

Aspirations and Compromises: Workers' Tactical Use of
the Space of *Kyabakura* in New York City

by

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Class of 2018

A thesis (or essay) submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Feminist, Gender, Sexuality Studies
Middletown, Connecticut April, 2018

Table of Contents

<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>CHAPTER 1</u>	<u>27</u>
<i>MIZU SHŌBAI AS A SANCTUARY</i>	27
<u>CHAPTER 2</u>	<u>61</u>
<i>MIZU SHŌBAI AS A WORKPLACE</i>	61
<u>CHAPTER 3</u>	<u>102</u>
<i>MIZU SHŌBAI AS TACTICS IN OPTIMISM</i>	102
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	<u>139</u>
<i>KYABAKURA AND ITS TRANSIENCE</i>	139
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	<u>142</u>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is a crystallization of many interactions – both intellectual and personal, that I have been so fortunate to have over the past year and more.

My first thanks to all my interlocutors. I am deeply grateful for those who were willing to let me take a peek at their vibrant lives both in the City and in Japan.

In the making of this ethnography, I am indebted to my advisor, Professor Kerwin Kaye. He has been extremely generous in sharing his time, wisdom, and positivity. His genuine interest in others has continually inspired me over the past three years. Thank you for all of your patience, kindness, encouragements, wisdom, and countless ginger candies.

FGSS department has provided me a rigorous yet safe space for me to explore my intellectual interest as a student and a feminist. Thank you Professor Tucker for her patience, and kindness. Thank you to Professor Scott Aalgaard, who fueled me with the very original theoretical inspiration for this thesis.

Many thanks to my friends that I cannot ever be thankful enough. Thank you to my friends from freshmen year who basically taught me from how to speak English to how tasty Chipotle can be – Sasha for line-editing my thesis 4 hours before its submission, Guilu for sitting with me in Olin for gazillion of hours and making a cup of tea at 1am when I was in need of caffeine; Fred for your plentiful care, your help with my tax return which was also due today, and the very wanted Happy Meal at 3am last night; Tony for giving me indescribable experiences and courage as a woman; Yohei and Kotaro for your creativity and the inspiring song; and Shoko and Monica for being my role models and my security blankets.

A huge love and gratitude to my family – papa, mama, Gou, oba-chan, ji-chan, ba-chan, and ichiro-chan. They won't have any idea what I have just accomplished when I call them tonight, but one day, I hope to give you all back soon. Papa, thank you for letting me explore, being willing to learn how to skype-call, and always picking me up at the airport with your love.

Last but never the least, I cannot imagine my life here without Professor Alice Hadler. She is an inspiration, a leader, a teacher, a mentor, a fighter, a godmother, a caretaker, and a giver. She has a heart of gold. Ever since I came here she has been generous enough to teach me not only grammars, but also how to craft my life. I am forever grateful to you for sharing your empathy, wisdom with me, and sacrificing countless nights of sleep to edit this thesis. Thank you for teaching me how to live, learn, and grow.

INTRODUCTION

Day 1

It is going to be only 20 minutes. Keep demurely talking to the guy sitting right next to you patting your thigh. Keep smiling at him even though his stare is piercing your body. Do not talk too much. Do not use any jargon you learned at school. Do not tell him that you are majoring in Gender Studies. Endure his discomforting smile. Just endure everything. Just for 20 minutes.

He was one of the first clients I dealt with when I worked in a *kyabakura* – a Japanese-style hostess club – in *Akihabara*. I worked there for 2 months in my sophomore summer break because I was curious, after taking several feminist courses at Wesleyan, what it feels like to be in such a gendered and hyper-sexualized space. As soon as I got to his table, he hooked his right index finger on my black uniform skirt – the skirt that was intentionally made extremely short so that people could see panties when the workers sat down – to flip it so that he could check my panties. Everything happened as I was sitting down, which gave me no time to even react. Constantly stroking my right thigh back and forth with his swollen hand, he then said, “approved.” After attempting to have an “interesting” conversation with him, he told me to shut up, and said to me that he never came to the club to talk, but to look at girls. I kept silent for the rest of the 15 minutes, staring at couples consisting of

female college students and male clients, who seemed to be enjoying their intimate interactions.

Kyabakura and Its Positionality in Society

Although the *kyabakura* is one of the biggest parts of the sex industry in Japan, its existence melts into the background of lives in Japan. When I watched *Cureyon Shin-chan*¹ as a child, the husband Hiroshi was always smashed like a potato after the wife Misae found a hostess's *meishi* (business card) in the pocket of his business jacket, after he came home very late. *Kyabakura* has also been recognized as a workplace, or even a lifestyle, for young women in Japan. In 2008, Miura conducted a survey for 1935 fifteen to twenty-two year old adolescents, asking what occupation they would like to do. Miura, excitedly reports, that *kyabakura* ranked 9th in the female section.² He states, "22.3 % women, that is, one in every five women wants to become *kyaba-jyō*."³ There are lifestyle/fashion magazines that feature women who work in *kyabakura*. The magazines are called *Koakuma-Ageha* and *Ane-Ageha*, first published in 2005 and 2010 respectively. *Koakuma-Ageha* sold more

¹ *Cureyon Shin-chan* started as a manga series by Yoshito Usui in 1990. An anime adaptation of the series begun in 1992 as a home comedy, and is still airing now.

² Atsushi Miura, 2008. *Nihon yōkairon: kono kuni no wakamonotachi : jenerēshon Z kenkyū*, (Tōkyō: Purejidentosha, 2008). Quotes from this work are all translated by me.

³ I find this statement false and quite misleading, as his survey allowed one respondent to choose as many as occupations they want. The survey also has only twenty-three choices, and the choices were quite skewed. While there are many choices related to entertainment industry such as singers, TV directors, dancers, there are not many choices on industry that requires certified profession such as medical industry, legal industry, or education. The twenty-three choices were musician, worker in music industry, boutique owner, baker, nail artist, café waitress, hair stylist, childcare worker, *kyabakura workers* and hostesses, TV directors, designer, dancer, cosmetic salesperson, office lady, artist, event staff, boutique salesperson, civil service, per groomer, CEO, elderly care worker, nurse, dolphin trainer, tour conductor, chef, pharmacist, "project planner," athlete, and barista.

than 300,000 copies in 2008.⁴ Sociologist Shinji Miyadai describes the magazines as “the textbooks of *kyabakura* workers.”⁵

Kyabakura is a distinctive type of sex work as compared to other categories of conventional sex work, such as prostitution, strip clubs, massage parlors etc., as they extensively prohibit any physical/sexual activities between workers and clients. There are three kinds of clubs that serve a similar role in the Japanese sex industry: host clubs, hostess clubs, and *kyabakura*. In both hostess clubs and *kyabakura*, female hostesses (called ‘*kyaba-jyo*’⁶ in *kyabakura*) serve male clients. In host clubs, the gender is flipped, and male workers called ‘hosts’ serve women. Though there are unique qualities and differences between the clubs, the main offering of all the clubs is conversation between clients and workers. In all of those clubs, touching workers is generally prohibited while in the club. In *kyabakura*, in a lounge-like space with couches and small tables, male clients are led by male waiters to tables and wait for a *kyaba-jyō* to sit and drink with them and enjoy conversation. Though without any physical/tangible sexual interactions between male clients and female workers, I argue in the following chapter that the club is a part of the sex industry because the space was crafted intentionally to commodify embodied femininity for male clients.

There is some English literature that analyzes the function of host clubs and hostess clubs in Japan. Anthropologist Anne Allison explores the social implication

⁴ Maki Hayashi, "Cabacla Lady's Work" *Ökumene research*, no.3: 83-104 (2014), <http://geo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp/ökumene/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/83-104.pdf>. Quotes from this books is translated by me.

⁵ Shinji Miyadai. *Chūgakusei kara no ai no jugyō: gakkō dewa manabenai miyadai shinji ga jūdai ni honki de oshietai koto*. (Tōkyō: Koamagajin, 2010), 219. Quotes from this book is all translated by me.

⁶ ‘*Kyaba*’ is an abbreviation for ‘*Kyabakura*’ and ‘*jyo*’ (嬢) means ‘young woman’ in Japanese

of hostess clubs in Japanese society, in her book *Nightwork*. Conducting a participant observation study in a hostess club located in Roppongi, Tokyo, she observes how the hostess club – where she worked as a hostess for four months – was utilized for company outings. She suggests that hostess clubs take a role in the company outings of big corporations in Japan, rather than being separated from other parts of Japanese society, and that they stay in the realm of sex industry where individual men come to purchase commodified sexual service. She emphasizes that hostess clubs are situated in the broader landscape of Japanese society in relation to other parts of Japanese culture.⁷ Company outings, male *salary-men* (a Japanese term for white-collar workers) do activities – mostly drinking is involved – with their bosses, business partners and co-workers – most of them are men – in order to have a “good time together” and positively influence their business performance during the day. Allison observes the way a hostess club and specific rituals and manners performed by hostess workers facilitate white-collar men to have bonding experiences.⁸

While Allison deepens the spatial and social understanding of the hostess club, another anthropologist, Akiko Takeyama, analyzes the commodified romance between hosts and female clients in a host club in Tokyo in her book, *Staged Seduction*. She investigates how seduction takes in place in host clubs, where female clients are the financial providers and hosts are the paid objects of seduction. By analyzing the broader dynamics of the political economy of the current Japanese society, Takeyama also investigates host clubs as a workplace for hosts to achieve

⁷ Anne Allison, *Nightwork*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 34.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

their dreams and goals, such as going to universities, opening their own host clubs, etc.⁹

However, though there is some academic literature on *kyabakura* in Japanese, there is little to be found in English texts. How are they different from each other? Do *kyabakura* and hostess clubs serve a similar purpose? I suggest that since there are fundamental differences among hostess clubs, host clubs and *kyabakura*. Simply adapting Allison's work, Takeyama's work, or that of other scholars who explore similar types of clubs to *Kyabakura* would not lead to a full understanding of the what kinds of role *kyabakura* plays in a bigger scale of Japanese society.

Sex Work as a Global Phenomena

As Allison emphasizes, hostess club takes a distinctive role in Japanese society. Both hostess club and *kyabakura* are categorized as a part of *mizu shyōbai* industry. The origin of the industry heavily resides in the economic prosperity/stagnation of post war Japan, and the cultural role it takes is determined by the needs of clients, which are also influenced by greater ideologies. Although the word of *kyabakura* is Japanese, and it is a distinctive type of sex work in the realm of *mizu syōbai* in Japan, there are sex clubs and sex bars outside of Japan that serve similar roles to Japanese hostess clubs and *kyabakura*.

An anthropologist Kimberly Kay Hoang explores the sexscape of Ho Chi Minh City, in her book *Dealing in Desire*. By looking at specific kinds of bars in the

⁹ Akiko Takeyama, *Staged Seduction*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

area of sex industry in Ho Chi Minh City, she describes the whole landscape of bars by looking at 4 bars that cater to different clientele.¹⁰ Two of the clubs she worked at do offer similar service to clients and similar kinds of emotional/intimate labor to those of Japanese hostess clubs and *kyabakura*. Khong Sao Bar is an exclusive bar that only Vietnamese political elites – men who have a relationship with the head mommy or top-paying regular clients – can access. All men who visit the bar belong to an exclusive community of privileged men who have significant political power in Vietnam. The bar is used by men to broker deals, and all the rituals in the bar are substantiation of their class and financial/political power:

Once the men were inside the private room, the mommy directed the barbacks (male service staff in the bar) to bring out the finest whiskey so she could pour a toast of welcome. Then she summoned the hostess into the room and took a seat next to the most senior local Vietnamese man at the table...Each man typically sat with one or two workers, whose job was to ensure that the client enjoyed his time in the bar. The hostesses' services for clients included pouring drinks, feeding them, serenading them, dancing with them, and initiating drinking games.¹¹

This description of the club resembles the roles of hostess clubs that Allison explores, as the space is crafted in order to express economic, class, and political power of clients. The intimate labor of female hostesses do not necessarily fulfill clients' individual desires for physical/mental intimacy, but rather offer hostesses the role of brokers of business/political negotiations taking place in the club.

¹⁰ Kimberly Kay Hoang. *Dealing in Desire : Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work*. (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), 8

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

Lavender Bar, on the other hand, seems to share similarities with *kyabakura*. The physical presence of the club is more visible from the outside.¹² The clientele they target is domestic Vietnamese businessmen, who do not necessarily have political power in Vietnam, yet have the financial capacity to pursue consumeristic leisure activities. As the bar responds to the taste of clientele, the club becomes easily identifiable on the street, and its interior is filled with gaudy chandeliers and garish sofas that reveal an aesthetic lineage pioneered by Las Vegas tourist economies.¹³ Other Asian countries do have clubs similar to hostess clubs and *kyabakura*. Most of the club is catered to businessmen, which indicates a strong tie between the origin of *kyabakura* and migration of businessmen.

In *the Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization*, Williams also suggests the relationship between sex work and globalization, as the industry is widespread and prevalent in many societies. Williams considers sex work as “global issues that is intricately connected to tourism and migration.”¹⁴ Drawing a “sexscape” of Ho Chi Minh City,¹⁵ Hoang also finds a firm connection between sex industry in Ho Chi Minh City and global economy and capital:

¹² Hoang, *Dealing in Desire*, 44

¹³ Frank (2004) and Bernstein (2007) discusses that “the flashy aesthetics” of sex tourism for the general public started as “Las Vegas Tourism” aesthetics, in which sex clubs and brothels are furnished with garnish and gaudy interior to give clients the feeling of uniqueness of the space that clients otherwise would not be able to experience on their daily lives. It is “tourism” as opposed to “travelling.”

¹⁴ Ritzer, George, Editor, and Wiley-Blackwell. *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization*. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Chichester, (West Sussex ; Malden, Mass.: Wiley Blackwell, 2012) s.v. "Sex Work"

¹⁵“sexscape’ refers to both a new kind of global sexual landscape and the sites within it. The word sexscape builds on the five terms Arjun Appadurai has coined to describe landscapes that are the “building blocks’ of ‘imagined worlds.’ He uses the suffix –scape to allow ‘us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes’ (with such terms as ethnoscape,

These multiple niche markets served a diverse group of men all tied to different kinds of global capital. For example, the market catering to local elites and their Asian business partners relied on the labor of hostess-workers to project confidence in Vietnam's booming market economy, a confidence that facilitated foreign direct investment through speculative capital deals. The market catering to Western budget travelers attracted a different kind of global capital, overseas remittance money that the male clients called "charity capital," through the labor of sex workers who portrayed Vietnam's Third World Poverty.¹⁶

Since there is a strong tie between how Vietnamese domestic/international economy is corresponds to sexscape of Ho Chi Minh City, Hoang suggests that looking at the landscape of how sex work is structured in a city enables one to see the economic/business landscape of the city and beyond.¹⁷

By looking at how the space of *kyabakura* is structured in a specific city and places, how workers are experiencing the space and the work, one can understand bigger societal structures that make *kyabakura* possible.

* * *

One sunny, very humid afternoon in Tokyo in August, I was talking to my friends who graduated from Wesleyan about my experiences in the club. When I told them that the club that I worked for only hired "female college students" in order to

mediascape, technoscape, finanscape, and ideoscape)...Sex-for-sale is one more dimension of global cultural flows." (Denise Brennan, *What's Love Got to Do with It?*, 15).

¹⁶ Hoang, *Dealing in Desire*, 8.

¹⁷ Massey Doreen also suggests, "it is time space and money which make the world go round, and us go around (or not) the world. It is capitalism and its developments which are argued to determine our understanding and our experience of space." (Doreen B. Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 147).

fetishize female bodies in more specific ways, one of my friends said, "oh by the way, I know someone who is working in a *kyabakura* in New York City. I have heard from her that a lot of young Japanese women work in the clubs over there."

Until she mentioned that there are Japanese-style clubs in New York City, it had never occurred to me that these kinds of clubs could exist anywhere but Japan. Since the very existence of *kyabakura* is so ingrained in Japanese society, how on earth could *kyabakura* possibly exist outside of Japan, and, if so, why? What kinds of people do they have as workers and clients? What kinds of broader social ideologies and social structures make it possible for *kyabakura* to exist outside of geographical Japan?

In fact, there is some academic literature on *kyabakura* about places physically located in Japan, such as Tokyo¹⁸ and Shizuoka,¹⁹ but as I mentioned, I was unable to find any scholarly literature that specifically focused on Japanese *kyabakura* in the global context. However, if you google "*kyabakura kaigai*" (meaning "abroad," in Japanese), there are multiple websites for *kyabakura* in foreign countries and cities such as Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan, New York City, Los Angeles, London, Hawaii, etc. The information on these *kyabakura* is only available in Japanese, and seem to only target Japanese people as their clients, and even their workers. The websites aren't translated into English or other languages, which makes the population who can encounter the space extremely exclusive. There are also several recruiting websites for those who wish to work in *kyabakura* outside of Japan,

¹⁸ Allison, *Nightwork*.

¹⁹ Hayashi, "The Cabacla Lady's Work."

yet they also only appear when searched in Japanese. On the clubs' recruiting pages, some even advertise that they would pay for flights if women wish to work for them but are currently still in Japan.²⁰

Yuiko Fujita's *Cultural Migrants from Japan* does mention that some of their informants work for hostess clubs, "the majority of them did not have legal full-time jobs, but often (illegally) took up low-wage jobs at Japanese restaurants, grocery stores, or hostess clubs, when their funds started running out,"²¹ yet it never gets into the details of their working situation. The conversation I had with my friend inspired me to build my thesis on this abyss on the subject, between academia and the on-going phenomena.

Methodology

My thesis is oriented around two major pillars: interviews I have conducted with former *kyabakura* workers, and a theoretical lens that gives me specific perspectives to understand what informants have voiced to me through the interviews.

I cannot emphasize the fact enough, that what made this whole project possible were the voices of my interlocutors. From May 2017 to August 2017, I conducted interviews with 12 former workers who had worked in *kyabakura* in New York City more than a month. In summer 2016, I worked for a *kyabakura* in Tokyo for 2 months, which inspired me to explore this topic as my thesis research. With the

²⁰ All information can be publically found in multiple search engines such as Google, Yahoo etc.

²¹ Yukiko Fujita. *Cultural Migrants from Japan*. (MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 4

questions and observations that I gained from my experiences in Tokyo, I began to visit *kyabakura* and Japanese hostess clubs in New York City. As my focus is augmented by the visits, I engaged in preliminary visits to these NYC clubs, in an effort to see if a full research project was possible.

I chose New York City because it is one of the most popular long-stay destinations for Japanese passport holders to visit. Since 2008, the United States has ranked as the most popular study-abroad destination for those who leave Japan with student visas.²² During the three months of my ethnographic research, I met the individuals face-to-face to conduct one to two hour interviews in New York City, New Jersey, and Tokyo. A snowball sampling method was used to meet my interlocutors. I first put posts on some of the online open fora for Japanese residents in New York City to exchange information, sell/buy personal commodities, advertise business, recruit workers, look for models, business partners, or even friends and dates etc., mentioning that I was a student at a college and was looking for people who used to work in *kyabakura* in the city for my thesis project. After I gained connections to a few people online, I asked them to introduce me to their previous co-workers who might be interested in being a part of my project. I also contacted some of my Japanese friends who have lived in New York City to see if they knew anybody who used to work in a *kyabakura* in the city. In order to reach out to as many individuals as possible, I didn't specify gender or the numbers of months they worked

²² JASSO, "The result of the survey on the number of Japanese nationals who study abroad based on treaties." (Tokyo: JASSO, 2017).
http://www.jasso.go.jp/about/statistics/intl_student_s/2017/index.html

in the *kyabakura*. As a result, I talked to 12 individuals, and was able to interview 10 of them. For each of the interviews, I asked a list of questions related to their work in *kyabakura* and their lives in New York City. Main inquiries were about why they were in New York City, why they worked in *kyabakura*, their perceptions of working conditions in the clubs, how much the salary was, what their shifts looked like, motivations to stay in or leave the city, etc. Inquiries I did not directly ask were their age, their sexual orientation, their visa status, their personal financial situation, their family's financial situation, etc. unless my interlocutors mentioned that information voluntarily during the interviews.

The geographical uniqueness of New York City allowed me to access more people. In fact, the first person who started rolling the snowball with me was a friend of a friend. While the nature of the work makes it harder for workers to come to light without any hesitation or a sense of embarrassment, my own personal network on the East coast enabled me to reach out to as many Japanese-speaking individuals as possible, which broadened the boundaries of my approach.

Yet, my positionality as a young female Japanese college student influenced the population I was able to reach out to, and the way my interlocutors interacted with me. Given that there is a certain sense of community – in one way or another – among Japanese-speaking residents of New York City, my embodied Japaneseness, fluent Japanese without any distinctive accent, and my background as a full resident of Japan enabled a sense of shared understanding toward certain objects in those interviews. As soon as I told my interlocutors that I had come to the United States a

few years ago, the amount of information and knowledge they expected us to share increased drastically. The change of attitude was distinctly recognizable in conversation, when they started introducing terms and systems without prolonged description, such as the system of college examination in Japan, the system of *kyabakura*, the system of job hunting in Japan. However, as my interlocutors imagined that we shared extensive knowledge and understanding of “behaving like a Japanese person,” it also made it harder for me to approach their precise and explicated thoughts. Most of them expected me to empathize with their vague, yet assured, feelings toward their “imagined Japan,”²³ their experiences in New York City as Japanese individuals, and their experiences in *kyabakura*, without precisely verbalizing them. When I asked one of the interlocutors why she wanted to leave Japan, she said “I kinda hated it. I didn’t really know why. But I just hated the attitudes towards women in Japan, you know? I can’t really explain. I’m pretty sure you have been feeling a similar way. Right?” I had a hard time deepening the conversation.

Moreover, although my social network did help me to advance my research, my status as a college student at an elite school limited the population I was able to reach out to. Since I partially relied on my personal connections in order to find potential interlocutors, most of the interlocutors I interacted with were those who were capable of staying in the United States for a longer period of time even after

²³ ‘Imagined Community’ is concept first coined by Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* in 1983. Anderson describes a nation as a community imagined by those who perceive themselves as a part of the community by repeatedly being exposed to certain images of the community by media, which targets the mass audience and addresses them as citizens .

they quit working in *kyabakura* and acquired appropriate visas and permits, and had access to an extensive community of Japanese-speaking individuals in the area.

Though I was able to glance at the diverse backgrounds of workers in *kyabakura* through the interviews, the 12 individuals I encountered by no means represents the diversity of workers in *kyabakura* in New York City.

Though I was troubled to overcome the challenges, my embodied traits as a Japanese young female student enabled me to have continuing peer relationships with some of the interlocutors, rather than an authoritative researcher-interviewee dynamic. While sitting at the edge of a flower bed in Washington Square, while digging into a 4 dollar mango that my interlocutor and I shared, we had an extensive conversation about the working conditions of *kyabakura*, her experiences of 3.11., the Great East Japan Earthquake. and pet-peeves she has towards her boyfriend and her dog. One of my favorite moments of the research was going on a souvenir hunt to Whole Foods with an interlocutor to look for Brooklyn-made-hipster-looking chocolate bars that are “really hip and trendy in Japan.” Not only their direct answers to my questions, but also all of these small chit chats and their habitual behavior, contributed to my understanding of *kyabakura* and their lives.

Theories Explored

During the interviews, my interlocutors and I always ended up spending time to evaluate *kyabakura* as a workplace. Many of the interlocutors told me about the working environment of the club, and how *kyabakura* as a workplace affected other

parts of their lives. Their stories varied from their general feelings towards the space to detailed and vibrant episodes about what they experienced in the City. How can we understand those miniscule yet important stories in a larger context? How can we use the stories my interlocutors told me as a scope to examine *kyabakura* as a concept?

In order to untangle the voices given by my interlocutors, I will discuss *kyabakura* as a workplace that is physically and mentally affecting workers. In order to understand my interlocutors' motivation to work in *kyabakura* and the outcome of their work, I am going to use Michel de Certeau's idea of tactics and strategy. I examine my interlocutors' use of *kyabakura* as a workspace from the idea of tactics, that the oppressed manipulate the space that they do not have control over in order to achieve their desires and goals.

While Certeau's idea of tactics and strategy does help me to understand how my interlocutors acted within the space of the *kyabakura*, another crucial question to ask is why they decided to work in a *kyabakura*, and continue to work there. Although most of them did tell me that working in a *kyabakura* forced them to endure unfair working conditions without any social benefits, they always ended the topic by saying, "well, I did not like working in *kyabakura*, but *shikata-ga-nai*" (it cannot be helped). Most of them were aware of the harsh working environment they had put themselves in, yet they chose to stay. The conversation always reached the conclusion that it couldn't be helped, that they had to stay, as they wanted to acquire something out of their work. How can one justify staying to endure an appalling working environment and avoid stress from the realization? To answer this question, I am

going to explore Lauren Berlant's idea of *cruel optimism*. By looking at the sense of transience and temporality that my interlocutors had in *kyabakura*, I will discuss how their sense of transience affected their conceptualization of working there, and their acceptance of the unreasonable working conditions.

Certeau argues in *Practice of Everyday* that there are two ways of utilizing space: strategy and tactics. Strategy is practiced by the oppressing body through authoritatively controlling the space. It presupposes the separation of the subject from the surrounding space, in order to objectify the space as a target of the exercise of the oppressing body's will and power. He defines a *strategy* as "the calculation (manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated."²⁴

It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives of research etc.) can be managed.²⁵

The space is thus possessed by the subject of power, and strategies also aim to control time so that their dominance of the space becomes lasting.

A *tactic*, on the other hand, is a practice of the oppressed. It does not have a singular subject or locus of power, and has a specificity that makes the acts stay within a moment. It is a momentary occupation of space without owning the space:

a *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of the tactic is the space of the other.²⁶

²⁴ Michel de Certeau. *Practice of Everyday Life*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 35.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

A tactic is determined by the absence of power and lack of ability to occupy the space because of its specificity. It thus can be understood as a kind of resistance that the oppressed practices by manipulating the given power dynamics within a space.

John Frow critiques Certeau's definition of strategy and tactics, as it is heavily based on the assumption that the subject of each action (especially tactics) is a unified subject.²⁷ There are no complexities within the oppressed people, and the oppressing and the oppressed are almost treated as two subjects that stand in a binary. Anne Allison makes a similar analysis on the space of the hostess club by applying Hegel's analysis of the master-slave relationship. Allison argues that men entering clubs are like masters who cannot survive without being fed by slaves, that is, hostesses in the clubs.²⁸ Allison observes that male clients in the club rely hugely on hostess workers to have “a good time together” with their companions, letting the hostesses facilitate the talk or making the hostesses a target of the clients’ collective insults. In this sense, therefore, male clients are the masters who cannot help but depend on hostesses to acquire their desires. However, the dependence of clients in the club is masked by them paying the club, which justifies men's dependence on hostesses as an act of acquiring paid services. By discussing Frow’s critique of Certeau, I argue that this Hegelian understanding of the client-hostess relationship only stands within the relationship of the two parties. In order to advance the discussion, I am going to consider two oppressing factors that influence the working

²⁷ John Frow. “Michel de Certeau and the Practice of Representation.” *Cultural Studies*, 5, no. 1 (1991): 52-60.

²⁸ Allison, *Nightwork*, 165.

conditions of workers in *kyabakura* that could disturb this simplified dependent relationship between clients as a singular owner, and hostesses as a singular slave, by looking at the three-sided dynamics among clients, club managers, and workers.

On the other hand, Lauren Berlant observes precariats²⁹ clinging onto their desired future, and enduring the negative consequences they receive from the present, and willing compromises the precariats make for achieving their desires in the future. She names this phenomenon as *cruel optimism*. *Cruel optimism* happens when something individuals desire is actually an obstacle to their thriving. Berlant argues that when people desire something, the state of desiring the object makes them temporarily endure certain situations which they believe enable them, without recognizing that the objects could be disabling them:

All attachments are optimistic. When we talk about an object of desire, we are really talking about a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us.³⁰

Berlant examines the fantasies of the “good life” first introduced in the postwar period, which attracted many people in the United States and Europe since the 1980s. Despite the evidence that liberal-capitalist societies cannot provide equal opportunities to all individuals, people still cling to job security, upward mobility, social equality, etc., while enduring a myriad of precarities and crises in the current situation.³¹ She describes “the present” time as stretched-out by capitalism instead of

²⁹ In this thesis, I am loosely adapting the term of “precariat” defined by Alex Foti: precarity is “being unable to plan one’s time, being a worker on call where your life and time is determined by external forces.” (Alex Foti. ‘Precarity and N/european Identity. Interview with Merjin Oudenampsen and Gavin Sullivan’, Greenpepper (2004)).

³⁰ Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

being organized by it, and as turned into a state of temporality before the desirable future happens. Thus, “the present” loses its own time, and is characterized by temporality.³² That is, people’s longing and dream to attain the “good life” makes their current temporary space to endure and compromise until their “good life” becomes their present time.

My broader theoretical argument is that the attachment my interlocutors have with the space of *kyabakura* is one of the main factors that makes workers compromise in their working environment. They were in *kyabakura* because they tried to maximize the manipulation of the space through their tactics, as Certeau suggests, while perceiving their status of working in *kyabakura* as transient. I argue that workers in *kyabakura* in New York City have utilized the space purely as a workplace in order to achieve their initial purposes of staying in the United States (or staying in the country as their purpose altogether), by gaining benefits from the space dynamics between club managers, clients and themselves. The distinctive incentive for all of my interlocutors to be working in *kyabakura* in the city was the club’s higher salary compared to other jobs available to them. Although the working conditions in the club were far from ideal, and they had no allow the club manager to control most of their actions in the club, they chose to stay in the space until they were able to dispose of it, once their initial purposes were achieved. Optimism – workers’ perceptions and the idea of transience towards the space of *kyabakura* as their workspace – is one of the strong drives that sustains the *kyabakura* space in New

³² Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 10.

York City. Though the club itself faces tangible challenges such as harsh working conditions, legitimacy of its business, and decreasing number of clients, etc., *kyabakura* is not considered to be a part of their “present,” and that makes workers either compromise the environment they are in, or simply ignore negative consequences, and ends up letting themselves stay in the space. The most distinctive and consistent response I got from my interlocutors about their working conditions was “*shikata-ga-nai*” (“it cannot be helped”). Most of them were aware of the harsh working environment they had put themselves in, yet they chose to stay. While complaining, the conversation always reached the conclusion that it couldn’t be helped, that they had to stay, as they wanted to get something out of their work. And it was sufficient for them to endure being in the space because it was temporary. The idea of transience allowed my interlocutors to endure the environment they were in without actively addressing the issues they had. After all, none of them were by any means planning to work in *kyabakura* for good, the idea was of *kyabakura* as a temporary stop-over in their lives, and the idea of the space as a resource for them to acquire whatever they were desiring at that time, made the workers more willing to ignore the situation they were in and the risks they were taking by working for a *kyabakura*.

Chapter Overview

In chapter 1, I begin by exploring the very idea of *kyabakura* and hostess clubs. By drawing a comparison from how hostess clubs are formed historically, I

discuss the position of *kyabakura* in Japanese society by (re)visiting literature that have dealt with *kyabakura* in its historical/economic contexts in cities in Japan. I mainly revisit Anne Allison's *Nightwork*, which is an ethnographic research work on a hostess club in Tokyo, Japan in order to draw a clear distinction between hostess clubs and *kyabakura*, which are often treated as a singular concept in literature. This chapter sets a basic understanding of hostess clubs and *kyabakura* especially from historical perspective, and clients' perspective, in order to advance the discussion of *kyabakura* as a workspace in the following chapters.

In chapter 2, I examine the space of *kyabakura* as a workplace. Based on some of the ethnographies on *kyabakura* and hostess club, and my own participant observation, I first discuss how the process of hiring and working in *kyabakura* is practiced, especially from workers' perspectives. My main goal in this chapter is to visualize an abyss between dogmatic rules of *kyabakura*, and how workers actually experience their work in the space of *kyabakura*. There are many aspects of working in *kyabakura*, that are invisible unless experiences of workers are shared, and this chapter aims to see the detailed experiences of working in *kyabakura*, through the eyes of female workers. I also discuss repercussions of working in *kyabakura*, by mainly speaking back the Allison's Hegelian understanding of the labor.

In chapter 3, I shift my focus to New York City from previous chapters' focus which I examined how hostess club and *kyabakura* can be understood on a concept level. First I describe the working condition of *kyabakura* in New York City in order to visualize the space of *kyabakura* in New York City, and how it differs from ones in

geographical Japan. Then I discuss Certeau's idea of tactics and strategies, to understand how my informants have utilized the space of *kyabakura* in order to achieve their goals of being in New York City. Finally, I explore Berlant's idea of *cruel optimism* and its effects on my interlocutors' perception of *kyabakura* as their workspace. I argue that *because* my informants were very aware of the ways in which they could manipulate the space of *kyabakura* through tactics in order to achieve their goals, it made their states of being in the space of *kyabakura* transient, and disarrayed their attention to the space itself. Rather than recognizing *kyabakura* as their legitimate workspace, they acknowledged space only as a temporary moratorium for them to endure until their desired future is achieved.

I cannot emphasize enough that my thesis project is not intended to produce any kinds of generalized statements about all the Japanese people in New York City, nor about all *kyabakura* located outside of geographical Japan. My thesis aims to look at the specificity of *kyabakura* in New York City, and how workers were located in the space of *kyabakura*, and furthermore, in the city itself, through my interlocutors' voices. My main role as a writer here is to let the voice of the workers be heard in the space of academia. In writing my thesis, I am focusing on how the informants talked about what they have experienced in the space, how they have utilized the space, and been affected by the space, in their own terms, rather than investigating the absolute factual truths about *kyabakura* in New York City.

I contend that workers' attitudes towards working condition of *kyabakura* is one of the crucial factors that sustains harsh working condition of *kyabakura*. The

narratives that my interlocutors craft on their experiences of working in *kyabakura* in New York City is heavily focused on the work's financial advantage that workers can potentially utilize in order to achieve greater desires in their lives. By recognizing the space of *kyabakura* as a transient space that was present in their lives *only because* they wanted to achieve their desired future, workers endured, compromised, and let the work negatively impact their lives, without consciously dealing with it.

Kyabakura was indeed a great tactic that workers manipulated, but it was also *cruel optimism* that they clung to.

CHAPTER 1

MIZU SHŌBAI AS A SANCTUARY

In the Introduction, I mentioned that there are two kinds of clubs that offer conversation with female hostesses to male clients as their major commodities — *kyabakura* and hostess clubs. Though both do offer similar experiences to customers, each club is constructed upon different aesthetics and targets different clientele. Anne Allison's *Nightwork* is one of the most prominent studies of Japanese hostess clubs, and it is usually quoted in literature on hostess clubs in Asia, and in Japanese literature about hostess clubs and *kyabakura*. She starts her book describing what hostess clubs are,

Hostess clubs differ from the other clubs, bars, restaurants, and sex joints in the *mizu shōbai* (literally "water business," the nightlife of urban Japan) by providing hostesses for their customers...In short, what characterizes the hostess and differentiates her service from that offered by others in the *mizu shōbai* is that her medium of service is primary talk. The job of the hostess, as both speaker and listener, is to make customers feel special, at ease and indulged. Or, as one Japanese man told me the role of the hostess is to make a man "feel like a man."³³

Mizu shōbai, briefly explained by Allison as “the nightlife of urban Japan,” is an umbrella term for night leisure activities in Japan. It used to be the term for jobs that significantly relied on one’s intelligence/artistic capital, and did not have any fixed salary and working hours, such as celebrity work, athletics, *sumo*, *kabuki*, performing,

³³ Allison, *Nightwork*, 8

writing, creation, etc. Currently, the term mostly refers to evening restaurants and alcohol that serve alcohol, such as hostess clubs, host clubs, and *huzoku*.³⁴

Both hostess clubs and *kyabakura* fall under the category of *mizu shōbai*, and both are lounge bars that prepare female companions to sit with and drink with male clients. What are the differences then? The biggest difference between hostess clubs and *kyabakura* is the themes of the clubs, based on different aesthetics. While hostess clubs craft their spaces in order to provide a sanctuary for businessmen to enjoy time at a club without worrying about their daily lives, such as their work, families etc., *kyabakura* provides a space that is an extension of their real lives. Both sell fantasized versions of femininity, yet they have different distances and relationships to their clients' lives outside of the club.

How Hostess Clubs Are Made

Several scholars have found that hostess clubs have a strong tie with the realm of business in Japan.³⁵ Historically, hostess work originated from female waitresses who worked at cafes and restaurants during *Taishō* era.³⁶ Those waitresses were called *jokyu*, which means "women who serves." The first cafe that started *jokyu* service was *Cafe Lion*, which opened in Ginza, Tokyo in 1911.³⁷ Those dining places

³⁴ *Huzoku* is a Japanese term for the sex industry. Most of the occupations in *huzoku* provide explicit physical sexual services such as prostitution and pornography.

³⁵ See Allison (1994) and Matsuda (2005).

³⁶ *Taishō* era is from 1912-1926.

³⁷ Taro Fukutomi, *Shōwa Cabaret Secret History*, (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō, 1994). Quotes from this work are all translated by me.

at that time had a majority of male customers, and female waiters' task was originally to wait on male customers. Eventually, the role of female waiters started to be interpreted more holistically, and their feminine presence was used to attract more customers. They started wearing designed *kimono* made of material varying from cotton to gold yarn, depending on the class of clientele each cafe targeted. Eventually, the cafe industry diverted into two kinds — the one that served coffee and non-alcoholic beverages, and the other that served alcohol and evening meals. The cafes that served alcohol and offered dining services employed two kinds of *jyoku* — the ones who took care of traditional waiting jobs such as bringing dishes, and the other ones who took care of male customers, by pouring drinks, lightning their cigarettes, and conversing with the customers while wearing showy, colorful *kimonos* to entertain the customers, in hopes of getting tips from the customers. Some of the cafes that served alcohol and dining services, started expanding their business by adding entertainment equipment such as jazz bands, or stages for dancing, which started calling themselves as “cabaret.”³⁸ Cafes were relatively smaller than cabarets. The culture of calling managers as “mama” or “master” started around this time, as the managers tended to be a married couple, and the business was family-owned.³⁹ The whole cafe industry, including cabarets, expanded its business, and even donated a combat aircraft on behalf of All Japan Cafe Association in 1937, during World War II, while having to endure the scarcity of resources during the war.⁴⁰

³⁸ Fukutomi, *Shōwa Cabaret Secret History*, 23.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

After World War II, the Japanese government established Recreation and Amusement Association (RAA) thirteen days after Japan's surrender in 1945. RAA's task was to create a military brothel for American troops in order to prevent sexual harassment and rape against Japanese women caused by them. The facility included not only organized prostitutions, but various kinds of "recreational facilities" such as spa, sports facilities, hunting facilities, shopping districts, bars, restaurants, and cabarets. However, the facilities were closed seven months after its opening by the authority of occupation forces of the Allies. Many female workers who were employed to work in cabarets and other facilities in RAA lost their jobs instantly, and cabarets became sockets for these female workers to find their jobs after the closure of RAA, which resulted in the expansion of the cabaret industry itself. Around 1951, *Asahi Newspaper*, which is one of the biggest newspaper establishments in Japan started using the word of *Shayō-zoku*, to refer those who visited cabarets as a part of their company outings.⁴¹ As the occupation of Allies mitigated restrictions on alcohol and other entertainment facilities, cabarets became even bigger industry which catered to the mass public.⁴² In 1951, the new business model called *alubaito salon* (part-time salon) was established by a club in Osaka as a response to the stagnation of the cabaret industry. The club hired amateur female students and female office workers instead of hiring professional *jyokyū*, who tended to demand a lot of tips from customers as it was the only source of their income. The club also applied a new fee system, that was cheaper than traditional cabaret and cafes, and only required

⁴¹ Fukutomi, *Shōwa Cabaret Secret History*, 83.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 83.

customers to pay to the club without tipping *jyokyu*. This business model got popular among the middle class men, who were usually disregarded by *jyokyu* in cabarets and cafes who required a lot of tips and financial commitments from male customers. In 1952, *The Luxury Club Clown* was established, as another tactic of dealing with the economic depression Japanese society was experiencing during that time. Instead of lowering the price and hiring amateur *jyokyu* who did not require customers to tip them, *Club Clown* called their *jyokyu* “hostesses,” who wore evening gowns, and made the club exclusive by setting the extortionate price system.⁴³ In November 1962, the Tokyo Sightseeing Socializing Association, which was originally formed by *jyokyu* workers, gave notice to the media to ban the name of *Jokyu*. The reason was that the word implied ignorance towards and a sense of discrimination against female waitresses, and instead advocated using the name of *Shako-in*, which means "socialite-members." Those who were popular working at the cafes gained social connections and the trust of businessmen in power, and continued to work as *shakō-in*. Matsuda Saori, a sociologist in Japan, argues that the hostess clubs started to construct their industry around the time of the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 starting from the emergence of the business model that was established by *Club Clown*. Because of the high demand to internationalize Japan for the Olympics, *shako-in* changed their name to *hostess*, as their job also started to specialize in entertaining male customers rather than just serving drinks and food.⁴⁴

⁴³ Fukutomi, *Shōwa Cabaret Secret History*, 124.

⁴⁴ Saori Matsuda, "What Do Hostesses Sell?" in *History of Sexual Desire*, edited by Shoichi Inoue (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2008), 185. Quotes from this work are all translated by me.

During the 1960s, Japan experienced astronomical economic growth after World War II. The culture of *settai* and *tsukiai* started to become popular, as companies continued to offer tremendous benefits by paying for their employees' entertainment. *Settai* refers to activities such as entertaining business clients, and *tsukiai* refers to socializing with colleagues and bosses through going out, especially after work, and playing golf on weekends. Hostess clubs significantly developed their industry in a response to the high demand for dining/drinking places that could accommodate businessmen in their *settai* and *tsukiai*. In the late 1960s, large companies started to provide their workers a specific budget for *settai*, as socialization was expected to strengthen work performances as a team, or business relationships with their clients.⁴⁵ Although companies were unable to continue offering a budget for *settai* when economic stagnation hit Japan in the 1980s and 1990s, the culture continues to be present, supported mostly by big corporations which are still capable of affording budgets for *settai* and *tsukiai*. The hostess club therefore has emerged as a place for men to socialize with other men while dining and drinking, with the presence of female waitresses whose task is to entertain the men through their service. The hostess club industry continued to grow, to become a completely separate occupation from the original *jyokyu* who worked in cabarets and cafes.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Allison, *Nightwork*, 199.

⁴⁶ Matsuda, "What Do Hosesses Sell?" 187.

What Hostess Clubs Mean to Clients

Allison specifically examines the ritual of *settai* and *tsukiai* in the club she worked for, and explores how enabling clients to feed their masculine privilege through interaction with hostesses shapes the ritual of visiting hostess clubs as a part of company outings in Japan.⁴⁷ Allison concludes that the space of the hostess club is tailored to positively affect the company outings taking place in the club.

When a group of businessmen visits the club, the main goal of the group is to have a "good time together," including the host of the party. They want to make sure that they end their night with a feeling of collective joy. What hostess clubs can offer to them, therefore, is the assurance that they can enjoy their time all together without any concerns. The spatial setting of the hostess club, for this specific goal, is constructed to spare the host the responsibility for making the outing a success, so that concerns are minimized. Instead, the workers at the club offer services that concentrate on entertaining the whole party.

The necessity of the company outings at hostess club comes from how workplaces and households are structured in Japan. Allison argues that the club provides a space that is neither work *nor* home, where all the rules and social hierarchies are less strict and blurred. At work, the relationship between workers is structured through a strict hierarchy and seniority, which makes it hard for workers to communicate well. This is especially true between workers and their bosses.⁴⁸ Their behavior is explicitly controlled by the expectations and responsibilities workers are

⁴⁷ Allison, *Nightwork*, 10.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

expected to perform, based on the position of the workers at the company. At hostess clubs, all these expectations and responsibilities are put aside, the highest ranking among the group of businessmen set the tone of *bureikō*, which means "a breaking of regimen, courtesy and demeanor," and releases workers from their status at work and its accompanying tensions.⁴⁹ At home, on the other hand, houses are usually located far from workplaces, and the way houses are constructed makes it harder to host social gatherings with a group of people. Allison also suggests that many businessmen cannot relax fully at home, because they are reminded of other kinds of responsibilities as fathers and husbands at home. Thus, the hostess club provides a space for businessmen to relax and utilize their leisure time, while positively affecting their performances and the community spirit at work. A hostess club is closer to their workplace, yet gives them a relaxing time without concerning about their status or responsibilities.

Because of its unique position between work and home, the hostess club's spatial appeal is to provide a space for businessmen to relax and be entertained. The spatial arrangements of the hostess club give a sense of luxury and order, which Allison describes as "a nighttime sanctuary,"⁵⁰ without always having a ticking clock on their minds. The hostess club where Allison worked was one of the most luxurious hostess clubs in Tokyo, placing costly objects in exposed ways, as a uniquely designed piano that occupies one fourth of the physical club space, a thick glass flower vase, paintings; the whole physical space confirms the aesthetics of

⁴⁹ Allison, *Nightwork*, 35.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

consumption, all of which cater to the taste of their wealthy clients – some of them the biggest capitalists and consumers in Japan:

Bijo has floors covered in deep carpet, walls hung with Parisian paintings, and a glass wall, etched with butterflies, separating the hallway from the main room, the front door opens into a hallway, with the bathroom and receiving closet off to the right. Straight ahead is the closed door to "A" *shitsu* ["A room" in Japanese], the more private area of the club which contains a velvet booth against the back wall, three small tables, chairs, plants, a painting, a mirrored wall, and the pièce de resistance, a tiered, locked glass table displaying expensive bottles of liquor. Off to the left of the hallway is the main room, "B" *shitsu*, into which most customers are immediately ushered. Approaching, one first sees the red of the baby grand piano filtered through the glass wall... the piano is fitted out with a polished wooden counter and five expensive bar stools. A mirrored wall to the right of the piano reflects the keyboard and the bar's occupants. Plain, heavy drapes along the left wall of the room cover the club's only window and conceal the outside. High plush booths, separated by potted plants, line each one of the three unmirrored walls. Nearby are small glass tables for individual parties...even the fresh flowers are intentionally luxurious and are displayed in thick glass vases. Viewed together, the furnishings and decorations of Bijo create a nighttime sanctuary.⁵¹

Allison also points out that the way the food and drink are served at her hostess club follows the aesthetics of the space. Although the snacks served are usually trivial, such as beans, peanuts, and several grapes, they are beautifully arranged on a small plate and served to each table by male waiters. The snack is often left untouched.⁵² Here, the food is rather used as a ritualistic mark of luxury and order the hostess club caters for its clients.

In addition, the placement of objects in the club confirms the luxury of time and space. The size of the hostess club gives the club a sense of high-class exclusivity. Most hostess clubs in Tokyo are relatively small, as Allison also

⁵¹ Allison, *Nightwork*, 38.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 39.

observes, and serve a "members-only" clientele. All clients at the club need to know the head hostess, called Mama, in order to gain membership in the club. Usually recommended by a member, potential members go through informal interviews with the Mama. Once the potential member is accepted, he gets a phone call the day after the interview and warm greetings, without mentioning the financial and practical aspects of membership. This gives the impression of his relationship with the Mama as a personal one rather than a business transaction. Usually the entrances to the clubs are hard to find on the street, and are usually guarded by male waiters. Belonging to a prestigious hostess club itself is a status symbol for a businessman, and the sense of exclusivity amplifies a hostess club as a sanctuary well-gated from the street; it shows status for the clients, the embodied confirmation of his social privileges. Being able to visit an exclusive hostess club frequently means that he works for a prestigious corporation that pays for his entertainment, a secure job position, a good house, a good salary, the good company of colleagues, and beautifully dressed women who are dedicated to entertaining him. Because visiting a hostess club is an act of status, one has to maintain it, on the other hand. Some wives Allison interviewed viewed their husbands' going to the club as a burdensome part of their job, rather than an indulgence that is rooted in individual desire for sexuality and intimacy.⁵³ A hostess club is a space for entertainment, but the motivation for a man to visit the club is rooted in his obligatory work during the day.

⁵³ Allison, *Nightwork*, 102.

Workers in the club also perform in certain ways to maintain this exclusive and entertaining atmosphere. At a hostess club, usually there are the owner of the club called Mama, a male manager who is the head of the male waiters who serve drinks and food, and female hostesses whose job is to sit with clients and entertain them through drinking, conversing, and sometimes singing *karaoke* with them. If a hostess club is on the higher end, there is usually a piano player who provides background music and accompaniment when hostesses and clients sing *karaoke*. All of the hostesses dress nicely according to the aesthetic that the club's interior provides. Male waiters, for example, always dress in black tuxedo, white shirt, black bow tie, and black shoes, as Allison observes.⁵⁴

How Hostess Clubs Run: the Mama

One of the most distinctive aspects of the hostess club is the head hostess called the Mama-san, who is the owner and a manager of club. Besides all of the logistical and management work to maintain the club, the main job of the Mama is to be the principal attraction of the hostess club, by maintaining relationships with each client, and embodying the principles of the hostess club through her attitude, style, and choice of fashion.⁵⁵ Although she is the owner and manager of the club and usually controls its management, when the club is open, she does not work behind the scene doing all the logistics. When clients are in the club, she goes around clients' tables and makes sure to greet all of them, and have drinks with them. Usually, the

⁵⁴ Allison, *Nightwork*, 39.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

financial and practical transactions are communicated only between clients and male waiters. Unlike *kyabakura*, described later, hostess clubs try to maintain relationships between the club *and* its clients. The Mama, admired by clients and respected by all the workers at the club, works as the hub of the all the relationships and transactions that take place in the club. The Mama is the main reason why clients visit the club, and invest their time and money there.

Allison points out an effect of “overstatement” of Bijo's furnishings. Favored by its clients, the hostess club is in a sense overdone, and gives the impression of being "a caricature of a style," that is practiced by its clients in their daily lives. This is an effect of a consumerist culture where one's wealth is visualized through possession of excessive objects. The hostess club thus is still a comfortable space for its clients, as it gives the sense of affirmation of the taste/lifestyle of clients, while having theatrical effects of making the club an extraordinary space that is not regulated by the social expectations and rules that businessmen confront both at work and at home.

The way a hostess club handles its financial logistics is also a unique characteristic of the hostess club. As the Mama's and hostesses' relationships with clients have to be performed as personal and genuine relationships, all the monetary transactions are taken care of by male waiters, who are outside of the relationship. Although male workers have to dress and perform according to the aesthetics of the luxurious club space, they are not expected to form any kind of personal relationships with clients, unlike the Mama and hostesses. To clients, male waiters are merely the

background of their entertainment. As male waiters take the burden of dealing with practical transactions, which disturbs the atmosphere of entertainment and clients' experiences of being in a sanctuary that hostesses create, the attention of the clients towards hostesses never gets hostile. In addition to the hostess club's effort to exclusively keep monetary transactions between male waiters and male clients, the fee system of a hostess club is usually unclear. Some prestigious hostess clubs require the clients to pay membership fees. Hostess clubs normally sell drinks by the bottle, and require clients to pay for the bottles of alcohol they open. As customers are expected to revisit the club, the bottle will be kept until they visit the next time if they do not finish it in one visit. In this case, payment could be postponed until the client finishes the bottle. This unclear system allows clients to put off their payments and keep postponing payment until the next time they visit the club. It sometimes happens that clients postpone their payments, which affects the salary of the hostesses, as their salary is based on hourly rates and tips they get from the club based on how much the hostesses' client spent in the club.⁵⁶

Thus, hostess clubs are spaces for businessmen to strengthen their relationships with their bosses, colleagues, and business partners, where they do not have to be concerned about any obligatory responsibilities and expectations based on their status, but just be entertained by the Mama and hostesses in a landscape of luxury. In other words, the majority of clients' autonomy is taken care of by the club, and clients' obligations to make any kind of choice are minimized once they are in

⁵⁶ Matsuda, "What Do Hosesses Sell?" 192.

the club. Besides deciding what to drink, the situations where clients have to make a choice or discuss choices as a group are minimized. Being led to their seat by male waiters, food is usually served without clients specifying what should be served, and conversations are facilitated by hostesses and the Mama. Hostesses take the initiative to entertain the party, and all clients have to do, in the end, is to sit, drink and “have a good time together.” The hostess club is structured upon this promise to give clients a chance to forget their daily lives, by providing an extraordinary space.

How *Kyabakura* Operate

What distinguishes *kyabakura* from the hostess club, is that this club space lets each client choose how he wants to utilize the space to fulfill his individualized motives to come to the club, rather than offering hostesses’ specialized services.

Historically, carrying the tradition of *alubaito salon* mentioned above, the *kyabakura* started evolving as an industry when the Entertainment and Amusement Trades Control Act was renewed in Japan in 1984. The new act was made to restrict *mizu shōbai* with more detailed and explicit requirements than previous legal restrictions, such as shortening opening hours, requiring the acceptance of notification of the National Public Safety Commission of each prefecture, and obliging the club to submit reports and data about the management of the club to the Commission. This change of law significantly affected the existing *mizu shōbai* industry, along with the decrease in clients affected by the Nixon Shock and two oil crises during the 1970s. The concept of *kyabakura* was said to have been originally created by the CEO of a

huge enterprise that ran restaurants and real estate agents, named Hiroshi Nitomi. In 1984, he created the first *kyabakura*, with the slogan of “if you visit the club to see a girl three times, you will get a personal date with her.”⁵⁷ The word *kyabakura* was created by Nitomi, combining the word of “*kyabarē* (cabaret)” and “*kurabu* (club).” The name implies the concept that *kyabakura* has the “clear fee system” and “sexy women” of the mass cabaret, and the elegance of a hostess club.⁵⁸ It swiftly gained popularity, and the industry rapidly spread nationally over the course of its first year. Unlike hostess clubs, which locate themselves, both physically and in concept, closer to businessmen’s workplaces, and tend to aggregate in big cities such as Tokyo and Osaka, many *kyabakuras* are located in small cities in the suburbs and countryside.

Because of its rapidly rising popularity, the word *kyabakura* won the buzzword of the year designation in 1985.⁵⁹ In 2013, it was even selected as one of the 10 most distinctive buzzwords since the award was established.⁶⁰ Unlike the hostess club, which is one of the traditional occupations in *mizu shōbai*, *kyabakura* is a new development of the industry that was created by a male entrepreneur in response to a deteriorating economy.

⁵⁷ *Gendai Yogo no Kisochishiki*, (Tokyo: Ziyukokumin-sha, 1986), s.v. “*Kyabakura*.” Translation is mine.

⁵⁸ Ryo Kurashina, *Yoru wo Tsukutta Otokotachi*, (Toyko: Zitsugyo-no Nihonsya, 2007). All quotes from this book are translated by me.

⁵⁹ Every year since 1984, a publishing company called Jiyū Kokuminsha nominates 50 buzzwords based on a survey of readers of their buzzword dictionaries, and commends one word to be the buzzword of the year. Along with a few other awards, it has been said to be a kind of an index that reveals the political and cultural climate of the year.

⁶⁰ “Top 10 Buzzword for the Past 30 Years,” *J-CAST*, November 14, 2013, <https://www.j-cast.com/2013/11/14188923.html>

How the *Kyabakura* Runs

As *kyabakura* were created in order to change the pre-existing trends in *mizu shōbai* and *huzoku*, one of their selling points was their unusually clear and explicit fee system. In *kyabakura*, unlike hostess clubs and other sex clubs in the *huzoku* industry, everything has a fixed price, including alcohol, the grade of seats and rooms, and even time spent in the club. Because the sex industry commodifies intangible services, it is difficult for a client to estimate the fees they will incur when visiting most of the sex clubs. Since there is no standardized fee system across the industry or even stores that offer similar services, estimating the amount of money a client has to pay varies by situation and is hard to do. The negotiation and transaction between the store and clients usually remains unclear, and potential visitors are forced to rely on unofficial reviews of the store and make their best efforts to precisely estimate the price and the flow of negotiation between a worker and themselves. There is also a threat of a fraud, as the sex industry is usually seen to be connected to organized crime, and specifically *yakuza*,⁶¹ in this particularly Japanese context. Because of these potential threats, *Kyabakura* was sensational, in the sense that its system tried to combat these risks and made it easier for new users to come into the industry.

As mentioned, what distinguishes *kyabakura* from a hostess club, is that it is *apparent* and *explicit*. Unlike the hostess club which is difficult to find on the street, it is easy for potential clients to find *kyabakura*. Usually located in city centres,

⁶¹ *Yakuza* is transnational organized crime in Japan.

kyabakura put up a signboard that show all the fee system of the club. If the *kyabakura* selects women based on specific categories such as college students, nurses etc., that would be the club's selling point, and be put up on top of the signboard. When the *kyabakura* isn't busy, there are a few male waiters called "*kyacchi* (catch)" posted outside the club entrance, to actively invite potential clients walking on the street into the club. *Kyaba-jyo* is called "*kyasuto*" (cast) in the industry.⁶² When there is a smaller number of clients than the number of female workers, one of the "prettiest" female workers, whose physique may attract pedestrians instantly, such as big exposed breasts, is told to stand right outside of the entrance with the *kyacchi*, holding a signboard that says, "today, we have twenty-five cute girls working in the club!" or "we only hire real cute college girls," for example. While *kyacchi* are encouraged to talk to pedestrians actively and keep saying catch phrases aloud, the female worker is prohibited from talking or saying anything. The point of having a girl outside of the entrance of the club is only to display what the club has to offer, rather than giving a free trial of conversing with the girl. The female worker is only meant to help potential clients imagine what kinds of experiences they can have once they are in the club. By displaying the female worker's body as a "product," *kyabakura* makes it easier for the potential clients to imagine the services, and incentivizes them to consider visiting the club. When a male pedestrian gazes at the female worker, one of the *kyacchi* approaches him and mentions the price to suggest paying a visit to the club, as the *kyacchi* walk along with the pedestrian. After

⁶² Both *kyaba-jyo* and hostesses are called "*kyasuto*" (cast) in the industry. For example, when clubs post recruitment ads, the line would be "hiring female *kyasuto*."

walking a few feet from the club and if the *kyacchi* does not see the pedestrian's intention to stop walking, they give up and go back to the initial position. *Kyacchi* sometimes also take the role of negotiator, when a potential client demands a bundle price for services or a different time set. Like the hostess club, financial and practical negotiations should only happen between a male client and a male worker, ideally only before they even come into the club.

When a client enters the club, he is led to an assigned seat based on the plan he has chosen. Normally *kyabakura* have two different plans — VIP and standard. In the *kyabakura* I worked for in Tokyo, Japan, clients buy a set (forty minutes and a bottle of alcohol) of time, as opposed to memberships to belong to certain clubs. The fee to enter the club is also than it is for hostess clubs. As Allison observes, at *Bijo*, the club where she worked, it cost a flat fee of 105 US dollar (15,000 yen)⁶³ per person to even acquire a membership of the club.⁶⁴ The *kyabakura* where I worked in Japan, on the other hand, required clients to pay 4500 yen per forty minutes, and after the first set, they are required to pay an extra fee every fifteen minutes.

The differences between the VIP and the standard pack are the rank of the alcohol that comes with the seat and the quality of the interior surrounding the seat. The VIP area and the standard area are separated by a room divider, which is not high enough to completely separate the space into two areas but high enough to divide the space and showcase the clear differences between the standard area and the VIP area

⁶³ Using an online inflation calculator, \$105 in 1990 when Allison worked in the hostess club, is equivalent in purchasing power of \$205.27 in 2018. Inflation Calculator, *Saving.org*. Last modified, 2018. <https://www.saving.org/inflation/inflation.php?amount=130>

⁶⁴ Allison, *Nightwork*. 37

in terms of furnishing. The standard seat and the VIP seat are furnished differently, and the seating is more spread out in the VIP area. The VIP area is also placed closest to the entrance, so that the clients walking to the area will not be bothered by the crowd in the standard area. The lighting is also darker in the VIP area, which makes the whole area veiled, while the standard area is visible under the bright lights. Through this dramatic gap between the VIP area and the standard area in one space, it visualizes the price-based precise transaction that a client enacts with a *kyabakura*. It gives a client the feeling of "the more he pays, the more he gets."

In both seats, a client is usually automatically registered for the first forty minutes set unless the client has negotiated an exception, and the extension fee is added up per twenty minutes after the first forty minutes. In the set, basic alcohol (called a "house bottle") is included (normally mediocre whisky or mediocre Japanese sake), and those drinks are free-refill. The later clients visit the club, the more expensive the seat fee becomes. Female workers are not allowed to drink the house bottles. Unlike hostess clubs where the food is served without ordering,⁶⁵ there is a menu for food and special drinks, such as cocktails, wine, and champagne.. Food is usually overpriced (i.e. a basket of fries is 1500 yen (convert) in the *kyabakura* I worked for). The management does not pay as much attention to the aesthetics of food decoration as they do in the hostess club. They usually serve snacks that are

⁶⁵ Allison, *Nightwork*, 39.

iconic enough to identify their brands, mostly popular snack brands for the general public, such as potato chips, and pocky.⁶⁶

Like male waiters in hostess clubs, all negotiations between clients and the club are taken care of by male waiters/service staff called "boys," no matter how old they are. They are in charge, from inviting potential clients outside of the club, bringing casts to each table, bringing ordered food and drinks, assisting *kyasuto* to suggest clients to order more expensive drinks and foods, to dealing with conflicts clients cause in the club. Since the communications between clients and the club are always taken care of only through the "boys," the only interaction allowed between *kyasuto* and clients is when casts are sitting with clients. They are not allowed to interact either before or after. Unless designated, casts cannot choose which clients to talk to, and they are rotated among several seats throughout their shift. Though what casts do at each seat is completely up to them, the whole space is strictly monitored by the "boys." The "boys" communicate through small headsets so that they can hear each other in the club filled with loud music and conversation. As soon as they recognize an issue, such as conflicts between clients and female workers or clients illegally touching casts, they go to the table and address the issue. The consequences of these issues range from a verbal warning to escorting the client out of the club either temporarily or permanently. There was one client who was permanently expelled from *College Gal*⁶⁷, where I worked in Tokyo, Japan. One co-worker told

⁶⁶ Pocky is one of the best-selling snacks in Japan.

⁶⁷ All names of individuals (except mine), and organizations in this thesis are pseudonyms. All names of places are unchanged.

me that one of her clients got expelled from the club when he slapped her during the session with her in the club. He got frustrated with her as she refused to date him. After that happened, the client was escorted outside the club by the "boys" and told to never come back, as the club put him on a "blacklist," which is a list of risky clients "boys" circulate. The worker was also escorted by the "boys" to the waiting room, and left the club right after.

What Clients Pay for in *Kyabakura*

As indicated above, the system of *kyabakura* is that a client acquires more kinds of services as they purchase more packaged services. Thus, when a client wants to acquire something that is not included in the basic fee, there are other additional services he can purchase in order to enjoy services that are not included in a normal session. When a client comes into the club having only paid the basic fee, a client gets one *kyasuto* each time, and one *kyasuto* usually stays at one table for twenty minutes. Once the session is finished, the *kyasuto* leaves, as she is called by the "boys," and the client gets a new *kyasuto*. The client keeps getting new *kyasuto* until he leaves or has already talked to all the *kyasuto*. If the client wants to talk to a specific *kyasuto*, he can choose the *kyasuto*. There are two ways clients can do this. One is an out-of-club appointment called *hon-shimei* ("real" appointment) and the other is *gyōnai-shimei* (in-club appointment). Both appointments designate one specific *kyasuto* dedicated to one client during the client's stay in the club. A "real" appointment means that a client comes to the club just to see one specific *kyasuto*, and an "in-club" appointment

is when a client finds someone who he wants to talk to exclusively during his session. The price of the "real" appointment is usually higher than that of an "in-club" appointment because a "real" appointment grants a client one specific *kyasuto*, which inconveniences the management of the club, as the basic rotation only allows one female worker to stay with the same client for about twenty minutes. In the club I worked in, for example, a "real" appointment, which happens as soon as a client gets in the club, costs 3000 yen, and an "in-club" appointment costs 1000 yen. There's no limitation for a client as to how many appointments he can make, so it is possible that a client can have more than one *kyasuto* at once during his stay by using the appointment system. One client who visited *College Gal*, when there were few clients in the club beside him, chose all eleven *kyasuto* who were not with clients at that time.

If a client wants to spend time with a specific *kyasuto* outside of the club, he can pay the club to do so. Though the negotiation of this "date" is communicated between the client and the *kyasuto*, the *kyasuto* has to notify the club, as the club collects the fee from the client and the date is also calculated into the evaluation of her work in the club. *Douhan* is when a client comes to the club with a *kyasuto*, and *afutā* (after) is for when a client leaves the club with a *kyasuto*. They normally meet a few hours before the *kyasuto*'s shift, and do anything — from eating dinner together to having sex — and come to the club together. While the *kyasuto* is getting ready and changing into her uniform, the client talks to another worker. After that, the client spends his whole time with the *kyasuto* with whom he originally came to the club.

Though negotiations of going on a date or meeting in private are totally up to clients and workers, *kyabakura* apply a fee if it's either *douhan* or *afutaa*, as it directly affects the profits of the club on that day. In the club I worked for, the system was unusual. Clients did not have to pay for *douhan*, and there was no *afutā*. Not having to pay for *douhan* makes it easier for clients to come to the club at an earlier time and to stay longer, as it grants that the client could monopolize the *kyasuto* during his stay at the club. Having no *afutā* is one of the club's mood making strategies, as they advertised girls as "innocent, high-class college students who are not allowed to go out past midnight." Since it was free for clients to meet *kyasuto* before their shifts, but *kyasuto* still got tips for bringing clients with them, some *kyasuto* took advantage of the system and did *demae-douhan*, in which they met with the clients in front of the club five minutes before their shift and simply came into the club with the clients. Even *kyasutos'* time outside of their work in *kyabakura* is systematized, so that it also contributes to the profit a *kyabakura* makes.

What *Kyabakura* Provides to Clients

Without the presence of the Mama, who is the core of all the relationships and a barterer of transactions in the hostess club, the *kyabakura* relies on the individual relationships that each *kyasuto* builds with her clients. The incentives for clients to visit a *kyabakura* vary more than those of the clients of hostess clubs. Some visit *kyabakura* for their *settai* and *tsukiai*, as a part of company outings, and use the club as a cheaper alternative to a hostess club, while others visit individually, seeking

intimate interactions with a *kyaba-jyō*. In a hostess club, a hostess sits with one specific client until he leaves. It is the hostess's responsibility to take care of the client when he is in the club. However, in *kyabakura*, as mentioned above, *kyasutos* rotate. "Boys" are responsible for rotating *kyasuto* to each table approximately every twenty minutes. If a client does not appoint anyone, he gets to talk to three to four workers in his first session. Then, the client must decide whether to appoint one *kyasuto* he liked during the rotation, or keep meeting new ones.

Sociologist Kaya Kitajyo, in an ethnography about *kyabakura*, recalls her own experiences of working in a club in Tokyo for six months. While Allison worked in a prestigious hostess club which required clients' membership and expensive fees, Kitajyo worked in a *kyabakura* which does not require any prior experience in the *mizu shōbai*. Kitajyo, in her ethnography, speaks about the experience of working in *kyabakura* by reflecting on her own experience there, and quoting her co-workers, while Allison observes how the space of the hostess club is used to shape clients' experiences in relation to a greater ideological agenda in Japanese society. She explains the differences between *kyabakura* and hostess clubs in terms of the ways each club maintains its relationships with its clients. In a hostess club, the Mama is the embodiment of the club. As she is the face of the hostess club, the Mama is the main reason clients visit the club. Hostesses are usually welcomed by clients *because* they are the ones the Mama has hand-picked *for* them, and there is a trusting relationship between the Mama and the host's clients. The relationship is crafted between the hostess club and a client, rather than a hostess of the club and the client.

In fact, sometimes Mamas and hostesses accompany clients to play golf on weekends.⁶⁸ In *kyabakura*, on the other hand, the relationship is crafted between individual *kyaba-jyo* and individual clients, and the club only takes care of the logistical and financial means of these relationships. The club would not intervene in the interaction between a client and a *kyasuto* during a session in club, and the club does not intervene in private meetings with clients when a *kyasuto* is off-shift. Thus, while a hostess club is a centralized institution that has the Mama as the core and the manager of the club who is in charge of every aspect of the club, *kyabakura* adopts two different approaches to managing the club: one is the centralization of the financial management of the club, and the other is the individualization of the interactions between clients and workers.

The reason why this specific system of management is adopted in *kyabakura* is because of their unique way of packaging clients' experiences in *kyabakura*. Unlike in a hostess club, where being a hostess is regarded as a profession in the entertainment industry, *kyabakura* brand themselves as places where clients can meet "ordinary girls," and where the relationships built with the girls can be explored freely. Japanese sociologist Hayashi Maki explicitly mentions this difference between hostess clubs and *kyabakura*:

because hostess clubs locate themselves in famous entertainment districts in big cities, and it costs tens of thousands every time clients visit, the clubs try to fabricate a space that is special, and not aligned with clients' workspace and household. On the other hand, *kyabakura* are everywhere and cheap to go in. Clients can enjoy them as an 'extension of their daily lives.' Even though

⁶⁸ Kaya, Kitajyo. "The Sociology of *Kyabakura* Ladies." (Tokyo: *Koudansha*, 2006). Quotes from this book are all translated by me.

kyabakura are casual and cheap, the interior is still decorative and *looks* (emphasis mine) luxurious. There is no dress code, and clients can decide if they want to buy a bottle or just do an open bar. Clients can visit *kyabakura* with a group of people and enjoy it as a party, or go for an intimate drink with a girl. These styles of *kyabakura* enable clients to enjoy going to the clubs in any way they want, and that is the reason why they become obsessed with it.⁶⁹

In this sense, *kyabakura* give the feeling as if one were in a hostess club, but provides a distinctive use of space, different from that of the hostess club. The experience of *kyabakura* is an experience of *feeling like you're* in a hostess club mass-produced for the general public. As mentioned above, most *kyabakura* have a similar building structure to a hostess club, though they tend to be bigger. As the interior of the *kyabakura* imitates that of a hostess club, there is a chandelier hanging from the ceiling, a glass divider, faux-leather couches, and cheaper alcohol. *Boys* wear formal attire, but the style is not standardized and they wear colorful ties (unlike hostess clubs where all the male waiters are required to wear a specific style of black tuxedo prepared by the club. *Kyasutos'* dresses and makeup are also not as controlled as in a hostess club, yet they still do have to wear dresses like hostesses. The purpose of this interior is not to trick clients as if they were in a hostess club, but to mass-produce the imitation of the luxurious experience of the hostess club, inspired by the Las Vegas tourism aesthetics, as I discussed in Introduction.

In order to fit what a hostess club does into the business model that *kyabakura* tried to achieve, i.e. mass-production at a cheaper cost, they have adapted the narrative of "ordinary and amateur" to *kyabakura*. Unlike the hostess club, where hostesses are trained to entertain clients, *kyabakura* often advertise female workers as

⁶⁹ Maki Hayashi, "Cabacla Lady's Work," 102.

“amateurs,” with whom clients can build their own interactions and experiences. Since there is no standardized way of “playing in the club” and training female workers, the amateurism of the workers opens up various possibilities of what clients can possibly gain from their interactions. This individualized expectation towards service is completely opposed from the traditional idea of “playing” and *mizu shōbai* of hostess clubs that is rather ritualistic and guided by the rules of the space.

The significant differences between hostess clubs and *kyabakura* lie in how they established their own model as they reflected the shift of the Japanese economy at that time. Throughout the history of the sex industry, both kinds of clubs emerged as a "new category of sex industry." Hostess clubs were created due to the increased demand for cafes and restaurants specifically tailored to white-color men, during the Japanese economic boom after World War II as argued above, while *kyabakura* was created to be a remedy for the Japanese economic stagnation during the 1980s. Hostess clubs emerged during the 1950s as a place to professionalize women as waiters at restaurants and cafes, who started to entertain businessmen using their femininity as an added value to their work. The hostess club contributes to constructing the businessmen’s leisure activities as a part of their life as a worker, which enables the formation of a masculine identity specifically for the needs of the corporations. Because being a member of a hostess club requires economic and social status, the space is made to be exclusive. *Kyabakura* on the other hand, is a mass-produced space to bring the general public into the industry of *mizu shōbai* for less risk and less exclusivity. *Kyabakura* gives clients freedom in their use of the space,

while giving an experience of *mizu shōbai* that is imagined to be like going to a hostess club. Female workers are showcased as “amateur ordinary girls” with whom clients are free to customize their relationship. If the hostess club is an embodiment of the clients’ social status and potential wealth, as Allison argues, *kyabakura* is where an experience of *mizu shōbai* is commodified for the general public and purchased instantly.

In her book, Allison suggests that play and rituals at hostess club enable a specific masculine identity that fits the needs of their corporations. As an example of this, she examines company-paid outings in hostess clubs. By describing how the hostess club produces six levels of effects on male workers to contribute to the modern structures of business and economics, she argues that the hostess club enables corporations: (1) to extend working hours even past the time when workers physically have to be in the office during the day; (2) to broaden the meaning of work that incorporates not only a realm of labor, but also a realm of pleasure, social relaxation, personal fun, and sexuality; (3) to distance workers from their home and private lives by physically constraining workers with work-related activities; (4) to masculinize a full-time career by providing play and services only appropriate for heterosexual men; (5) to feminize households by implying obligatory participation in company outings to a hostess club as a part of corporate work and; (6) to place the sexuality of male workers into the public domain where the sexuality may be commodified,

controlled, and manipulated.⁷⁰ Playing at a hostess club, is thus a part of white-color men's work,

The *mizu shōbai* is not for or about sex; companies are not paying for their workers to be and become men with a particular construct and utility – the type of men who will make good and committed workers. For this, a certain kind of sexuality is useful, a sexuality of play that services men, bolsters the male ego, and makes them feel confident and assured.⁷¹

Then why do they need hostesses to achieve this? In order for male clients to achieve specific bonding experiences that enable these 6 levels of management of workers, the feminine presence of hostess workers is necessary to enact the formation of their corporate masculine identities, which are also connected to other parts of their lives, such as work ethic and family life. Eve Sedgwick examines “homosociality,” which is as a term denoting the generally homogeneous bonds of people of the same sex, in her book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*.⁷² Eve Sedgwick examines men’s desire to bond with other men and how the desire is enacted and performed, in some English texts. Though the word is deeply connected to the word “homosexual,” Sedgwick argues that male social bonds are usually characterized by homophobia and heterosexuality: “‘obligatory heterosexuality’ is built into male-dominated kinship systems, or that homophobia is a *necessary* consequence of such patriarchal institutions as heterosexual marriage.”⁷³ This is because it is impossible for masculinity and male homosexuality to coexist in one body, as male homosexuality makes the body an object of male sexual desire, which

⁷⁰ Allison, *Nightwork*, 206-209.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁷² Eve Kosofsky Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men : English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

⁷³ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 4.

then defines the body as a feminine being.⁷⁴ Catherine MacKinnon argues that femininity is mostly structured by being a sexual object of male desire: “Socially, femaleness means femininity, which means attractiveness to men, which means sexual attractiveness, which means sexual availability on male terms.”⁷⁵ Bonds between men, then, are only possible between two heterosexual men who do not objectify each other. As bonds between men that are formed through company outings are considered to be an important contributing factor to the formation of worker identity and cohesion, the bonds acquired through the company outings also affect other realms of their lives, as Allison also observes how company outings taking place in hostess clubs affect the workers' households. Sedgwick also asserts,

our own society is brutally homophobic; and the homophobia directed against both males and females is not arbitrary or gratuitous, but tightly knit into the texture of family, gender, age, class, and race relations. Our society could not cease to be homophobic and have its economic and political structures remain unchanged.⁷⁶

Sociologist Michael Kimmel also discusses homophobia as a crucial element of masculinity's sustained hegemony. Hegemonic masculinity, coined by sociologist Raewyn Connell, conceptualizes practices that legitimize masculine domination in society across societies, culture, and history.⁷⁷ The concept gives a tool to examine why and how heterosexual men maintain dominant social roles over other gender identities. Kimmel argues that homophobia is one of the strategies used by "men in

⁷⁴ Allison also makes a similar argument by adapting Peggy Sanday's work on a ritual of collective rape practiced by American college men. See Allison (1994), 168-169.

⁷⁵ Catherine A. Mackinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence." *Signs* 8, no. 4 (1983): 635-58, 630-631.

⁷⁶ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 3.

⁷⁷ R.W. Connell, "The Social Organization of Masculinity" in *Masculinities* (2005): 67-86.

power" to maintain hegemonic masculinity, feminizing and objectifying any kind of gendered subjects as targets of male desire, rather than autonomous identities. In order for masculine identities to be dominant in society and have alliances with each other, they need to claim their heterosexuality and dominance over other gender identities, especially women.

Therefore, in order for men to bond with each other while asserting their dominance over other gender identities in the public sphere, it is important for them to maintain their heterosexuality in the scene of bonding. Hostess clubs provide a perfect space for Japanese white-collar men to engage in this bonding. In the hostess club, businessmen experience homosocial bonding enacted by specific performances and services hostesses and the Mama provide. They take a role as crucial elements that make male clients' bonding homosocial, not homosexual – that is, femininity.

In order for clients to feel like "men," hostesses and the Mama act as facilitators of the conversation, or a target of clients' sexual conversations or flirtations with clients. Allison observes that conversation between clients is usually oriented around hostesses' physical aspects, especially about breasts. As discussed earlier, one of the main purposes of having hostesses at the table is so that the host of the group does not have to be concerned about making sure his guests are enjoying themselves, and rather lets the host also have a good time *with* his guests. The hostesses do so by facilitating the conversation at the table, and by minimizing the tasks that clients would need to do on their own such as lighting cigarettes, pouring

drinks, and asking for new napkins.⁷⁸ Another function of hostesses is that they become subjects of client conversation. In a hostess club, conversation could range from trivial topics to business deals. The important mission to accomplish through these conversations is, again, to give clients at the table the impression that they are sharing the time and space together. Allison observes that when a client starts talking to hostesses, joking about their breast sizes or other physical qualities, the conversation is usually shared with other male clients as they exchange their personal opinions of the hostess. Allison explicitly mentions,

alluding to women's breasts, the men speak at such times *of* females but mainly *to* other males...that is, just as a man will call a woman's breasts flat and look to the other men, who all laugh, a man will place his hand on the breast of a hostess and look not at her but at the rest of the males.⁷⁹

In other words, hostesses as female-beings become topics of conversation *only* heterosexual men can share and enjoy, and they all can empathize with each other, usually oriented around their sexuality.

The Mama takes an important role as a booster of a male client's ego, and their confidence as men. Greeting all clients and making sure that everyone is having a good time at her club, the Mama is the best hostess in the hostess club, capable of flattering everyone yet making each one of them feel he is special to her. Unlike other hostesses who usually wear dresses and gowns, the Mama usually wears an expensive yet neat kimono. Going around the tables, she makes sure to complement each client on how handsome they are, while getting compliments from clients. She sometimes

⁷⁸ Allison, *Nightwork*, 202.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

asks a client to do a *karaoke* duet with her, making sure to take a photo of the couple in order for the client and his group to ruminate on the moment over and over again. The client who sang *karaoke* with the Mama suddenly becomes the target of admiration and teasing. Through all this personalized flirtation with one client after another, the Mama gives the client a type of delusion that she may really be his. The feeling gives the client an affirmation of his masculinity, as the Mama functions as a prize that he acquired by his masculine attractiveness. Although most of the clients do understand the performative aspects of all the communications and conversations taking place in the hostess club, the quality of her customer service and her performance is high enough for clients to keep coming back to the club.⁸⁰ In other words, the status, the beauty, and the class of the Mama becomes the mirror of the status of a client himself. As a man who has access to the club, which is managed by such a beautiful woman, he must also be socially acclaimed: “the Mama is classy herself and makes the man feel important as well.”⁸¹

Hostess clubs and *kyabakura* created a space for men to spend an evening after work. Although they adapt similar business models, in which the service offered in both clubs is interactions with female companions – what each club offers is different. Hostess clubs provide a space for white-collar businessmen to conduct their company outings. By doing so, the hostess club also enables men to form a specific masculine identity that is beneficial to their corporation. The masculine identity is formed through hostesses' performance of serving them, in order to minimize men's

⁸⁰ Allison, *Nightwork*, 70.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

anxiety about the party. *Kyabakura*, on the other hand, provides a space for various clientele to interpret interactions they have with *kyba-jyō* in *kyabakura* in a personalized and individual way. *Kyabakura* offers the amateurism of its workers, leaving space for clients to design their own way of enjoying the club, unlike a hostess club, where "professional" hostesses take care of everything. The experiences of clients in both hostess clubs and *kyabakura* significantly contribute to their hegemonic masculine identity, by setting up a space for men to bond with each other without the threat of homosexuality. The feminine presence is necessary for bonding between men, and both hostess clubs and *kyabakura* provides a space for the men to feed their masculinity by offering feminine companions. While I have focused in this chapter on how a hostess club and *kyabakura* differ from the clients' perspective, I now examine how this difference in services affects hostess clubs and *kyabakura* as work spaces for female workers.

CHAPTER 2

MIZU SHŌBAI AS A WORKPLACE

I wake up at noon since I went to bed at 3:00 am the night before. After a few hours of organizing my field notes from my last shift, I get up and start getting ready at 2:30 pm to catch a 4:00 pm train. I am wearing makeup that looks natural but not natural enough to look like I am wearing nothing. I try to make double-eyelids by gluing the skin of my eyelids. I shave every single part of my body to pretend my puberty has never come. I wear a strapless bra under my normal bra. Then, finally, I'm done with getting ready. I get on the train, get off at Akihabara station. *College Gal* is a few minutes' walk from the station. I walk into the club, and greet the "boys" in the club. I walk into the dressing room that is about 3m x 4m in area. Trying to squeeze myself into the room already filled with other workers getting ready for the opening, I write my *genjina*⁸² on the waiting list to get my hair done by the hairdresser. While waiting for my turn, I touch up my make-up and change the color of my lipstick as my co-worker has advised me that many clients don't like too bold colors. The hairdresser calls my name, and she curls my hair so that my face looks smaller. I punch my time-card by 5:00 pm, and the club manager calls everyone for a meeting. Girls sit on the long couch, and the boys and the manager stand in front of them. The manager does the opening roll call, and each "boy" tells a small funny story based on the theme of the day. Today's theme is "how to become a hardworking person by respecting and following bosses' orders and advice." At the end of the meeting, the manager tells a funny story that's somehow transformed into a lesson of bringing more clients to the club. After the meeting, I sit on a couch with other girls until called. While waiting, I text several clients I have sat with before, asking them to visit me in the club again with different kinds of heart emojis I would never use. The club gets crowded as time passes, and *kyasuto* are made to stand in the hallway. I sit with my last client at 11:20 pm. My shift is supposed to end at 11:30pm so that I can catch the 11:45 pm train, which is the last train home. But I am still not called out of the table by the "boys," past 11:30 pm. Please, I need to go home. I can't stand up and just leave as I am allowed to stand up from the table only when I am directed by one of the "boys." Trying to catch their glance and attention, I am looking at them as I talk to clients, yet they seems to be intentionally ignoring me. Please. As I actually start to stare at them for a few minutes, they finally call me from the table. I throw off my

⁸² *Genjina* is "a stage name" for a *kyasuto* to be called in the club. It is usually only a first name, and each *kyasuto* decides her own when she starts working in club.

uniform and foot-binding-like-heels and run to the station. I barely make it to the last train. I get home at 2:00 am and take off the thick mask of make-up to get ready for bed.⁸³

There are significant differences between hostess clubs and *kyabakura* in terms of how each space is tailored for clients, based on different economic needs and historical contexts. Then how do these clubs differ for workers? Are there any significant differences? How do the different needs of clients affect workers? What do they offer? And finally, are they sex workers? In this chapter, I will explore both the hostess club and *kyabakura* as work spaces, with more focus on *kyabakura*. I discuss how workers are employed, rules they have to follow, how workers are paid, and how they serve clients in the club. At the end of this section, I examine some theoretical work on sex work and discuss whether hostess club and *kyabakura* are sex work, in relation to intimate labor.

As discussed previously, hostess clubs and *kyabakura* refer to similar systems in which female workers drink and converse with male clients. Their services are deeply ritualized in order to realize clients' initial purpose of visiting the club, which varies from bonding with his colleagues to having an intimate time with a female worker. Yet, they adapt different strategies of packaging the services provided by their female workers. Female workers also use different tactics to work in hostess clubs and *kyabakura*. The fundamental differences between hostess clubs and *kyabakura*'s offerings affects who works in each industry, and how each space functions as a workplace.

⁸³ Excerpt from my field note

How They Hire

When one wants to look for jobs in *mizu shōbai*, it is not that difficult to find a posting online. Most of the information is online, and is accessible through phones and computers.⁸⁴ One book estimated that the size of the *kyabakura* industry today is 9800 billion yen.⁸⁵ If you simply put the word of “*kyabakura arubaito*” (part time job) in google, 4,770,000 results come up. There are some online platforms used mostly for looking for part time jobs (i.e. *Ann*, *Baitoru*, etc.), and there are online platforms that are specifically used for looking for positions in *kyabakura* and hostess club (i.e. *Tainyu.com*).

Most of jobs are listed as “part time jobs” regardless of how many hours and shifts workers end up working in the club. Once one enters for a position online, she has an interview with the club. The number of ads for jobs in *kyabakura* is significantly greater than that of hostess club, as *kyabakura* is a bigger industry spread across Japan, and hostess clubs sometimes rely on references from current workers when looking for new employees. Those job listings usually only include hourly rates and some of the benefits such as monetary credits, if one decides to have an interview. Most clubs mention that they pay transportation fees for the interview, or even give some cash (usually about 5,000 to 10,000 yen), in order to increase the number of applicants, and put higher rates than the amount actually paid.⁸⁶ The entire

⁸⁴ Miura, *Why Do Women Want to Become Kyaba-jyō?*, 75.

⁸⁵ Kitajyo, “The Sociology of *Kyabakura* Ladies,” 32.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 72, 78.

process is not well elaborated in the advertisements. The contracts and rules of the club are only told to an applicant after the interview. Although there are no requirements listed on their advertisements to become a *kyaba-jyo*, the club checks the feasibility of the applicant during the interview, based on her age, physical appearance, and experience in the industry.

Does that mean anybody can work in a *kyabakura* or hostess club? Though the advertisements do not mention any requirements, there seem to be unwritten rules about clubs' worker preferences depending on the club's location and prestige. When I was looking for a *kyabakura* to work for, I had three interviews at three different locations. All of them were in Tokyo, but in different areas. I could not find any openings in hostess clubs, as they prefer workers to work in the club for a longer period, and almost every day, than I was willing to dedicate. The first club I went to was *Club Peter Pan* in Kabukicho.⁸⁷ Interviews are usually set during the day, when the club is not busy. I went in at 11:00 in the morning, and there was one group of clients partying with hostesses. I was escorted to the table next to them, and silently waited there for 5 minutes. The club manager came, and asked me to fill out a form on which I had to provide information about my name, home address, age, my ideal shifts, my ideal hourly rate, and my experience in the industry. For hourly rate, I wrote down 4000 yen, as the club ads mentioned that the minimum wage was from 5,000 yen. Yet he said the normal hourly rate is 2000 to 2500 yen when he saw my

⁸⁷ Kabukicho is the biggest red light district in Tokyo, known as a district filled with prestigious *kyabakura*, host clubs, and *huzoku*. Located itself in the heart of Shinjuku, which is the district of offices for big corporations, civil service institutions, and governmental institutions, it has a geographical advantage of being within the reach of office workers of Shinjuku after their work on weekdays.

form. He asked me if I had any experience working in a club and I said no. He went to talk to someone, and came back after a minute. He told me his club could not hire me because I could only work such a short amount of time with no experience. The whole interview took ten minutes.

The second interview I had was at *Club Round* in Roppongi. As the area has many prestigious office buildings and residence mansions, the neighborhood is known for higher cultural/financial capital, and prestigious hostess clubs for white-collar workers in the district. Two minutes away from the station, the club was located on the third floor of a building facing a big intersection. A sign was up in front of the building. The whole club was furnished with white beige faux leather couches and crystal chandeliers, yet the lighting was a little dark. I told one of the male workers that I had come here to do an interview, and he led me to one of the couch areas where no clients were sitting, and told me to wait and fill out the entry sheet while he called a manager. The entry sheet had the exact same questions as the one I filled out in Club Peter. On the other side of the couch, one woman in a short dress was lying down, probably sleeping. The manager came, while having stared at me from head to toe. He sat across from me and looked at my entry sheet. Surprised, he told me that not many people with no experience would want to start working in Roppongi. He started explaining the system of salary and rules, yet the information he gave me was completely different from what I saw on their ad on the site. Their hourly rate was 2,000-2,500 yen with no experience, although their advertisement clearly said it was 5000 yen and up. When I asked him about how the hourly rate is

determined, he told me that he usually decides at the interview, saying, "It does not make any sense if an ugly woman came in and asked for 5,000 yen per hour. I would kick her ass and say you are so ugly that you do not deserve such a high rate."

There are other costs that workers need to pay on their own, which was again not mentioned in the advertisement. At *Club Round*, for example, workers have to pay 1,500 yen per shift for their rental dresses, and five hundred yen per shift for hairdressing. The advertisement stated rental dresses and hairdressing were free. The normal hours of the club are 5:00 am to 12:00 pm because their club was open during the morning, expecting "hosts" to visit the club after they worked at host clubs, yet he told me that they usually closed at 11:00 am since they do not have that many clients: "Our club is the bottom of the bottom in Roppongi, so we do not expect to open the club full time. We do not care if you are experienced or not, but I do judge if I want to hire girls based on how pretty they are. If they have big boobs and a nice butt, they can work in my club." Since most of the clubs — especially those on the lower-end— do not provide transportation reimbursement, workers are also required to pay for their own transportation. Although he recommended that I look for another place, he also said he would hire me if I wanted to work there, telling me I have a nice butt. He said he would let me do a "try-out," and that my hourly rate would be 3,000 yen with free rental dress and hairdressing for the day of the try-out. I told him that I would text him via a messenger app called *Line* about the date when I would like to try out. During our conversation, he told me several times to bring a silicon push-up bra. After I left the club, I got a message from the manager via *Line*. He said, "please let

me know about the try-out, I do think you are really cute. I am looking forward to working with you," with several smiley faces and heart emojis. I told him that I would text him about the try-out.

The last club I applied for, which I ended up working for, was *Club College Gal* in Akihabara. Akihabara is another business and shopping district known for being the home of technology and computer-related business. This club advertised itself as one that had eliminated annoying workers' responsibilities, such as the cost of dresses. Unlike other clubs, this club did not require workers to prepare their own dresses. Instead, the club was a kind of cosplay club where workers serve clients while wearing "office-lady inspired" uniforms. They also specialized, in hiring only female college students who had little experience in the club industry. Their come-on to the clients was that clients could talk to young, cute, sexualized, and innocent girls who have not acquired any hostess *habitus*.

In my interview for *College Gal*, I went to the nearest station and called the club, as instructed. The manager who answered the call directed me to *Club Olivia*, instead of *College Gal*. It was a club affiliated with the one I applied for. The club I applied for was a part of one of the biggest corporations in the *kyabakura* industry, which owns six different *kyabakura* chains. *Club Olivia* specialized their service by only hiring women who were older than college students, and having them wear high school uniforms while serving. The young manager, who was maybe around his mid-twenties in age, directed me to the club I had initially applied for, and directed one of the male workers to walk me there. During the walk, the male worker kept insisting

on holding my umbrella, as it was raining, saying that “I would be scolded by my manager if I treated an ‘*onnanoko*’⁸⁸ like this.”

At *College Gal*, I had an interview with the manager of the club. Young, long light brown hair, pierced ears, and skinny suits made of grey satin fabric. He asked a few questions about my status as a college student, and repeatedly asked if I really wanted to keep working after the try-out. I had to say yes, as I figured that otherwise they would not have let me try out. I asked them to do a try-out right after my interview, but the manager told me to come back the next day, though the advertisement said applicants could do a tryout on the day of the interview. The whole interview took twenty minutes.

My field research is an example of the fact that *Kyabakura* advertisements are unique in that they lack significant information about costs that female workers will be responsible for, and do not have any accountability for the information they put in the ads. Kitajyo encountered a similar experience: the interview seemed to determine the actual working conditions for applicants, individually and subjectively assessed by a manager. Although the average advertised hourly rate is 4,000 yen to 5,000 yen, those who do not have any experience in the club industry are usually required to work for around 2,000-2,500 yen per hour. In try-outs, the hourly rate tends to be 500-1,000 yen higher so as to give applicants incentives to work in the club, but the rate suddenly drops when they start working, following the deductible costs that they have to pay out of their salary, and the selling quota that is set based on each worker's

⁸⁸ ‘*onnanoko*’ is a specific way of male workers calling female workers. The word literally means ‘girl’ in Japanese.

popularity with clients. Since many clubs require workers to wear a dress and heavy hair arrangements, most clubs provide rental dresses and hair arrangements. Again, though advertised to be free, those arrangements cause workers to take up a financial burden after the try-out. Their advertisements work as a hook for potential workers, especially those who have no experience in the industry. It presents the jobs as something she doesn't need prior experience for, initial investment, and strict time constraints.

Try-out Day

In most *kyabakura*, the club management usually asks applicants to work for a day after their interviews in order to evaluate their performance at the table. This system is also supposed to give some time for applicants to consider if they actually want to work in the club. On the day of my try-out, the manager of *College Gal* told me to come to the club an hour before the club opened in order to teach me some of “the basics” such as mixing drinks, lighting cigarettes, sending hand signals to the “boys.” This was also the time for me to be informed about terms and conditions. A male worker brought a piece of paper and told me a few places where I needed to put my signature. As I signed the contract, he asked me to give him my IDs (credit card, student ID, driver's license). They went to the back side of the cash register, to copy all my IDs. They then led me to the dressing room and told me to change. The dressing room was about six square meters in area. In the dressing room, there were lockers to store workers’ individual valuables, two big mirrors, and one shoe box.

Under the lockers, there was a uniform prepared for me. It was an office-lady-inspired costume that included a white half sleeve button-down, a black tight skirt, and nude beige stockings. I wore it with a pair of 6-inch black heels. The skirt was short enough to reveal my underwear when I sat, so I put one of the sofa pillows on top of my knees while signing the contract. I was also told to carry a small purse with a lighter (to light clients' cigarettes), a handkerchief (to wipe water off clients' glass cups and to put over your tights so that your underwear won't be visible), and name cards (to exchange your contact info with clients). After that, they briefly told me how to make drinks and taught me some of the hand signs and holding of napkins. These were used as a medium of communication between male workers and female workers when the female workers were at the table and could not directly communicate with male workers. When the whole session was done, I was told to line up with the other girls along the hallway to welcome clients. There was no specific guide on how to interact with clients. For the first shift at *College Gal*, 5:30 pm-11:30 pm, I met with five clients. The male waiters did not call me back to the waiting area until 11:40 pm, at which time I plunged myself into the waiting room and stuck my legs into jeans to run to the last train. The manager asked me if I wanted to keep working as we walked toward the station. After we exchanged phone numbers, he went back to the club.

How They Work: Hostess Club and *Kyabakura*

The most significant difference between hostess clubs and *kyabakura* is the different ways of entertaining the clients. I mentioned in the previous chapter that while being a hostess requires a sense of professionalism to entertain a group of clients, *kyabakura* amplifies its workers' amateurism as one of their unique offerings, that emphasizes the possibility of more intimate interactions between clients and female workers. Thus, the primary job of the hostesses in hostess clubs is to enable clients to have a "good time together," collectively. Allison describes "the hostess's role is to help create a *group* out of a table of individuals."⁸⁹ Thus, the collectivity of the space is the main task for hostesses to achieve through their service.

Because of the significant focus on collective activities in hostess clubs, hostesses in hostess clubs belong to an "apprentice group," led by an experienced hostess. This apprentice group consists of a leading hostess, with her own clients, and assistant and part-time hostesses, who do not have their own clients, and help the leading hostesses. They adopt a kind of "apprentice system" within the apprentice group, where inexperienced hostesses can learn from their leaders, Sociologist Saori Matsuda asserts the uniqueness of apprentice groups of hostesses where hostesses cooperate with each other to serve clients, exchange information, and hand down techniques, skills, and knowledge. In spite of the fact that hostesses are inherently prone to frequently change clubs they work for, apprentice groups are formed and provide a space for hostesses to work effectively as collective groups, but also firm

⁸⁹ Allison, *Nightwork*, 65.

relationships with other hostesses.⁹⁰ By observing the structure of each apprentice groups and how the groups are formed, Matsuda concludes that the system apprentice group takes a crucial role of determining the quality of each hostess's work in hostess clubs.

This system affects salaries significantly, as all earnings are deposited with the main hostess of the group. In a hostess club, the hostesses' salaries are the sum of their hourly rate and the additional tips they get based on how much their clients spend in the club. This is the same system as that of *kyabakura*; however, only head hostesses are able to get additional tips on top of the hourly rate. In both *kyabakura* and hostess club, one hostess accompanies one client. For example, when a group of 5 clients visit clubs, 5 hostesses are going to wait on the table. This is more flexible in hostess clubs, as they usually have fewer hostesses than *kyabakura* do. In hostess clubs, the idea is that hostesses need to entertain *a group*, not each individual.⁹¹ When there are more clients than there are hostesses in a hostess club, the Mama makes sure that each table gets one experienced hostess. Those "experienced" hostesses are the ones who are responsible for the table, and they initiate getting other hostesses to entertain the table. At the table, this one experienced hostess is the core/leader of the entertainment. Because of this business model, the table is considered to be the leading hostess's table, and the clients are hers. For example, when a client (Client A) of hostess A visits the club with two other clients who have never visited the club

⁹⁰ Matsuda, 'Colleague' Relationships among Women in the Service Sector: A Case Study of Japanese Hostess Clubs, 90. All quotes from this work are translated by me.

⁹¹ In *Nightwork*, Allison mentions that the club she was working for only had only 4-9 workers were prepared for 35-45 clients during the busiest time.

before, the Mama puts an experienced hostess (Hostess A) and one assisting hostess and one part-time hostess from her "apprentice group" at the table. Hostess A serves Client A, and the other clients get the other hostesses. In this case, Client A is considered to be Hostess A's client, and the other clients are guests of Client A. Since it is Client A who brought the guests to the club, and it is Hostess A who brought Client A to the club, so all three clients are considered to be Hostess A's. Although each hostess gets the hourly rate equally, only Hostess A gets her margin out of the amount of money the group of clients spend in the club., which is usually ten to fifteen percent of margin of what her group of clients pays to the club at the end of their visit.

In *kyabakura*, on the other hand, the division of the margin is based per couple, of a client and a female worker. In other words, all earnings are individualized. As the service in *kyabakura* is considered to be communicated between a client and a *kyasuto*, every transaction made by a client is considered to be to the credit of the *kyasuto* who is waiting him. There is no official system of dividing female workers into groups based on their experience and capabilities, and they are not required to cooperate with each other when serving at the same table. For example, when a client (Client A) visits the club with two other people and chooses a female worker (*Kyasuto A*), the client gets *Kyasuto A*. The other two clients get random *kyasuto* who are brought to them by male waiters as a part of the rotation of female workers. Depending on the estimation of the purpose of the group visiting *kyabakura* that the *kyasuto* makes, each *kyasuto* is usually only responsible for the

client she gets, unless it is clear to the workers that the group of clients came to the club as a part of a company outing. In another sense, it is completely up to these female workers if they want to interact with the clients collectively or individually. Sometimes, a group of clients gets divided, and each client ends up talking only to the female worker he was assigned. When the table opens a new bottle of champagne, the margin is divided by all the female workers who are at the table, unlike in the hostess club, where experienced hostesses monopolize the profits of the table.

In *kyabakura*, all female workers earn their salaries through the hourly wage and occasional tips. The average minimum hourly rate (when you have no experience at all) is around 2,000-2,500 yen⁹² in Tokyo, although most of advertisements online claim the minimum to be more than 3,500 yen at the least. The hourly rate rises generally based on the number of times a worker gets chosen, additional drinks and food clients order while she is at their table, the numbers of times a worker does *douhan* with clients, and for participation in special events such as a bikini night, nurse cosplay night etc. In *College Gal*, the club I worked for, all these commitments were converted into points monthly, and the hourly rate was increased by a hundred yen each time you gained five points.

Occasional tips called "back" are made when a worker contributes to making clients pay more fees on top of the basic fees that clients pay, depending on how long they stay in the club. At *College Gal*, for example, each time a client orders a drink for a female worker, she gets five hundred yen back. If the client orders more

⁹² The exchange rate between JPY to USD is 1 Japanese Yen = 0.89 US Dollar as of 12/17/2017

expensive bottles, such as wine and champagne, the worker gets a five to ten percent of margin on the price of the bottle. Each time she does *douhan* with a client, she gets 1000 yen back. In the case of *douhan*, it is considered that the worker brought the client to the club, thus the ‘back’ she gets tends to be better compensated than other situations. A worker can also get 1000 yen back for a "real" appointment, and five hundred yen back for an in-club appointment. During special events, a worker also gets extra ‘back’ for attendance, to incentivize more workers to participate in events, which usually require workers to wear more exposed uniforms. During my time at *College Gal*, they had two nights of bikini events, during which all female workers wore bikinis instead of their normal uniforms. Since this was one of the biggest events of the year, the “back”s were huge in order to put as many workers as possible on shift on those nights. If a worker works the night of a special event, she gets 5000 yen, and 10,000 yen for attending both nights, on top of the normal hourly rate and backs.

Though “backs” seems to be highly compensated, penalties diminish their advantages. At *College Gal*, 1,000 yen is deducted from a worker’s salary if she is late for her shift, or leaves earlier than her shift, no matter what the reason. 3,000 yen for canceling her shift a day before, 5000 yen for cancelling on the day of her shift, and 10,000 yen for not showing up at all. For special events where workers have to bring their own costumes, such as the bikini event mentioned above, if the costume does not meet certain criteria set and measured by the manager, which is very arbitrary and sometimes even based on their moods, 5000 yen is deducted from the

her salary. One of my co-workers at a bikini night was penalized because the manager thought her bikini was not exposing enough, as her bikini top had 4x4-inch cloths that covered a part of her arms. Once an infraction is recognized as a penalty by the club, there is no space for workers to make a claim or to negotiate at all. No explanation is justified, and all the penalties are automatically deducted from the workers' salary, without even informing the worker that she is being penalized. Besides those penalties based on workers' behavior, many hostess clubs and prestigious *kyabakura* have quotas each worker has to achieve. The quota varies from the amount of earnings a worker has to achieve monthly to weekly *douhan* (workers need to bring "their" clients to the club).⁹³ If workers are unable to comply with those quotas, they have to pay penalties, such as giving up as much as the worker's daily earnings, to the club manager.

All of the "back"s and penalties are calculated by the manager, and added/deducted from workers' salaries, which are paid weekly. A worker could also choose to be paid daily, but she can receive only 80% of what she earned that day, and the remaining 20% is kept by the club in order to deduct taxes and penalties weekly, and given to the worker after the deductions. Taxes, other fees, and penalties are deducted from the salary. At *College Gal*, 3000 yen was deducted from your first salary as an "entrance fee" for the club. Income tax (the amount earned in one day minus 5000 yen multiplied by 10.21%), miscellaneous expenses (700 yen per shift), insurance fees (500 yen per month) are also deducted from your salary. All these

⁹³ Matsuda, "What Do Hostesses Sell?," 193.

expenses are not mentioned in advertisements, and only told to workers after they sign a contract. During my nine shifts working at *College Gal*, I earned nearly 70,000 yen (about 650 US Dollar). It was possible to earn at least about 12,500 yen every shift, which only lasted 5 hours at the longest. As Tokyo's minimum hourly rate is currently 958 yen,⁹⁴ the pay for working in the club as a *kyasuto* is extremely high. This high rate could be financially attractive, as it does not require workers to have any skills.

The number of hours workers spend physically in the club gets counted for the hourly rate, and there is no designated time for workers to take a break. Female workers usually take a break when they are not at a client's table and wait in the waiting room, and how crowded the club is determines how much time workers can spend in the waiting room. When the club is having extremely busy nights, all workers barely get any break time, as they have to go to table after table, even if female workers have no clients who specifically choose her. Especially on weekdays, when the club does not have any events and only has a small number of clients, workers may just sit and play with their phones for the first 1-2 hours of their shift. This excerpt is from my diary, when I kept track of the use of my time during my shifts when the club was busy during an event, and when the club was completely empty during the week. The excerpt represents the significant gap between an extremely busy night and a quiet night. The quality of "breaks" is also notable, as

⁹⁴ "The Announcement of the Increase of Minimum Wage in Tokyo." *Tokyo Labour Bureau*, October 1st, 2017: http://tokyo-roudoukyoku.jsite.mhlw.go.jp/news_topics/houdou/122834/123207.html

female workers are able to sit, somehow segregated from clients' gaze, on the quiet nights, while they have to stand in the hallway and greet clients while they are on

"break" on a busy day:

Friday, June 25th, 2016, 5:30pm-11pm

Bikini Night

– sitting – 5:30-5:45

Client #1 5:45-6:00

Client #2 6:05-6:47

Client #3 6:47-7:27 in-club appointment

Client #4 7:27-7:34

Client #5 7:34-7:47

Client #6 7:47-8:03

Client #7 8:04-8:26

Client #8 8:26-8:47

Client #9 8:47-9:45 in-club appointment

– standing – 9:45-10:05

(one client came up to workers standing in the hallway, and started to interrogate workers one by one, asking the age and the name of the university in order to choose one to bring back to his table.)

Client #10 10:05-10:15

Client #11 10:20-10:36

Client #12 10:38-10:58

Wednesday, June 22nd, 2016, 5:00pm-11:30pm

Quiet Night

– sitting – 5:00-7:00

Client #1 7:00-7:20

– sitting – 7:20-7:45

Client #2 7:45-8:00

– standing – 8:00-8:23

Client #3 8:23-8:41

– standing – 8:41-9:20

Client #4 9:20-9:43

Client #5 9:43-10:00

– standing – 10:00-10:40

Client #6 10:40-11:20 in-club appointment

Client #7 11:20-11:40⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Excerpt from my field note

Although each club generally has a “waiting room” for workers to sit back and rest, some clubs, including mine, do not have a waiting room.⁹⁶ In these cases, workers are gathered in one corner of the room, and ordered to wait until called. At *College Gal*, the VIP area was used for “casts” to wait in when there were no clients using the area. When the club got crowded, or a group of clients paid to sit in the VIP area, workers were made to stand in line in the hallway near the entrance. While standing, they wait for “boys” to call them to sit with clients, while greeting clients coming in. Even though this is considered the workers’ “break time,” workers are constantly under the gaze of clients, male workers, and the manager. During the waiting time, workers usually spend their time either talking to other casts or texting clients on their phones. If they’re sitting, there are certain rules to follow in order to present themselves nicely to clients, such as workers not being allowed to cross their legs or put their elbows on the table.

One of the distinctive tasks that hostesses and *kyaba-jyō* have to do that is different from other kinds of sex work and intimate work is *eigyō-meil* (“sales mail”). Workers are strongly encouraged to constantly stay in touch with as many clients as possible in order to encourage them to come back to the club and spend their money both on the worker and the club. Although this is not considered to be a task that requires a massive amount of labor, it has to be constant and simultaneous. When a worker sits with a new client, she is encouraged by the club to exchange LINE IDs⁹⁷

⁹⁶ *Kitajyo, Kyabajyō no Shakaigaku*, 92.

⁹⁷ LINE is an app for communications on electronic devices that enables users to message and call for free.

or phone numbers in order to keep in touch with the client even after the client leaves the club. The purpose of *eigyō-meil* is to increase the numbers of long-term clients who choose specific workers, and therefore increase the amount of money they spend in the club. One of my interlocutors told me that she was at one point communicating with twenty clients. Another interlocutor told me about her struggle separating her private self from her work in *kyabakura*, as she had to constantly send messages to clients. This is one of the biggest contributing factor to make working in *kyabakura* as emotional labor,⁹⁸ and the service that blurs the boundaries between the realm of work and the realm of private. Although it is up to each worker if she wants to message clients, it is almost impossible to get regular clients without messaging. The intensity of the messaging is up to individual clients, yet the default is that workers are supposed to reply right away and not cut off the flow of the communication. This means that workers need to constantly open their receptors as *kyaba-jyo* for clients, no matter what they are doing during the day. Although a worker can be as strategic as possible in order to minimize her labor and manipulate the ritual, one might ask: *then would she ever rest?* During the waiting time, most of the workers were talking to clients on their phones. Although the salary system is precisely calculated based on the hours and the results “*kyasuto*” achieve in the physical space of the club, there is

⁹⁸ Here, I am loosely adapting the definition of “emotional labor” introduced by Arlie Hochschild. Emotional labor is form of emotion regulation that creates a publicly visible facial and bodily display within the workplace Hochschild also introduced the term “emotional work,” also called as “emotional management” which refers to these same acts done within the private sphere of one’s home or private interactions with family and friends. But here, I explicitly use the word of emotional labor. Emotional labor is the state that one’s emotional management is controlled according to employers’ expectations through supervision and disciplining, and employees are expected to practice their emotional management with other people, in public. (Arlie Russell Hochschild. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling.*)

also invisible labor inside/outside of the club that is not compensated by salary. It is hard to measure the effect/intensity of the intimate labor a worker has to be involved in, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Kyabakura seems to have achieved a system which divides intangible elements of work into clear explicit categories, to simplify transactions among female workers, clients, and the club through a clear fee system and an hourly rate purely evaluated by the amount of time clients and workers spend physically in the club and the amount of profit they bring in to the club. Compared to hostess clubs, where the system seems to generate profits by encouraging hostess workers to collaborate with each other, the management structure of the *kyabakura* completely individualizes the work of female workers. By charging clients by time rather than on the kinds of service they get, it clarifies the minimum workers can get for a day. Being able to be partially paid daily gives more choices to workers on how to utilize the financial means they gain through their labor. However, as mentioned above, the system does not completely take care of all the existing labor that workers provide for the club. The club still needs to rely on female workers' voluntary (and substantial) "overtime" of communicating with their clients outside of the club, which is considered to have no limit. The goal is to have as many clients as possible come to the club, and that they spend as much money as possible in the club. In this sense, the worker's labor is infinite and unrecognizable in the system, which otherwise categorizes everything. Furthermore, most hostess clubs and *kyabakura* do not provide any benefits to their workers, as female workers are considered to be self-employed freelance escorts who

work individually with their own clients.⁹⁹ This system enables clients to give gifts to workers without any consequences, and, at the same time, enables clubs to adopt strict penalties, which are usually prohibited by the labor laws in Japan, without following other labor laws such as giving employees a certain amount of breaks.¹⁰⁰ Those who work in the clubs are expected to acquire social insurance from their day-time work, or from national health insurance. Some *kybakaura* are run as a part of big corporations, and recognize female workers as employees. Those *kyabakura* corporations normally have different branches of clubs, and turn themselves into joint-stock corporations, where workers are considered to be their taxable employees. In these cases, workers get the benefit of social insurance from the company in exchange for compensating some of their expenses. In both business models, however, there are little compensations to be provided for female workers by clubs, as the culture of *kyabakura* still recognizes female workers as "independent workers."

How They Serve: Hostess Clubs and *Kyabakura*

A hostess club prioritizes entertaining clients so that they as a group can have "a good time together" and bond as a group of workers at the hostess club. The *kybakura*, on the other hand, advertises the interaction between a client and worker as an "organic interaction" which clients and female workers can craft on their own,

⁹⁹ This is a fairly conventional way for clubs in the sex industry to avoid their obligations to follow labor laws that are meant to provide more social securities for employees. Kerwin Kaye explores the conflict between strip clubs and strippers regarding the legitimacy of clubs' right to increase stage fees, while providing no additional compensation for strippers in San Francisco. (Kerwin Kaye, "Naked but Unseen: Sex and Labor Conflict in San Francisco's Adult Entertainment Theaters.")

¹⁰⁰ Hayashi, "Cabacla Lady's Work," 90.

without ritualistic restrictions. The way female workers serve men at each club also responds to this difference in business models, as hostesses usually work as a guild group to serve a table, while *kyaba-jyō* completely serve a man individually, performing “amateur” interactions with a client.

In hostess clubs, the hierarchy of hostesses is strongly visible. Matsuda examines the way hostesses incorporate services for clients by utilizing the differences in status of the hostesses, and the friendships they form with each other at work. Matsuda writes that hostesses usually work on a guild basis, consisting of (1) a leading experienced hostess who is paid based on her commissions, as she is expected to bring clients to the club, (2) assistant hostesses who are paid based on both commissions and hourly rates, who are expected to be leading hostesses later in their careers and, (3) part-time hostesses who are paid an hourly rate as they are expected to have no clients who would expressly choose them. The three kinds of hostesses who have different statuses in the club, work together and form an apprenticeship group in which an experienced hostess teaches assistant and part-time hostesses her service technique and introduces her clients, in order to treat several clients sitting at the same table as a collective group.¹⁰¹

In a hostess club, only the leading experienced hostess can earn commissions such as the appointment “back” and *douhan* “back.” The assistant and part-time hostesses are not allowed to gain any commissions from the clients of leading hostesses, as they only work as assistants at the table. New hostesses serve one

¹⁰¹ Matsuda, "'Colleague' Relationships among Women in the Service Sector: A Case Study of Japanese Hostess Clubs," 90.

specific leading hostess, and learn from her how to serve and perform as a hostess. This is the start of her career as a hostess. It is possible for a hostess to stay as an assistant hostess or a part-time hostess, if she has no clients who choose her. The ultimate rule of the hostess club is that no one is allowed to take other hostesses' clients. However, she can do so *if* she changes her workplace, as she is allowed to ask clients who she served in the previous club (no matter what status she was) to come to the new club and appoint her. Because of this rule, many hostesses tend to move around clubs so that they can increase the number of their clients and become leading hostesses. In hostess clubs, leading hostesses control the space, and helping hostesses and part-time hostesses are supposed to work according to the leading hostesses and their clients. For example, if a client likes one of the part-time hostesses, a leading hostess would ask the part-time hostess to make a phone call to the client, or do *douhan* with him. In this case, although it is the part-time hostess who "brought" the client to the club, the leading hostess would get the commission. In the hostess club, therefore, the hierarchy among hostesses is strong, and the status of the hostess directly affects the salary one can earn. New hostesses are expected to belong to one of the unofficial apprentice groups that are led by experienced hostesses, and to learn service techniques while helping the experienced hostess.

In *kyabakura*, on the other hand, the system of a guild or voluntary coalition between workers does not exist. The salary system is made to benefit individuals, as all the commission and the rise in hourly rates take place based on individual performance at the club. As Kitajyo describes it, "the system sets the battles between

women on fire."¹⁰² In order for a hostess to compete in *kyabakura*, the best way to do so is to gain as many long-term clients who appoint her as possible. The more appointments and "back"s she gets, the higher her commissions and her hourly rates rise. Because of this system, the competition tends to be more explicit in *kyabakura* than in a hostess club.

Amateurism in *kyabakura* is another factor of *kyabakura* that accentuates individual competition between female workers. Unlike hostess clubs, where hostesses cooperate to create a space for a group of men to experience collective bonding moments, the interaction in *kyabakura* is between a client and a female worker, who "has an atmosphere of the girl next door and does not have the vibe of a professional *mizu shōbai* woman."¹⁰³ Most workers are in fact working part-time in *kyabakura*, and only for a short period of time, as they usually have school or another day-time work during the day.¹⁰⁴ Rather than training workers, *kyabakura* expects workers to bring their personalities and the *habitus* of their daily lives as "ordinal girls" into the club space. As the original version of *kyabakura* hired many amateurs, college students, as workers and attracted clients to the club as a place for them, "quasi-romance" is one of the prominent offerings female workers provide for their clients. Kitajyo also mentions that she felt that her *kyabakura habitus* was invading her private life, when she was working in *kyabakura* for her ethnographic research. Reflecting on that experience, she recalls,

¹⁰² Kitajyo, *Kyabajō no Shakaigaku*, 105.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

A few months after I started ethnographic research in club L, I was horrified when one of my upperclassmen in the same research lab told me, “I started to be confused whether you were a *kyaba-jyo* or my normal underclass(wo)man.” As I was working in *kyabakura*, I was unconsciously bringing the way I communicated as a *kyaba-jyo* into my “day-time world.” At that time, I realized again that the relationship between men and women in the “day-time world” was brought into the inner world of *kyabakura* as it was. *If I had to say, “every woman can be a kyabakura-jyo.”*¹⁰⁵

Here, Kitajyo states that the relationship constructed in *kyabakura* is no different from what a woman and a man would have organically in the “day-time world,” thus it is possible for any woman to become a *kyaba-jyō*. Although it is one of the female workers’ tactics to “play natural” in order to gain clients’ trust so that they will fall for her and become her client, this does merely mean that *kyabakura* is for a woman to sell her “authentic” self. *Kyabakura*, ultimately, is a *stage* that is strategically built with the intention of providing a space for male clients to have a specific experience of “talking to an ordinal girl.” The *kyaba-jyō* is a *player* on this stage, a member of the cast, as they were named “*kyasuto*.” Because the interaction taken place in *kyabakura* needs specific settings to be achieved, *kyaba-jyo* also plays along the rule to enact a seemingly organic conversation with a client. Miura calls *kyabakura* “an amusement park of men and women.”¹⁰⁶

I mentioned that *kyabakura* offers its workers’ amateurism as their main offering at the club, yet that does not mean the work cannot be professionalized. Female workers indeed adopt some tactics in order to perform like an “amateur and therefore 'innocent girl',” rather than simply being themselves and interacting with

¹⁰⁵ Kitajyo, *Kyabajyō no Shakaigaku*, 213.

¹⁰⁶ Miura, *Why Do Women Want to Become Kyaba-jyō?*, 48.

complete honesty. As mentioned multiple times in this chapter, one of the ultimate goals of *kyabakura* is to provide romantic/intimate/sexual experiences with a ‘girl next door.’ In order to follow this business model, a *kyaba-jyo* uses service tactics called “*irokoi-eigyō* (Erotic-Romance service).”¹⁰⁷ In *irokoi-eigyō*, a female worker interacts with her client *as if* they were in an intimate relationship, or falling in love. Through building the relationship, the female worker tries to gain the client’s trust by making him believe that she is showing her true self. Some workers do this by complaining about other abusive clients, or showing their vulnerabilities such as financial struggle, and conflicts with their boyfriends. This creates a personal attachment with the client, and makes it easier for the client to spend more money and time on a specific worker. However, this also provides some risks to female workers of “being too close with clients.” As the trust between a female worker and a client significantly depends on the exposure of the worker’s “true self,” it also means that workers put their privacy in danger. It is usual that once a worker starts *irokoi-eigyō*, some clients demand to meet outside of the club, or even to visit the worker’s home. In these scenarios, the worker needs to shift the client’s motivation to see her outside of the club, which does not directly affect her earnings in the club. As workers are also expected to keep in touch with clients through the phone all the time, some clients persist and ask the worker where she lives, or what her real name is. In order for female workers to prevent these situations from developing, some clubs encourage them to have a fake “real self.” In addition to the club name, some workers would

¹⁰⁷ See: Kitajyo (2014) and Matsuda (2008).

also prepare real fake names, and build stories around the created personality in order to avoid clients' confrontational questions. If a worker did not want a client to repeatedly ask for a date outside of a club, she might say, "since I am still new to the club, I am not allowed to meet with anybody outside of the club. May I ask you on a date once I am allowed?" Even if she lived alone, she would tell a client that she lives with her parents or siblings, so that he does not ask her to invite him to her home. In order for a worker to minimize the amount of contact that she has with a client outside of her shift in the club, she may tell him that she is always busy with schoolwork or a daytime job when she is not in the club. This sets an inexplicit boundary between the worker and the client, which discourages the client from expecting her to always be available to respond to his texts or calls, or meet outside of the club.¹⁰⁸ Through setting up their "true" personality for exposure to clients, workers are able to "play natural" while also protecting themselves. Thus, the "romance" performed in *kyabakura* is only expected to be imagined and not actualized in the real lives of clients and workers. This is supposedly also true for clients, as many guide books for clients suggest they enjoy *kyabakura* as a "playground," rather than a serious matchmaking service.¹⁰⁹ The idea is that it is the expectation of "something might happen between us" that a client has, which is enough for him to come back to the club over and over again.

¹⁰⁸ Kitajyo, *Kyabajyō no Shakaigaku*, 132.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

However, *irokoi-eigyō* is not considered to be an ideal business model for a hostess to adopt, because it is hard to sustain the relationship with minimal risks.¹¹⁰ Thus, *irokoi-eigyō* is considered to be an inefficient tactic for a worker to practice. Some workers cannot justify the feeling of “lying to clients” and adjust multiple layers of stories to maintain consistency with multiple clients all at once. Clients constantly asking for more, a sense of guilt and delusion, and the potential resentment from clients when a worker turns down the clients’ intimate confession could sometimes be too much to endure. Since *irokoi-eigyō* needs as little technique and experience as a worker has, this tactic is usually practiced by inexperienced workers.

Experienced workers, therefore, try to build relationships with clients so that clients become either “trustworthy friends” or “rich patrons” who support girls with big aspirations and big ambitions. One of the most sustainable ways for a female worker to keep clients depends on whether she is capable of channeling a client’s affection from sexual affection into a platonic relationship, often described as “friendship” or “patronship.”¹¹¹ This can usually be achieved through either performing as overly honest, or performing as a worker who has a big life goal to achieve. In this performance, working in *mizu shobai* is merely a means to gain financial support to achieve her dream. By doing so, a female worker successfully makes an atmosphere in which a client feels hesitant to ask for more commitment outside of the club. Instead, he would figure that it would be the best for them to come to the club in order to indirectly support her dream of going to graduate school,

¹¹⁰ Matsuda, "What Do Hostesses Sell?," 210.

¹¹¹ Miura, *Why Do Women Want to Become Kyaba-jyō?*, 48.

becoming an actress, etc. In some cases, when workers retire from the *mizu shōbai* industry, their patron would fund their next business such as a small restaurant or a snack bar. Hoang describes Mamas at Vietnamese sex clubs, that have systems similar to Japanese *mizu shōbai* – with patrons who fund the Mama’s business, from running the clubs to managing the business after their retirement, which also works as a place for retiring hostesses to work after they are too old for the hostess business.¹¹²

The most efficient way for workers to work in *kyabakura* and hostess clubs, therefore, is to channel clients’ desire to have temporarily intimate/sexual relationships into a desire to have trustworthy relationships that clients want to rely on and support for the long-term. Leading hostesses in hostess clubs do so by entertaining their clients and clients’ business partners, so that their clients can tangibly benefit from her presence. Matsuda calls this relationship a “business relationship,”¹¹³ where an experienced hostess induces clients to want to stay with her because she is a skillful hostess who can entertain his party, and also a trustworthy person who builds a genuine friendship with him, rather than because she is valuable as a woman who is sexy, attractive, and beautiful. Working in *kyabakura* and hostess clubs thus has a huge aspect of intimate labor, which female workers are constantly required to perform based on clients’ desires, and maximizes the benefit of their labor by redirecting clients’ romantic affection to platonic affection.

¹¹² Hoang, *Dealing in Desire*, 180.

¹¹³ Matsuda, "What Do Hostesses Sell?," 188.

Positionality of Female Workers in *Kyabakura*

Miura, who calls *kyabakura* a kind of amusement park for women who want to dress like women, and men who want women who act like women, argues the uniqueness of women in *kyabakura*:

Kyabakura-jyō, who dresses in a man-pleasing style is “counter-revolutionary” from the perspective of a “gender neutral” society. In other words, with the current social trend where everything is treated equally between men and women, it is safe to say that a woman cannot enjoy feminine fashion fully unless she becomes a *kyaba-jyō*. The number of women who dress like a conventional feminine woman is decreasing. In this kind of social trend, *kyaba-jyō* wear flashy dresses and high heels, go to hair salons that costs 30,000 yen (about 280 USD), go to nail salons that costs 20,000 yen (186 USD), and polish their skin at spas that costs 50,000 yen (466 USD). This is the privilege of *kyaba-jyō*, who can enjoy this kind of luxury. It seems like they are showing off the perk of being a woman to society by wearing fashion that overly appeal their femininity and by celebrating the happiness that only women can experience... Someone like Margaret Thatcher is a prototype of women who should be respected in society, and women who fawn over men by using their sex appeal to be taken care of by men are to be denied. Femininity is only allowed in a unique space like *kyabakura*. *Kyaba-jyō* gain approval as feminine women by dressing overly feminine, while also gaining approval as independent women by earning a lot of money through their work. Although they seem to be counterproductive to the idea of a gender neutral society, it is the *kyaba-jyō* that win both femininity and financial independence.¹¹⁴

Here, he suggests that *kyabakura* is a space for women to embrace their femininity while also sustaining their financial stability, which, according to Miura, are incompatible and unable to be achieved at the same time in a “gender neutral” society, where women are denied to dress like women, and forced to become “strong” like Margaret Thatcher. Allison also makes an analysis on the space of hostess clubs by applying Hegel's analysis of the master-slave relationship. Allison

¹¹⁴ Miura, *Why Do Women Want to Become Kyaba-jyō?*, 48-50.

argues that the men entering clubs are in the state of masters who cannot survive without being fed by slaves, that is, hostesses in the clubs. What is being fed here, is that the entertainment provided by hostesses – the entertainment that firms’ business relationships, clients’ masculine identities, and the men's leisure experiences. Applying Hegelian understanding of the master-slave relationship in which masters need the existence of slaves in order to recognize themselves, Allison seems to suggest that this is an aspect of hostess clubs that empower hostesses even whilst they are performing to be subordinate to clients. Unless there are hostesses – slaves – in charge of facilitating the space, clients – masters – cannot practice any activities that are deeply interconnected to the foundation of their identities as men. Both Miura and Allison find the possibility of the space of *mizu shōbai* to provide a space for women—who are subordinate, and seen as dependent on men by “gender neutral Japanese society” – to embrace their femininity while acquiring a kind of power over men. Especially Miura points out the financial power that female workers gain through their work and finds the uniqueness of the space where women can be “subordinate” at the same time embracing their “power” in an inexplicit way.

I find this analysis of the space of *mizu shōbai*, as a space for women to be “powerful” performing the traditional gender role of women, to be shallow. First of all, Miura’s argument that Japanese society values performative gender equality and is in need of “strong women like Margaret Thatcher” is completely false. Japan ranked 102th in Global Gender Gap Report in 2008 for the sub index of Political Empowerment, where they measured the ratio of female politician at three different

levels of national politics, while ranking 98th in the overall result.¹¹⁵ Miura also asserts one of the reasons why the expansion of *kyabakura* industry is happening is because there are few opportunities for women without high academic backgrounds in society where gender and class disparity is extreme.¹¹⁶ Miura suggests that *kyabakura* also functions as a “safety net” for women who would otherwise become “working poor”¹¹⁷ in Japanese society that has experienced its economic stagnation during 2000s, while these women would not have to look for their safety nets, if Japanese society were to be gender equal and give equal opportunities to both men and women, as Miura suggests. As Miura contradicts himself and as I have discussed in this thesis so far, the very society that Miura describes as “gender neutra” is the force that produces *mizu shōbai*, and what continues to feed the industry.

I also question the legitimacy of “power” that female workers potentially gain through their work in *mizu shōbai*. Miura emphasizes the financial independence that the work gives to female workers, and Allison points out the dependence of men on female workers. First, the financial independence that they gain is unstable. Miura again, mentions that *kyabakura* is an unstable industry that does not have any job security for workers in a long-term.¹¹⁸ Because of the industry’s nature to prefer amateur young women, it only provides female workers temporary financial stability. Hukutomi also shows a worker’s increasing obligation to invest in their dresses and hair-dos as the worker’s income increases, because they have to dress “better” in

¹¹⁵ World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report*, 2008.

¹¹⁶ Miura, *Why Do Women Want to Become Kyaba-jyō?*, 97.

¹¹⁷ See: Anne Allison, “Chapter 3: Ordinary Refugees” from *Precarious Japan*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 201), 43-76.

¹¹⁸ Miura, *Why Do Women Want to Become Kyaba-jyō?*, 97.

order to serve higher-class men. Because of this necessary expense, some workers are spending more than they earn, as Fukutomi quotes a worker's statement of income and expenses.

Allison's Hegelian understanding of client-hostess relationships is also limited, as it only stands when one looks at a transaction *only between* clients and female workers that is practiced *only* in the physical space of club. Club managers are a significant variable to consider in thinking of the relationship between clients and female workers, as they are the ones who deal with the financial transaction between the two, and have control over the working environment and emotional labor of female workers. Although female workers have a significant amount of control over the interaction between female workers and clients held at each table, the work of female workers are always surveilled by managers of the clubs. Workers are constantly obligated to report their work to the club, and take risks of paying fines if their work does not fulfill the quota that clubs set for them. Kitajyo mentions that workers at her club have to send reports to their manager before each shift. She had to report the number of texts and calls she has made to clients and the number of clients she was bringing to the club that day.¹¹⁹ Workers also usually have to continue their work even outside of the physical space of a club, because of the system of *douhan* and *aftaa*. The objectification of workers ("slaves") by male clients ("masters"), which is a crucial step for masters to recognize their own existence, as Hagel argues,¹²⁰ continues to be practiced even outside of their work. Furthermore, this dependence, as

¹¹⁹ Kitajyo, *Sociology of Kyaba-jyō*, 103.

¹²⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

Allison suggests, is concealed by the payment clients make to clubs. By paying money to the club, clients' dependence on female workers are legitimized and justified as the purchase of a kind of service. Without the recognition of their work by men and the financial control of their own salary, "the power" female workers can acquire in *mizu shōbai* only stays within the very moments when they are interacting with men at tables in club.

Sexual Aspects of *Mizu Shōbai*

It is also notable that *kyabakura* and hostess clubs are not categorized as a part of the *huzoku* industry, a primary sex industry in Japan. As I suggested above, the primary tactic of female workers is to have trusting relationships with clients, rather than fulfilling male clients' sexual desires. Does that mean *mizu shōbai* does not provide any sex-oriented services?

I suggest that although *kyabakura* and hostess clubs are socially categorized separately from the sex industry in Japan, it is a form of sex work, which entails many aspects of gendered intimate labor. The expectation for female workers to perform some kinds of sexual activities are vividly present in the business, and their service are mainly built on the manipulation of workers as feminine beings.

If one looks at *mizu shōbai* as a whole industry, it is even hard to say the space of *kyabakura* is completely sex-free. Although many scholars argue that the main job of hostesses and *kyabakura* is talking to their clients,¹²¹ there are some *kyabakura* that

¹²¹Allison, *Nightwork*, 38.

offer physical and sexual interactions in the club. *Sekukyaba*, which is one of the categories of *kyabakura*, for example, allow clients to touch casts' bodies to a certain extent. *Seku* is an abbreviation of *sekuhara*, which is an abbreviation for sexual harassment, and *kyaba* is an abbreviation of *kyabakura*. Taking the two concepts together, the clients are allowed to perform anything except touching genitals on the "casts" bodies, otherwise called sexual harassment outside of the club. One of the clubs affiliated with the club where I worked was famous for being able to touch the workers' bodies on top of their uniforms, which barely covered their skin, while setting the standard fee higher than the clubs that prohibit clients from touching workers. There is another kind of club called *oppabu*, where clients are allowed to touch female workers' breasts while female workers lap dance on top of the clients.

The structure of *kyabakura* leaves a huge space for clients and workers to be involved in explicit sexual acts outside of the club. In Japanese law enforcement, *kyabakura* and hostess clubs are categorized to be its own industry. Because it is not categorized as prostitution in the law and explicit sexual activities are not provided in the club, the industry is allowed to have privileges that are not granted to other kinds of sex work and prostitution, such as early opening hours, and club locations that are closer to the centre of cities. As described above, all services provided in *kyabakura* are just to provoke the imagination of a client by sharing an intimate and romantic atmosphere with a female worker. In other words, a female worker provides a client an experience of intimacy by indicating that they might be in a romantic/sexual relationship through the interactions they have in the club and the calls/texts that they

exchange. However, the physical club space does not prepare any service that responds to these provoked expectations. This provoked “imagination” is supposed to be kept as a fantasy throughout the visits of the client, and a hostess would try to deactivate this fantasy through adjusting their relationship into more friendship-like relationship, as mentioned above. However, when a client starts to have a desire to actualize the fantasy, the labor a female worker provides for the club and clients are expected to go beyond the shifts she takes in the club. This ambiguity of what *kyabakura* presents, what female workers might offer to clients through flirtation as a major medium of their service, and the system that allows workers and clients to meet outside of the club are what makes *kyabakura* a form of sex work.

Although a club encourages and credits female workers for meeting with a client outside of the club, the club does not have any control over what its workers and clients do outside of the club. There is always a possibility that workers and their clients are involved in sexual acts outside of the physical space of the club. Through the system of *douhan* and *afutaa*, some workers go on dates with their clients as a part of their job. During those time, they are free to do anything from having dinner together to having sex. Some of them do have sex with the clients as one of their tactics to keep/get regular clients. Clients who come to the clubs for the purpose of finding somebody to have sex with, are called “*yarimoku*,” which literally means “a guy who’s here to fuck.” Because the services in a club indicates potential sexual interaction with its workers and creates a complexity of boundaries, it leaves both workers and clients space to manipulate the system while also “playing by the rules.”

This nature makes it extremely difficult to explicitly list the tasks of workers, and hard to deny the possibility of sexual services in the industry.

Even in conventional *kyabakura*, that strictly prohibit clients from physically touching female worker, touching female bodies is usually practiced by many clients using various kinds of tactics. Some clients try to create situations where the women have to get close enough to “happen” to touch the clients’ bodies. One client I met when the club was holding a bikini day put several chairs around the table so that I had to stride over the client in order to get out of the seat. Some clients touched my lower back and slid their hands down to my bikini but no boys could see it since it was hidden from their sight by my own body. Since these acts of touching are momentary and are repeated irregularly rather than constantly, it is extremely difficult to catch the clients in the act of those prohibited behaviors. It is also difficult to draw a strict boundary between illegal touching and physical contact as a part of their communication, as *kyabakura* is a place to offer flirtation, rather than purely verbal communication.¹²²

Furthermore, even though experienced hostess workers are strategic enough to entertain clients while minimizing the risks of their work, clients’ initial incentive to visit hostess clubs and *kyabakura* is, after all, the feminine aspects of the workers. Allison mentions that hostesses are evaluated by three criteria: (1) how young they are (age); (2) how authentic they dress (appearance and styles of dress); and (3) how

¹²² Allison, *Nightwork*, 45.

pretty she is (natural beauty – face, hair, petite body frame, and busty figure).¹²³ The “friendship” and “patronship” tactic mentioned above is only feasible to those who usually fail to fulfill the (1) and (3) criteria, and if a female worker fulfills all three yet has little experience, they usually become the target of clients’ sexual commodification. In hostess clubs, for example, inexperienced hostesses who are in the position of helping more experienced hostesses and part-time hostesses are usually a target of clients’ sexual incentives to come to the club. Since they do not have enough experience to have their own clients and have to follow their leading hostess, their job as hostesses are oriented around supplementing what experienced hostesses cannot give, which are normally physical acts of service, such as going to *douhan*, or presenting themselves as amateurs whom clients can play a “love game” with.¹²⁴ In *kyabakura*, it is hard for workers to establish patronship with clients since the club’s main offering is the possibility of romance with female workers. In this case, female workers establish a double standard of their own that makes them struggle between the need to constantly portray themselves as innocent virgin women who could be the target of clients’ desire for sexual fantasy, and the risk of being disdain and shamed as an “indecent woman” who works in *mizu shōbai*. This double standard produces both mental and physical burden on workers, as Kitajyo mentions. Her co-worker experienced sexual harassment because of the gap between the worker’s intention to make her relationship with a client as sexually neutral as

¹²³ Allison, *Nightwork*, 62.

¹²⁴ Matsuda, "What Do Hostesses Sell?," 199.

possible, and her client's serious romantic feeling for her.¹²⁵ Her co-worker once experienced a situation in which she was verbally harassed in public, and called "a dirty whore who works in a *mizu shōbai*," when she was five minutes late for her date with a client.¹²⁶ After the experience, she went through a huge phase of depression, as she struggled to cope with the emotional labor that she was put on by working in *kyabakura*, that is, to perform as innocent as possible, while dealing with slut-shaming from clients. *Koakuma Ageha*, the magazine that featured *kyabajyo* and their lifestyles, got significantly popular partially because they coined the term "*yamu*" (directly translated as "get sick"), which was used to describe *kyabajyo*'s significant depression and poor mental health that were caused by their work. The magazine featured issues of depression, suicidal thoughts, and harassment by managers and clients, as some of the most conspicuous aspects of working in the industry.¹²⁷

As Kitajyo mentions that she has internalized the value of women that the *kyabakura* industry has put on her, which is "the younger the better" principle,¹²⁸ *kyabakura* is not a kind of "sanctuary" for female workers to embrace their femininity while maintaining their financial independence, nor a paradise that female workers freely embrace their femininity. Even if female workers were to acquire some kind of control over men or the management of clubs through tactics they mastered through their working experiences in the industry, it would be limited and momentarily. The management of clubs is structured to minimize the clubs' obligation to provide

¹²⁵ Kitajyo, , *Kyabajyō no Shakaigaku*, 200.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 181

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 210.

job/social securities for female employees, and it is usually up to individual female employees to make do with the system. Because there is a significant inconsistency between what clubs are allowed to offer and the kinds of sexual/intimate desires clients are provoked to imagine, female workers usually have to fill this gap by fulfilling clients' desires one way or another outside of the physical space of the club. This makes female workers have to carry different personalities that they perform for male clients both inside and outside of the club. In this way, the labor in *kyabakura* penetrates the private sphere of female workers' lives, and makes depression and harassment as one of the crucial aspect of working in *kyabakura*.

CHAPTER 3

MIZU SHŌBAI AS TACTICS IN OPTIMISM

In 1991, an author named Shōko Ieda, wrote a book that "exposed" the "shocking truth of New York City." The book was about a dozen young Japanese women who lived in Los Angeles and New York City, and mainly how "tainted" they were both financially and sexually, in comparison to the "respectable Japanese women" they used to be before flying from Narita airport.

In her book, three interviewees out of twenty one people interviewed, were mentioned as workers of "piano bars," a tag name for hostess clubs and *kyabakura* in New York City. They were described as those who were staying in the country illegally, were bettering the salary they earned at the bar by exploiting their clients for their manipulative black boyfriends, and were addicted to substances. The book mentions, "a piano bar in Manhattan always has a long line of boyfriends on its pay day. Japanese women who work in the club give the whole paycheck to the men as soon as they receive receive the money. Among those men, some could not even wait so that they forced their way into the club while it was still open, and snatched the women's salary."¹²⁹

As pointed out in the introduction, there is little literature that mentions the existence of hostess clubs and *kyabakura* outside of geographical Japan, either in

¹²⁹ Shōko Ieda, *Ierō kyabu: Narita o tobitatta onnatachi = Yellow cab*. (Tōkyō: Kōyū Shuppan, 1991), 93. Quotes from book are all translated by me.

English and Japanese. Even though there are books that mention those who work in *kyabakura* in New York City, their attention is often misdirected towards "reporting" how corrupted the workers' lives are, rather than apprehending the nuances and the diversity of the women's' lives. Almost all stories about these women follow similar prototypes – a Japanese woman who used to be young, beautiful, well-educated, who had a middle-class life with a respectable job such as nursing or teaching, came to New York City for some reason, ended up having multiple sexual relationships with African-American men who constantly deceived her, got addicted to drugs, lost her job, and struggled to find even a roof to sleep under for a night without the help of these deceiving foreign men. The discussion that takes place in Ieda's book seems to be also used to discuss ways in which Japanese women's status overseas is of concern within Japan and Japanese people, and the way in which women's sexual "virtue" is used as a way of discussing the status of the nation as a whole.

In her series of books published between 1991 and 1995¹³⁰, Ieda created controversy by describing and exposing in detail the "piano bars" (*kyabakura*) in NYC, as well as other supposedly "degraded" positions in which Japanese women working overseas often found themselves. Ieda's work was controversial as it seemed that large portions of her narrative were oversimplified, or even, crafted by her. The primary stories which generated the most attention did not even concern *kyabakura*, but rather a phenomenon she described as "yellow cabs:"

¹³⁰ Shōko Ieda, *Ierō kyabu 2: Nyū Yōku shōgeki no shinjitsu!* = *Yellow cab 2*. (Tōkyō: Kōyū Shuppan: 1995). Quotes from this book are all translated by me.

Nowadays, it has becoming known that American people call Japanese women “yellow cabs,” even in Japan. I would like to explain to those hearing the word for the first time. “Yellow cab” is a taxi service. It differs by city, but taxis are generally yellow in New York City. That is why it’s called “yellow cab,” but the reason why it became a nickname for Japanese women comes from the implication that “they are people that anyone can easily ride on them whenever they want.” Easy women.¹³¹

She introduces the idea that this slang has become “popular” and “common” both in Japan and the U.S., and that Japanese women, including herself, are often stereotyped as “easy women,” and called as “yellow cabs.”¹³² Her initial motive for investigating started as curiosity to actually understand the situation of these women who were called “yellow cabs,” and to see how they were crafting their lives in American megalopolises. As she “saw” herself in these Japanese women who try to escape from pressures they receive in Japan by living in foreign countries,¹³³ she decided to fly to New York City and Los Angeles to conduct a survey on seventy to ninety Japanese women living in the cities. She interviewed twenty eight Japanese women who had especially “interesting lives.” As she states in her book, “be that as it may, their lives in the U.S. were extremely rough.”¹³⁴

Her first book, and the second, which was published in 1995, aroused significant controversies in Japan, as all the women she interviewed were drug dealers, drug addicts, alcoholics, homeless, patients in a mental hospitals, victims of extreme sexual assaults, strippers, or the coerced partners of black men who were

¹³¹ Ieda, *Ierō kyabu*, 1.

¹³² Ibid., 3.

¹³³ During the time of writing this book, Ieda lived in Hawaii, as she suffered from serious psychosomatic disease caused by the media pressure she got in a response to her previous reportage on wives of Japanese gang members, *yakuza*.

¹³⁴ Ieda, *Ierō kyabu*, 3.

drug addicts. For example, Magumi, one of the interviewees for her second book, was a 45-year-old woman who did “iguana business” near Central Park at the time of the interview. She had been a nurse in Japan, before coming to New York City to look for her father. She was kidnapped by a Greek man when she was taking a walk in Central Park in the evening during her stay with her father. She was imprisoned, raped by multiple men every day, and gave birth to three children. She was discovered by a neighbor, when she was screaming loudly because “a man was trying to rape her even when her water had broken.”¹³⁵ After the incident, she was homeless for a while, during which she was raped by a police officer and gave birth to another child soonafter. In the interview, she also said that she gave birth to her fifth child, the result of her having sex with a 70-year-old Chinese man. She was also raped by a Spanish man, who stabbed her in her stomach when he was raping her. When she was interviewed, she was on welfare, doing an “iguana business,” earning money by letting people take photos with her iguana.¹³⁶ As we can conclude from this example, all the stories in the books depict extreme violence, poverty, and substance abuse. Every story depicted in the books refer to sexual aspects of these women's lives, including their history of sexual assault, or their work as strippers and *kyabakura* workers. Calling the East Village a "Japanese Harem," Ieda seems to amplify the voices of those who were struggling the most in New York City and Los Angeles.

However, the books are criticized for creating false facts and constructing an oversimplified stereotype of Japanese women who live in foreign countries, rather

¹³⁵ Ieda, *Ierō kyabu* 2, 169.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

than depicting the reality and actualizing their experiences into literary texts. Soon after the first book was published, a rebuttal book was published, in 1994. The movement was organized by the "*Yellow Cab* Think Tank," established by Japanese women who lived in New York City, who were concerned about the negative consequences the book had for them through its enforcement of overdramatized "facts" about Japanese women living in a foreign city. Their main concern was whether Ieda was creating a myth of young Japanese women being called "yellow cabs," while the slang barely existed and was hardly familiar to the general public both in New York City and in Japan was not familiar with it in reality. Because the book was presented as "the first book that reveals the surprising truth about New York City," people in the think tank – especially young Japanese women who had different lifestyles from the ones described in the book – called out the dramatized stereotype of Japanese women as those who were "fooled by American men," "sexually loose," and "fallen." Ieda's books were also criticized for stereotyping black men as manipulative, yellow-feverish, drug-dealing, and as boyfriends who took advantage of "yellow cab" women. The think tank called the book and its media coverage in Japan as "media contamination."

The biggest controversy around the book was the author's research methods. She does not cite any tangible resources or evidences that supports her assertion that "yellow cab" even exists as a slang word that refers to Japanese women who live in Western cities. The "surveys" she conducted, are cited unclearly in her books, as she states in her book: "[my] survey was taken among Japanese women whom the writer

met in Los Angeles and New York City. 70-90 people responded, but the number of answers is inconsistent from question to question."¹³⁷ Although the number of answers differs from question to question, Ieda makes a pie chart with percentage for each question. As a method of interviewing, she mentions when she interviewed one of the women; "I lied to them that I came here to decide whether I should study abroad in Los Angeles or New York City, in order to join their conversation."¹³⁸ Moreover, the think tank argued that some of the interviews might have been either paid to create a narrative based on Ieda's interest, or edited by her. Rika, who was depicted as a "drug dealer" in Ieda's book, later argued that her answers were intentionally changed, oversimplified, and dramatized. For example, Rika claimed that she told Ieda that she used to work as an actress in Japan, and she once played a role in an SM play as an actress. However, in Ieda's book, Rika worked for an SM sex club in Japan.¹³⁹ Coordinator who introduced some interviewees to Ieda, George Saratt Jr., also published a book in Japanese, called *Extra Lessons in New York City*, stating that he was involved in Ieda's fabrication of false facts about the interviewees, since he was promised her assistance in publishing his first book in Japan if he would help Ieda fabricate the book.¹⁴⁰

Is this what *kyabakura* looks like in New York City? Ieda's depiction of Japanese women in New York City is clearly oversimplified and problematic, as she

¹³⁷ Ieda, *Ierō kyabu*, 12.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹³⁹ Masayoshi, Toyoda. *Kokuhatsu! "Ierō kyabu": masukomi kōgai o utsu*, (Tōkyō: Sairyūsha, 1995), 94. Quotes from this book are all translated by me.

¹⁴⁰ George Saratt. *Nyū Yōku no kagai jugyō = Extra lesson*, (Tōkyō: Kōyū Shuppan: 1992).

does not present any feasible evidences that backs up the existence of the culture of the "yellow cabs." Then how are the women actually living in the city? My task as an ethnographer here, is to present the diverse voices of Japanese women living in New York City, who are not fully represented by Ieda's work. In this chapter, I will explore the space of *kyabakura* in New York City, especially from the perspective of *kyabakura* workers. Understanding who worked in the clubs, and why they worked, I examine how working in *kyabakura* affected the workers' lives in New York City, and how their perceptions of the space structured the space itself.

* * *

Walking down the street on the east side of Mid-Manhattan towards the East River around 10:00 pm, one will find skyscrapers filling one block after another, some big gaudy objets d'art placed in front of the entrance of a global insurance company, and CVS's and other chain pharmacies located on every block. As she gets closer to the river and farther from a subway station, I leaves all the skyscrapers, the bulky buildings, and the beaming lights from fluorescent lights in the pharmacies behind. She starts to find small, stone buildings that are used as residential apartments, small dining places, and bars. In between these buildings, I see even smaller and narrow building; unable to see what kinds of purposes these buildings are used for from the outside, it is easy to dismiss even the existence of these buildings. On the stairs to the building sit, several Asian men in black suits. They seem to be sitting in the same spot every night. Talking to each other, their eyes are

always on the street. When they find a few Asian men who are also in business suits, they walk to them, saying “Hey what are you doing tonight? We can prepare many cute girls for you.” or, “We've got new girls tonight. Would you like to come in?” Some try to walk away, yet the men persist as the businessmen walk away, “Don’t be so serious. You should forget about work and just relax with girls tonight.” After the businessman gives up and starts listening to the man, the man says, “How about \$90 in total for 50 minutes?” After agreeing to the price, the man in black escorts the businessman into the building. While she is watching the whole scene, one man in black also comes up to her and asks, “are you here for a job interview?”

Kyabakura in New York City

Apart from "Little Tokyo" in the East Village, *kyabakura* and hostess clubs are located on a few streets closer to offices in a part of the financial district of New York City, where many migrant businessmen from Japan work. There are about 10 hostess clubs and *kyabakura* in total, but no host clubs. The clientele of the clubs are usually Japanese migrant businessmen.¹⁴¹

Except for one hostess club that is affiliated with a prestigious hostess club located in Ginza, Japan, most of the clubs are invisible from the outside, as they do not have any signs. In order to minimize the risk of catching unnecessary attention from the police,

¹⁴¹ As of 2016, 46,917 Japanese people are registered as migrants, who has lived in New York City for more than three months. New York City ranked the 3rd of foreign city that has the largest population of Japanese migrants after Los Angeles and Bangkok. New York City also ranked the 4th of foreign city that has the largest population of special permanent resident of the country after Los Angeles, Sydney, and Vancouver in 2016. For more details, refer to: Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Annual Report of Statics on Japanese Nationals Overseas*, (Tokyo: Consular Policy Division, 2017), 38-40.

most of them are located on the second and third floor of small tenements. Some of them requires you to ring an intercom in order to get in so that the club manager can check your face and assure that you are a client. Hostess clubs usually do not accept first-time clients, in order to maintain the clubs' prestige and their security. Their main clientele is businessmen who temporarily work for the New York City offices of their Japanese corporations, and those who frequently fly between Japan and New York City as part of their jobs. New clients are introduced as guests of these long-term clients at first, then they are able to visit the clubs on their own starting from their second visit on. However, there are only a few clubs that are capable of adopting this strategy, as it potentially risks the finance of a club if they exclude potential clients, who are in the city for an extremely short period of time, such as tourists. Most *kyabakura* advertise their presence online through review websites that specifically feature *kyabakura* and hostess clubs abroad, or simply, word of mouth.

Another tactic for the club to get clients is the act of "catching" practiced by "boys." They normally stand outside of the entrance of the building that their club is located in, and look for "those who look like Japanese businessmen" (Kazu).¹⁴² Once they spot Japanese businessmen, they walk along with them, inviting them to the club. Once potential clients start to show their interest, they start negotiating the price. The negotiation of the price is usually held during the "catch." and the negotiated price is irreversible once the client steps into the club. Clients sometimes talk to "boys" when they want to negotiate a price for cheaper than what is listed on their

¹⁴² All interviews were done in Japanese. Translation is all mine.

websites. Although there is fixed price for everything in the club, "boys" normally offer a cheaper "bundle price" in order to increase the numbers of clients they "catch," and increase the number of hours they stay in the club. Some clubs belong to an alliance, where they agree to fix the minimum price each club can offer to clients.

The system and the concept of *kyabakura* in New York City resemble the ones in Japan, yet the way the clubs operate and are used differs from those in Japan. The price system does not change from clubs in Japan, yet the salary is a lot lower than what workers would get in Japan. Their rules are extremely arbitrary compared to the clubs in Japan, and the treatment of workers is more subjectively determined by the managers of the club. In short, many negative consequences of working in *kyabakura* are worsened in New York City:

The working conditions are the worst. Even if you compared with the ones in Japan, the ones in New York City are the worst. Payment is minimal, harassment exists, and there's nobody who calls out these kinds of mistreatment because nobody thinks it's bad...(Kazu)

Inside, the interior of the club resembles to those in Japan, with small tables, and a karaoke machine in a big couch area. The interior of the building is described as "sketchy" and "filthy" by my interlocutors, as furniture was usually worn out and the buildings with *kyabakura* inside are usually small buildings that only stand "in between other buildings," affecting the aesthetics of the entire club. Some of my interlocutors referred to this point as one of the reasons why there are fewer clients than before:

There are fewer clients visiting the club nowadays. I think it's because their companies stopped paying their employees' *settaihi*. It is also because it does not make sense at all to visit such sketchy clubs for

such high fees. The buildings are really filthy, and the girls are unprofessional. (Honoka)

One of the distinctive elements of *kyabakura* interiors in New York City is that most of the spaces are private booths or private rooms. Normally, *kyabakura* in Japan do not have private rooms which only accommodate one group of clients per room, in order to minimize the risks of harassment and abuse of workers. This is the result of protecting clients' privacy, as some of the clients who come to *kyabakura* in New York City are thought to be celebrities in Japan. Many of my interlocutors mentioned the clientele of *kyabakura* in New York City as of higher class or status than those of *kyabakura* in Japan:

Most of the clients who come to *kyabakura* are Japanese people who work in the city. Some people are diplomats, some are white collar workers for big Japanese corporations which have offices in the city. Some are students who came here to study English. We also have a lot of celebrities visiting the club. When they travel to New York City on business, they would always stop with an entire staff crew. One day, a member of GENNEX (one of the most popular male vocal groups in Japan) came to our club with a bunch of his staff after a recording session, and it was one of the craziest nights. Normally we also have other famous idols, TV producers, news anchors, etc. coming into the club. Those clients are usually led to private rooms so that they don't have to sit in the open area. (Kazu)

Because of this characteristic, touching, which is supposed to be prohibited even in clubs in New York City, is significantly more noticeable in these clubs. Light touching was common, and some interlocutors mentioned the difficulty of preventing sexual harassment in the club:

Me: Did anybody ever help you when clients were touching you?

Risa: No, not at all.

Riho: Our club even had a, like, "go-for-it" style. The more you were being touched, the better. Since they are all private booths, clients would make girls sit on their laps or put girls' legs on their laps while touching.¹⁴³

Touching is common. Some "boys" did save me. If it was Hiroto (the manager), he just ignored it because he didn't like me. One time, the client wanted to smell my feet and that was really gross. When we had a "school uniform" event, one of the clients tried to put his hand in the bikini bottom I was wearing under my school uniform because the skirt was too short and would expose my underwear. In these situations, I held the client's hands and brought them to my lap so that at least I could control where the clients could touch. (Mei)

There was so much touching because it was in private booths. When I was working there as one of the "boys," I tried to help female workers by intentionally timing when to go into the booths. As a "boy" I had to change their napkins and ice buckets, or bring drinks and food. So I used these as an excuse to go to the booth so that clients would hesitate to touch the girls. (Shyunya)

Compared to other work that is available to migrants, *kyabakura* still pays the highest, and that is a major factor in attracting female workers:

It was a lot cheaper compared to *kyabakura* in Japan, but it still paid me well. (Yuri)

The hourly rate was really low. It was \$16 per hour at first. The ad said the hourly rate ranges from \$16-40, but the highest that I have ever heard of was around \$32. (Riho)

If you work "seriously," you can earn a lot. You get \$50 back if you do *douhan* with a client. On weekends, you can probably earn at least \$200 a night, if you drink a lot and work for a long time. If your clients order a bottle or two, you get like \$500 a night. (Risa, Riho)

Workers also emphasized that the advantage of "backs" (financial credits workers receive from clubs when clients spend extra fees in the clubs), that are not available to other migrant workers (besides tips). Most of them emphasized the generosity of

¹⁴³ For Risa and Riho, I interviewed them together on their request. Their interview was carried out as a conversation among Risa, Riho and me.

“backs” in New York City, compared to Japan. They mentioned that they get higher and more “backs” especially when they consume more drinks:

“Backs” were good in the City. Unlike Japan, everyone drank a lot and ordered bottles of champagne or tequila shots. Once that happened, my salary changed significantly. (Risa)

However, because of this system, the consumption of alcohol was significantly higher. In *kyabakura* in Japan, normally “drinks” that female workers drink are diluted so they have very little alcohol in them, in order to maximize the profit a club gets from selling the drink, and it helps female workers “last longer.” The drinking culture is rather predominant in host clubs,¹⁴⁴ but not in hostess clubs and *kyabakura*, as their main offerings are “interaction with female workers.” In New York City, however, because of the higher socio-economic status of the clients, the drinks clients order tend to be hard liquor and bottles of champagne, rather than individually-made, diluted drinks for female workers. My interlocutors mentioned,

It was so much easier to work in New York than working in Japan. Once they started drinking a lot, nobody knew what was going on. Like we did tequila shots over and over again. So I could sometimes just leave [clients without the consent of the “boys”] and just come back again whenever I wanted to. Some clients fell asleep because they drank too much. They didn’t know how to party. (Risa)

What I hated the most about working in *kyabaura* [in New York City] was that I had to drink so much. Since I have a high tolerance for alcohol, I kept drinking every night I worked there. It ended up hurting my stomach. That is one of the reasons why I quit. (Mei)

¹⁴⁴ The documentary movie directed by Clennell depicts a culture of heavy drinking in host clubs in Osaka. See: Jake Clennell, and Robert Coyne, *The great happiness space: tale of an Osaka love thief*, (2007).

Another major factor that contributes to a harsh working environment in clubs is the existence of “mean,” “unreasonable” bosses. Five of my interlocutors worked in the same club, and the club manager was seen as a “moody” and “unreasonable” boss, whom workers constantly had to fawn over. As indicated in the previous chapters, there is a huge power dynamic between a manager, and both female and male workers. In New York City, the power that a manager holds is so great that it makes it difficult for workers to have any “say” in a club. The manager decides who to hire, who/when to fire, how much each worker gets paid, when they are getting paid, which female worker gets which client, which harassments of female workers from clients are a violation of club rules, and even when workers can go home after each shift. There are no written criteria or statements for any of those actions taken by the manager, as workers describe, “You just have to get along with him to be paid properly” (Riho, Risa, Yuri, Mei, Airi)

As briefly described in Chapter 2, Kitajyo mentions that there are clear criteria in *kyabakura* in Japan when it comes to salary evaluation, as clubs create sales rankings of workers and workers’ salaries correlate to their rank.¹⁴⁵ In *kyabakura* in New York City, those rankings do not exist, or are not released as an open source to workers. Some clubs have one-on-one meetings with their managers to evaluate them and tell them to bring more clients to the club:

Sometimes a manager would ask me like "How are you doing?" "How many clients are you talking to right now?" "How many clients do you have right now?" "Can you show me the messages you sent to your clients?" "You can do better." He also told me, "Girls are products we sell. So you should be

¹⁴⁵ Kitajyo, *Kyabajyō no Shakaigaku* (Sociology of Female *Kyabakura* Workers), 103

selling this point of your character...You should build and manipulate this and that...." (Momo)

When there are no specific criteria and variables to evaluate workers, managers hold significant power to determine who's getting paid *more*. Recognizing this power structure, some workers tried to craft "personal" relationships with him:

Me: Is it true that you get paid better if you date the manager?

Risa: Ah yeah. I think there were a few [who dated the manager].

Riho: The one who was a *hafu*¹⁴⁶ filipina.

Risa: "The grandma," "Another grandma whom Yukiko [another worker] hated" ... and Sakura [another worker]. They are all favorites of Hiroto [the manager of their club], so their hourly rates are high and they get a lot of "backs."

Riho: I don't think they were dating, it was the Filipina girl. I think she was sleeping with him, rather than dating him.

Risa: She was *hafu*, and she was telling me that she hated when Hiroto touched her breasts and her buttocks when they were in a cab or something.

Riho: It's legit sexual harassment ... like she told me when they ride in a cab, he always touches her breasts.

Risa: She shouldn't have ridden in the cab with him in the first place.

Riho: He would get mad if she didn't ride with him. So she had to. It's power harassment, rather than sexual harassment.

Here, they were talking about how Hiroto, their manager, manipulated his position and power to harass his workers without receiving any legitimate complaint that threatened his position. Although most of my interlocutors did mention their frustration with the ways in which he exercised power, they also needed to maintain relationships with him in order to get as many benefits as possible from their work. Dating him, or sleeping with him, was just one of their tactics. Risa questioned how much control the worker had in the situation of getting in a cab with the manager, while Riho pointed out that any kinds of "objection" from workers were taken as

¹⁴⁶ *Hafu* is a Japanese word that refers to individuals who are mixed-race, and half Japanese.

“rebellion” or “disobedience” towards the manager, which usually encountered the manager’s anger. Not only did this favoritism affect how much benefits workers could get *on top of* their basic salaries, it also served as justification for the manager to disadvantage some workers:

Risa: Since I had an experience of working in *kyabakura* in Japan, I conflicted with his own rules a lot at first.

Riho: There were many moments when I thought his rules were odd... but if you pointed that out, even once, he would go like, “What the hell?” “What do you think you are saying?” Especially when he was in a bad mood. He would be like, “I am the superior in this club. You better follow me and say nothing.”

Risa: I think I encountered that once.

Riho: Yeah yeah, that’s when you misordered a drink or something?

Risa: No no no, it’s when I already had an in-club appointment, but he made a mistake and I got double in-club appointments. And it was in the same group! I was sitting on the right side of the big table with the client who in-club appointed me first, and then he called me out. He told me to go to the other side of the table, because I also got another in-club appointment. But I was like, “What? That’s not right. I already have a client here.”¹⁴⁷ Then he got so pissed. In addition, the one who appointed me later was a male waiter from the *kybakaura* downstairs. I said, “He [the waiter] should better understand the situation [that she already had an appointment with an actual client]. Then he [the manager] got even more pissed, and literally scolded me in front of the other girls.

Riho: Once he notices a worker [who objects to what he says)], he never forgets. It’s like, “Risa objected. I’m pissed. She’s the worst.” He’s somebody who keeps that kind of [negative] image, for a hot second, on Risa. Like, there are some girls who don’t understand the rules and the situations right? Like, when he’s in a bad mood, you wouldn’t talk to him or tell him certain things. But these girls do that. Once it’s done, he hates them forever. When one of them got an in-club appointment, she was asked to sing *karaoke*, so she was singing. But then he was like “Why are you singing? You are singing too much.” He was scolding her. It was nothing but unreasonable.

I hated Hiroto so so so much. He’s really mean. He didn’t like me either, I think, because I didn’t have that many shifts when I was busy. He intentionally put me on the table with not so good clients, like those who

¹⁴⁷ It is common for a female worker to have multiple in-club appointments at the same time, but she can never have more than one in the same group of clients.

didn't want to spend that much money, or who were only in the city for a few days, or who were already somebody's clients. He didn't pay me for 4 months. I asked for it for a few times, but it made him madder and he just hated me more. (Mei)

Many interlocutors told me that there were frequent delays for payments, because the manager simply "forgot," or "he didn't like that person." In order for workers to get paid "well" and on time, workers have to get along with the manager in one way or another. This shows that there is an intense power structure that denies workers "power" and "autonomy" in club space that clients were supposedly providing for the workers, as Allison suggests.

Although most of these stories resonate with other migrant jobs, which also have bosses and managers with a significant amount of power over their workers, *kyabakura* work has unique consequences for the workers' lives, as the control managers have penetrates into their private lives. One of the *kyabakura* in the city also had "dormitories," which extended the manager's control over his workers. *Kyabakura Smile*, which is managed by Hiroto, and said to be the oldest and most popular *kyabakura* in the city, assisted workers coming to New York City by offering them a place to stay, paying for their flight tickets, and sometimes even helping them find ESL schools under certain conditions:

Riho: Hiroto works as an agent of an ESL school.

Risa: That's how I found *Kyabakura Smile*. I didn't know Hiroto himself, but an agent in Japan knew Hiroto, and the father of the agent was my client in Japan. [when I was working in *kyabakura* in Japan.] And then, he told me like "I would introduce my son to you, if you are going to New York City." Then, he introduced me to *Kyabakura Smile*.

I really wanted to live in Manhattan, so I searched for a job before going there since I needed to work anyway. I knew there would be something similar to *kyabakura*, so I googled. Then, it was like if you agreed to work more than 5 times a week on a full shift for like 3 months, they would pay half for your flights and let you stay at their dormitory for free. It's on the 4th floor of the building that has three different *kyabakura*, and *Kyabakura Smile* was on the third floor. There are three bunk beds. The size of the room is about 105ft x 105ft. I really liked it as the ceiling was really high and there was a balcony. But the manager was so stupid. So once, he accepted 8 people in the room that could only accommodate 6. So I had to leave the room. But they also had another dormitory outside of Manhattan, so I was moved there. It was a shared house, but really comfortable to live in. (Mei)

One of the things my interlocutors complained about, which I also argue is one of the most distinctive characteristics of *mizu-shōbai* work, is that workers never know when they can go home. This uncertainty comes from three variables that female workers cannot control. Even though they technically have pre-determined shifts, it is all up to the clients and managers who actually determine when female workers can go home.¹⁴⁸ First, when a *kyabakura* is not as crowded as expected, some workers, especially those who do not have any appointment clients, are forced to leave earlier than they are supposed to. Second, when clients ask for *aftaa* (service that allows clients to take female workers on a date right after their shift finishes), workers have no control over when their shift ends, as there is no time limitation. Third, when the consumption of alcohol is too high, workers are unable to go home on their own. This tendency was intensified in New York City, as there was a huge gap between days when clubs were crowded and the days when they were not. There was no financial credit for *aftaa* and usually female workers were asked to accompany their male

¹⁴⁸ Some clubs in Japan do guarantee their workers' shifts. In those clubs, even if there are fewer clients than workers, workers are guaranteed to stay in the club until their shift ends, and get their full salary. Based on my interlocutors' voices, this was not the case in New York City.

workers and the managers to go eat and drink after the clubs closed around 2:00 am, and the amount of drinks consumed in the club tended to be more than one's capacity. Momo told me that it was difficult for her to assume when she could go home after each shift, as she was "forced" to end her shift earlier sometimes, or stay after when the club was supposed to close because clients stayed in the club:

Since my club always suffered from not having enough girls, when I had to work, I had to work a lot. But when there were few clients, I was sent home around like 9pm or 10pm even though my shift was supposed to be from 9:00 pm to 2:00 am. I didn't own many clients, so I would usually go home after working for 3 hours or something. So I ended up not earning that much, as I had to take a cab back home. Probably I earned like \$48 a night, and the taxi was \$40. The dental office I was working in at the same time I was in *kyabakura*, was located on 5th Avenue. It was real close to my club, so I slept there when I finished my shift around 3:00 am or 4:00 am. Then I would wake up before the doctors came in the next morning. I would go out to buy breakfast, and come back to the office again as if I had just come in. (Momo)

When I was supposed to work only until 1:00 am, I had to work until 2:00 am or 3:00 am. On Fridays, sometimes I worked from 9:00 pm until 5:00 am. Even after that, I was invited for *aftaa*, and went to eat and drink at restaurants and bars nearby, probably until like 7:00 am. Then I was finally able to go home in the morning. In addition to this, when I had to do *douhan*, I would meet with a client and eat with him around 6:00 pm, and do the whole cycle until 7:00 am the next morning. It was tiring. So I would usually skip classes, and sleep during the day, then go to work again. (Mei)¹⁴⁹

Risa: It was hard to balance with my school work. I was a full-time student at that time.¹⁵⁰ It usually ended around 4:00 am.

Me: Even if you had a predetermined shift?

Riho: It's usually ignored.

Because I lived in the dormitory upstairs, I usually stayed till the end. I really couldn't tell when I would be able to finish, as the manager would think that he could make me stay as long as he wanted to. (Mei)

¹⁴⁹ Mei was a junior at a private university at the time I interviewed her.

¹⁵⁰ Risa went to a ESL school and an art school, when she worked in *kyabakura*.

The amount of alcohol workers consume in *kyabakura* is extremely hard to control, and has a significant impact on workers' lives outside of their work, especially mornings after work:

It was physically intense. Different from clubs in Japan, I actually had to drink a lot. There were just so many tequila shots. (Honoka)

It's harder the next day. Since we were running our business based on Japanese culture, when we had to drink, we had to drink with clients, or the manager forced us to drink using any kind of excuse to make us drink. Drinking with clients was usually fun because the drink was actually tasty, and I didn't have to drink that much. When clients and female workers did something like tequila shots, "boys" were also asked to join, as these were the moments when they were usually getting more excited and heated up. But when GENNEX came to the club, one of the "boys" had to consecutively drink 10 tequila shots with them. Our manager liked to make us drink as a penalty. We had a quota of "catches," and when we couldn't bring a certain number of clients, the manager poured whisky fully into this size glass (pointing at a 12oz glass on our dinner table), and told me to take a shot. Cymbals were jingling the next day. Sometimes I couldn't even go home. (Kazu)

Although working physically in a club is limited to 5-6 hours a shift, the effect of their work is beyond the physical constraints of the club, and hard to quantify. Especially the culture of drinking hard liquor and taking tequila shots blurs the boundary between work and life, as the impact of alcohol makes it hard for workers to minimize the effect of working in *kyabakura* in their daily lives. Heavy drinking also disables the censorship of sexual harassment practiced in the club, as it makes it difficult for female workers to fend off harassment. As mentioned above, once a group of clients start drinking heavily, the whole club is pressured to join, including female and male workers. As the drinking games proceed, the whole club gets "chaotic," and few workers pay attention to the order of the space, and are not in

control of the situation. Mei told me that once when a client got extremely drunk, he suddenly put her foot up and started licking it. She had to let him do it for a while, as other girls and male waiters, including herself, were too busy with finishing the bottle of champagne and ordering the next bottle. Risa extended her stay in the city from six months to a year, as she found it difficult to "balance her life" in the city.

Being Affected by *Kyabakura* and Affecting *Kyabakura*

As discussed above, the working conditions of *kyabakura* in New York City are far from ideal, and carry many risks of impacting one's life negatively. Then why do people keep working under these conditions? Why is the working environment never improved? Who is working for what in the first place? I suggest that there are three perspectives to tackle these questions: (1) how workers utilize their work in *kyabakura*; (2) how workers perceive the space of *kyabakura*; and (3) how workers process the harsh working condition of *kyabakura* in their recollection of their experiences in *kyabakura*.

Who are the workers, and why did they work in *kyabakura*? The most prominent reason for my interlocutors to work in *kyabakura*, especially in New York City, was its financial advantages which meant more compensation relative to the other work available to them. Most of them wanted to earn as "efficiently" as possible, in order to better their lives and achieve their goals.

In his book, the *Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau argues the importance of looking at how people utilize space and manipulate the rules authorities

set, especially in capitalistic society where there is an abyss between the oppressors and the oppressed. By looking at *how* people, especially the oppressed who do not have legitimate power and control over others and objects, make do with what they have in the spaces they cannot control and impose rules, de Certeau argues that it enables us to better understand the historicity of people, and even objects, which are the creation of the historicity:

In any case, the consumer cannot be identified or qualified by the newspapers or commercial products he assimilates: between the person (who uses them) and these products (indexes of the 'order' which is imposed on him), there is a gap of varying proportions opened by the use that he makes of them.¹⁵¹

He also finds that the power of resistance, when the oppressed manipulate the rules of the authorities. Certeau indicates that we can redefine the historicity of the objects that were made to be oppressing those who do not have the control over, by exploring how “those oppressed” take advantage of the rules set by authorities, and redefine the ways of using the objects. He argues the impossibility of separating how people use a space, and how the space is recognized and defined, as the way in which subjects use objects determines the social historicity of the objects. This way of building historicity of objects challenges the dogmatic legitimations of authorities, and offers the diversity of narratives and nuances that are individual, situational, yet collective, and symbolic:

Like tools, proverbs (and other discourses) are *marked* by users: they offer to analysis the *imprints of acts* or of processes of enunciation... more generally, they thus indicate a social *historicity* in which systems of representations or

¹⁵¹ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 32.

processes of fabrication no longer appear only as normative frameworks but also as *tools manipulated by users*.¹⁵²

Certeau calls this practice “tactics,” which are only able to use, manipulate, and divert spaces that are owned by those who are in authoritative power. “Strategies” practiced by the oppressed, who own all control of a space through legitimate rules and dogmas, are capable of producing, and imposing spaces on others. Tactics is a practice of the other, originating from the absence of power over a space. Each tactic is reactionary to the space, momentary, and utilizes time to craft opportunities for the foundations of power: “but they [ways of operating -- ways of walking, reading, producing, speaking, etc.] introduce into it a way of turning it to their advantage that obeys other rules and constitutes something like a second level interwoven into the first (for instance, *la perruque*¹⁵³)”¹⁵⁴

In *kyabakura*, many workers use “tactics” in order to utilize *kyabakura* as their tool to achieve a greater goal in their lives. The “goals” each individual aspired to achieve were diverse. Yet the narrative, that most of workers use in speaking about experiences in *kyabakura*, is that they “took advantage of the space” in order to sustain their financial stability to achieve something else:

When I quit my job, I wanted to try professional dance again. My family owned a dance school, and I wanted to come to New York City to train myself. So I decided to come for three months. I wanted to utilize my time here as much as possible. I knew there was *kyabakura* everywhere. And if I

¹⁵² Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 21.

¹⁵³ Joe Scalan describes "*la perruque*" as, "dancing to music that only we can hear is a poignant example of this intimate form of resistance, a diversionary tactic characterized by a concept much discussed at the time, Michel de Certeau's *perruque*, or "wig," in which the outward appearance of acceptable behavior disguises ulterior motives" (Scalan, "The Uses of Disorder." 162-69,226,10.).

¹⁵⁴ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 30.

were to work, I wanted to work as effectively as possible. I chose *kyabakura*, because I was able to stay in Manhattan for free, and they partially covered my flight. I was able to earn \$550-750 a week. (Airi)

I came to New York City to become a DJ. The first 6 months were the hardest. Because DJs needed to have a personal connection to be referred to clubs, I had to work before I even got to DJ here. For a year or two, I worked for *kyabakura only* because I had no money. I would never want to go back. (Shunya)

Before coming to the U.S., I was in Canada going to a school that gave me a certificate as a nail artist. Before that, I was working as a singer. During that time, I did many business trips to Asian countries, such as Singapore. So English was not so much of a barrier. After school in Canada, I wanted to go to college in the U.S. to get a degree in Music Therapy. I worked in *kyabakura only* for the money. Nothing else. It was a good system to play with. (Honoka)

I worked in *kyabakura* as a “boy” because I wanted to be free during the day. I am a professional dancer here, and I worked in order to pay off my medical fees [about \$10,000] when I injured my leg. (Kazu)

I decided to work in *kyabakura*, because I wanted to earn some money to play around. (Mei)

I started working in *kyabakura* after I graduated from university here. I wanted to go to graduate school in New York City, so I worked in *kyabakura* for a year to save for graduate school. (Momo)

As confirmed by many of my interlocutors, they utilized the opportunity to work in *kyabakura*, as a tool to achieve their goal, such as coming to the United States at a minimal cost, paying rent, covering medical fees etc. Workers, especially female workers, utilize the space in order to maximize their financial benefits in addition to their basic salary. Some told me that they would go on a date with clients even though there were no “backs” or financial credits given by the club for doing so:

I would always go on a date with clients. They’d usually take me to really luxurious dinners that I couldn’t pay myself. It was good for me because I got to eat more expensive meals than I would pay for myself for free. For other experienced girls who came from Japan, it was normal for them to ask clients

to pay their school tuition or something. Things like, “can you pay my rent?” or “can you pay for my living?” I had a friend who got \$10,000 right after she asked one of the clients to do so. I don’t think she has slept with him. I asked her how. Did you sleep with him? She said no. How often did you see him? She said she only saw him three times. He worked on Wall Street, so \$10,000 was not a big deal for him, apparently. She was like a professional. She worked in Kabuki-chō, and ranked really high in the club. She had admired New York City for a long time, and she came to the city after she quit her job in Japan. These professionals have no intention of relying on the salary from the club. They get more from clients. (Mei)

I worked in *kyabakura* because I wanted to make a film about it for my undergraduate thesis. Among the crew, I was the only one who had access to the place. So I did an “undercover.” (Yuri)

Since I was living in the dormitory that was on the same building as *kyabakura*, I maximized my time in the city. Even if I got really drunk at 2:00 am, I went to bed at 2:30 am because my room was just a few steps away. I would wake up normally the next morning, then go to dance school or do tourist stuff. Sometimes I made breakfast for everyone [so we would get along], and they took care of me well and helped me get more drinks while sitting at the same table when we worked. (Airi).

In Mei’s comment, a large majority of female workers who “understood the rule of *kyabakura* well enough” used the space of *kyabakura* as a space for meeting their own patrons, rather than using it as a legitimate workplace that provided a major source of their income. As she mentioned, their main incentive to work in *kyabakura* was that the space would give them opportunities to meet with clients, who could potentially become their patrons and pay a lot more than they would earn by working in *kyabakura*. Rather than a primary workspace in and of itself, *kyabakura* was a place to foster better future encounters for the workers.

However, *kyabakura*, being a workplace that has better financial incentives compared to other migrant jobs available in New York City, gets ambiguous. For “boys,” the salary was not even higher than other jobs. Both Kazu and Shunya told

me that the average hourly rate of "boys" was about \$9. Although Kazu mentioned that \$9 per hour was still better than the other jobs that were available during the day, which would usually pay workers around \$6 per hour, his initial purpose of working in *kyabakura* – that he needed to pay off his \$10,000 medical debt – seemed unachievable, considering the fact that he only worked 3-4 times a week at maximum for a year and a half. Momo, who worked in order to afford her graduate school program, ended up having her boyfriend pay most of her tuition:

I really tried to save. At that time, I was renting a place for \$900/month. I at least tried to afford the rent on my own, using the money I earned from *kyabakura* and the dental office. Working in *kyabakura* for a year, I did not do anything but work. I didn't have any money to spare, to even cut my hair. So I didn't even buy makeup products. I didn't wear it at all, then the people at *kyabakura* would be like "You have no motivation whatsoever." But I couldn't say that I didn't have money to buy makeup products, you know? Since I tried to minimize my expenses, I also washed my hair every other day.¹⁵⁵ My boyfriend didn't really know anything about my life. When we ate out, he usually paid, though. He also paid for my cell phone. For a while, I didn't have a cell phone because I had no money, but he paid for me. Sometimes he also covered my rent. I think I saved like \$30,000 after 2 years. But I asked him to cover my tuition because my savings weren't enough. I don't really remember how much I had to pay in the first place because I ended up paying only \$1,000, and he paid the rest. (Momo)

This story tells how intense Momo's motivation for saving was and how stoically she restricted her expenses in order to save for her graduate school program. But, it still remains unclear how strategically her work in *kyabakura* was oriented around her goal of paying her graduate school tuition. Mei, on the other hand, mentioned that she needed to earn money that she could use on her own. However, she is an international student from China, who goes to a private university and is capable of

¹⁵⁵ In Japan, most people wash their hair every day, and it is considered to be "dirty" not to wash one's hair every day.

affording its about \$35,000 tuition, and living in the heart of Manhattan. While talking to her, she told me that she bought a ring from Harry Winston (a well-known high-end brand) that cost about \$7,500 as a treat to herself for completing her schoolwork, her internship at a Swiss megabank, and her part-time job. Considering the financial stability she has without working for *kyabakura*, she only worked once a week. She did tell me that she was looking for a part-time job where she could practice her Japanese, yet she did not mention it until I asked her so.

Then one would ask: why do workers keep mentioning financial incentives as one of the most prominent reasons for them to work in *kyabakura*, when *kyabakura* seems to offer little financial advantage to them? What matters here, as de Certeau also points out, is how the power of narrative structures one's experiences¹⁵⁶ and how we process experiences *through* words and narratives – it is the way in which my interlocutors build their narratives on the space of *kyabakura* and how they restructure their experiences in the space through reasoning, rather than what working in *kyabakura* actually provided for them that matters.

Lauren Berlant coins the concept of *cruel optimism*: a state when we are willing to sacrifice the present for a better future.¹⁵⁷ Anticipating the future we desire gives us a sense of optimism towards the current situation we are in, which enables us to compromise with the current situation in order to acquire the future we want. The present, thus, becomes a temporary step for acquiring a desirable future, rather than an object of our attention itself. Pointing out Lefebvre and Certeau, as those who are

¹⁵⁶ Certeau, 21.

¹⁵⁷ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 12.

interested in examining how capitalism functions as a tool of organizing one's everyday life, Berlant examines how capitalism overwhelms our lives by disrupting our attention to the present through the desire to sustain our dream, that may not necessarily be available to us any longer because of the current capitalist social structure:

Cruel Optimism is a more formalist work than either of these projects. Here, optimism manifests in attachments and the desire to sustain them: attachment is a *structure* of relationality. But the experience of affect and emotion that attaches to those relations is as extremely varied as the contexts of life in which they emerge. A optimistic attachment is invested in one's own or the world's continuity, but might *feel* any number of ways, from the romantic to the fatalistic to the numb to the nothing.¹⁵⁸

Here, Berlant suggests that once we come to have attachments to certain desires – from job security to romantic relationships – we can show optimism to the situation in various ways. The optimism, Berlant argues, is a trust on promises that allows us to actualize and acquire our desires. It makes us compromise the present for the future, by embracing, or even enduring, since the present allows us to reach the actualization of our longing. This optimism is cruel, because it reasons our endurance to a current situation, no matter how bad it is:

What's cruel about these attachments, and not merely inconvenient or tragic, is that the subjects who have *x* in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object/scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the *content* of the attachment is, the continuity of its forms provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 1.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

This *cruel optimism* also undermines the final desired goal, when the sacrifice of the present is actually in vain, and the condition of the present is actually negatively affecting the future.¹⁶⁰

When my interlocutors talked about their experiences in *kyabakura*, and how working in *kyabakura* was the best decision they could make in order to realize their goals, the sense of "inevitability" soon follows with comments:

I *had to* choose *kyabakura* to balance my life as a dancer. (Kazu)

Kyabakura was the best workplace for me to achieve what I wanted to do at that time. With experiences of working in *kyabakura* in Japan, it was the most efficient and the easiest way for me to earn money. There's nothing but incentives for a higher salary in *kyabakura* for me. (Honoka)

This sense of inevitability is transfigured as their acceptance of the space of *kyabakura*, a place that is *inherently* harsh for workers, and the sense that there is nothing to be done. When I asked about their thoughts on the harsh working conditions of *kyabakura*:

Well, it cannot be helped (*shikataga-nai*). If you want to survive as a girl, in such a situation, you have to be prepared for it. It is very sketchy, but it is, at the end of the day, your responsibility to take. (Yuri)

If I were to complain about the working conditions, I would be the one who's wrong. Since I was in a lower position, I would be blamed for being too naive and immature. So even if I thought it was wrong, and some others would agree, we would be like, "Well, it can't be helped" (*shikataga-nai*). (Kazu)

Yeah, Hiroto sucks, and the management of the club is terrible. But you just have to deal with it, you know? You can change your attitude a little bit, you get along with Hiroto, and everything will go smoothly. (Airi)

The idea of class also enabled workers to justify the harassment that workers would get from clients. Unlike other migrant jobs, some workers justify clients' illicit behavior *because* they were high-class, as it secures that they are respectable even if

¹⁶⁰ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 2.

they harass workers. What distinguishes *kybakaura* from other migrant jobs is this sense of class exclusivity, that they are working for "higher class men," who are rich and capable enough to come to New York City on behalf of their companies. Workers tend to justify the sexual encounters between a *kyabajyo* and a client because he is "socially respectable":

Most of the clients usually drink more than they can handle. They often go crazy and lose control of themselves. They wouldn't stop drinking, and sometimes touch girls more than they should. But I am kind of okay with it, because I know that they are high class, and have a sense of integrity and better common sense. When I work in Japan, I feel more uncomfortable because I really don't know the class of the clients and who they are. (Konomi)

Momo, who worked in one of the *kybakura* for a year, also told me that one of the main takeaways she received from the time she worked in *kybakura* was:

Since some of the clients were CEOs of their own companies, it was motivating for me to talk to these people who are *higher* (emphasis is mine). I was able to learn how to study and how to collect useful information from them. (Momo)

Although working in *kybakura* was supposedly their tactic to manipulate the space in order for them to actualize their greater goals, the balancing between manipulating the space and being manipulated by the space is extremely obscure, as it is described above how harsh working conditions disable workers from going about their everyday lives outside of the club. It is this *cruel optimism*, the belief that working in *kybakura* would better one's life, that justifies workers' ignoring its harsh working condition, and its negative repercussions in their lives. In fact, some of my

interlocutors struggled to balance their work and their initial reason for coming to the city:

Since I was always working and going to school, I did nothing else but work and schoolwork. I barely made any domestic friends. I was too busy. (Risa)

I had to skip school after my shift, as it usually ended around 7am in the morning. (Mei).

Sometimes I couldn't wake up the next day because I drank too much in the club. As soon as I started working in *kyabakura*, I started to wake up past noon, and my body started to get used to it. At first, I thought I would have time during the day because I work in the evening, but the work ate up my time anyway. (Kazu)

Considering what these voices have said, *kyabakura* was indeed a tactic that they manipulated, played with, and took advantage of in order to achieve their desires, but it also created a certain studied ignorance of the harsh working conditions that they were put in, and the negative consequences that affected their own very desired lives. Although the negative consequences from working in *kyabakura* affected their lives so much that some found it difficult to go about their everyday practices, they would justify the situation by simply saying "it cannot be helped," and therefore there is little point in dwelling on it. These negative consequences were tolerated and endured, as all of them knew that "they were going to quit real soon," and the consequences would be in effect only for extremely short periods of time. This sense of transience of the space of *kyabakura* distanced the space from other parts of their lives, even though they were deeply interconnected. The sense of transience workers had for their work transformed *kyabakura* into a *transient space*, where effects of the space on workers' lives had to be limited, temporary, and even illusory.

Those who were able to achieve their "desires" after working in *kyabakura*, distanced *kyabakura* as a whole experience from their current lives, that were once the very future they longed for, and suppressed its impact on their lives. In New York City, this process is fabricated by marking the space as "Japanese," or "non-American." The space is temporary, and does not belong to the rest of their lives that are built in the rest of the city. All of the experiences workers had in relation to *kyabakura* were labeled the bad habits of Japanese people, and differentiated from what they thought of as American mannerism. Yet what remained unquestioned in this culture-specific ritual of the Japanese people was only effective in the temporary space of *kyabakura*:

I think they [clients] are so stupid. I am ashamed of them when I look at them doing stupid things. When I went to eat with my clients after *kyabakura*, they would go as if they had been in Japan. They would yell at waiters arrogantly, and it just made me go home because I was so embarrassed. *If they came here as Japanese people, I would want them to go beyond the thinking of Japanese people.* I got so disappointed when they complained about American people. I thought they were not flexible at all (emphasis mine). (Momo)

Those who are working in *kyabakura*, I think, would never get out of the Japanese community even though they live in New York City. They can't imagine what would be acceptable and what kinds of way of running a business would give a bad image. Owners and managers can't speak English, so that's also another issue. Well, it's probably because they do everything based on how they would do it in Japan. Even when I said something that might have crossed a line, they didn't understand. In fact, there was a complaint from another building once. They didn't like that our club had "boys" hanging around the street and near the building. The building later put grids on their flower beds so "boys" couldn't sit, but the club completely ignored it. It is because they don't get the common sense of living in the city, or the ordinary way of thinking here. That's all because they spend their time with Japanese people. (Kazu)

Here, any kind of negative images related to *kyabakura* are marked as "Japanese," and are inherent in the club, and therefore, unfixable. By labeling it as something that is inherent to the club space, they distance themselves from the situation as somebody "who does not belong in the same thinking and space," which justifies the bad behavior practiced by participants in *kyabakura*.

In addition, while the space of *kyabakura*, its abusive managers, and uncivil clients are being labeled as "Japanese" and do not belong to New York City, the idea of the West is idealized throughout the space.¹⁶¹ Most of my interlocutors described non-Asian clients who came to *kyabakura* positively, and often described them as "very gentle and nice" (Risa, Riho). Risa and Riho recalled when they sat with a non-Asian client:

Riho: I was so happy when Americans were my clients. They were so nice and gentlemanly. Also the way they touched us wasn't sexual at all. Like their hug was so kind and gentle.

Risa: They didn't even get mad when I fell asleep on one black client. When I was really drunk, I fell asleep on the client's lap. Then I woke up after an hour or so, he said I could still sleep. He just kept drinking, I think he saw me as a pet or something.

Here, they explain the differences between American, especially non-Asian American, and Japanese people in terms of how they treat female workers. They draw this differentiation between Japanese clients who are rude and harassing, and American ones who are gentle and non-sexual. While drawing this distinction, they

¹⁶¹ Mitziko Sawada, who examined the migration of Japanese to the United States during 1890-1924, also points out the migrants' tendency to idealize the idea of American society even after coming to the United States: "Their view of Japan was, in fact, fairly realistic: their expectations of American society, by contrast, were profoundly unrealistic." (Mitziko Sawada. *Tokyo Life, New York Dreams : Urban Japanese Visions of America, 1890-1924*. (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1996), 6)

did mention that these situations did also happen when they worked in *kyabakura* in Japan, without labelling the Japanese clients as “gentle” and “non-sexual.” Like Kazu mentioned in the interview, most workers who were temporarily staying in the city and worked for *kyabakura* barely had any interaction with domestic residents of New York City. They did not have any chance to meet with Americans. Most of their friends were either those whom they met in *kyabakura*, or their ESL schools during the day. *Kyabakura* also enables some workers to continue to idealize the West and isolate the space of *kyabakura* even further.

For those who acquired “the desired future,” *kyabakura* even turns into an object of criticism. Reika, who worked in a higher-end club in New York City, and is now a housewife married to a New Jersey native completely separated herself from the space of *kyabakura* even on a metaphysical level:

Right now, I have a Green Card, and I pay taxes. So my husband and I are now for Trump. I don't like illegal migrants. I have no objection to legal migrants at all, but I have a negative image of illegal immigrants and illegal work. I just think it's unfair. It's unfair from my perspective of mine, who applied for a visa on my own, went back to my country once the visa expired, reapplied again, and then applied for the green card...I also pay appropriate taxes. As somebody who actually went through these legitimate steps, it's just unfair, like Melania Trump was saying. (Reika)

Momo also commented that she was going to move to the middle of Manhattan, because she did not like getting on the subway. When I asked the reason, she answered that she did not want to see anyone who was "lower" than her class, such as "black" and "hispanic" people who are homeless. Recalling her experiences in *kyabakura*, she implies that she no longer belongs to the space of *kyabakura*:

I think it was overall good that I worked in *kyabakura*. There were so many opportunities for me to see people who were lower than I was. They showed me many bad examples that made me think like, oh I don't wanna be like this, this is where you would end up if you are too obsessed with money. I would end up like these people if I just keep playing myself, or oh I don't wanna be like this old lady who has no purpose in her life. I was able to push myself more because I thought I didn't want to be like them, I didn't want to interact with them for good, and I didn't wanna be in such a distasteful pit for any longer. (Momo)

Both Reika and Momo successfully achieved their own goals after they worked in *kyabakura*. The temporary nature of the space of *kyabakura* now influences how they process their experiences in *kyabakura* – as something that was temporary, not true to themselves, and only for non-respectable people. Once "the desire" is achieved in any way, the *cruel optimism* continues to suppress their experiences in the space, the space itself, and people who are in the space, as it was something that was only temporary and something that does not belong to them now. "The present" of *kyabakura* is archived in their thinking, and only pulled out as a "bitter life lesson" that cannot happen to people like themselves who have "successfully" realized "the desired future." This is precisely why the working conditions of *kyabakura* never improve. The refusal to include this space in one's own life suppresses the recognition of the space, although that does not affect the very existence and physicality of the space, which continues to affect people's lives.

Even though the working conditions of *kyabakura* do include risks of affecting one's life negatively, workers still decide to work in *kyabakura*, mostly because they are attracted by its financial benefits. *Kyabakura*, after all, is merely a tool for many workers to achieve something greater in their lives. Some workers use

tactics to maximize the benefits of working in *kyabakura* by manipulating the space in order to meet clients who can be their patrons, rather than using the work as a primary source of income. Working in *kyabakura*, for many workers, is just a temporary phase of their lives, and most of them have no intention of staying for good. However, this idea of manipulating the workspace, which is constructed in a way that significantly disadvantages its employees, makes workers disregard the present space of *kyabakura*, instead considering it as a space they once belonged to. Working in *kyabakura*, and serving clients, gives workers a sense of transience in the space, which enables them to maintain a kind of ignorance of the space. By pointing their attention toward goals they want to achieve *through* working in *kyabakura*, rather than the state that they *are* working in *kyabakura*, workers take the working conditions of *kyabakura* for granted, and adapt themselves to the environment. The space is not worth their attention, therefore, it is easier for them to "make do with it," rather than recognizing the consequences of their work. This adaptation is justified because the space is transient, their work is transient, therefore, they can endure a bit of struggle because it is not going to be forever, and they can give up whenever they want to. The space is transient, therefore, the consequences are also transient, and do not affect their desired future. Once the desired future is achieved, the space is recognized as only a "phase" of their lives, and separated and distanced from other aspects of their lives by marking the space as "Japanese," and "lower-class"— i.e., which do not belong to the rest of the space and experiences they craft their lives in. The harsh working conditions of *kyabakura* continue to be tolerated, and the

responsibility of handling the repercussions is put on individual workers, as "it is up to themselves to decide if they want to work in *kyabakura* or not, and if they suffer, well, it sucks."

CONCLUSION

KYABAKURA AND ITS TRANSIENCE

This thesis aims to understand historical, economic, and social contexts that created the industry of *mizu shōbai*, how it is operated both inside and outside of geographical Japan, and how the space is manipulated by its workers, while affecting their. Since the very moment of its birth, *mizu shōbai* has been a reflection of Japanese economic circumstances. Cafes with female waiters who are dedicated to take care of male customers, which is the very original version of *mizu shōbai* started as business that provided white-collar men to have a taste of coffee, which was the most westernized, and fashionable drink that one could acquire during Taishō era. *Jyokyu*, who were female waiters of those cafes, started dressing themselves to offer special services in order to attract more male customers through their femininity. Some of the cafes eventually started serving alcohol, and expanding the size of cafes by adding stages for band music and dancing, which created the foundation of cabaret. Cabaret instantly prospered right after World War II, by providing a space for those *jyokyu* who worked for RAA facilities, to build their second career. Both hostess clubs, and *alubaito salon*, which runs its business similar to the way *kyabakura* does, emerged as strategies that tackled the stagnation of cabaret industry during 1950s. Hostess club, therefore, is a version of Japanese traditional cabaret

industry, which changed its shape in order to maximize the benefit from their primary customers, that is, white-color men.

Kyabakura, on the other hand, is relatively a new establishment within the realm of the sex industry that was built to combat obstacles for new potential clients in the sex industry. With adopting precise fee systems based on quantifiable measures and furnishing clubs with gaudy and garnish interior, *kyabakura* enables clients to experience *the feeling of* visiting hostess clubs, while providing services that are reshaped for the mass public.

The working condition of *kyabakura* is filled with uncertainty and instability, as there an ambiguity of rules set for female workers. Most of clubs put strict surveillance on female workers when they work in club, and the whole business model relies on the expectation that female workers would use their private time to interact with their clients, in order to benefit the clubs. This manipulation of workers' private lives leaves space for clients and workers to engage in sexual activities, that is prohibited in physical space of *kyabakura*. Because the space of *kyabakura* provokes clients' fantasies on female workers, the workers end up having to either actualize the fantasies or manipulate the fantasies, by providing emotional labor outside of their shifts in physical space of *kyabakura*. Some may call this female workers' ability to manipulate clients embracing and powerful, yet I argue that it will ignore the nuances of risks that workers are taking by working in *kyabakura*.

In New York City, the working condition of *kyabakura* seem to be more harsh than that of *kyabakura* in Japan, yet workers still find ways they can take advantage

of the space in order to maximize the benefit they can acquire from working in *kyabakura*. Many workers indeed had no intention to stay for good in the work, but saw the work as a tool for them to achieve their "desired future" mainly by gaining financial capitals through working in *kyabakura*. This tactical way of recognizing the space of *kyabakura*, however, makes workers see the work as a transient phase that they need to endure in order to acquire their desired goals, rather than the present situation that manifests repercussions to their lives. Even though there were tangible negative consequences that even threatened the possibility of achieving their desired future, workers continued to endure the work rather than tackling the issues of the working condition they were in. For them, the space was only a tool, and a tool could only affect so much on, its masters, that was, themselves. They distanced themselves by labeling the space as "Japanese," and segregated the space from the rest of their lives that they experienced in the City. This workers' way of building a narrative on the space of *kyabakura* is one of the most crucial elements that sustains its harsh working condition.

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