

A Complex Exploration of Japan's Male Host Industry and its Societal Implications

Film/reading reaction paper, Set 4

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The Great Happiness Space: Tale of an Osaka Love Thief is a compelling documentary film that offers a glimpse into the lives of male hosts in Japan's nightlife scene. The documentary presents a unique perspective on the world of male hosts, where they entertain female clients in exchange for money, gifts, and affection. The film is a representation of the complexities of the modern world and the social, economic, and cultural factors that drive human behavior.

One of the most powerful aspects of the film is how it presents the lives of the hosts and their clients as a reflection of Japanese society's larger issues. The film delves into the psychological and emotional needs of the clients and how they in turn are fulfilled by the workers. It explores the societal pressures that push the clients to seek validation and companionship from them.

The documentary also sheds light on the often-overlooked issue of the commodification of emotions and intimacy. The Japanese hosts sell companionship, affection, and love to their clients in exchange for money, often blurring the lines between what is genuine and what is a transaction. Furthermore, the film's portrayal of the hosts as entrepreneurs who are running a business is very interesting, as it shows how commodification of intimacy is not limited to just sex work but also extends to other forms of emotional labor. In *Healing Labor: Japanese Sex Work in the Gendered Economy* by Peter C. Koch, the chapter titled "Healing Customers" explores the ways in which sex work in Japan is marketed and sold to clients as a form of healing, particularly using euphemistic language, advertising, and the creation of a curing and healing environment.

The main impression taken away from this chapter is that the sex industry in Japan is heavily marketed and commodified, with sex workers often marketed as healers or providers of emotional support. The chapter highlights the ways in which the use of therapeutic language and

advertising can contribute to the exploitation and objectification of sex workers, and the challenges faced by sex workers in negotiating their roles and identities in a heavily regulated industry. Additionally, it also depicts underlying gender and power dynamics in market of sex work in Japan, and the ways in which this marketing reinforces traditional gender roles and expectations. This is shown in the film through the differences seen between female workers and male workers. The film's depiction of the hosts as victims of their circumstances is another powerful aspect of the documentary. Hosts come from diverse backgrounds, including broken families, financial hardships, and societal pressures. They have resorted to working as hosts to support their families and make ends meet. However, the film does not portray them as mere victims, but rather as complex individuals who are making the best of their circumstances.

A weakness of the film is its lack of focus on female clients' perspectives. The documentary tends to romanticize the hosts' lifestyles and portrays them as glamorous and luxurious. However, it fails to offer a more nuanced portrayal of the clients and their motivations for seeking out the hosts' services. The film seems to be more focused on the hosts' stories and their struggles, rather than exploring the clients' motivations and their emotional and psychological needs outside of superficial reasons.

Another weakness of the film is its lack of attention to hosts' impact on their clients' lives. While the film acknowledges the emotional labor the hosts put in and the financial benefits they reap, it does not address the potential negative impact their services can have on their clients' lives. The documentary overlooks the power dynamics between the hosts and their clients and the potential for exploitation.

As a final point, another topic that is rarely discussed in the film is that of the risks and stigmatization that people in this profession are exposed to, especially in regards to men. Host

clubs also involve sex work and in Japan, this is a highly risky industry. It is well known that sex workers face a wide range of legal, social, and health risks, and as Koch discusses in his chapter, “Risks and Rights”, how criminalizing the practice of sex work in Japan contributes to the marginalization and exploitation of these workers, and how greater legal protection and legal recognition are needed for sex workers in Japan. The chapter also examines the challenges faced by sex workers regarding accessing health care, as well as the stigmatization and discrimination that they may experience from health care providers when seeking health care. It also discusses the importance of harm reduction strategies and the need for greater access to resources such as condoms and HIV testing. In regards to the film, I wish these factors were also discussed. All in all, these shortcomings have left me wanting a deeper exploration of the broader social, cultural, and economic factors that shape this industry and the experiences of those who choose to work in it.

Regarding surprising aspects of the film, how the hosts seemed to be involved in a tremendous amount of emotional labor to complete their work is one thing that comes to mind. Hosts not only provide physical companionship, but also emotional support and validation to their clients. They spend hours listening to their clients' problems, comforting them, and offering advice. This emotional labor is often invisible and undervalued, but the film highlights its significance and how it contributes to the hosts' financial success. In Koch's "Healing Customers" the author discusses the emotional labor that service workers in the healthcare industry are expected to perform, arguing that emotional labor involves managing and regulating one's emotions to meet the expectations of customers, clients, or patients. Similarly, in *The Great Happiness Space*, the hosts are also engaged in emotional labor, managing, and regulating their emotions to meet the emotional needs of their clients. The hosts provide emotional support,

comfort, and validation to their clients, which is a form of emotional labor.

The film's portrayal of hosts as entrepreneurs is also surprising. Hosts are not just entertainers but are also businessmen who are running their own businesses. They employ various strategies to attract clients, such as building relationships with regular clients, creating a desirable image, and investing in their appearance. The film's portrayal of hosts as entrepreneurs is an intriguing perspective, as it highlights the business aspect of the nightlife industry and the importance of marketing and branding in the service industry.

Koch also discusses the power dynamics that exist between service workers and their customers. The service workers are expected to perform emotional labor, but they may also face emotional demands and expectations from their customers, which can be emotionally taxing. In the film hosts also sometimes had to face emotional demands and expectations from their clients. The hosts are expected to provide emotional support and companionship to their clients, which can be emotionally taxing for the hosts.

In conclusion, *The Great Happiness Space: Tale of an Osaka Love Thief* is a thought-provoking documentary that sheds light on the host industry for men in Japan and its wider social, economic, and cultural implications. The film portrays hosts as complex individuals who are making the best of their circumstances, while also highlighting the commodification of emotions and intimacy. However, the film falls short in providing a deeper exploration of the female clients' perspectives and the potential negative impact of the hosts' services on their lives. Nevertheless, the film is a valuable addition to the conversation on the modern world's complexities and the underlying gender and power dynamics that shape our behavior.

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