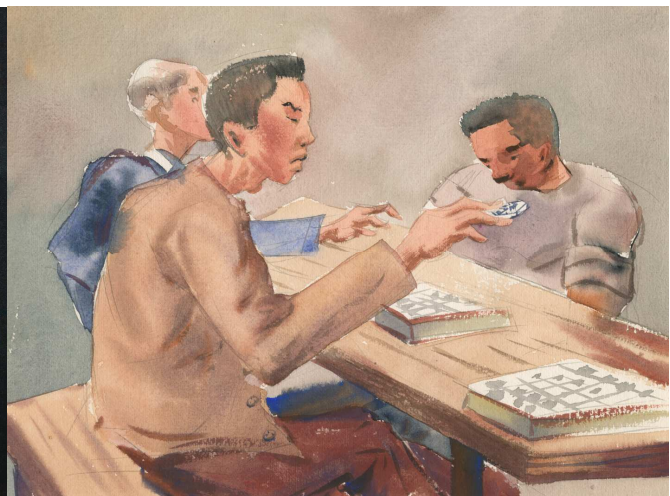




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## Gaming and Gambling in Japan: An Overview and Themes for Further Research



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## Introduction

Gambling and gaming are thriving in East Asia. Despite the moral and legal sanctions against gambling which characterise most East Asian societies, plans for the development of casinos and other gambling facilities are either in place or under discussion in Singapore, Thailand, South Korea, the Philippines and Japan. In Macau, the hub of casino gambling in East Asia for 150 years, the return to sovereignty to China in 1999 and subsequent granting of licenses to 'outside' investment has led to an explosion in development, including significant investment from major Las Vegas gambling interests. In May, 2004, the first fully foreign owned casino in Macau, *The Sands*, opened its doors and in August, 2007, *The Venetian* – the world's largest casino – opened along the Las Vegas-inspired Cotai strip in Macau<sup>1</sup>. In 2006, seven new casinos opened in Macau, with five more due to open in 2007. Revenues from casino gaming have, correspondingly, exploded, increasing by 34% between 2003 and 2004, accounting for 40% of Macau's GDP in the latter year. By 2005, gambling revenues had increased to \$5.7 billion, catapulting Macau to the second largest gambling enclave in the world, after Las Vegas. In 2006, revenues leapt by another 22% to \$6.95 billion (compared to \$6.5 billion generated in Las Vegas), thus establishing Macau as the world's most lucrative centre for casino gaming and gambling. Regionally, casino gaming is expected to grow by more than 15% annually, increasing revenues from US\$8.8 billion in 2004 to \$18.5 billion by 2009, with Macau accounting for more than two thirds of total regional revenue. Much of the expansion is being fuelled by the growth of the economy and consumer spending in China and by fierce competition for a share of the regional tourist market.

Both at home and abroad, East Asians are amongst the world's most avid consumers of gambling. Regionally, casino gambling is at the heart of the demographics of travel and tourism, with Thais travelling to Burma and Cambodia, Singaporeans to Malaysia (Gentry Heights), Japanese to Korea and mainland Chinese to Macau - more than 22 million in 2006 - making the entry and exit point between Zhuhai and Macau one of the busiest border crossings in the world. Gambling has also figured prominently as a motivation for international travel, with Australia and Las Vegas as favoured

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<sup>1</sup> *The Guardian*. 29 August 2007.

destinations<sup>2</sup>. A propensity for gambling within East Asian (especially Chinese) communities abroad is well established in both anthropological accounts (Watson 1975, Constable 1994, Oxfeld 1991, 1995) and in the growing interdisciplinary discourse on gambling (The Wager 1997, Blaszczyński et al 1998, Bell and Lyell 2002, Tse et al 2004).

This scramble for a share of the burgeoning gambling tourism market in East Asia has fuelled discussion about whether to introduce casino gambling in Japan. Since 2001, proposals for the introduction of casinos in Japan have been hotly debated. Led by Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara, proponents have argued that casinos will create jobs, raise much needed tax revenues for the municipal and regional governments that would manage them, extinguish the market for illicit gambling and gaming which currently exists and attract tourists, whilst opponents counter on both legal and moral grounds.

Although wagering for money is strictly and unambiguously illegal in Japan under 1908 legislation, various forms of gambling and gaming – pachinko, horse racing and other ‘officially managed races’ and the lottery – are well established. Pachinko, which is not officially classified as gambling-for-money, is by far the most ubiquitous and lucrative form of gaming in Japan, dwarfing even the mighty automotive industry in terms of revenues generated and pachinko parlours are amongst the most visible and iconic features on the contemporary Japanese landscape. An enthusiasm for gaming and gambling is also well-documented historically and the Japanese mafia or *yakuza* (the name comes from a losing hand in the card game *hanafuda*) trace their origins and the origins of many of their characteristic rituals and traditions to professional gamblers or *bakuto*.

Although gaming, gambling and related activities are, despite legal prohibitions, socially and economically embedded in contemporary Japanese society, such activities have, with a few notable exceptions, evaded scholarly attention, even in the wake of an explosion of interest in related topics such as popular culture and leisure, the ‘after hours’ world of the *mizushobai* (‘water trade’), and the *yakuza*. Although scholarly interest in gaming and gambling outside Japan (so-called gambling

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<sup>2</sup> In 1998, more than 800,000 East Asians, led by the Japanese, visited Las Vegas. Japan Airlines and Northwest Airlines each have multiple weekly flights to meet the demand.





Fig. 1. The Sands Macau casino, opened in May, 2004



Fig. 2. Sands Macau at night



Fig. 3. Depiction of *The Venetian*, due to open along the Cotai Strip, Macau in August, 2007



Fig. 4. Recruitment booth for *The Sands* and *The Venetian* at University of Macau (March, 2006)



studies) has been growing, due in part to the recent global expansion of casino gaming and gambling<sup>3</sup>, research on gambling in East Asia, including Japan, remains scant. Given this neglect and in light of the recent boon in casino gambling across East Asia, research focusing on the rich world of gaming and gambling in Japan is overdue. The twofold aims of this paper are, first, to introduce the main forms of gaming, gambling and related activities in Japan, providing an overview of their history and development, status in contemporary Japan and social significance and, secondly, to hint briefly at wider themes for consideration.

### **Gambling and Gaming in Japan: An Overview**

Gaming and gambling in contemporary Japan encompasses a wide variety of popular activities, ranging from the lottery (*takarakuji*) and variations on the theme such the soccer lottery (*sakkakuji*), games such as *mahjong*, the so-called *kôei kyôgi* (officially managed races) which include horse racing (*keiba*), bicycle racing (*keirin*), motorboat racing (*kyôtei*) and motorcycle racing (*ôto rêsu*) and the ubiquitous *pachinko*, which is Japan's largest leisure industry and most lucrative form of gambling.

Gambling has a long history in Japan. An early example, contained in "The Chronicles of Japan" (*Nihongi* or *Nihon Shoki*) which was compiled in 720AD and is considered to be amongst the nation's first literary works, took place on September 18, 685 when the Emperor Tenmu (*Tennô Tenmu*) invited high-ranking aristocrats to play *hakugi*, a dice game of Chinese origin, awarding them clothes as winnings (Nagashima 1996:350). During the Heian period (950-1050AD), a rich variety of games and contests were developed amongst the leisured classes, often as vehicles for demonstrating the skill, taste, refinement and erudition of their participants. *Go*, a board game which was introduced from China during the Nara period (710-794AD) was popular in aristocratic circles, as illustrated in a scroll from *The Tales of Genji*, depicting a game between Prince Kaoru and the Emperor in which the prize (unwelcome as it turned out) was the hand of the Emperor's daughter (Morris 1964: 162). Although *go* was often played for bets, *sugoroku*, a backgammon-like game played with dice, was the "...real gambling game of the time" (ibid.). Less elegant than *go*, it was periodically (but generally

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<sup>3</sup> In the United Kingdom, problem gambling is the subject of a new research venture funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in partnership with the Responsibility in Gambling Trust (RIGT). Funding

ineffectively) forbidden. A multitude of other games were developed during the Heian period, including parlour games involving verbal ingenuity and knowledge of classic literature and games based on ‘comparison’ (*awase*) - mainly of things, but also of songs, birds and verse for example<sup>4</sup>. Within Heian courtly circles, a person’s ability to participate in such activities with style and finesse was a marker of status and reputation and among the upper classes generally, gambling was regarded as “a desirable form of leisure, comparable with the arts” (Nagashima 1996:351). By contrast, gambling among the lower classes was repeatedly suppressed with legal orders, albeit not very successfully (*ibid.*).

Much of the subsequent history of gaming and gambling in Japan can be characterized in terms of this relationship between the grass-roots popularity of such activities and the attitude of the authorities towards their regulation. According to Nagashima, gaming and gambling in the Edo period (1600-1868) was officially regarded as a great crime and social evil. Government policy was prohibitive, with the effect of driving such activities and their practitioners underground. In a bid to maintain law and order, the Edo government agreed to grant professional gamblers (*bakuchiuchi*) special, unofficial status on the condition that they be segregated from ordinary citizens (*katagi*). The term *asobinin* (*asobi* meaning ‘play’ and *nin* meaning ‘person’), which is synonymous with ‘gambler’, became established in opposition to *katagi* (serious people) as a designation for the inhabitants of this newly segregated, semi-illicit world to which the origins of the present-day Japanese mafia or *yakuza* is attributed.

There seems to have emerged two types of betting culture in Japan, one the ‘mild’ betting on games to enhance their pleasure which was popular amongst the upper classes and the other the ‘heavy betting’ of the lower classes in the spirit of win or die which, according to Nagashima, “was deeply connected with the Japanese aesthetics of *machismo* represented by the cherry blossom, emphasizing the beauty of a swift fall after a brief climax” (1996: 352). An aesthetic shared by all classes in Japan, within the context of gambling, “...it formed the core ideology of the *yakuza* culture, expressed in the idiom *otoko ni naru* (to become a man)” (*ibid.*). The development of a an unyielding aesthetic and

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worth around GBP920,000 over a three year period has been awarded to six projects researching the impacts of gambling on those involved as well as the broader implications for society.

<sup>4</sup> See Masakawa Koichi (2000) for a full-length treatment in Japanese of games based on comparison.

moral code within the *yakuza* which reflects wider aesthetic and moral values of Japanese society is often cited as one of the reasons for the popularity of *yakuza* or gangster films in Japan.

Popular forms of gambling and gaming during the Meiji period (1862-1912) included the lottery (*takarakuji*), which existed (but was illegal) in the Edo period; *fukiya*, form of darts (or blow-darts); *shogi*, a board game which is still played today; *hanafuda*, a card game (and one of the original products of video game company Nintendo); dice and billiards, which was imported from Holland and was played mainly by the upper classes.

Gambling thrived after the Meiji period, despite continued government efforts to suppress it. It also became much more professionalized, leading the development of increasingly sophisticated ways of cheating. During the austerity of the Second World War, gambling was completely prohibited and severely punished, flourishing once again in the post-war period. Popular forms of gambling which were developed after World War II included *keirin* (bicycle racing), *kyôtei* (motorboat racing) and *ôto rêsu* (motorcycle racing), whilst many other forms which had previously existed, such as pachinko, flourished.

Having briefly outlined the historical development of gaming and gambling in Japan, the remainder of the paper provides an overview of what have been the most popular and significant forms of gaming and gambling in post-war Japan.

## **Pachinko**

Pachinko, which has been (somewhat erroneously) described as ‘Japanese pinball’, is by far the most popular and lucrative form of gambling in Japan. In 1999, Japan’s 16,000 plus pachinko parlours took in an astonishing 30 trillion yen (nearly \$300 billion) in bets, making pachinko the largest industry in the world’s second largest economy. In 1992, pachinko alone accounted for 5% of Japan’s total GNP and in 1999, 40% of the total leisure market, restaurants and bars included. An estimated 40 to 50 million people or more than a quarter of Japan’s total population play pachinko at least occasionally. At the peak of pachinko’s popularity in 1994, as many as 30 million people could be described regular patrons, a figure which had remained constant for more than thirty years, leading one researcher to dub pachinko, “the unquestionable king of leisure in a kingdom of 30 million

subjects” (Kato 1984:12-13, quoted in Manzenreiter 1996:360). For its owners and shareholders, pachinko is a source of immense wealth. Annually published lists of Japan’s top one hundred taxpayers always include at least several names of those involved in the pachinko business and both the makers of pachinko machines and, more recently, the owners of pachinko parlours have appeared in Forbes Magazine’s annual list of global billionaires<sup>5</sup>. As summarised by one commentator, pachinko makes Vegas look like small change. Although still not well known outside of Japan, pachinko machines have recently begun to appear along-side more conventional slot machines in gambling resorts in both the U.S. and Britain.

The archetype pachinko machine popularised in Japan in the decades following the Second World War, resembles a form of vertically orientated pinball. In exchange for coin tokens inserted into the machine, a number of steel balls – 3/8 inch in diameter and resembling ball bearings – are released into a tray at the base, from which they are launched in quick succession to the top of the machine, cascading down through a labyrinth of pegs and falling either into the selected slots triggering a pay-off of more balls into the tray or, much more usually, unprofitably to the bottom of the maze. Players control the speed and force with which balls are launched by altering the exact positioning of the lever/dial at the base of the machine, sometimes using a coin to jam the lever into place once the ‘correct’ position is determined and thus freeing their hands for smoking and other pachinko-related pastimes.

At the end of a session, any remaining balls are exchanged for ‘prizes’ – normally various consumer items - which can in turn be exchanged for cash at a separate kiosk normally located just outside the parlour. This system, known as *santen hoshiki* (lit. ‘three-store method’) developed in order to circumvent legislation prohibiting gambling for money.

### History

Like so many other forms of popular culture in Japan such as karaoke and *bunraku* puppet theatre, pachinko traces its origins to Osaka, where it was first popularised in the open air (*roten*) stalls

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<sup>5</sup> The 2006 list of global billionaires included Mr. Kunio Busujima, the Chairman of Sankyo, Japan’s second largest maker of pachinko machines (#109), Mr. Han Chang-Woo, Chairman of Maruhan Corporation, which is Japan’s largest chain of pachinko parlours and Mr. Hajime Satomi, the founder of Japan’s largest slot machine maker, Sammy, and current Head of the recently formed Sega Sammy Corporation (following Sammy’s acquisition of Sega in 2004). Mr. Chang-Woo and Mr. Satomi appeared jointly at #698 on the list. In the Forbes

the Sennichimae entertainment district. As in the case of karaoke, the exact origins of the pachinko are somewhat elusive and there are at least six different theories of its evolution in Japan. The officially acknowledged version and the one over which there seems to be widespread agreement is that the pre-cursor of pachinko was the American *corinthian game*, imported from Chicago by an Osaka retailer in the early 1920s. A children's toy of very simple construction, the *corinthian game* (rendered *korinto gēmu* in Japanese), "...consisted of a horizontal board with scoring slots protected by nails, a steel ball, and a wooden dowel for shooting the ball onto the board" (Manzenreiter 1996: 361).

The game was initially popular among children who were attracted by prizes of fruit and candy and by the early Shōwa period, *korinto gēmu* had not only been installed in nearly every candy store and department store (*dēpato*), but was also becoming a standard feature of local shrine and temple festivals, brought by itinerant merchants or *tekiya*. As the popularity of the game began to spread to adults, prizes expanded to include goods such as tobacco, vegetables, soap, and even cash prizes. The basic construction of the game was also transformed. A spring-loaded handle and glass cover were added and the game was re-orientated into the vertical position, giving rise to the first version of the modern pachinko game and marking a divergence from the evolutionary trajectory which eventually produced pinball in the West<sup>6</sup>. The new game became known as *gachan-gachan* or *gachanko* in the greater Osaka or Kansai area and *pachinko* – from *pachi-pachi*, an onomatopoeia meaning the clicking small balls or cracking of fire – in the Kanto or greater Tokyo region (Sedensky 1991:19, Manzenreiter 1996:363). In 1930, Hirano Hama secured permission from the police to build the first pachinko hall in Nagoya City and by the outbreak of the World War Two, there were 380 such venues in Nagoya, all but a few of which were forced to close for the duration of the war.

Pachinko was immediately revitalized following the end of the war, providing a means of winning scarce commodities such as sugar, rice, vegetable and cigarettes, in a period of severe deprivation and austerity. The production of pachinko machines recommenced in Nagoya and with the gradual normalization of daily life in the late 1940s, pachinko boomed. Between 1949 and 1953,

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2007 list of Japan's richest, these three appear at no. 5, no. 25 and no. 26, respectively ([http://www.forbes.com/2007/06/06/biz\\_07japan\\_Japans-Richest\\_land.html](http://www.forbes.com/2007/06/06/biz_07japan_Japans-Richest_land.html) ).

the number of pachinko parlours rocketed from 4, 818 to 43,452, propelled by the development of machines in which the element of chance and sense of thrill were greatly enhanced. In 1953, authorities worried by developments in what was increasingly coming to resemble a form of gambling enacted legislation outlawing over successful pachinko machines, thus initiating a severe bust<sup>7</sup>. Within just a few years, the number of halls fell to less than nine thousand and of the 500 pachinko manufacturing companies registered in 1952, only forty-seven remained.

Between 1960 and 1980, pachinko steadily grew in tandem with the expanding Japanese economy and the industry was characterised by a period of consolidation during which machine design, management techniques and hall policies were rationalized in accordance with policies of modernization (*kindaika*), rationalization (*gôrika*) and image improvement (*imêji appu*). Between 1970 and 1975, the annual turnover for the pachinko industries doubled, surpassing the trillion yen (\$100 billion) for the first time and establishing pachinko as Japan's leading leisure industry. During the 1980s, developments in computer technologies revolutionized pachinko machines, incorporating synthetic sounds, digitalized voices and video screens and, more importantly, enhancing the experience of pachinko play by automating many of the mechanical aspects of the machine, accelerating the timescale required for winning and increasing the magnitude of potential payoffs (and losses). Imbued with a new pace and spirit and fuelled by buoyant economic conditions, pachinko boomed throughout the 1980s, quadrupling its market size between 1982 and 1992, a period during which the leisure market as a whole doubled.

Ongoing technological innovation aimed at improving the performance of pachinko machines and, more importantly, attracting punters in a competitive market, has resulted in the diversification of pachinko into at least three of four modern variations on the theme. *Hanemono* (lit. 'wingtype') preserves most of the core features of conventional pachinko play (steel balls, a system of pegs and winning slots), but adds to a central scoring slot wing-like appendages which open momentarily under certain circumstances, providing additional scoring opportunities. In comparison with some of its more robust, fully computerised counterparts, *Hanemono* is less expensive and less risky to play, with

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<sup>6</sup> Sedensky (1991) speculates that the vertical orientation was probably first developed in Kanazawa, Ichikawa prefecture, where eight of the twelve pachinko machine makers in Japan were then located.

<sup>7</sup> See Sedensky (1991:22-24) for a more detailed discussion.



a more modest payout. *Deji-pachi*, an abbreviation of ‘digital pachinko’, feature LED or LCD display screens in the centre which are activated when the ball drops into a particular slot. When the central display, which usually depicts the rotating drums of a slot machine, shows a winning combination, a pay-off sequence known as a “fever” is initiated, lending this machines its nickname, *fiba* (pronounced ‘fee-ba’) type. *Kenrimono* (*kenri* meaning ‘right, claim or privilege’ and *mono* meaning ‘type’), as the name implies, involve certain ‘rights’ which accrue over the course of play and success depends on a detailed knowledge of these rights and how to take advantage of them.

With some models, the odds of winning can alter as play proceeds, starting at 1 in 300 for example, but increasing to 1 in 30 following just one win, which can garner winnings of several thousand balls. Subsequent wins may then depend on balls falling into a specific slot, prompting players to concentrate on aiming balls towards a particular winning slot. With the reputation for being the game of serious gamblers, *kenrimono* offers the potential for winnings and losings on a large scale. A more recent popular entrant into pachinko parlors is *pachi-suro* (an abbreviation of the Japanese rendering of ‘pachinko slot’), which is essentially a slot machine utilizing tokens, rather than coins or balls, which are exchanged for prizes.

### Social Aspects

Men account for a disproportionate number of pachinko patrons. According to statistics quoted in Manzenreiter (1996), whereas every other second man in Japan played the game in 1989, only one in seven women had played pachinko in the same year. In 2005, nearly a quarter of the adult male population played pachinko, compared to 8.2% of women. A disproportionate number of the men who play pachinko are between the ages of 20 and 59, whereas interest in the game amongst older men (over 60) and the very young (under 20) is more moderate. The overall number of people who play pachinko has been decreasing over recent years, from 29 million in 1995 to 17.1 million in 2005 and one of the challenges of the pachinko industry is to find new ways to attract new and younger generations of patrons, especially women<sup>8</sup>. Recent attempts at the latter have included the use of cuter or more elegant décor and furnishings in pachinko parlours aimed specifically at female patrons, the

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<sup>8</sup> Both Sedensky (1991) and Walker (1997) mention efforts by the pachinko industry to enhance its image and broaden its appeal. Source for statistical information: 2006 *White Paper on Leisure*, published by the Centre for Social and Economic Productivity.



Fig. 5. Pachinko and Slot parlour, *Gaia*, in Meguro-ku, Tokyo. The inclusion of slot machines is transforming conventional pachinko parlours into so-called *pachisulo*.

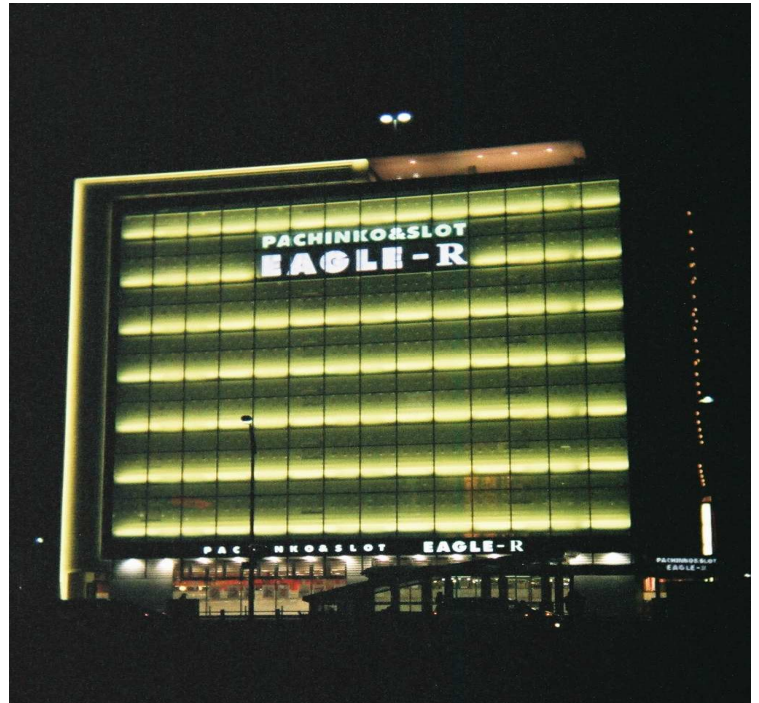


Fig. 6. Multi-story pachinko and slot parlour opened in Shonandai (near Tokyo) in 2006



Fig. 7. The unmarked and unlabelled kiosk where patrons from the adjacent pachinko and slot parlour go to redeem their prizes for cash.

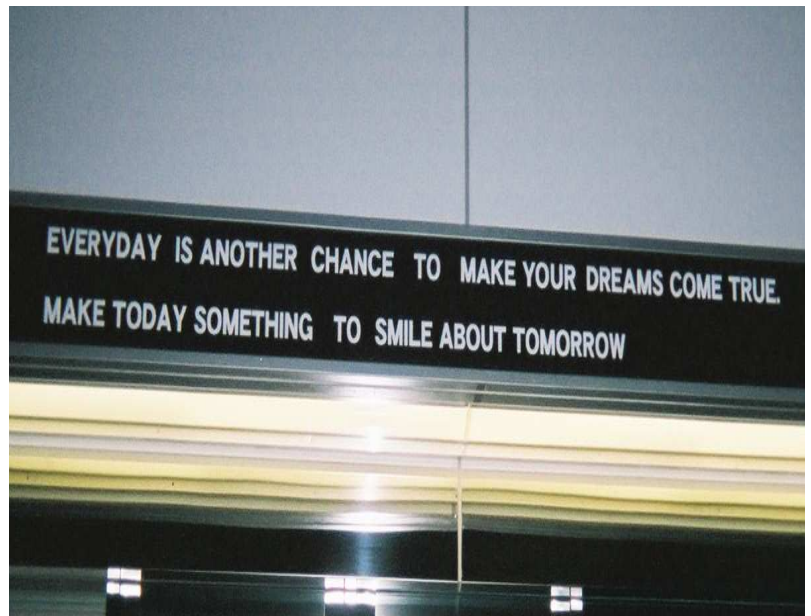


Fig. 8. Slogan which appears above the entrance of the Eagle-R pachinko and slot parlour in Shonandai

expansion in prizes to include goods such as gucci handbags, perfume and other fashionable items and even an advertising campaign for pachinko company Sankyo starring American actor Nicholas Cage as a pachinko fanatic.

In terms of socio-economic status, Manzenreiter reports that in one survey of 5,000 active *pachinkâ*, only 10% had an annual income above 5 million yen, referred to as the average income of a white-collar employee with higher education and a few years of professional experience. According to the same survey, more than a quarter of *pachinkâ* have no private income whatsoever (housewives, students, the unemployed), more than 12% earn less than 1 million yen annually (about \$10,000) and a further 16.5% less than three million yen (\$30,000). Manzenreiter's conclusion is that whereas pachinko attracts patrons from all age, gender and socio-economic groups, it disproportionately attracts young and middle-aged males with relatively low incomes (1996:368).

Enthusiasts expend a substantial amount of both time and money on pachinko. Whereas the average pachinko fan is said to play twice a week for two or more hours, expending an average of three thousand yen (\$30), more than 8 million people spend an average of four thousand yen (\$40) playing for three hours or more daily and at least a quarter of those who play pachinko do so four or more days weekly. Aficionados can be seen lining up in front of pachinko parlours for the 10a.m. opening in order to claim the best (or their favourite) machines and, in some cases, loitering at closing time to find out which machines are being 'adjusted', perhaps favourably to pay off more frequently, for the next day's play. Inevitably, the obsession becomes excessive in some cases and 'pachinko dependency' and 'pachinko bankruptcy' have become recognised conditions<sup>9</sup>. One report has claimed up to one million sufferers of 'pachinko dependency syndrome'<sup>10</sup>. Obsessive pachinko playing has had other destructive consequences, such as the periodic death of children left in cars for hours while their parents play pachinko<sup>11</sup>. In 2003, the governor of Akita Prefecture was forced to resign when, after hearing of a serious earthquake in his jurisdiction, he kept a government car waiting for forty-five minutes so he could continue to play pachinko (BBC News, 30 May 2003).

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<sup>9</sup> Walker (1997:67)

<sup>10</sup> *Shukan Post*, 27 May 2005, as reported in *The Japan Times*, 22 May 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Walker cites police reports indicating that, "more than 30 children had died between April 1994 and late 1996 in incidents somehow involving pachinko" (1997:67). See *Japan Times*, 30 May 2006, for a recent example.

Perhaps the most extreme manifestation of pachinko dependency is the so-called pachinko (or pachinko slot) professional (*pachi puro*), who depends entirely on pachinko for his (usually his) livelihood. The pachinko professional is the subject of a recent best-selling semi-autobiographical comic, *Pachisuro de Kazoku wo Yashinau Otoko* (The Man Who Supports his Family by Pachislot) by gambler-cum-comic artist, Seiichi Hoshino. The story, which follows the trials and tribulations of its protagonist - a thirty-something family man and pachinko professional – attempts to convey a sense of the white-knuckle excitement of life as a professional gambler. The comic story is rendered in what has been described as “a hallucinatory graphic style to convey to readers the hell of riding luck for a living” (*Japan Times*, 17 April 2005).

Pachinko’s generally unwholesome image derives not only from its status as a potentially addictive form of gambling, but also from a general reputation for semi-illicitness related to the activity itself – a thinly veiled form of cash-for-gambling – but also from its associations with tax evasion and, more importantly, the Japanese underworld or *yakuza*. The pachinko industry is well-known for its suspected under-reporting of revenues<sup>12</sup> and has been repeatedly listed among the ‘most notorious tax-evading industries’ by The National Tax Authority (Manzenreiter 1996:360), a situation which inspired the Juzo Itami film, *Marusa no onna* (A Taxing Woman). In part as a result of the size, scale and nature of the business, pachinko’s ties with the Japanese underworld have long been assumed. In particular, many of the booths behind pachinko parlours where prizes are exchanged for cash have been rumoured to be *yakuza* concerns. One other connection which bears mentioning is that with North Korea. According to a 1994 police survey, North Koreans control 30% of pachinko parlours and pachinko is known to be a significant source of income into North Korea<sup>13</sup>. Until recently, pachinko had not really made significant inroads into markets outside Japan, but has begun to appear for example in casinos in the United States and Britain. In 2001, the British company BS Group invested heavily in the Japanese pachinko, hinting at the possibility of importing the activity to the United Kingdom<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> See for example *Japan Times*, 13 September 2006

<sup>13</sup> See for example *Japan Times*, 12 June 2006 for an article linking proceeds from pachinko in Japan with North Korea’s efforts to develop nuclear weapons.

<sup>14</sup> *The Guardian*, 6 July 2001; *Financial Times*, 13 January 2001, 21 July 2001 and 28 September 2001.





Figs. 9&10. Stills from the manga, *Pachisuro de kazuko wo yashinau otoko* (The Man who supports his family by pachislot), by Seichi Hoshino. Courtesy of Byakuya Shobo Co. and reproduced from an article in *The Japan Times* (17 April 2005) with the permission of *The Japan Times*.



Figs. 11-12. Pachinko and Slot manga (comics): *Pachi Puro* (Pachinko Professional), published by Sôgô tosho (2006) and, right, *Pachisuro* (an abbreviation of 'pachinko slot') *jitsusen bakuretsu tekku*, published by Take-Shobo (2006). Note the exaggerated pachinko callous on the thumb (right).

### **Officially Managed Races (*kôei kyôgi*)**

Officially managed races or ‘gamble races’ as they are more colloquially referred to include horse-racing (*keiba*), bicycle racing (*keirin*), motorboat racing (*kyôtei*) and motorcycle racing (*ôto-rêsu*). With the exception of horse racing (*keiba*), all were established just after the end of World War II as a means of generating revenues for central and local governments in desperate need of funds for post-war reconstruction. Post-war gamble races, which were modelled on horseracing, inherited its negative connotations and were officially regarded as less a form of leisure than a necessary evil under extraordinary circumstances.

In 1993, officially managed races accounted for about 15% of the leisure market in Japan, with a combined turnover of an astounding 9 trillion yen (\$90 billion), but their fortunes have since declined, in some cases substantially, and many local governments have withdrawn from the management of racing (and race courses) completely. Due in large part to superior marketing, horse racing continued to grow in popularity throughout the 1990s, generating more than 47 trillion yen (\$47 billion) at its peak in 1999. By 2003, the market for officially managed races had contracted considerably to about 5.7 trillion yen (\$57 billion), undermined by more than a decade of economic recession and growing competition from alternative forms of gambling, leisure and entertainment.

There are several distinctive features of Japan’s gamble races which bear mentioning. First, the combining of activities such as bicycle, motorcycle and boat racing with gambling for money has imbued these pursuits with a semi-illicit nuance via association and it is only with the recent inclusion of bicycle racing (*keirin*) as an official Olympic sport that its status in Japan has begun to shift towards that of a sporting and leisure pursuit. As government managed activities, Japan’s gamble races represent officially approved forms of gambling for money in a nation where it is otherwise illegal. Finally, as with other forms of gambling in Japan, one of the main challenges for the operators of gamble races has been to manage their image in order to attract new patrons and remain viable. Horse racing has been by far the most successful of all the races in marketing its image to diverse sectors of the Japanese population, especially to women, reinventing horseracing as fashionable and trendy for a period in the 1980s and early 1990s.



### Horse-racing (*Keiba*)

Horse racing is the most popular, the most lucrative and the oldest of the officially managed races in Japan. More money is bet on horses and paid out in winnings to jockeys in Japan than anywhere else in the world, three times as much as in the United States. At the peak of horse racing's popularity in the early and mid-1990s, receipts from betting on horses regularly topped 4.5 trillion yen (\$45 billion) annually, well over half the total receipts for all forms of betting on races<sup>15</sup>. Although horse racing has suffered from a negative image throughout much of its modern history, successful efforts by promoters and organizers during the 1980s to broaden its appeal, combined with the effects of a vibrant Japanese economy, have resulted in the rapid expansion in the popularity of *keiba*, which experienced an astounding 260% growth between 1983 and 1993. By the end of the 1990s, following several years of economic recession in Japan, the popularity of horse racing had begun to wane and between 1997 and 2005, receipts fell by more than 30% in total<sup>16</sup>. In fiscal 2000, one half of all horse racing operations lost money and in the same year, municipal government coffers received just 35 billion yen (\$350 million) from horse racing, about one tenth the amount received in 1991.

### *Organization*

Horse racing in Japan is organized through one of two main bodies. The first is *Chuô keiba* (lit. 'central horse racing') which is managed by the Japan Racing Association (JRA) under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and encompasses ten 'national' racecourses distributed between Hokkaido to Kyûshû. The other is *Chihô keiba* (lit. 'regional horse racing'), which encompasses thirty race courses, each under the control of local and/or regional government. *Chihô keiba* are collectively represented through NAR, the National Association of Racing (*Chihô keiba zenkoku kyôkai*). Whereas NAR represents a far greater number of venues, races and horses than JRA, the latter's races, "...feature the best horses, carry the greatest prestige, have the largest payouts and receive the widest media coverage".<sup>17</sup> This difference is also reflected in the respective economies of JRA and NAR managed races, with the former generating roughly six times the revenues of the latter in 2005. Over recent years, the contraction in both the popularity and revenues generated by horse

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<sup>15</sup> *White Paper on Leisure 2006*.

<sup>16</sup> Source: *White Paper on Leisure 2006*.

racing has been more pronounced for *Chihô keiba* than for *Chuô keiba*. Whereas the revenues generated by JAR-managed races was roughly the same in 1991 and 2003 (expanding somewhat in the intervening years), revenues for NAR-managed races during the same period plummeted by more than 50%, from a post-war peak of 982 billion yen (\$9.82 billion) to 450 billion yen (\$4.5 billion). One of the reasons for this difference is that it is mainly *Chuô keiba* races which benefited from the efforts of the Japan Racing Association to broaden the appeal and enhance the image of horse racing and it is from JRA-managed races that the most celebrated horses and jockeys have emerged, whilst *Chihô keiba* races have had the reputation of being more local, down-market and less glamorous affairs<sup>18</sup>.

### History

Although modern horse racing was first introduced by the British in 1862, there is a long history of indigenous horse racing in Japan which, according to Nagashima, has been associated with Shintoism and the Emperor from its beginning (1996:352). The emperor Tenji is recorded as having watched 'horse running' (*souma*) on a holy day in May of 665 and references to the term *souma* appear frequently in documents recording royal events from the early eighth century (ibid.). During the Heian period (794-1185), horse racing and a form of polo known as *dakyû*, were among pursuits enjoyed by Guards officers of the Heian Court (Morris 1964:165). Horseracing is also mentioned in the context of an annual Heian court calendar which was "...rich with ceremonies and festivals of every kind" (ibid.), and was featured for example along with archery in the Iris Festival during the fifth month (1964:173). Betting on horse racing seems to have appeared by the Heian period and has persisted despite its periodical prohibition.

Modern horse racing was introduced on a beach in Yokohama in 1861 by British residents in Japan. In 1862, the Yokohama Race Club was established, the first racecourse was built by the Japanese government and the first Western style horse race was held. A second racecourse, designed by a British captain, was built in Negishi, Yokohama. Races were subsequently held in Tokyo and Hakodate (a port city with a large foreign population located on the southern tip of Japan's northernmost island, Hokkaido) and, eventually, throughout Japan.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.bigempire.com/sake/horse.html> ['Japan's Horse Racing: Changing with the Times: Part One of a Two-Part Series Focusing on Gambling']

<sup>18</sup> Since 2003, revenues generated from horseracing have further contracted, by more than 20% in the case of the JRA and 7% for the NAR (Source: *White Paper on Leisure 2006*).

The Meiji Emperor took an interest in horse racing and is said to have attended races on at least fourteen different occasions, including a visit to the Negishi track in 1893, accompanied by Saigô Takamori, one of the most influential samurai of his day and subject of the 2003 Hollywood film, *The Last Samurai*. Takamori's younger brother, Saigô Jûdô, was one of the first Japanese owners of race horses and was instrumental in forming the Nihon Race Club in 1880 which included the participation of Japanese in what had been, until then, an activity almost exclusively managed by Westerners (Nagashima 1996:353).

Although informal betting had long been associated with horse racing, the first official betting ticket was introduced by the Nihon Racing Club in 1888 at the cost of one dollar per ticket, equivalent to about half the monthly salary of a college graduate at the time. Unofficial permission to sell betting tickets was granted by the Japanese government in 1904, but following a public and media outcry against the betting frenzy unleashed by this liberalization of gambling policy and the overt involvement of *bakuchiuchi* (professional gamblers), the government retreated, enacting legislation in 1908 once again prohibiting the sale of betting tickets (Nagashima 1996:354). In 1923, legislation was enacted which resulted in the formation of eleven horse racing clubs authorized to sell betting tickets. This re-establishment of the relationship between horse racing and betting resulted once again in a shift in the profile of those who patronized horse races:

...most of the new customers were of dubious background, representing the counterculture of *bakuchiuchi* and/or *yakuza*, and racecourses were regarded as *tekkaba* – a term referring to a traditional dice-gambling place filled with *bakuchiuchi*. It became unthinkable for an ordinary citizen to visit a race course, and if one did, he seriously risked his social status. (ibid.)

Shortly after the enactment of the 1923 legislation, the Imperial Racing Society was established as a centralized co-ordinating body between the eleven horse racing clubs with responsibility for the operation of horse racing, including the establishment of the original rules of racing, the provision for the registration of racing colours, the licensing of jockeys and other related functions.

The years leading up to the Second World War witnessed the development of horse racing into its modern form. The 1936 revision of the Horseracing Law resulted in the establishment of the Japan Racing Society, which legally usurped the eleven racing clubs and Imperial Racing Society. Classic races such as the Japanese Derby were established, resulting in great increases in both proceeds and

attendance at races and 1941 produced the first winner of the Triple Crown in Japan, a horse called Saint Lite. With the intensification of war, horse racing was suspended in 1943 and the most historic of modern racecourses, Yokohama, was commandeered by the government for military use, but racing resumed in Tokyo and Kyoto soon after the end of the war.

In 1948, a new horse racing law was enacted, dissolving the Japan Racing Society and entrusting the management of horse racing to the government under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, thus de-privatizing control over the operation of racing. In 1954, enactment of the Japan Racing Association law established the Japan Racing Association (JRA), making provision for both national racing in Japan and the legalization and operation of Regional Public Racing as a separate system to national racing. In 1962, the National Association of Racing (NAR) was established as a national co-ordinated framework for registrations and licensing of local racing.

Other benchmark dates in the post-war period include the introduction of telephone betting in 1976, the staging of the first Japan Cup in 1981 and the launching of night races at the Ohi racetrack in 1986 and at Asahikawa and Kawasaki racetracks in 1994 and 1995 respectively. In 1996, the Japan Racing Association's first female jockeys, Maki Tamura, Yukiko Makihara and Junko Hosoe, begin their professional riding careers. Throughout the post-war period, horseracing in Japan has become increasingly 'internationalized'. In 1960, the first Asian Racing Conference was held in Tokyo. In 1971, import restrictions on racehorses were eased. In 1973, the first JRA representative attended the International Conference of Racing Authorities in Paris. In 1974, the JRA joined the international agreement on breeding and racing. In 1992, the first Young Jockeys World Championship is held and the JRA opened its first overseas representative office in London. In 1993, the Japan Association for International Horse Racing was established and the JRA opened representative offices in Paris and New York. In 1994, Lisa Cropp of New Zealand became the first overseas jockey to receive a riding license in Japan. Beginning in the late 1990s, Japanese horses began racing successfully overseas, particularly in France, recording a number of

wins in major events. In 2001, two foreign-bred horses run in the Japanese Derby for the first time and Japanese horses raced successfully in Dubai and Hong Kong<sup>19</sup>.

### *Jockeys, Horses & Racegoers*

As this brief account suggests, the image of horse racing in Japan has fluctuated considerably over time, in large part as a function of the legality or illegality of betting which, in turn, is linked to the profile of the typical racegoer. Whereas modern horse racing began as a somewhat prestigious activity, patronized initially by foreign (Western) residents and the elite in Japan, including for example the Meiji emperor, it's later associations with professional gamblers and the Japanese mafia stigmatized horse racing to such an extent that those in mainstream professional occupations such as bank employees or high ranking civil servants could have lost their jobs if found to be horse-racing fans (Nagashima 1998:168).

Beginning in the 1970s, the image of horse racing was greatly enhanced through a combination of efforts by organizations such as the Japan Racing Association to manage and improve the status and appeal of racing and simultaneous emergence of horses and jockeys who captivated the public imagination. One of the earliest of these was *Haiseko*. Born in 1970, a succession of early wins on the regional (*Chihô*) circuit, followed by four consecutive wins of major events on the national (*Chuô*) circuit resulted in a popular *Haiseko* boom, "...arousing positive interest in racing from the general public for the first time since 1908" (Nagashima 1998:170). The first horse in Japan to earn more than 200 million yen (about \$2 million at 2005 rates of exchange), *Haiseko* more importantly won the hearts and minds of the Japanese public and became a catalyst for the popularization of horse racing in the 1970s. *Haiseko*'s defeat in the 1973 Derby is said to have resulted in national lamentation (ibid.) and upon retirement, the song *Saraba Haiseko* ('See ya Haiseko') became a hit.

Other popular horses which subsequently emerged included Mr. CB, winner of the Japanese Triple Crown and Horse of the Year in 1983 and Simbori Rudolf, the Triple Crown winner and Horse of the Year in 1984. Perhaps no horse in the 1980s has captured the attention and affections of the

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<sup>19</sup> Sources for these dates are historical documents from the Japan Racing Association (JRA) [[http://japanracing.jp/organization/pdf/brief\\_story.pdf](http://japanracing.jp/organization/pdf/brief_story.pdf)], the Japan Association of International Racing (JAIR)

Japanese public more than *Oguricap*. Known also as the ‘Gray Monster’ (*ashige no kaibutsu*) because of his size and dappled grey colouring, *Oguricap* began his somewhat checkered career in 1987, winning eight consecutive races after placing second in his first race. Early successes in major events on the *Chuô* circuit fuelled Oguri-fever, especially amongst young women who began to attend races in droves to support their beloved *Oguri-chan*, as the horse was affectionately nicknamed. Beset by injury which prevented his racing for most of a year and challenged by competition from younger, stronger horses, *Oguricap* continued to race, although sometimes controversially given what many perceived to be his weakened condition. Entered into the Japan Cup in 1990 amidst a storm of protests at a time when his retirement was thought by many to be imminent, *Oguricap* surged from behind the early leaders to clinch victory. According to Nagashima,

*The three cheers lasted more than ten minutes. There was a standing ovation. Tears ran down the faces of both men and women; it was at this moment that Oguricap, the gray monster, became a living legend. (1998:173)*

The popularity of *Oguricap* not only transformed the demographics of race attendance, attracting many more women – both young and older – to horse races, but also contributed to transformation in the way in which horse racing was consumed. Women did not attend races in order to gamble, but mainly to see and support *Oguri*. Attending the races was for them a form of leisure and a fashionable pursuit. The cult of *Oguricap* that developed also included the production and sales of *nuigurumi* (stuffed toys), which were sold in a range of sizes and prices and were often used as adornments in cars for example. At the peak of the *Oguricap* craze, the demand for such items regularly outstripped supply and potential buyers often had to wait weeks to make their purchase (Nagashima 1998:173-6). According to Nagashima, the attraction of *Oguricap* for many Japanese was a function of the horse’s humble origins and rise to prominence against all odds,

*...the accepted image of Oguricap was that of a talented ‘boy’ born in a poor family, destined to be the lowest of the low (shitazumi, literally: the lowest layer of goods in a packing box), who through his own wits and efforts successfully climbed up the social ladder without losing his early charm. (ibid.:176)*



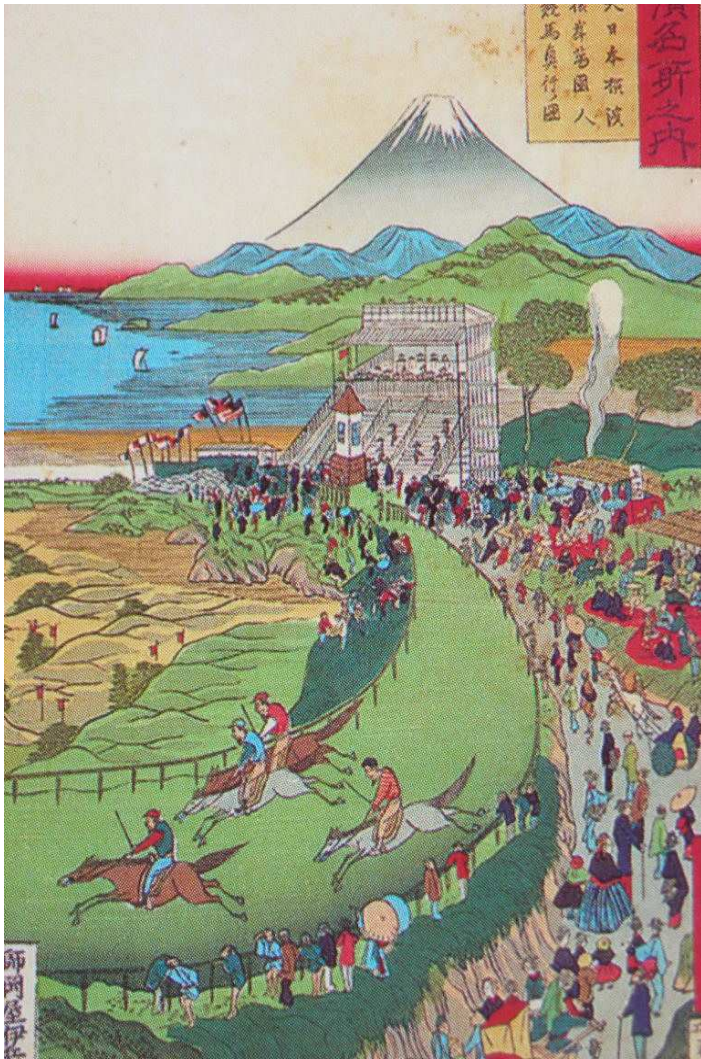


Fig. 13. Meiji period illustration of horseracing at Negishi, Yokohama (Nagabayashi Nobuzane, 1872). Reprinted with permission of the Equine Museum of Japan.



Figs. 14 & 15. Front and side view of the remains of the main grandstand of the Negishi racecourse, Yokohama. Horseracing began at Negishi in 1866 and continued until 1942.

Nagashima suggests that whereas the attraction of women for *Oguricap* was analogous to that for a boyfriend, men tended to identify with Oguricap as, "...a representation of themselves, because their social backgrounds are as obscure as his. In such cases, the basis for a shared identity is the sense of being an under-dog" (ibid.:177). Whilst for some men, *Oguricap* may represent their abandoned dreams and the hope that their achievement may yet be possible, for others, he represents their own success, achieved through hard work (ibid.).

Perhaps the most striking example of a horse capturing the affections of the Japanese public is *Harûrara* ('Gentle Spring'), celebrated for having one of the worst records in racing in Japan, if not the world. Since her debut in 1998, *Harûrara* never won a single race, accumulating 112 losses in as many starts as of September, 2004 (*Mainichi Daily News*, September 30, 2004). Since first coming to the attention of the public in a journalistic profile, the runty chestnut mare with her trademark pink 'Hello Kitty' hood has become an equine superstar, earning a fortune off-track which dwarfs her paltry \$14,000 career earnings as a race horse. Since being publicly embraced by a recession weary nation as a symbol of perseverance against all odds, *Harûrara* has been the subject of CDs, beer commercials, documentaries and books, as well as a feature film about her life. *Harûrara* charms, badges, and T-shirts, bearing the slogan, "Never Give Up!" are sold nationwide and her on-track appearances have attracted record crowds. Her popularity has been credited with saving the fortunes of the nearly bankrupt Kochi racecourse where her career has been based and in March, 2004, she was even eulogized by Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi for demonstrating that "people shouldn't give up, even when they lose" (*New Zealand Herald*, 27 March 2004). Fans retain betting stubs for *Harûrara* as protection against misfortunes such as traffic accidents. Since, in gambling, winning is referred to as *ataru* (to hit), as in 'to hit the jackpot', the logic is that since *Harûrara* never wins or 'hits', holders of these charms will be protected from hits of all kinds, including road collisions!

There is a range of possible explanations for the popularity of *Harûrara*. According to her trainer, Dai Muneishi, "The sight of *Harûrara* straining for the line one more time despite her terrible odds has 'cheered people up'" (ibid.). Others in Japan have suggested that it is a preference for the underdog and in a society where "...winners are few and all the rest are considered losers", a Japanese tendency to "...sympathize with anyone who looks weak and in trouble", a sympathy for *Harûrara*

borne from “...a subtle feeling of inferiority to those who are touted as being ‘strong’ in society”, the extraordinariness of a ‘perfect’ record of losses unblemished by even a single win or simply the fact that, “...people need something to be hooked on” (*Japan Today*, July 21, 2005). Whether the popularity of *Harûrara* can best be explained as a passing popular fashion or as a contemporary example of the Japanese tendency to embrace its tragic heroes and to celebrate the ‘nobility of failure’ (Morris 1975), her contribution towards restoring both the image and declining fortunes of horse racing are undeniable.

The recently concluded career of *Deep Impact* provides a sharp contrast to that of *Harûrara*. Foaled in 2002, *Deep Impact* began racing in early 2005, winning his first seven consecutive races and becoming the first undefeated horse in twenty-one years (and only the second in Japanese horseracing history) to win the triple crown. Of a career total of fourteen races, *Deep Impact* has won all but two, finishing second to *Heart’s Cry* in the 2005 Arima Kinen<sup>20</sup> and third in the Prix l’Arc de Triomphe (near Paris) in October, 2006<sup>21</sup>. A horse of deceptively diminutive stature, *Deep Impact* became known for his characteristic racing style of running in the back of the pack through the final turn and then exploding towards the finish on the last straight. The stallion won his debut race by two-and-a-half and his second race by five lengths before moving into group level (or G1) racing. He won the Japan Triple Crown’s first leg (Satsukisho) by two-and-a-half lengths, followed by a win in the Japan Derby “...by a five length monster of a margin”<sup>22</sup>. This was followed in 2006 by a string of several more first place finishes, which included setting a new world record for 3200 metre races at the Tennô Shô in Kyoto. The disappointment of disqualification from Prix l’Arc de Triomphe in October, 2006 was followed by victories for *Deep Impact* in the two final races of his career, the Japan Cup in November, 2006 and the Arima Kinen on 24 December 2006.

Like *Harûrara* and *Oguricap* before him, *Deep Impact* has enjoyed widespread adulation amongst the Japanese which extends far beyond horseracing enthusiasts and has helped to attract

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<sup>20</sup> Held annually in December at the Nakayama racecourse near Tokyo, the *Arima Kinen* has been described as the world’s biggest betting race (*Guardian*, 27 November 2006). *Deep Impact* ran the final race of his staggering career at the 2006 Arima Kinen, galloping from the back of the pack to a seemingly easy first place finish in the final straight.

<sup>21</sup> The disappointment of a third place finish was further exacerbated when a banned chemical was subsequently detected in a routine drug test, resulting in *Deep Impact*’s disqualification. The substance, ipratropium, which is used in nasal sprays to treat lung ailments, is legal in Japan, but not in France.



attention and new adherents to the sport. On October 23, 2005, a record crowd of nearly 137,000 turned out to witness *Deep Impact* win the Triple Crown at the Kikkasho in Kyoto. Jockey Take Yukata described the crowd's cheers during the race as, "the loudest roar from the stands... he has ever heard in 18 years of riding"<sup>23</sup>. Similarly, the 120,182 fans at the Japan Cup race in November, 2006 were described in one report as "...a wall of sound as it chanted Deep's name" (Japan Times, 27 November 2006). Following Deep Impact's two-length victory, "...cheers for 'Deep', as his loving fans always call him, rang out for several minutes. The crowd chanted 'Yu-ta-ka'<sup>24</sup>, and a 50-piece band played Handel's 'Hail the Conquering Hero Comes' not once but at least six times." (*Guardian*, 27 November 2006). More than 10,000 fans reportedly lined up at the gates of the Nakayama Race Course from four o'clock in the morning in anticipation of Deep Impact's final race, the Arima Kinen (*Japan Times*, 25 December 2006) and 6,000 fans reportedly made the journey to Paris to support their horse in the Prix l'Arc de Triomphe in October, 2006. The latter was the first overseas race ever to be broadcast live by Japan's national broadcasting company, NHK, attracting extraordinary numbers of viewers, especially considering that it was aired from late Sunday night to early Monday morning in Japan. Viewing figures peaked at 22.6 percent in the Tokyo area, 28.5 percent in the Osaka region and 19.9 percent in Nagoya when the race ended at 12:37a.m. (*Japan Times*, 3 October 2006).

In addition to enhancing the profile of Japanese horseracing, both at home and abroad, *Deep Impact* has also generated enormous earnings, both in prize money for its owners, trainers and jockeys totalling into the multi-millions of dollars, in bets generated and, again as with many of his high profile predecessors, in commemorative goods and souvenirs. Purchased for a relatively modest 70 million yen (Less than U.S. \$700,000), Deep Impact has recouped his owner's investment many times over, claiming for example a first prize purse of 250 million yen (about U.S.\$2.4 million) in the 2006 Japan Cup, which boasts the third richest purse in the world. Deep Impact's success has also fuelled betting revenue both at home - in races such as the Arima Kinen, the biggest betting race in the world – and overseas. Betting on Deep Impact in the Prix l'Arc de Triomphe in Paris exceeded 1.5 million Euros, most of it generated by Japanese living in Paris. Deep Impact-related goods have also been

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<sup>22</sup> Reported in *The Blood-Horse* online magazine in a story posted October 23, 2005: [http://www.bloodhorse.com/viewstory\\_plain.asp?id=30648](http://www.bloodhorse.com/viewstory_plain.asp?id=30648)

<sup>23</sup> *The Blood-Horse*, 23 October 2005.

popular with fans. The day of the 66<sup>th</sup> running of the Kikkasho, at which Deep Impact claimed the Triple Crown,

*...saw fans snapping up Deep Impact T-shirts, caps, stuffed animals and a lineup of other goods. Special commemorative racing programs featuring full color foldout photos of Deep Impact's first two crowns disappeared hours before the 3:40p.m. post time.*<sup>25</sup>

In an article published in the *Asahi Shinbun* to mark the running of Deep Impact's final race and retirement from horseracing, the popularity of this horse and Haruourara amongst the Japanese public is summarised as follow: "One rose to popularity for being the perennial loser, and the other made his name for being a perennial winner. Most racehorses fit somewhere between the extreme records set by these two." Noting the retirement of Haruourara in the same year, the article concludes that, "Many people must have projected their perception of life's broadness onto Deep Impact and Haruourara" (25 December 2006).

Jockeys who have been instrumental in the mass popularization of horse racing include Matsunaga Mikio and Take Yutaka. Born in 1967, Matsunaga made his debut as a jockey in 1986 and winning his first grade 1 race in 1991. In 1996, he suffered a serious accident in training which left him in hospital for several months, but returned later in the year to win another G1 race. In 1997, Matsunaga became only the 12<sup>th</sup> jockey to win more than one hundred races in a year and married a former model. Handsome and with a pop star like image, Matsunaga's celebrity extended far beyond the usual population of horse racing aficionados.

Take Yutaka is one of the most famous and successful jockeys in Japan. Born in 1969 and the son of former jockey turned trainer Take Kunihiro, Take Yutaka made his professional debut in March, 1987 at just eighteen, winning his first race just one month later and his first grade 1 race in 1991. A five-time grand prize jockey, he became the first rider ever to notch up 200 wins in a single year. Handsome, modest and an extremely talented jockey – he has been nicknamed 'genius' (*tensai*) – Take Yutaka quickly gained widespread appeal, attracting female fans to the tracks who would not otherwise have any interest in horse racing. In the 1990 Arima Kinen, it was Take Yutaka who rode *Oguricap* to his legendary and much celebrated victory (see above) and it is this combination of superstar jockey and horse which contributed so effectively to the spectacle of the event and, more

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<sup>24</sup> The name of the jockey, Yutaka Take.

broadly, to the transformation of horse racing in the 1980s and 1990s. In recent years, Take Yutaka has been closely associated with *Deep Impact*, having guided the horse to victory in all twelve of his first place finishes and ridden him in all fourteen of his career races.

In addition to emergence of popular horses and jockeys and the Japan Racing Association's astute management of their images and merchandizing, a number of other factors have contributed to the gradual transformation of the image of horse racing from lowbrow gambling to popular leisure. The introduction of night races or 'twinkle races', first introduced at the Oi racecourse near Haneda Airport in Tokyo aimed to attract working men and women who might not otherwise be able to attend races and also established horse racing as a potential 'date spot' for young couples. Advertisements featuring celebrities such superstar heartthrob and lead singer from the pop group SMAP, Kimura Takuya (or KimuTaku as he is popularly known) or those emphasizing the genteel nature of horse racing and romance of horses served to both soften the sport's image and widen its appeal, whilst promotional activities such as the periodic designation of 'Lady's Days' with free admission to women were aimed at shedding the dirty-old-man image that racing had acquired by attracting many more women. The negative image of racing also benefitted from the gradual invisibility of the Japanese mafia (*yakuza*), who were legally banned from attending races. Media coverage of horse racing in newspapers like the *Asahi shinbun*, which had previously been extremely hostile, became more neutral and extensive as racing became treated more as a sport and less as a social ill. Finally, the image of horse racing might also have benefitted from a generational diminishment in the moral objection to 'earning without sweating across the brow' and a gradually growing tolerance of gaming and gambling as a form of recreation.

In recent years, the Japan Racing Association and other racing interests have been actively engaged in trying to counter the declining popularity of horse racing, enacting measures such as the combining of *Chûo* and *Chihô* races, liberalizing and internationalizing Japanese racing through the staging of more international events in Japan and more extensive participation in races abroad and developing more avenues for placing bets on horse races, via the internet for example. Irrespective of the ebbs and flows in the popularity of horse racing, such efforts, in combination with the successful

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<sup>25</sup> *The Blood-Horse*, 23 October 2005



re-imaging of racing which occurred between the 1970s and the 1990s, seem destined to ensure that horse racing in Japan has permanently shed its former cloak as a seedy and dubious form of gambling.

### Bicycle Racing (Keirin)

Bicycle racing first took root in Japan in the late nineteenth century and was organized into a government-managed form of racing, along with the other ‘officially managed races’, in 1948. In the following year, nineteen tracks (of a current total of 47) were opened and from the beginning, bicycle racing proved a successful source of revenues for local municipalities, generating for example more than 10.7 billion yen (\$100 million) for Tokorozawa (in Saitama Prefecture, near Tokyo) alone over the following fifty years (*Japan Times*, May 8, 2001). However, as with other ‘officially managed races’, revenues from *keirin* have steadily declined in latter years, dropping by over 54% from a peak of more than 1.9 trillion yen in 1991 (\$19 billion) to less than 0.9 yen trillion (\$9 billion) in 2005<sup>26</sup>. By 1999, of the 68 local operators of bicycle races, 39 had incurred losses and since 1995, at least fourteen municipalities have abandoned the management of bicycle races completely<sup>27</sup>.

*Keirin* races involve nine riders circling an oval track eight times at speeds of up to 70 kilometres per hour. Riders follow a lead motorcycle for the first five and a half laps, accelerating from 25 to 45 kilometres per hour, before breaking away for the last two-and-a-half lap race to the finish. There are a total of 3800 *keirin* riders nationwide, divided into ‘S’ and ‘A’ classes, the former consisting of 860 riders and the latter, the remaining 2940. There are a total of 47 tracks across Japan, including two ‘velodromes’ – dome-covered courses.

In contrast with horse racing, the negative image of *keirin* has persisted and has been exacerbated by a number of factors. In the early post-war period, races were plagued by a number of scandals, including suspected race fixing. In 1949, a riot broke out during an event in Osaka after the favourite got off to a slow start and finished the race in a poor position. The following week, there was further mayhem at an event near Kobe when a bell-ringer lost count of the number of laps. In an attempt to quell the unrest, organisers enlisted the assistance of mobsters, but their presence, which often

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<sup>26</sup> 2006 *White Paper on Leisure*, published by the Centre for Social and Economic Productivity

<sup>27</sup> *Japan Times* 8 May 2001.



Fig. 16. Guided by jockey Take Yutaka, *Deep Impact* gallops to victory in his final race, the *Arima Kinen*, 24 December 2006



Fig. 17. Jockey Take Yutaka, who officially became the Japan Racing Association's best jockey ever with his 2,944<sup>th</sup> win at the Kokura Racecourse in Kyushu, 21 July 2007. Yutaka has ridden some of Japan's finest racehorses, including *Deep Impact* and *Oguri Cap*.



Fig. 18. Tokyo Racecourse – The Japan Racing Association's largest track is home to several major annual events, including the *Tokyo Yushun* (Tokyo Derby), the Japan Cup and the *Yasuda Kinen*. Figs. 16-18 courtesy of the Japan Racing Association.

involved infighting amongst rival gangs, only served to further detract from the image of bicycle racing<sup>28</sup>. Public pressure eventually led to greater policing of gang involvement and the imposition of strict penalties for race fixing helped to undermine bicycle racing's reputation for corruption.

Other factors, which contributed to bicycle racing's enduring dubious reputation, included the fact that *keirin* patrons tended to consist mainly of the elderly and the unemployed since they were among the only sectors of the population which could attend the daytime events. As a form of gambling, both bicycle racing and motorboat racing gained a reputation for being at the hardcore end of the spectrum, due in part to a tendency of these activities to attract higher wagers than other forms of gambling for money. In 2005 for example, the average spent annually per patron on bicycle and motorboat racing was somewhat more than that wagered on most other forms of gambling (see table 1). It is only relatively recently that the image of bicycle racing in Japan has begun to improve. The official inclusion of *keirin* in the 2000 Olympics in Sydney<sup>29</sup> has helped to redefine bicycle racing in Japan as a wholesome sport and raise its profile internationally, as has the Olympic success of Japanese riders Nagatsuka Tomohiro, Fushimi Toshiaki and Inoue Masaki, all of whom were silver medalists at the 2004 Olympic games in Athens. Domestically, perhaps the most successful Japanese rider has been Yuichirô Kamigawa, who has won more than 500 career races and more than 1.5 billion yen (\$15 million) in prize money.

**Table 1: Participation & Expenditure on various forms of gambling in Japan (2005)**

Activity	No. Participants	% Population	Avg. No. of times/year	Avg. spent/year (yen)	Avg. spent/time (yen)
Bicycles	1,000,000	0.9	16.8	66,400	3,950
Motorboats	1,200,000	1.1	21	92,400	4,400
Motorcycles	100,000	0.1	3.0	32,500	10,830
Horse racing					
<i>Chuô</i>	7,500,000	6.8	15.6	56,300	3,610
<i>Chihô</i>	1,300,000	1.2	10.7	53,600	5,010
Lottery	43,800,000	39.7	9.9	22,300	2,250
Soccer lottery	1,500,000	1.4	13.9	19,300	1,390
Pachinko	17,100,000	15.5	23.6	103,200	4,370
Mahjong	7,600,000	6.9	13.4	18,300	1,370

Source: *White Paper on Leisure 2006*, published by the Centre for Social and Economic Productivity

<sup>28</sup> *The Japan Times*, 7 April 2002.

<sup>29</sup> *Japan Times* 13 September 2000.

### Motorboat racing (*kyôtei*)

Motorboat racing is somewhat unique amongst the ‘officially managed races’ in Japan in that a significant proportion of its profits have been channelled into an wide range of philanthropic causes through a network of organisations set up by Ryoichi Sasakawa, the controversial founder of the activity and, until his death in 1995, one of Japan’s leading post-war philanthropists<sup>30</sup>. Born in 1899, Sasakawa was both an astute and maverick entrepreneur and a significant, if somewhat dubious, political figure during the pre-war and wartime years. A pilot in the Imperial Navy in his youth, Sasakawa first entered politics in 1931, when he assumed control of the ultranationalist Patriotic People’s Mass Party (PPMP), increasing its membership from one thousand to fifteen thousand during his tenure. In 1939, Sasakawa flew to Rome in one of his own planes to meet Mussolini, for whom he seems to have had a great regard. After the outbreak of war in 1941, Sasakawa purchased a number of mines throughout Japan, profiting from the sale of minerals required for the war effort to the government. Following the annexation of Manchuria, Sasakawa was also implicated in the ransacking of China for valuable minerals, reportedly returning to Japan in a plane so heavily laden with plunder (said to include three sacks of industrial diamonds) that the wheel shaft warped upon landing under the strain. In 1942, Sasakawa was elected to the national Diet (Japan’s Parliament), but was arrested in 1945 by the American occupying forces, accused of being a class A war criminal. Following his release without trial from Sugamo prison in 1948, Sasakawa actively promoted motorboat racing as a form of legalized gambling and, in anticipation of it gaining approval as one of the ‘officially managed races’, he began positioning himself to oversee its organization and management<sup>31</sup>. In 1951, Sasakawa successfully gained control of motorboat racing, allegedly seeing off his rivals with a payoff of \$13,500. Political approval followed later that year with the passage of the Motorboat Racing Law, which required that 75% of proceeds from the activity be returned as winnings to bettors, that 3.3% go to the Nippon Foundation, an umbrella organization for a number of loosely affiliated foundations, and that the remainder be apportioned between relevant prefectural and municipal governments, and

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<sup>30</sup> Sources of biographical information for Ryoichi Sasakawa include Daventry (1987), Samuels (2001) and information published on the website of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation.

<sup>31</sup> According to Daventry, Sasakawa first got the idea of motorboat racing from a photograph in *Life Magazine* while he was still in Sugamo Prison: “One day a prison guard handed Sasakawa a copy of *Life Magazine*. Sasakawa could not read English, but he enjoyed the photographs. One photograph made an instant impression on him. It was of a race of small motorboats with outboard engines...” (1987: 62).

organizations involved in the management and promotion of races. The Japan Motorboat Racing Association (JMRA) was established as the national body for overseeing the co-ordination and management of racing, with the Ministry of Transport acting as JMRA's 'patron'.

The races themselves involve six color-coded motorboats which race over a distance of 1800 meters (3 X 600 meter laps) on a specially designed course consisting of two buoys placed 300 meters apart with the start/finish line running perpendicularly mid-way between them, a giant clock, 9 meters in diameter, which is visible to audience and competitors alike and a starting pit located some distance from the starting line. There are 24 speedboat courses throughout Japan, each with exactly the same specifications and layout. The color-coding of boats, the uniforms of drivers and the pit are also consistent, as follows: No. 1 – White, No. 2 – Black, No. 3 – Red, No. 4 – Blue, No. 5 – Yellow, No. 6 – Green.

Boats leave the pits and circle one of the buoys, jockeying for position as they speed towards the starting line, which they must reach within the second before the sweeping hand of the giant clock reaches zero, signalling the official start of the race. If a boat is too early, it constitutes a flying or 'F' start, whereas a boat which is too late has committed an 'L' start. In either case, the penalty is disqualification. Skill is required in both manoeuvring around the buoy to achieve the optimal starting position and in the fine timing of the approach to the starting line and all professional drivers undergo rigorous training at a specialist academy located at the base of Mount Fuji. Professional motorboat drivers earn a good living, said to be on par with that of professional baseball players, and prize money for a single race in an event such as the Sasakawa Prize Tournament which lasts over six days ranges from 300,000 yen to win (\$3,000) to 120,000 yen (\$1,200) for finishing last!

As with other 'officially managed races', there are various options for placing a bet, including betting to win, betting to place and betting on two or more boats to place or win (either in any order or in an exact order), bearing such monikers as 'Exacta', 'Quinella', 'Trifecta', or 'Trio' (see table 2). The minimum bet is 100 yen and, according to some commentators, bets such as the 'exacta' and 'trifecta' are preferred to bets to win for example. At some venues, such as the Heiwajima racecourse in Western Tokyo, the local municipality employs staff to provide tips on upcoming races to pundits for 100 yen.



**Table 2: Betting on Motorboat races**

Type of Bet	Description	Odds
Winning	First finisher	1/6
Place	One of top two finishers	1/3
Exacta	First two finishers, in exact order	1/30
Quinella	Top two finishers, any order	1/15
Trifecta	Top three finishers, exact order	1/120
Trio	Top three finishers, any order	1/20
Quinella Place	Two of top three finishers, any order	3/15

As has been the case with most other forms of gambling in Japan, the proceeds from motorboat racing have fluctuated over time, growing from \$4.5 billion in 1976 to \$8.4 billion in 1983 and then to a peak of more than \$20 billion in 1991, before contracting by more than 50% to less than \$10 billion by 2005. Despite this recent decline in speedboat racing's fortunes, the activity continues to generate hundreds of millions of dollars annually, funding major donations to universities throughout East and Southeast Asia, the prevention and treatment of Aids and leprosy in Africa, scholarly research and myriad other worthy causes. Since 1989, more than \$106 million has been diverted to the Sasakawa Japan-China Friendship Fund and the Southeast Asia Cooperation Fund. Such activities have won kudos for Sasakawa from organizations such as the United Nations and the friendship of influential individuals in many countries, including for example Jimmy Carter, whose research centre and library in Atlanta has benefitted from the generosity of foundations linked to Sasakawa. Up until his death in 1995, Sasakawa is said to have been responsible for deciding on the distribution of \$600 million dollars per year, all raised from the proceeds of motorboat racing.

## **Mahjong**

Mahjong (sometimes also rendered in English as mahjongg, majiang and hyphenated forms of mah-jong or mah-jongg) is a gambling game, usually played by four people, which originated in China in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and was popularized in the Japan, the United States, parts of Europe and throughout much of the rest of Asia from the early twentieth century. Although the precise origins of mahjong are uncertain – there are numerous accounts of its beginnings in the latter half of the the nineteenth century – the game seems to have emerged in the territories surrounding Hangchow, Nanking, Shanghai and Ningpo in China, as a derivative of a popular card-game called *Ma-Tiao* or

# HOW TO BET

## TYPE OF BETTING (Japan Racing Association)

**Win** Select one Horse to finish First ( ☐ )

**Place** Select one Horse to finish First, Second or Third ( ☐ , ☐ , ☐ )  
If there are only five to seven declared starters, select only First or Second.

**Bracket Quinella** Select two Brackets to finish First and Second in either order ( ☐ - ☐ )



**Quinella** Select two Horses by Horse number to finish First and Second in either order ( ☐ - ☐ )

**Quinella Place** Select two Horses by Horse number to finish First, Second or Third in any order. ( ☐ - ☐ , ☐ - ☐ , ☐ - ☐ )

**Trio** Select three Horses by Horse number to finish First, Second and Third in any order. ( ☐ - ☐ - ☐ )

**Exacta** Select two Horses by Horse number to finish First and Second in the exact order. ( ☐ (First) & ☐ (Second) )

**Trifecta** Select three Horses by Horse number to finish First, Second and Third in the exact order. ( ☐ (First), ☐ (Second), ☐ (third) )

Win	2	Exacta	2-10
Place	2 10 5	Quinella Place	2-10 2-5 5-10
Bracket Quinella	1-5	Trio	2-5-10
Quinella	2-10	Trifecta	2-10-5

### Types of betting available according to the total number of runners in a JRA race

Two runners: Win only

Three runners: Win, Quinella, Exacta

Four runners: Win, Quinella, Exacta, Quinella Place, Trio, Trifecta

Five to seven runners: Win, Place (1st or 2nd only), Quinella, Exacta, Quinella Place, Trio, Trifecta

Eight runners: Win, Place (1st, 2nd or 3rd), Quinella, Exacta, Quinella Place, Trio, Trifecta

Nine runners, or more: Win, Place (1st, 2nd or 3rd), \*Bracket Quinella, Quinella, Exacta, Quinella Place, Trio, Trifecta

\*Bracket Quinella is available provided the total number of the field is assured of nine horses, or more.

However, Bracket Quinella can still sold if the total number of the field becomes less than nine because of a scratch or scratches in advance of its sale, as long as there is at least one bracket with two or more horses remaining in a bracket.

Fig. 19 - Guide to betting on horse races, reprinted with permission of the Japan Racing Association (JRA).



*Ma-Diao* ('hanging horse'). Although the playing of mahjong was regionally restricted to the Yangtze Kiang and area around Peking in 1905, by 1920 it had spread throughout China, eventually supplanting chess as the national game. Mahjong continued to be played in China until it was banned by the communist regime during the Cultural Revolution. Although the game is tolerated in contemporary China, playing mahjong is not, at least officially, encouraged.

Mahjong seems to have been first described (in English) in a paper by American Anthropologist, Stewart Culin in 1895<sup>32</sup> and by 1910, it appears in numerous published accounts in a variety of languages, including French. In the 1920s, mahjong became a sensation in the United States, where it was called 'Pung Chow' or 'Game of Thousand Intelligences'. In 1920, Joseph Park Babcock published *Rules of Mahjong* (known as the 'Red Book'), which became a sort of bible for mahjong enthusiasts. Babcock began importing mahjong sets in bulk in 1922 and also took out a copyright on the name, 'Mah-jongg', establishing himself as the leading authority on mahjong in America. At the peak of its popularity in the United States in 1923, the value of mahjong sets exported from Shanghai stood at more than \$1.5 million dollars, ranking it sixth among exports from that city, after silks, laces, skins, eggs and tea. The demand for mahjong sets was acute, far outstripping supply, and cow bone from Kansas City and Chicago was shipped to Shanghai in an attempt to meet production requirements. Particularly popular amongst women, mahjong was featured in society and lifestyle magazines and played in fashionable drawing rooms, which were sometimes decorated in a Chinoiserie style to exoticize the experience. Numerous rulebooks were published, including in 1924 *American Official Laws of Mah-Jongg*, which was a first attempt to standardize the rules of the game. Many of these included historical accounts of mahjong, erroneously attributing its origins to ancient China, which lead one commentator to surmise that, "...more nonsense has been talked and written about the history of Mahjongg than about any other game." (Millington 1977:100). The mahjong craze even spawned at least one popular hit song, *Since Ma is Playing Mahjong*. By the late 1920s, the fad had subsided as dramatically as it appeared, leaving purveyors of mahjong sets with more than \$2 million of unsold

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<sup>32</sup> Although widely reported that Culin first mentions the word, mahjong, in his 1895 paper, 'Chinese Games With Die and Dominoes', more accurately, he describes a set of mahjong tiles, referring to them simply as 'Chinese dominoes'. On re-visiting both of Culin's 1895 publications, the author was unable to identify any usage of the word mahjong.

stock. In the mid-1930s, interest in mahjong was once again rekindled, facilitated in part by the formation of the 'National Mah Jongg League' and attempts to further standardize rules and scoring.

Mahjong appeared in Japan during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was popularized in the 1920s, at about the same time as in the United States and the United Kingdom. As with other forms of gambling, the playing of mahjong was discouraged by the authorities between 1931 and 1945, regaining popularity after the war. In the 1950s, a group of players established the Mahjong association in an effort to standardize the rules of mahjong and in an attempt to limit changes and innovations to the game. Throughout much of its post-war history, mahjong became associated with the dark and smokey 'parlors' (*jansô*) in which it was played and, like so many other forms of gambling, with the Japanese mafia or *yakuza*. However, the image of mahjong has been changing, spurned in part by its popularity as a leisure activity amongst diverse sectors of the Japanese population such as university students and women for example, but also by the growing internationalization of a game which has, since 1998, been officially recognized as an international sport. In 2002, the World Championship in Mahjong was held in Tokyo, played according to international rules developed by the State Sports Commission of China in 1998.

In comparison with many other forms of gambling in Japan, the appeal of mahjong can be strongly differentiated across generational lines and has, as a generalization, been much less popular with recent generations of youth than with their forbearers and in decline since about 1980. In terms of numbers of venues, whereas there were 60,000 mahjong parlors in operation in 1983, the number was closer to 25,000 by 2006<sup>33</sup>. According to one source, in 2002, there were just 20,000 parlors across Japan, 5,000 of which were in Tokyo and 2,000 of which were in Osaka. In economic terms, whereas mahjong generated 314 billion yen (\$3.14 billion) in 1988, in 2005, revenues had fallen by more than 70% to just 90 billion yen (less than \$900 million). In the decade between 1995 and 2005, the number of people participating in mahjong shrank by nearly half, from almost 14 million to 7.6 million. During the same period, the percentage of the male population who played mahjong fell from 21.3 to 11.2 and for the female population, from 5.3 to 2.8.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Japan Times*, 8 May 2006.

<sup>34</sup> *White Paper on Leisure 2006*.

According to some commentators, one reason for this relatively sharp decline in the popularity of mahjong is related to changes in preferences with regard to socializing and sociability across generations. Whereas older generations in Japan preferred more public and interactive forms of leisure such as mahjong and ‘after hours’ socializing in contexts such as nightclubs, their younger counterparts are said to prefer more privatized forms of social intercourse as represented by the karaoke box for example. However, there are recent signs that the young in post-recession Japan are once again being attracted to mahjong, perhaps in part because it is, at 1000 yen per hour for adults and as little as 500 yen per hour for students, a relatively affordable form of leisure and recreations.

### Play

Mahjong is analogous to the conventional card game, gin rummy, wherein players select and discard cards (or usually ‘tiles’ in the case of mahjong) in turn, attempting over the course of the game to assemble sets of cards of the same suit in their hand. A completed hand consists of four sets of three (or four) tiles in a suit, plus an identical pair of any suit.

A full mahjong set consists of 144 tiles, made of ebony and ivory in the case of higher quality sets or white bone or plastic in the case of less expensive sets. Tiles are rectangular in shape, resembling dominoes and are smoothly polished on all sides. The different suits include the wan or ‘Character’ suit, consisting of 9 tiles numbered 1-9 in Chinese characters (hence the name), the ‘Circle’ suit, consisting of between one and nine circles on each tile, the ‘Bamboo’ or stick suit, consisting of small images of between one and nine lengths of bamboo on each tile, the ‘Wind’ suit, which includes four tiles, each with the Chinese character for one of the four directions, north, south, east and west, the prime or ‘Dragon’ suit and the ‘Flower’ suit, consisting of two series, each numbered 1-4. Also included in the standard mahjong set is a pair of dice and roll of chips (or bones) for keeping score.

With the spread of mahjong globally, multiple versions of the game have developed. Recognized variations include ‘Chinese classical’, the oldest version and the one which was first introduced to the United States; ‘Hong Kong Mahjong’, the most common form, varying only slightly from the Chinese classical version; ‘Japanese Mahjong’, involving some scoring and rule changes; ‘Western classical’, a descendent of the version introduced to the United States by Babcock and

‘American’, the form which has been standardized by the National Mahjong League and American Mahjong Association.

There are actually two popular variations of mahjong in Japan, one a somewhat modified 4-player game and the other a more radically transformed 3-player game, which is faster, riskier and better suited to gambling. Rule changes in the Japanese game include those officially adopted by the Japanese Mahjong Association and *richi*, a reference to unofficial, but more popular versions played casually. Among the modifications to the Japanese game, one is that all players pay the winner – there is no second place – and another is that the discarder of the winning card pays for all the losers. With flower and season titles omitted in Japanese play, the total number of tiles is 136 instead of 144. A number of other conventions and scoring differences also distinguish the Japanese game.

The Japanese version of mahjong has become popularized outside Japan mainly through video games, especially those increasingly available online. In 2005, Japanese videogame maker Toei released *Mahjong Taikai III: Millenium League*, a game produced in co-operation with the Japanese Mahjong Museum for Sony Playstation II. The game, which features some of the valuable mahjong tiles housed in the museum and includes a message from the museum’s director on the cover, is a good example of the kind of co-operative tie-ups that are sometimes entered into in the production and promotion of popular culture.

Mahjong is also the subject of a sub-genre of *manga* (comics) which began to appear in the late 1970s. These include titles such as *Naki no Ryû*, by Nojô Jun’ichi, which was serialized in *Bessatsu Kindai Mahjong* (‘Modern Mahjong Supplement’) between 1986 and 1991, *Mahjong Hôrôki* (also a film) and *Shôbushi Densetsu Tetsuya* (‘Gambler Legend Tetsuya’), by Sai Fumei and Hoshino Yasushi, which was serialized in the weekly *Shonen* magazine. The latter, which is based on the life of novelist and mahjong player Asada Tetsuya, traces the protagonist’s ascent from teenage disciple of an elderly mahjong mentor, to a famous mahjong player in who earns the title of Saint Jong (*Jong Sei*). Set at the end of the Second World War, the series opens with the 15-year-old Tetsuya, who has been mobilized to work in a munitions factory, receiving advice from his old master as they play a game of mahjong.

*The game is broken up by an air-raid that destroys the factory. Tetsuya is left amid the ruins of war and the chaos of surrender without a yen in his pocket. But, armed with the old man's*

*precious advice Tetsuya drifts into the underworld where he faces down brutal foes, discovers his luck and pursues his destiny at the mahjong table...*

The story has also been the basis for a 20-episode animation series of the same title, which was broadcast between October 6, 2000 and March 24, 2001 and for a video game, *Shoubushi Densetsu: Tetsuya Digest* (Gambler Legend: Tetsuya Digest), which was released by games software company, Athena, in May, 2004.

## **Casinos**

The introduction of casinos in Japan has been under discussion and examination since at least 2001. Strong views have been expressed on both sides of the issue, with proponents arguing that casinos will create employment (as many as 10,000 new jobs according to Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara who has been a leading advocate for casinos), generate tax revenues which will improve the finances of prefectural governments, clean-up the illegal casinos and profiteering which currently exists in Japan and bolster tourism to cities like Tokyo which currently attracts only about one quarter of the number of visitors annually that cities like London and Paris (*The Japan Times*, April 7 2002). Whilst acknowledging potential economic benefits of casinos, opponents are concerned about the social implications of casino gambling, including the implications for gambling addiction. Whereas prefectural governors polled by Kyodo News in 2001 were divided on the issue, with twelve clearly in favour and fifteen unambiguously opposed (*ibid.*), by June, 2005, 22 prefectures had signed up to build casinos if given the opportunity (*The Japan Times*, June 11, 2005).

One of the main issues involved in introducing casinos into Japan is in how to circumvent the 1908 law prohibiting gambling. Possibilities include the creation of special deregulated zones within which casino gambling would be allowed or a special dispensation from the law, as granted to the 'officially managed races' for example, requiring that profits be used for public expenditure. In either case, many agree that the existing legal framework is inadequate and would require revision in order to accommodate casino gambling and to more effectively regulate the whole spectrum of gambling-related activities in Japan. According to Toru Mihara, advisor the casino study group of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), "If we can create legal structures within one or two years to come, maybe in 2012 casinos in Japan will start to operate." (*Taipei Times*, 16 April 2007)

## Summary: Themes for Further Research

This cursory overview of gaming and gambling in Japan suggests a number of wider, inter-related issues for consideration, including: (1) the relationship between gaming/gambling and society; (2) the image of gaming and gambling in society; (3) the relationship between participation in gaming/gambling and social parameters such as age, gender, status and class; (4) the relationship between the state and gaming/gambling – the regulation and political economy of gaming/gambling; and, (5) the relationship between gaming, gambling and globalization. In summarizing and concluding this paper, a few comments are offered with reference to these themes in the interest of suggesting at least a few directions for further research.

### *The Relationship Between Gaming/Gambling and Society*

With reference to the relationship between gaming/gambling and society, related issues include the legality of gaming/gambling and the way in which such activities are integrated into (or excluded from) society, as well as popular perceptions of gaming/gambling, which can range from unethical, immoral and a social ill to an acceptable form of leisure and entertainment. In contemporary Japan, the relationship between gaming/gambling and society has been mediated by two primary factors: (1) its status as officially illegal since 1908 and, (2) its widespread association throughout much of the post-war period, with the underclass, the underprivileged and the unemployed (or under employed)<sup>35</sup>. In his 1969 study of the *doya-gai* (subtitled, ‘A Japanese version of skid row’), Caldorola mentions pachinko as “...the most often practiced type of daily amusement among the... residents...” (p. 521), whereas Gill, writing thirty years later with reference to day labourers in Yokohama, notes that their narratives, “...included a battle with Pachinko addiction... which some seemed to be losing” (2001:69).

Both accounts also suggest that, at the bottom of Japanese society, gambling is almost exclusively a male domain. The association between gambling and conceptions of manliness, particularly within the context of the *yakuza* or Japanese mafia, has already been mentioned (see page

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<sup>35</sup>The association of gambling with the underclass in society is well established. In a recent review article on ‘Gambling Across Cultures’, Per Binde mentions a number of studies from the 1970s demonstrating a positive association between the “presence of socioeconomic inequality” and gambling which serves as a “shortcut to wealth and a better life” (Pryor 1976, quoted in Binde 2005: 15), a link between games of chance and “...the presence of environmental, individual and social uncertainty...” (Ball 1974, quoted in *ibid*) and between games of chance

5), as have the many efforts of the gaming industries to appeal to women. The correlation between gender, gaming and gambling, which is certainly not distinctive to Japan, and more specifically, the way in which it is mediated by the gaming industries through marketing, publicity campaigns and advertising, warrants more detailed research.

#### *The image of gaming and gambling in society*

In response to falling revenues generated by legalized gaming and gambling in Japan, gambling interests have been seeking ways of enhancing the image of games of risk and of attracting interest and participation from diverse sectors of Japanese society, especially women and the young. In the broadest sense, this has involved efforts to re-invent ‘gambling’ as ‘leisure and entertainment’, a process which has proved crucial in paving the way for the introduction of casinos not only in Japan, but throughout East and Southeast Asia. In the case of casinos, the process has been greatly facilitated by the involvement of foreign gambling interests in the construction of new mega-casinos in East Asia, especially investment from gambling interests in Las Vegas, where the association between gaming and gambling and leisure and entertainment on a grand and fantastical scale is well established. Investment from Las Vegas gambling interests in East and Southeast Asia has not only fuelled the rapid expansion of gaming and gambling, but has also served to reinvent casinos as venues for more than just gambling. In Singapore, one of the stipulations in the construction of one of two recently approved mega-casinos was that gaming and gambling be restricted to no more than 5% of the total area of the casino complex, with the rest reserved for shopping, restaurants, theatres and other consumer, leisure and entertainment pursuits.

In the case of horseracing, efforts by the Japan Racing Association to attract ‘non-traditional’ visitors to races, such as women and young working couples through initiatives such as night (or ‘twinkle’) races, Ladies Day and new, more attractive systems of betting, combined with the mass popularization of both horses and jockeys have served to broaden both interest in and the appeal of horseracing and, perhaps more significantly, to transform the way in which it is socially perceived and defined, from ‘gambling’ to a form of mass leisure, entertainment and spectacle.

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and “societies where men have little control or understanding of the forces that shape their lives” (Lenski 1970, quoted in *ibid.*).



*The relationship between the state and gaming/gambling (the regulation and political economy of gaming/gambling)*

The regulation of gaming and gambling in Japan has involved the role of the state through legislation, the national, prefectural and municipal governments responsible for managing gambling facilities and the police, who are responsible for the regulation of pachinko for example, as well as commercial gaming and gambling interests. Although a distinction between ideology and practice may be necessary, a focus on how gaming and gambling activities are regulated and on how the regulation of such practices changes over time provides a means of assessing the nature of the orientation between gambling activities and mainstream society, as well as an indication of how society seeks to protect its citizenry from the potentially disastrous consequences of excessive engagement in gambling.

This issue of regulation is not restricted to legal sanctions, but may also involve cultural means of regulating or mediating gambling activity, whether legally encoded or not. According to at least one account of gambling in pre-war Japan, self-regulation on the part of the organizers of illicit gambling meetings played a role in moderating the scale of losses incurred by individual gamblers:

*Everybody wanted to win of course, but people came as much for the atmosphere as for the gambling... the important thing was to see that even if they lost they went home feeling OK... if someone started losing too heavily, the boss would have a word with him – something soothing, like “Look, sir, you don’t seem to be in luck this evening. Why don’t you call it a day?” And he’d give him a bit of money and say, “Here’s something to get you home with – it’s on the house.” (Saga 1999:51).*

In distinguishing the professional gambler of the past from the gangsters who later came to dominate gambling, the protagonist notes that the former was, “...like a master craftsman, who happened to make his living at dice. It paid to be considerate – no one who was just out to make a profit at other people’s expense would have kept going for long in that business.” (ibid.:52).

An important criterion in the regulation of pachinko has been the size and scale of payouts of particular machines. Although, on the one hand, the development of machines with high potential payouts since the 1980s has been “responsible for pachinko’s growth into the mega-industry it is today” (Sedensky 1992), the fact that such machines share in common “a strong slant towards

gambling” (ibid.) has led to several being banned<sup>36</sup>. In this sense, the regulation of pachinko machines is consistent with the official ideology of pachinko as non-gambling. As this example suggests, focusing in detail on the regulation of gambling – of what is tolerable and acceptable and what is not - and on the rationale underlying such judgements may yield insights into how gambling is conceived and the relationship between such activities and their wider social context.

Related to the regulation of gambling is the issue of ‘problem gambling’. The recent global proliferation of casino gambling and proposed introduction of casinos in Japan has rekindled discussions about how to discourage and/or deal with the potentially severe consequences – for individuals, their families and society in general – of problem gambling. In Japan, where pachinko addiction is already a recognized syndrome affecting both men and women, potential themes include the definition, conceptualisation and demographics of problem gambling and the role of government organisations, the gambling industries and independent bodies in addressing the issue and the treatment of problem gambling.

However, the notion of what constitutes ‘problem gambling’ is neither fixed, nor universal, but varies across both space and time. It has been argued for example that a tendency to conceive of problem gambling in pathological terms – i.e. as a medical condition – is, in the West, historically derived, displacing a formerly dominant conception of gambling as a compulsion:

*The movement to medicalize gambling as an addiction is not based on sound empirical evidence. Thus the inadequate metaphor of gambling as compulsive is replaced by another inadequate metaphor of gambling as addiction.* (Walker and Dickenson 1996:223)

The degree to which this historical trajectory applies to Japan and the way (or ways) in which ‘problem gambling’ is conceived, defined, discussed and socially constructed in contemporary Japan are also questions warranting further investigation.

#### *Gaming, Gambling and Globalization*

The global scope of gambling and gaming interests and increasing degree of integration between related activities on a global scale has also had an impact on the image of gambling and gaming ‘at home’ (in Japan). The effects of investment (both monetary and in terms of know-how)

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<sup>36</sup> According to Mr. Tetsuya Makino, manager of the Pachinko museum in Tokyo, in the case of *hanemono* machines – i.e. those with ‘wings’ which open repeatedly, providing greater opportunities for balls to fall into the

from Las Vegas gaming interests in transforming the image of casinos from semi-illicit and slightly sordid venues for gambling to highly diversified leisure and entertainment complexes has been mentioned. In horse-racing, horses and jockeys increasingly crisscross the globe to participate in prestigious events and recent successes, such as the 1-2 finish by Japanese horses, *Delta Blues* and *Pop Rock* in the 2006 Melbourne Cup serve to enhance the profile of horseracing in Japan, as horses and jockeys become the ambassadors for the nation in global horseracing arenas. The 100-strong press corps which accompanied *Deep Impact* to Paris for the 2006 Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe and the 20% (or more) of the Japanese population who watched the event - the first international horseracing event ever to be televised by national broadcaster NHK – is strongly suggestive of a link between the globalization of horseracing and the expansion of popular interest in the sport in Japan. Similarly, the inclusion of bicycle racing (*keirin*) as an event in the Olympic Games and the success of Japanese racers within that most global of sporting arenas has transformed perceptions of an activity once thought of as primarily a form of gambling.

#### *Other themes*

Games of chance and/or gambling are characteristic of a wide range of both small-scale and complex societies and are mentioned, at least in passing, in anthropological writing. Mitchell's interpretation of gambling amongst the Sepik as a 'leveller' which counteracts the distinctions of wealth within a capitalist market through the random redistribution of monetary resources, is one which is not only resonant in other small-scale societies (Sexton 1987, Rubenstein 1987, Goodale 1987), but also in more complex societies such as Japan. In his ethnographic study of day labourers in Yokohama, Tom Gill interprets gambling as an "...effective unseen levelling device, preventing the accumulation of money and of inequalities of wealth..." (2001:161). As such studies suggest, the social context for gaming and gambling and the role of games of chance in mediating social interaction and the relationships between actors is a potentially fruitful focus for further research.

The role of gaming and gambling in the random redistribution of material wealth also suggests a connection with wider anthropological themes such as the notions of accumulation and exchange and the role of money, versus other forms of material wealth, as a currency of exchange within the context

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expanded winning slot(s) – the law limits the number of times the wings can open in succession to eighteen,

of gaming and gambling. The *santen hoshiki* (three-store method) system in pachinko - wherein customers exchange their 'winnings' (pachinko balls), for 'prizes' (consumer goods) which are then exchanged for cash at a kiosk located outside the main pachinko premises - involves an intriguing juxtaposition of material and monetary exchanges which serve as a means of skirting the legal, if not the moral, sanctions against gambling for money in Japan.

The relationship between gambling and religion or religious practices is another potential focus for further research and analysis. As anthropologist Per Binde has recently suggested, "...gambling and religion have certain elements in common: notions of the unknown, mystery, and fate, as well as imagery of suddenly receiving something of great value that changes life for the better." (2007:145) In characterising this relationship, Binde notes a distinction between monotheistic religions, which tend "...to denounce gambling" (ibid.) and polytheistic religions which can act as a source of divine assistance to both the gambler seeking success in gambling and the gambler trying to abstain. As examples, Binde mentions the consultation in Taiwan of local deities, "...asked by lottery players to reveal the winning number of the next draw" and the belief in Italy that the spirit of the dead and some saints are able to reveal winning lotto numbers (2007:146-7).

In Japan, one can appeal to Shinto deities for good luck in any number of financial endeavours, including small business enterprise and gambling. There are also gambling-related beliefs and superstitions, such as those already mentioned - a belief that some pachinko machines are luckier than others or that ticket stubs from bets placed on racehorse, Harurara, will offer protection from harm - and others which have been reported in academic accounts<sup>37</sup>. Participation in certain Shinto practices, such as the posting of wishes on wooden plaques or *ema* (lit. 'horse picture') at shrines, provide a means of appealing to higher powers for assistance in abstaining from vices of all kinds, including gambling.<sup>38</sup>

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since more than eighteen times is deemed to be "too much like gambling" (personal communication).

<sup>37</sup> As a somewhat obscure example, in an article published in *Journal of American Folklore* (Oppler 1950), the author reports a belief amongst Japanese living in Tule Lake, California that that the baby of a man who is lucky at gambling will be a boy.

<sup>38</sup> To cite an early example, wishes posted on *ema* documented in the 1930s included the following: (i) A man born in the year of the boar vows to abstain from betting on horses for a period of twenty years, beginning May 21, 1935; (ii) A man of forty-five vows to abstain from betting on Mah Jong for period of three years, beginning May 25, 1935 (Showa 10-5-25); (iii) A man of thirty-five, born in the year of the tiger, vows to abstain from betting on horse races for a period of ten years, beginning May 14, 1935 (Showa 10-5-14); (iv) A man of thirty-

Other themes which might be pursued in the context of a study of gambling in Japan include conceptions of and attitudes towards ‘risk’ and the relationship between participation in gambling and attitudes towards money (and the winning and losing of it). Although an elaboration of these subjects is beyond the scope of this paper, anthropological and theoretical discourses on both topics are fairly well-developed. As Cassidy’s recent work on horseracing at Newmarket (in the United Kingdom) demonstrates, even core anthropological topics such as ‘kinship’ may have their application in studies pertaining to gambling, and an analogous study of horse breeding and pedigree in Japan may yield insights into both the domestic and global parameters of equine kinship. A study of the structure and organisation of horseracing – the stable system and education of trainers and jockeys for example – might also yield interesting comparisons/parallels with other traditional, artistic and/or athletic pursuits in Japan.

### *Summary*

This brief overview of the most prominent forms of gaming and gambling in Japan and cursory summary of potential themes for further research aims to provide students and potential researchers with a starting point for more detailed, ethnographic research of an area of Japanese life which has evaded academic scrutiny, in spite of a great burgeoning of research related to leisure and popular culture in Japan. The ongoing liberalisation of restrictions on gaming and gambling worldwide and proliferation of casino gambling, including online gambling, on a global scale, suggests a widespread and globally pervasive reorientation in the relationship between gaming/gambling and society. In East Asia, this has been triggered by a liberalisation in the granting of gambling permits in Macau which has paved the way for substantial investment by outside (mostly Las Vegas) gambling interests and ignited a boom in the development of casinos both in Macau and across the region by governments eager for a share of the rapidly growing gambling and associated tourism market. In Japan, where the introduction of casinos is predicated upon revamping of the nearly century-old legislation prohibiting gambling (with notable government-controlled exceptions), Japanese society seems to be on the precipice of redefining – in legal terms at least - the relationship between gambling

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one, born in the year of the dragon [vows to] abstain for a period of three years from betting money on base-ball and from stock speculation. (Holton 1938:161-3)



and society, with possible consequences for the legal status of pachinko and other existing forms of gaming and gambling. In such a climate, further interdisciplinary research on this long-neglected area of Japanese life is particularly timely.

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