

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, April 2023

—Voices of the WGO? Staff and Members of the Volunteer Guide Seminar—

To Sell Spring

My acquaintance was slowly driving along near Dobashi station when a female pimp suddenly climbed onto his car and swatted at the windshield. She wanted to get his attention and solicit his business. Alleyways by the station used to be part of a red light district.

In 1946 following surrender, Japanese authorities established the Recreation and Amusement Association in order to offer prostitutes to Allied soldiers. In fact, it was organized as a breakwater to hold back the rising wave of fear that Allied occupation would result in sexual assault and violence upon the general population, something that had already occurred to as many as 10,000 Okinawan women during the war.

For the purpose of preventing rape, protecting the sanctity of Japanese women and thus the purity of the Japanese race, the RAA employed prostitutes, but this number was not sufficient for the 430,000 occupying soldiers. The association then tried to recruit ordinary women 18 to 25 years old, placing ads in newspapers. The nature of the work was obscured while promising food, clothing, and shelter. At its peak, there were some 70,000 "comfort women" working for the RAA. It's ironic that the government collected and sacrificed ordinary women, mostly impoverished workers and widows who had lost everything in the war, so as to protect other ordinary women's chastity. This systematic prostitution was the cause of much personal tragedy. Day after day, these women sold their bodies cheaply. Many in turn were raped and utterly humiliated. Some committed suicide.

The RAA made their brothels off-limits to military personnel in 1946 because of outbreaks of sexually transmitted disease. 55,000 women lost their only way of making a living and were forced to become "pom-pom" or "pan-pan" girl street walkers in order to survive.

Along with this dismissal, police marked red lines on maps to specify districts where licensed brothels were allowed to do business. Dogo Matsugae-Yukaku was one of them. Dobashi drinking quarter was a so-called "blue-line area" where illegal prostitution was concentrated. Prostitutes who used to work in Dogo moved to Dobashi.

Today, one of these brothels is in ruins, a hideout for stray cats. In the shades of night, the vacant houses' faded bar counters, darkened signs and rusty license badges are all covered in darkness. And although the former pleasure quarters in my town seem to be gone, as long as men and women exist, sex-related businesses won't die out. For instance, smartphone dating apps. make it harder than ever for police to prosecute illegal cases of sexual abuse cases, particularly ones against underage girls.

The character for prostitution is written "to sell spring" in Japanese. But this is a grim reality for those who work the streets at night. Ordinary Japanese despise them not knowing the circumstances that led them to this life. Organized crime exploits them. Sex industries take advantage of loopholes in prostitution law.

Municipal governments collect a huge amount of taxes from these industries, but don't deal with the fundamental social problems surrounding their profession.

Men mumble, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas", and take a 'so-what' attitude.
And the women themselves?

Many of them are runaways, girls abused at home with nowhere else to go. They suffer for a lack of justice. They often experience mental disorders and always risk their bodies. (Miwa N.)

The other day I made strawberry *daifuku* for the first time.

I heard from a friend that it was very easy to make, so I tried it. Since it was my first time, I made only 8 pieces.

The ingredients are strawberries, *shiratama* flour, *anko* (sweet bean paste), sugar and water.

It was very easy to make because I used a microwave oven. I chose small strawberries because they work best for this recipe. For the *anko* (red bean paste), I used an easily available supermarket brand. After dissolving *shiratama* flour in water and warming it in a microwave oven, I divided it into 8 pieces and rolled them out into a circle.

Then I covered the strawberries with *anko* and rolled them into a ball. This process is a little difficult, but it was much easier than I thought it would be, and it turned out delicious.

When I put freshly made strawberry *daifuku* on my tongue, spring filled my mouth.

(Hiroko T.)

Did you already hear this news?

Ozu was included in the top 100 list of Sustainable Destinations by the Netherlands-based international certification organization for the first time in 2022. The list is announced annually by Green Destinations, which evaluates sustainable tourism efforts in local areas.

And at the ITB Berlin 2023 on March 7, Ozu won first place in the 2023 Green Destinations Story Awards! The ITB, *Internationale Tourismus-Borse* Berlin is the world's largest tourism trade show. *Kita* Co. in Ozu city received the Inspirational Initiative for Sustainable Tourism Development Award in the 'Culture & Tradition' category.

About the news, my husband was much more excited than I. For Isao, this shining town of the past is a very special place. He's been conducting epidemic surveys there for over a decade. With a good team of local doctors and public nurses, he frequently visits rural communities all over Ozu for follow-up interviews and medical examinations of thousands of people.

On our latest visit to this castle town last March, we found it was no longer a lonely, empty, sleepy site. Even on a rainy Sunday morning, many visitors under umbrellas walked along the narrow streets. Even the public parking lot next to the tourist center office was full.

Did all this happen before their winning the prize?

An old path to the *Garyusan-so* Villa built in 1904, is my favorite place. According to the locals, the width of this road has not changed in 400 years.

Now, a fancy brand-new café and shops along the street are adjacent to one of the renovated hotels now scattered about the area: the Nipponia Hotels. Under the project, 33 old and dilapidated houses will be renovated for new uses in the next couple of years.

You might find Ozu a very interesting place if you visit. Are you interested in coming?

(Kazuyo Kajiwara)