

Japanese society yakuza

Society



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

It is said quite often that Japan is one of the safest countries in the world, what I comparing to Germany or other countries can confirm from my own experiences. With only 19.177 per 1,000 people got Japan #34 in a world crime ranking, while Dominica rates #1, United Kingdom #6, USA #8 and Germany #11. (United Nations, 2000) Nevertheless Japanese families, in our case homestay families, are all the time in my view exaggeratedly concerned about safety, wherefore you could think, that this is just useless talk. But the Yakuza, the Japanese Mafia is famous all over the world with Kobe and Osaka having the highest crime rate in Japan.

Especially in movies, the Yakuza are shown as the Japanese equivalent to the Italian Mafia, but in personal interviews with my former hostmother and other Japanese colleagues Yakuza were often played down and even portrayed as nice and helpful. In the city I live – Kobe – is the headquarter of the Yamaguchi-gang (YMG), the largest Yakuza group with over 20,000 members. They actually control a large part of Japan and other countries. (Blathwayt, 2008, p. 41) Sometimes I see them when I go shopping or to the Kobe's Mosque, because the headquarter of a gumi is around this area and I as well as other Japanese people got used to them.

It is quite easy to recognize them, because they stick out as buffed, tattooed (sometimes you can see that it protrudes from the shirt), wearing sunglasses (even at night) and having expensive cars. But of course like every other Mafia, they control popular, semi-legal or illegal businesses like prostitution, drugs, protection racket and gambling. However there seems to be a big influence by the Yakuza on Japanese society. In this report, I will examine, what kind of influence the Yakuza have on the Japanese society.

In doing so i will take a look at parts of the sex industry, daily and business life, as well as in other areas like random smaller criminals as for example japanese biker gangs called Bosozoku and even normal teenagers next door. First of all i will start with the history of the Yakuza, why and how they developed and try to find here possible parallels of a influences on the modern society. Furthermore in the third part of the report, i will write about my personal experiences and experiences of friends and acquaintances, because such statement often say more than just " dry facts".

I will close my essay with a conclusion and try to give a forecast about whether the Yakuza will continue to exist the way it does today or whether it will change, as every society developes dynamically and continuesly. a. Origin of the Yakuza The word “ Yakuza” means eight (“ ya”), nine (“ ku”) and three (“ za”) and allegorizes a combination of numbers, that is considered to be the worst hand at a Japanese card game called “ Oicho-Kabu” and though is worthless. (Parkanian, 2010, p. 15) The origin of the Yakuza is not clearly to allocate.

Some people say that they are descendents of crazy outlandish samurai called kabuki-mono in the 17th-century, who were very conspicuous because of their outlandish clothes and hair styles. They also spoke a luxuriant slang and carried long swords in their belts. Those servants of the shogun, became leaderless ronin (wave men) and eventually rather thieves and gangsters during the Tokugawa era, an long period of peace in Japan. (Hill, 2003, P. 37-40) Others claim their origin to be the gambling syndicates called “ Bakuto” in the Edo period.

They were people of humble birth, too, like farmers, craftsmen or merchants, who lost their jobs and then had no other choice than entering the gambling syndicates. As mentioned before there was an extended time of peace during the Tokugawa Period in which almost all policemen were former samurai. Therefore there was a high tension between both parties, for example the Yakuza were called “ wannabe samurai” without glorifying the way of the warrior (“ Bushido”) and treated very condescending. Thus a kind of “ Robin-Hood-Image” came up and that was the first steps into a solid influence on Japanese Society.

During the Meiji Period their importance increased when a national hero called Jichiro, the boss of a gambling organization, got high merits because of his alignment to the emperor during the conflicts of the Meiji Restoration. After the end of the occupation period and the appreciativeness of Japan as sovereign state in 1952, a rebuild of the Japanese economy and national structures began, so the Yakuza reacted with a buildup of their own economic activities tool, focusing especially in gambling and the construction industry. The consequence was gang fights between the different Yakuza gangs.

The state answered with a persecution, which led into a higher concentration of power on the three main Yakuza gangs : Inagawa-kai, Sumiyoshi-kai and Yamaguchi-gumi. In the 70's and 80's, when Japan got into a recession because of the famous “ bubble economy”, the Yakuza took advantage of the situation to get access into the financial sector.

Protection money extortion of stock corporations followed. In addition to that, there was a change of generations in the big syndicates during in the 80's,

<https://assignbuster.com/japanese-society-yakuza/>

thus again bloody gang fights were the consequences, but the situations changed as well. Blathwayt, 2008, p. 36-41) For example younger Yakuza tended to break the old rules and standards by using fire arms and being more violent; Being one reason, why Yakuza organizations were banned by the government. In 90's the Yakuza were still legal and their headquarters could be easily find. It was even possible to recognize the group those headquarters offices belonged to and their position in the structure of the group.

Yakuza bosses were at news conferences and on TV, they had their own newspapers and even visited the police for congratulations at New Year. Gunther, 1999) It was easy to recognize an influence of the Yakuza on Japanese society, especially in the financial or construction sector in earlier times. But how is the situation today, about 10 years after they were banned. How are they structured today, if as mentioned before a kind of development, respectively change, were coming up? And what are Japanese people thinking about them? b. Their role in today's Japanese society First of all Yakuza look different from the average Japanese guy. One sign are the tattoos, which is a taboo in Japanese Society.

For me it was not really possible to wear a tank top during the summer without catching everybody's attention. Referring to Bruno(2007) the “ Yakuza members also favor tattoos, but theirs are elaborate body murals that often cover the entire torso, front and back, as well the arms to below the elbow and the legs to mid-calf. Dragons, flowers, mountainous landscapes, turbulent seascapes, gang insignias and abstract designs are typical images used for yakuza body art. The application of these extensive <https://assignbuster.com/japanese-society-yakuza/>

tattoos is painful and can take hundreds of hours, but the process is considered a test of a man's mettle. Another sign is the famous “yubizume”, the amputation of the last joint of the little finger, if a yakuza severely disappoints his boss. The next mistake would lead into an amputation of the second joint of the little finger and later moving on to the next finger. Beyond all, a yakuza knows what to do if his boss gives him a knife. (Kaplan and Dubro, 2003, p. 14) As a Yakuza there is also no space in Japanese Society, but the mafia is quite more accepted as in other countries like for example United States.

Yakuza have an increasingly influence on politics and politicians by supporting them financially or with “services” like extort people to vote for them. For the Yakuza corporate extortion is a very profitable business and the shareholders’ meeting men called “Sokaiya” are highly involved. Bruno(2007) describes it as follows:” Sokaiya will buy a small number of shares in a company so that they can attend shareholders' meetings. In preparation for the meeting, the sokaiya gather damaging information about the company and its officers; secret mistresses, tax evasion, unsafe factory conditions, and pollution are all fodder for the sokaiya.

They will then contact the company's management and threaten to disclose whatever embarrassing information they have at the shareholders' meeting unless they are "compensated." If management does not give in to their demands, the sokaiya go to the shareholders' meeting and raise hell, shouting down anyone who dares to speak, making a boisterous display of their presence, and shouting out their damaging revelations. In Japan, where

people fear embarrassment and shame much more than physical threats, executives usually give the sokaiya whatever they want.

But Japan is also a society where directness is considered rude, and even the criminals make their threats known in a circuitous, outwardly polite manner. Threats come in many disguises. Some sokaiya pose as business magazine publishers who encourage their targets to take out ads or buy subscriptions in exchange for favorable reporting about the company. Since these sokaiya will follow through on their threats and print a magazine or newsletter filled with condemning articles, company executives usually pay up rather than face the bad press. Another sokaiya scam is to set up booster clubs that solicit donations for non-existent causes.

They also throw gala events to which the invited businessmen are expected to bring cash gifts for their hosts. Such events have been known to net more than \$100, 000 in a single night. The sokaiya have also organized beauty pageants for the purpose of shaking down corporate "sponsors," and sokaiya golf tournaments come with pricey entrance fees for their corporate players. These corporate racketeers have also been known to sell blocks of tickets to theater events at grossly inflated prices. Anything to extort money out of legitimate companies in the most polite and indirect way possible. The intention is therefore to control them after the vote and to avoid a minding in their business by the state. They are often right wing nationalistic and even the cars with big loudspeakers of right parties are often driven by Yakuza members. With prohibition of the Yakuza, the conspicuous behavior alleviated. Former offices are now placements for loans or jobs and although the Yakuza are officially called "Boryokudan" (violent groups), violence is

<https://assignbuster.com/japanese-society-yakuza/>

usually the last resort regardless of whether legal businesses like loan lending or placement services or illegal businesses like drugs, prostitution or gambling. Takahashi, 2009, p. 40-43)

Certainly the yakuza's standards decreased when recruiting new members. While about 60 % of all Yakuza descend by "Burakumin", offspring of the "impure" people of the feudal age of Japan, most new members currently come from the bosozoku (speed tribes), known for their love of motorbikes. (Takashi, 2009, P. 43) Yakuza, who treasure their ancestral ties to the old samurai reject the term and consider it an insult. So the Yakuza remain the "shadow of Japanese society", while their image are getting worse. When I asked surrounding people only two of them had contact with them and described them as very polite but arrogant as well. Their friends are Yakuza and studied Law in an university, but then started a career at a Yakuza organization after graduation. They said that Yakuza are very friendly especially to foreigners, except you are getting involved into their business. Two Mongolian guys, who I met, told me that one of them kicked a Yakuza member during a quarrel in an izakaya. When the police and other Yakuza member arrived later, they said to the Mongolians that if they wouldn't pay 50000 yen, they would find and kill them.

And that in front of the police men, who didn't want to get involved in this business. This kind of controversy mixture of gratefulness (when the Yakuza helped Japanese people after the big earthquake in 1995 earlier than the Japanese government) and fear, tolerance but no acceptance is a very interesting situation in Japan. But situations are changing. While in other Mafias, in which a member is a member for life and this short-term career

<https://assignbuster.com/japanese-society-yakuza/>

can have severe repercussions, former Yakuza are becoming now salary men.

There are even companies who offer jobs and rehabilitation programs for former Yakuza, who want to change their life. (Bruno, 2007) Conclusion As we could see, there is an influence as well as transition of the Yakuza to Japanese Society. Complaints of Japanese citizens about Yakuza activities increased considerably, although there are still feared, the acceptance is getting lower and lower. Some people are fighting back by banishing yakuza social clubs from their neighborhoods or forbidding Yakuza to enter local “Onzens” (public hot springs or spas) or gyms.

In addition to that, yakuza organizations are having serious problems to recruit new members, because a Japanese boy from a well-protected good family doesn't tend to start working at an underground organization. The author Bruno (2007) described the situation with much apropos: “ Today they could be more active—and more careful—than ever, broadening their bases, infiltrating new territories and working new scams. Like the fabled ninjas of ancient Japan, they can be everywhere and nowhere, but they're always lethal. ”