

# From Brawler to Boss: Old School Yakuza Careers and Modern Times

Wolfgang Herbert

## Introduction

One of the most important assets of a yakuza is (his) reputation. In his youth, it should be one of being a fierce and violent street fighter, and with age, it should be one of being a savvy mediator, troubleshooter, protector, leader and moneymaker. When it comes to gaining honor, the same holds true for the yakuza as is observed in the case of the Mafia: »To achieve such fundamental social control, the archaic virtues of courage, ruthlessness and force, which favoured his rise to power, were no longer enough. The *mafioso* [i. e. the yakuza, W.H.] had to be able to exercise the activities of government if he wanted to die in bed honoured and revered as a gentleman. To the lion he had to add the fox.«<sup>1</sup> On top of that, it is crucial to form the right alliances within and outside of the gang. At least, this was the way until recent years and pertains to the old elite of the yakuza. I will describe the ideal life stages of a successful yakuza career by looking at the (auto)biographies of two old school yakuza bosses.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, I will also use numerous interviews I conducted with both men in September 2010.

Another focus of this paper will be put on some of the old rites and rituals that have become more and more obsolete, such as:

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- 1 Pino Arlacchi, *Mafia, Peasants and Great Estates: Society in Traditional Calabria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 114.
  - 2 Takahiko Inoue, *Shura no jijoden: »Yakuza« o ikiru* (Tokyo: Gendai shorin, 1996); Ken'ichi Uetaka and Miyazaki Manabu, *Gokurakuki* (Tokyo: ōta shuppan, 2004).

- *heyazumi*, learning the ropes by living in the house of the boss or another senior yakuza (*aniki*)
- *sakazuki*, the formal initiation and ceremony to become a regular member
- *yubitsume* or *enkozume*, the chopping off of a part of one's finger as a definitive gesture of apology and commitment
- *monmon*, getting a bodysuit tattoo
- *girikake*, inter-yakuza gang communication via ceremonies like fraternizations, peace treaties, funerals, boss installations, etc.

Then I shall discuss the vital relationship between *oyabun* (boss) and *kobun* (underling). The metamorphosis from rowdy youth to businessman will be explained as well as the function and *raison d'être* of the yakuza in Japanese society. I shall then purport that all the mentioned traditional trappings and trademarks repel rather than attract young outsiders from joining the yakuza. New legal measures, stricter law enforcement and policing and an increasingly negative public image have all also made the recruitment of new yakuza difficult. Finally, I will show that yakuza are facing increasing new competition and displacement on the criminal market.

### Fighting for a Reputation

Inoue Takahiko was born in Kumamoto on the southern island of Kyūshū. He was the second of four brothers. In his youth, his father sent him to a Kendō school, where he practiced fencing with bamboo swords. »That's where I developed the eye of a fighter and learnt to strike at the right moment!«<sup>3</sup> Soon fighting became his favorite pastime. He states that he had a keen sense of justice and could not stand it when weaker boys were bullied by stronger ones. Inoue insists

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<sup>3</sup> Inoue, *Jijoden*, 17.

that he never initiated any of the numerous fights he was involved in. According to him, he only intervened to restore justice and to help the oppressed. Thus, he regards the many brawls he had as a teenager in the light of the old Yakuza myth he likes to allude to: helping the weak and fighting the oppressors! Actually, he loved reading stories about Shimizu no Jirochō, a legendary founding figure of the yakuza: »The more I read about him, the more I felt to be exactly like him!«<sup>4</sup>

At fourteen, he beat up a much older, small-time criminal and extortionist. The man ended up in hospital with three broken ribs and several knocked-in teeth. There were no sanctions because Inoue's opponent was a known crook and had started the fight. Inoue, however, saw this confrontation as one of his decisive steps in the direction of becoming a yakuza. His reputation of being a tough cookie and protector grew and he gained a following. Very soon, he was the leader of a gang of deviant youngsters. He loved to strut through town in the hours after school. Wearing a suit or traditional Japanese clothes, he was reminiscent of the *otokodate* of Edo times, who also liked to parade through towns in eccentric outfits and who were likewise prone to solve conflicts with brawn and violence. Inoue himself insinuates that he sometimes felt he was born in the wrong age.

At sixteen, he had his first brush with the law. He was indicted for assault and bodily harm. The trial ended with a parole sentence. But Inoue broke parole almost immediately after his father became the target of a group of blackmailers. Once again, the only solution he saw was using violence and Inoue ended up being arrested. It was his »first experience of being handcuffed.«<sup>5</sup> He was lectured by the police that he could not always take justice into his own hands and was threatened with juvenile detention and earning a criminal record. Eventually, the police let him go because his adversary was again a professional criminal on the run. But Kumamoto had now become too hot a place for Inoue, and he decided to move to Kantō, where his

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4 Inoue, *Jijoden*, 29.

5 Inoue, *Jijoden*, 60.

older brother waited for him. Eighteen of his »followers« and comrades joined him in search of work and coming-of-age adventures. They formed the core of his future yakuza gang.

The theme of fighting for a reputation is a recurrent one in yakuza biographies: the eminent third boss of the Yamaguchi-gumi, Taoka Kazuo, who was responsible for the aggressive expansion of his syndicate and its transformation into a nationwide franchise system, began his career as a street fighter. He earned the nickname »*kuma*« (bear) and was feared for his brutal »two-finger technique« with which he poked out the eyes of his adversaries. He claims to have perfected this technique in numerous brawls with delinquent youths.<sup>6</sup>

The notorious Gotō Tadamasu, a former underboss in the Yamaguchi-gumi, had done eight stints of prison time by the age of 38. He called these eight rounds »*hachishū*« when he decided to break this cycle.<sup>7</sup> He also had an exemplary career that had started from an early age. Shortly after having graduated from junior high school, he was arrested for the first time for grievous bodily harm. He had already established a reputation as a fierce street fighter and was seen as a *banchō* (leader of juvenile delinquents) by other dropouts and young ruffians, the perfect preparation for a career as a yakuza boss. Indeed, many yakuza bosses claim to have been a *banchō* when they were young. Frequent brawls and knife fights consolidated Gotō's reputation as being »dangerous.« He became the leader of about twenty *gurentai*, wanna-be-gangsters, and was actively seeking contact with yakuza. And soon, he was under their tutelage. In order to prove his manliness, he launched an attack against a rival gang with a Japanese sword. Spectacular actions of this kind are very effective for making a name in the underworld. This particular one »earned« Gotō two years in prison.

Delinquent youths who later become yakuza are not total losers. They do not fit into the conventional education regime and the mid-

6 Kazuo Taoka, *Yamaguchi-gumi sandaime: Taoka Kazuo jiden*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 1973), 53.

7 Tadamasu Gotō, *Habakarimagara* (Tokyo: Takarajimasha, 2010), 87.

dle-class frame of expectations. However, in the subculture of students, particularly those with deviant inclinations, they are highly respected. They are popular, outgoing, active, excel in sports, and they bring people together. They have a sense of justice and humor, and they are tough and kick against authority.<sup>8</sup> Hirose bases this description on in-depth interviews he held with seven former yakuza. They all came from dysfunctional families, had a history of early delinquency, and had joined youth gangs. But they also reported that they were well-liked among their peers. All named physical toughness, fighting skills and leadership as conditions for being successful as a future yakuza. But they also pointed to smartness and being streetwise.<sup>9</sup> Thus, both brawn and brains were assets early on.

Permanent brawling is also the result of a hypersensitive obsession with reputation. »The reputation of mafiosi constantly aspires to mythical proportions (...). Yet myth is perilously fragile, and mafiosi remain sensitive to the slightest challenge.«<sup>10</sup> And any challenge is usually met with violence. In the Japanese context, this reads as follows: »We know that the average Japanese is concerned about face, but the behavior of *yakuza* shows that they have an exaggerated face sensitivity. With *yakuza*, as with society at large, preserving face takes both defensive and aggressive forms. Defensively, the dignity must be kept from injury, destruction, or pollution (...). The *yakuza*, being extremely defensive about his dignity, overreacts to the feeling that face has been ›smeared with mud,‹ ›wounded,‹ or ›crushed.‹ (...) Impulsive, violent action in such a circumstance is approved as ›masculine‹ in the *yakuza* world, masculinity being a crucial component of dignity. (...) The aggressive aspect of preserving face refers to ensuring that the prestige, power, or influence of a *yakuza* is recognized by fellow *yakuza* and even by the outside world.«<sup>11</sup>

8 Noboru Hirose, *Yakuza ni naru riyū* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2017), 108.

9 Hirose, *Yakuza*, 136–142.

10 Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 46.

11 Takie Sugiyama Lebra, *Japanese Patterns of Behavior* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), 182–183.

## Prison

Inoue followed the logic of martial prowess as a means to become reputable. »In this world the only way to get a name, to show what man one is, is to fight.«<sup>12</sup> He also bragged about his dramatic rows using swords and firearms. This came to the attention of his superiors and, in the long run, »saved« him, because he was given the post of a bodyguard for his boss, Ishii Susumu, the paradigmatic »*keizai yakuza*,« a fixer and money maker during the bubble economy of the late 1980s. Under him, Inoue was supposed to learn how to behave and to acquire etiquette. It might also have shaped his view concerning imprisonment. To go to prison is a rite of passage to become a full-fledged yakuza. Inoue only did one time in Kosuge Prison, two and a half years for extortion and intimidation. It was a contentious case concerning the collection of »protection money« from a game center. Inoue comments that he met many men in jail who boasted about how often they had been incarcerated, but he found this rather foolish. He regarded these men as irresponsible, as they were not able to get their lives together.<sup>13</sup>

Still, going to prison is part of the lifestyle of a yakuza, and many euphemisms exist for how yakuza describe this: »school,« »university,« a »business trip,« a »trip abroad,« etc. Yakuza regard prison as a »training ground« for becoming real men. The stigma of having been behind bars is converted into the currency of honor. Their identity as outlaws is sealed and certified. »The length of time spent in prison ... provides an ›objective‹ measure of the respect one is owed relative to other gang members.«<sup>14</sup>

As Foucault has thoroughly demonstrated, the penitentiary as an institution is conducive to the formation of a hierarchized milieu of delinquents, who form alliances and solidarity bonds. Potential ac-

12 Inoue, *Jijoden*, 115.

13 Cf. Inoue, *Jijoden*, 184.

14 Diego Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld: How Criminals Communicate* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 13.

complices for all kinds of future conspiracies are assembled there.<sup>15</sup> According to Uetaka and Miyazaki, inmates talk business, plan future coups, and ensure economic cooperation for themselves in the coming times. »The slammer is said to be a correctional institution, but in there it is impossible to correct anything. It is merely a facility for isolation.«<sup>16</sup> And for yakuza, it is a place for making useful acquaintances. In fact, Uetaka met his future boss in jail.

### *Yubitsume*

Let us return to the Inoue brothers after they left their home town. Their chosen milieu was perfect for a Yakuza career: Kotobuki, the day laborer area of Yokohama, as »the people who lived there were called ›drifters,‹ day laborers in the harbor, hired hands living in barracks, yakuza and *chinpira*, prostitutes and wanted guys fleeing from the police, in short: castaways only, a place in which normal folks would not set foot.«<sup>17</sup> Most of the labor agents and many foremen were yakuza and bossed the ordinary workers around, an atmosphere in which Inoue's temper and sense of justice inevitably had to lead to clashes. Arguments were solved with fists and working tools were used as weapons. Inoue even had to leave Kotobuki temporarily because he injured a yakuza and had to wait for the situation to cool down. Once he was back in Kotobuki, it did not take long until he was again entangled in a brawl with a yakuza underboss. Inoue inflicted heavy injuries to his opponent's head, and the man's yakuza gang demanded a frightening sum of cash as compensation. Since the Inoue brothers could not pay, they did what was functionally equivalent and would do the job: Nobuhiko, the older of the two, cut off the tip of his left hand's little

15 E.g. Michel Foucault, *Überwachen und Strafen: Die Geburt des Gefängnisses*, trans. Walter Seitter (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 343.

16 Uetaka and Miyazaki, *Gokurakuki*, 179.

17 Inoue, *Jijoden*, 69. *Chinpira* = hoodlums.

finger. Inoue Takahiko describes this scene with a comical note. Since fingers do not just snap off smoothly, he had to take a massive ashtray that he hit on top of the knife until the fingertip was severed.

In fact, Takahiko, the younger one, also came into a quandary, and he saw *enkozume* as the only way out of it. A yakuza friend and drinking buddy of his had insulted one of his superiors, and quick action was called for. He ran into a nearby general store and demanded the sharpest kitchen knife available and a rubber band to improvise a tourniquet to minimize the blood flow. While chopping at his finger, he remembered how he had assisted his elder brother, grabbed an iron ashtray, and used it to hit the top of the knife. The little finger was cut off and offered to the boss, who was fortunately still in the bar where they had been carousing. The apology was accepted and the air cleared.

What is of interest here is that the Inoue brothers acted like yakuza long before they formally became gangsters. They had formed a group called »*Inoue-gumi*« (without being a yakuza group (*kumi*)), believed in having to prove their manhood via violence, talked argot, and even appropriated a yakuza ritual par excellence: *yubitsume*. Their constant brawling reached the ears of an influential foreman, who called them into his office. He recommended them to undergo some formal training as yakuza. This would not only guarantee their survival but also be the most adequate job for them. The foreman then arranged the pivotal meeting of the Inoue brothers' lives. He introduced them to the »Don of the East,« Ishii Susumu, head of the Yokosuka-ikka, affiliated with the Inagawa-kai.

Uetaka Ken'ichi told me the most grotesque or—depending on one's way of regarding matters—most humorous *yubitsume* story I have ever heard: »I was a bit over twenty, just out of jail, when I witnessed a brawl in a bar. I grabbed both fellows and dragged them outside. One of them drew a knife and stabbed his opponent. The two were members of two yakuza gangs at war. I was ordered into the office of one of the bosses. He wanted to know what had happened and why I had intervened. The fight was none of my business. I was not a full-fledged yakuza yet. The boss praised my courage and invit-



ed me to join his gang, but I refused. A big affront. I had to apologize. The only adequate way I saw was offering one of my pinkies.

»It was evening and pitch dark. I tied a string tightly around the little finger to avoid too much bloodshed. It got white. The only thing at hand was a plane and I sliced my finger off by a flagpole. I picked up the whitish piece, wrapped it in my handkerchief. When I opened it in order to present this token of my remorse to the boss, everybody looked at it repeatedly. This was not a fingertip: this was a piece of dog shit! I ran back to the flagpole with an electric torch. But I could not find the severed finger, only dried, white, little pieces of dog feces. Dozens of them. Now I can laugh about it, but at the time I was sweating blood. Could almost have cost me another finger!«

The cutting off of a fingertip (usually beginning with the little finger of the left hand) is a gesture with an enormous power of persuasion: it cannot be refused and tempers justice with mercy. It serves as an apology or reparation for bungled actions. It was also often demanded when someone wanted to leave the yakuza organization. Nowadays, though, it is said that fines (millions of Yen) will also do. Where the custom comes from is not quite clear. In red-light districts in Edo times, prostitutes presented fingernails or locks of hair as tokens of their devotion to preferred customers or lovers. The utmost sign of (mental) faithfulness was a severed fingertip. The first historical record of a finger amputation by a *kyōkaku* dates to the year 1834. Sakamiya Masagorō (1807–1886), a. k. a. »Edo no Aimasa,« chopped off his finger at a banquet with high ranking *hatamoto* as an act of »entertainment« and to display his manly courage. He dropped it into a sake glass and let it be passed around.<sup>18</sup>

There exists a story about Shimizu no Jirochō, according to which he cut off three fingers of his foes, leaving them with just enough fingers to be able to eat with. In former times it was said that missing pinkies made it difficult to handle a sword with precision; nowadays,

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18 Ken Kitashiba, *Yakuza no ura keizaigaku: Moto keiji ga akasu waru no renkinjutsu* (Tokyo: Nihon Bungeisha, 2008), 190.

yakuza say the same thing about golf clubs. When I spoke with Yamanouchi Yukio, a consulting lawyer of the Yamaguchi-gumi, about *yubitsume*, he remarked: »The really tough guys keep all their fingers.« As I showed astonishment and wanted to know why, he added: »They do not apologize!«

It is rumored that *enkozume* is getting obsolete and monetary compensation is becoming the preferred means of reconciliation. This may be true for loosely associated members of yakuza gangs (*jun kōseiin*), but hardcore yakuza still uphold this old and painful custom. It also has another practical function: it is the most evident sign of being a yakuza. Since new legal restrictions forbid the use of visiting cards with gang names and symbols or the display of lapel pins in the shape of the gang emblem and other visible signs of being a yakuza, a missing finger is an unmistakable mark that makes any other indications superfluous. It is a mark of Cain but also a *passé-partout*. Yakuza joke that holding their hands out of a car window as blinkers allows them to drive wherever they want.

## Tattoos

Another flashy sign of being a yakuza, however, has become quite *demodé* among them: the tattoo. Don Inoue had a big skin decoration of a Chinese lion and peonies tattooed shortly after he officially entered the world of the yakuza. This is also a conspicuous way to say good-bye to the mainstream world of ordinary citizens. Although historically tattoos were not exclusively worn by yakuza at all, a full bodysuit made of colorful ink is usually associated with criminals. Although police data consistently show that the percentage of yakuza with tattoos is around 70 percent,<sup>19</sup> tattoo masters like Horitsune

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19 Peter Hill, *The Japanese Mafia: Yakuza, Law, and the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 87.

and one of his disciples, Miyazō, told me that the number of yakuza among their clientele has significantly dropped. Tattoos are expensive, lurid, painful and permanent. Many young yakuza cannot afford them or shun the stigma attached to skin decorations. Miyazō told me in March 2014 that, ironically, the number of straight clients who want traditional big surface tattoos has increased. Yakuza, on the other hand, only get themselves a small, fashionable picture that can easily be covered up. Fashion tattoos are en vogue, and the decrease of yakuza among tattooists' customers could possibly also be attributed to the substantial rise in people who run tattoo studios.<sup>20</sup> This trend is corroborated by an article in the *Japan Times*, which states that around 1990, approximately 200 tattoo artists operated in Japan. Nowadays, this number has risen to around 3,000.<sup>21</sup>

### Rites and Rituals: *Sakazuki* and *Girikake*

*Sakazuki* play an important role in the life of a yakuza. To perform a whole *sakazuki* in prison is quite exceptional, but Uetaka proudly told me how he had organized a fraternization ritual (*kyōdaibun sakazuki*) behind bars. In his book, he called it an »unprecedented ritual of a *sakazuki* on the move.«<sup>22</sup> He himself took over the function of guardian (*kōkennin*) and appointed a go-between (*baishakunin*), a master of ceremonies (*torimochinin*), witnesses, and the monitor (*mitodokenin*). With this, the mandatory dramatis personae were

20 On the history of tattooing in Japan and Horitsune, see Horitsune II and Wolfgang Herbert, *Bunshin II: Japanese Traditional Tattoo. Horitsune II, Dragon and Kannon* (Mannheim: Huber, 2010); on Miyazō, see Wolfgang Herbert, »Vom Schüler zum Meister. Tätowierer Miyazō aus Osaka,« *Tätowiermagazin* 12 (2011): 86–92.

21 Jon Mitchell, »Japan inked: Should the country reclaim its tattoo culture?« *Japan Times*, May 3, 2014, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2014/05/03/lifestyle/japan-inked-country-reclaim-tattoo-culture/>.

22 Uetaka and Miyazaki, *Gokurakuki*, 161.

assembled, and a formally correct ritual was held. A member of the Yamaguchi-gumi and one of the Matsuba-kai wanted to become »ritual brothers,« and Uetaka formed a group of about twenty yakuza, who were in the same prison at the time. Everyone learned his locution by heart. The only time and place where they all came together was the hour allotted for physical recreation, when they could roam around in the yard. They decided on a day, and while slowly walking in single file, they recited the necessary formulas and brought the ceremony to its proper end.

### *Oyabun-kobun Sakazuki*

*Sakazuki* have an almost sacred character and serve as the confirmation of social relations among yakuza. The most important *sakazuki* is the one between the boss and his followers. Yakuza organizations are formed as fictional kinships and are paternalistic clans following Confucian models. At the top is the father (*oyabun*, *oya* = parent), and underlings are treated as »children« (*kobun*, *ko* = child). The *oyabun* has absolute authority and demands total obedience, as expressed in the very famous saying: »When the *oyabun* declares a crow flying by to be white, for the *kobun* it is white.« For many young yakuza, the gang is indeed a surrogate family. Groups often call themselves *ikka* (family), *kumi* (group) or *kai* (association). The bosses are accordingly called *kumichō* or *kaichō*, and the *kobun* swear loyalty by declaring the boss and their new trade (*kagyō*) to be more important than their real parents. Another formula used at the *sakazuki* goes: »(...) and even if I cannot feed my wife and children, I will give everything for my boss, even my own life!«<sup>23</sup> Thus, joining the yakuza has an almost religious character (cf. Mathew 10.37: »He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And

23 Hiroaki Iwai, *Byōrishūdan no kōzō: Oyabun kobun shūdan kenkyū* (Tokyo: Seishin shobō, 1963), 151.

he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.«). It resembles entering an order or being converted and leaving the secular world behind.

Many yakuza come from broken homes or are dropouts of the relentless educational system. Most of them have experience with juvenile delinquency or even have convictions. They are misfits who do not want to fit in or are members of socially outcast minorities. The yakuza give them an emotional home, a second chance of education (as »real men«), and offer an alternative professional career. Yakuza gangs are male societies based on highly emotional friendships and companionship. »The Yakuza are an asylum and function as an association of mutual support for those who have been socially marginalized. To be part of a certain syndicate fills its members with immeasurable pride, gives them an identity and self-esteem. Furthermore, the group proffers the chance to somehow earn a living.« That is how Yamanouchi Yukio, a lawyer and consultant of the Yamaguchi-gumi, whom I have known for more than twenty years, once described the role of yakuza organizations to me.

The *sakazuki* between *oyabun* and *kobun* establishes the formal relationship between the two and is valid for life. The *kobun* is then also recognized as a proper member of and by the yakuza world (in their argot, yakuza metaphorically speak of »*geso o tsukeru*« = »putting on (decent) footwear«). In recent police statistics, it even serves as a means of differentiating full members (*kōseiin*) from loosely associated members (*junkōseiin*),<sup>24</sup> In the case of an *oyako-sakazuki*, both parties drink their share and carefully stow away the sake cup. It becomes the symbol of their bond (*ketsuen*) formed with this ritual. Should their alliance break, they also break these sake cups. This can happen as the most severe sanction against improprieties, with their subsequent expulsion from the gang (*zetsuen* = rupture of the bond).

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24 Cf. Tomohiko Suzuki, *Gokudō no ura chishiki* (Tokyo: Takarajimasha, 2008), 140 and 276.

*Sakazuki* are part of the ritualistic cosmos and everyday life of *yakuza*. They can be exchanged among equals; as described by Uetaka, *yakuza* of the same rank become brothers, and in rare cases, these *kyō-daibun-sakazuki* can also be held between a *yakuza* and a non-*yakuza*. The share of sake is 50:50. *Sakazuki* can also cement horizontal alliances, and *shatei-sakazuki* are held between fictive elder and younger brothers. The relationship is again defined by the amount of sake shared (60:40 or, rather rarely, 70:30). In this case, the partners drink from the same cup. The quantum of sake symbolizes the hierarchical position (again with Confucian rigidity): the older brother gets more, and the younger is bound to obey him. Should the leadership change or jumps up the career ladder occur, the new positions can be confirmed by a renewed ceremony (*sakazuki naoshi*). *Sakazuki* can also go beyond individuals and deepen partnerships between syndicates. They are held as peace treaties or reconciliations after gang wars (the name *teuchishiki* derives from the ritual »clapping of the hands« (*teuchi*) that is characteristic of this kind of *sakazuki*). Another big *sakazuki* is held to celebrate the succession of a boss (*atome sōzoku* or *shūzoku sakazuki*). High-ranking colleagues from allied syndicates are invited, and thus good relationships are confirmed.

In recent years, *sakazuki* between big syndicates have been held to either prevent or to solve potential conflicts over territories in a diplomatic way.<sup>25</sup> Aggressive warfare is perceived as detrimental: mass media and citizen groups launch anti-*yakuza* campaigns, the police clamp down on them more strictly, the image of the *yakuza* suffers, and their own personnel is reduced (ending up in hospital, prison or the graveyard). *Sakazuki gaikō* (*gaikō* = diplomacy) has widely substituted shootouts or other military operations.

*Sakazuki* are by no means secret rites. They are extensively described in Iwai Hiroaki's classical anthropological study.<sup>26</sup> He also explains the symbolism of the necessary paraphernalia and different

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25 See examples in Hill, *Japanese Mafia*, 212.

26 Iwai, *Byōrishūdan*, 146–162.

kinds of *sakazuki*. In addition, I should mention a quite peculiar phenomenon called *gokudō jānarizumu* (yakuza journalism).<sup>27</sup> The so-called *jitsuwashī* («magazines with true stories») regularly (weekly or monthly) report on yakuza activities and propagate their ideology. *Shūkan Jitsuwa*, *Jitsuwa Jidai*, *Jitsuwa Jihō* and *Jitsuwa Dokyumento* are the most prominent ones. Their style of coverage is similar: yakuza, or «sources» close to the yakuza, are frequently quoted by using their specific slang. Photos of their «offices,» limousines, ceremonies, portraits, etc. are openly published. Regular features disclose the full structure of big syndicates like the Yamaguchi-gumi with portraits of all the high-ranking capos. Conflicts are chronicled like wars and deliver ongoing thrills. The use of violence is not condemned, and the *Weltanschauung* of the yakuza is uncritically disseminated. These magazines are read by yakuza themselves, and it can be assumed that the reporting is quite accurate. In almost every issue, one can find apologies or corrections, for instance, because one of the writers used a wrong or outdated title for a boss, whose hierarchical position has changed. Obviously, such complaints come straight from the yakuza themselves. Uetaka mentions that he did not miss one issue of the monthly *Jitsuwa Jidai* even when in jail,<sup>28</sup> as it was his source of information concerning his boss and his own gang. As far as *sakazuki* are concerned, they are frequently reported in the *jitsuwashī* and are illustrated with plenty of photos of the participants. Prominent yakuza literally have «faces,» and they show them off like celebrities. The monthly *Jitsuwa Dokyumento* regularly appends a pocket diary as a gift for its loyal readers (I got hold of one from the June 2010 issue, and the cover reads: *Ninkyō 2010 sakazuki reki* = *sakazuki* calendar). It contains not only all the important data of yakuza events through the year (following the old Chinese calendar) but also detailed descriptions of how the different forms of *sakazuki* are to be held.

27 Satomi Adachi, «Gokudō jānarizumu wa shiminshakai no torankiraizā da,» in *Yakuza to iu ikikata: Toshi no soko ni hisomu otokotachi no monogatari*, ed. Ishii Shinji (Tokyo: JICC, 1987), 242–251.

28 Uetaka and Miyazaki, *Gokurakuki*, 187.

All of the above mentioned Yakuza-fanzines (*jitsuwashī*) have ceased their publication in the last years, which can be read as a tell-tale indication of the decline of the Yakuza. The last magazine standing was *Jitsuwa Jidai*. Its publication was brought to a close with its last number in September 2019.

### *Girikake*: Ceremonies and Obligations

*Sakazuki* are part of *girikake*. The word derives from *giri* (= social obligation) and *kakeru* (= to put on, burden with). It is a generic term for all kinds of ceremonies yakuza hold and attend, and incurs the onus of repaying favors. Important *girikake* besides the *sakazuki* mentioned above are new year ceremonies (*koto hajime*), jail release celebrations (*demukae*), promotion parties, visits to the graves of former bosses, or funeral rites. *Girikake* strengthen the cohesion within and between gangs on an organizational and individual level. The elaborate seating arrangements give everybody a sense of place. In a busy month, high-ranking bosses like Inoue Takahiko sometimes attend up to a dozen *girikake*. Yakuza relationships are precarious and, in the end, mutual trust has to be permanently reassured. *Girikake* are one of the means used to accomplish this. »Perhaps the most insidious role played by *girikake* is a mechanism for transferring money within the *yakuza* world. When attending *girikake* the participants typically pay money for the honour.«<sup>29</sup> As one former boss remarks, this keeps the *yakuza* under pressure to make money.<sup>30</sup> Recently, *yakuza* have become thrifter and, due to police and public pressure, ceremonies have become less conspicuous. Formerly, they also served to show off the strength of an organization.<sup>31</sup> Nowadays, due to legal restrictions, hotels and Japanese restaurants do not rent out space for *yakuza*

29 Hill, *Japanese Mafia*, 79.

30 Kōyō Kitagawa, *Yakuza ga okuru futsūnin e no dokuhaku* (Tokyo: Hama no shuppan, 1985), 191.

31 Noboru Andō, *Yakuza to kōsō* (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 1972), 204.



meetings anymore. Many *girikake* are held in more private surroundings, e. g. in the headquarters of the syndicates.

### Yakuza Internship: *Heyazumi*

Both Inoue and Uetaka went through the traditional yakuza training called *heyazumi*, which literally translates as »living in the room.« The apprentice shares his roof with a supervisor, a veteran yakuza, whom he calls *aniki* (»older brother«), or with his boss. Inoue and Uetaka were lucky to be in the closest vicinity of their respective bosses, Ishii Susumu and Mizoshita Hideo. They were bodyguards, but also drivers and runners for all kinds of errands. During the *heyazumi* period, the apprentice yakuza not only has to be around and on alert 24 hours a day, but also is under steady observation and control. He will do menial tasks like house cleaning, parking lot sweeping, gardening, dog walking, telephone answering, and other domestic chores. Yakuza used to be good cooks due to this training, remarks a boss, who also extensively describes the drills and rigorous discipline of *heyazumi*.<sup>32</sup> The recruit learns not only etiquette, the function of the hierarchy, and the language and behavior of a yakuza, but also the ropes of doing business. His character and courage can be tested, and anybody lacking such will be dismissed. Traditionally, it is only after several years of *heyazumi* that a formal *oyako-sakazuki* is held, and the former factotum is then accepted as an official gang member.

When talking of his time with his boss, Mizoshita, Uetaka lends this experience a comical note. He had to be on the alert around the clock. Uetaka had two ringtones on his mobile phones, one for general business and one exclusively for his boss. The latter's ringtone was programmed to the tune of the yakuza movie series *Jingi naki tatakai* (*Battles Without Honor and Mercy*, 1973–74). Mizoshita could

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32 Kitagawa, *Dokuhaku*, 52.

not stand a drowsy or drunken voice and insisted that his underling answered the phone after the first ringtone. »It did happen that I jumped up from the toilet and lost my trousers because I stood to attention once the dreadful song shrilled from my cellular!«

*Heyazumi* is also the time to »hone oneself as a man« (»*otoko wo migaku*«), a phrase frequently used by yakuza to describe the forming of their new personality. It also alludes to being a strong warrior and ruthless fighter. *Otoko*, in the sense of »real man,« is a favored word and concept in the world of the yakuza. The relationship with the boss is often referred to in strongly emotional language like »I fell in love with the boss« (»*oyaji ni horeta*«). And, indeed, the utter loyalty to the boss up to the willingness to give one's life for him does demand »love« and dedication. It is reminiscent of the fealties of a vassal to his lord and, in fact, the yakuza insist that they are the heirs to Samurai ethics and their code of behavior. With their feudalistic, extremely conservative value system, yakuza implicitly ask for sympathy from the general public and play on nostalgic sentiments of bygone days of past glory. Thus, yakuza likewise claim that they strictly follow *giri-ninjō*, the observation of duty and justice (*giri*), while maintaining warm human feelings and kindness (*ninjō*).

In an interview I held with Inoue Takahiko on September 21, 2010, he earnestly declared:

The 8-9-3 [*ya-ku-za*] etymology of yakuza is well known. It derives from a losing hand in the card game *oichokabu*. At first glance the combination looks good, but according to the rules of the game it is worthless. You see, it's a diminutive: yakuza tend to make themselves small. They are humble. They are servants. The term yakuza can also be derived from ›yaku,‹ written with the character for ›duty, function, office,‹ and ›za,‹ meaning ›seat, position.‹ This quite adequately describes our role in society: we are part of the local community and act as a kind of justice of the peace. People come to us with their troubles and sorrows and we try to help them. We are on the side of the poor and oppressed. We fight against the ones in power and the authorities.

›*Yowaki o tasuke, tsuyoki o kujiku*‹ is one of our old slogans: ›Help the weak and shatter the powerful!‹

### Turning from Lion into Fox: from Thug to Honorable Member of Society

In the case of yakuza, the same career pattern can be observed as in the description of Arlacchi for the traditional mafioso. Most likely, there are two distinct phases clearly separated from each other: an anomic one and a legal one. In the anomic phase, the gangster is preoccupied with getting attention and recognition in the world of the »men of honor.« This phase is affected by severe law-breaking and violence. Once the mobster has secured a high position in the gang, he enters a legal phase, where he approaches politicians and other institutions of the state, as well as big business. He does not clash with legal norms anymore but rather seeks recognition from the establishment.<sup>33</sup>

In *gokudō* journalism, biographical notes on yakuza dons follow rules that are almost as strict as those for depicting an icon in an Eastern Orthodox church. This kind of hagiography also distinguishes between two periods in their life. In their youth and at the beginning of their yakuza life, all of them were allegedly fierce and indomitable fighters, endlessly engaged in tussles and wars, in which, needless to say, they invariably won. As a famous yakuza boss of the post-Second World War era who became an author and actor writes,

What counts in our barbaric world is: who does not kill is going to be killed! The credo of our world is: to win in small and big battles. Seen from the view of the regular society, it must seem stupid, but we fight spilling blood, sweat and lives. It's part of our belief that who-

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33 Pino Arlacchi, *Mafiose Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus: Die unternehmerische Mafia* (Frankfurt a. M.: Cooperative, 1989), 55.

ever repeatedly wins in all kinds of altercations will pave his way to becoming a boss by acquiring face (i. e. a reputation).<sup>34</sup>

The moment they have climbed up the ladder and become a boss, they settle down. Then they are portrayed as strict but just, as chivalrous and warm-hearted, kind and full of foresight; in short, as real men of stature, as entrepreneurs gifted with leadership. They gain the same position as a Capo in the Mafia. In the following quote, recall that »honor« is the preferred term for »reputation« in the Mafia business:

Mafia behaviour was part of a system of culture centred on the theme of honour achieved by means of individual violence. (...) *Mafiosi* became the civil and criminal judges, mediators, protectors, arbitrators, subsuming in themselves many delicate functions normally exercised by the power of the state. Honour transformed itself into authority, and finally into legitimacy. The legitimacy, then, in its turn, turned into a further source of confirmation and amplification of honour.<sup>35</sup>

Analogously, Miyazaki Manabu writes about his father, a local Yakuza boss in Kyōto:

Yakuza in those days were not separate from society, as they are today, and were more integrated into the community. My father was pretty much counted upon by the people in the area (...). In fact, I frequently saw our neighbors pay visits to my father for advice and consultation. On several occasions, I even saw married couples come dashing in while yelling at each other, so he must have acted as a mediator in marital disputes, too. In that sense, he was like the presiding judge of a private neighborhood court.<sup>36</sup>

34 Andō, *Yakuza to kōsō*, 86.

35 Arlacchi, *Mafia*, 112, 113–114.

36 Manabu Miyazaki, *Toppamono: Outlaw, Radical, Suspect. My Life in Japan's Underworld* (Tokyo: Kotan, 2005), 15.

Don Inoue characterized his own boss (in the legal phase) with a formula that is often repeated: would one not have known him to have been a yakuza boss, one could have mistaken him for a regular businessman. For Inoue, he was the charismatic embodiment of *ninkyōdō*, the noble and benevolent way of life that any Yakuza ought to follow. And Inoue's boss was intent on finding a »modern« way to do so: the foundation of companies in trade and construction was part of that. »Become a Yakuza, who pays his taxes!« was an expression he frequently uttered and directed at Inoue.

However, at the beginning of his own career, Don Inoue and his 20 followers tried different trades: work on the docks, construction, gambling, real estate and, finally, in finance. He established himself in the shady grey market of loans and debt collection. Legally, the latter is permitted exclusively to lawyers, but it is a bothersome business and takes a long time with uncertain results. Taken in hand by yakuza, the money comes back for sure, but for a price: *toritate seppan* is the rule of the thumb, whereby half of the retrieved cash goes into the pocket of the collector. When I met Inoue, he insisted that all his economic activities were legal. What he might have meant by this is that he never got caught. And Inoue also insisted that people came to him rather than it being him seeking to do business with them.

The essence of ... various protection services seems to be dispute settlements. The mafiosi themselves view their trade in this way. In the conversation with his Sicilian friends secretly recorded by Canadian police in Montreal, Paul Violi remarked: »Our life consists always of encouraging reason, of fixing things for someone or other. ... When a person comes into conflict with other people and does not know where to turn, he knows that you are there and comes to you ... because he knows that if he comes to you, you can ... [sort out] the situation somehow.«<sup>37</sup>

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37 Gambetta, *Sicilian Mafia*, 169.

Organized crime can be seen as entrepreneurship in economic niches. It purveys goods and services in legal, semi-legal and illegal sectors. And protection is the core business, meaning that any dealings in legal grey zones or illegal zones need a guarantor for fair trade other than the state. This goes for the sex industry, gambling, drug dealing, shady real estate transactions, money lending, and so on. Should a deal go wrong, the police cannot be called on to intervene, as everyone involved might face legal trouble. That is when the *yakuza* come in. And this is their locus in society. Uetaka Ken'ichi describes this as follows:

Civil society is protected and controlled by the police. But many conflicts arise in the demimonde and underworld. In these cases, the help or protection of the police is neither desired nor sufficient. And the cops are much too slow anyway. In all the shady corners of society, it is us who offer protection, aid and quick assistance in solving disputes. From time immemorial, we, men of *ninkyō* [= chivalrous spirit, i. e. *yakuza*], have had an important function in society.<sup>38</sup>

In the advanced stages of one's career as a *yakuza*, he will aspire to be part of the high society: every week, Inoue held a »club« in his apartment in Shinjuku, where businessmen and other regular people came together for good food and a few drinks. No *yakuza* was allowed at this gathering. I was fortunate enough to be invited to this »club« a few times. For more than two decades, Inoue also presided over the »Wednesday club,« which he had initiated and which was a meeting of bosses who had their offices in Shinjuku. This area includes the entertainment district Kabuki-chō and is reputedly the home of more than 20 different *yakuza* syndicates. The gathering served as an exchange of information and the prevention of possi-

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38 Interview on the September 28, 2010. Uetaka is the boss of the Uetaka-gumi, which is affiliated with the Kudō-kai and based in Fukuoka.

ble conflicts (depicted with photos of a dapper Don Inoue, then a member of the executive committee (*shikkōbu*) of the Inagawa-kai in the July 2001 issue of the yakuza fanzine *Jitsuwa jihō*).

Once a reputation is established, things can change: it does not have to be defended at any hint of a challenge. It works in the manner of positive feedback:

Reputation, a »good name,« is an asset of great value which in business commonly refers to the expected quality and reliability of a commodity or dealer and acts as a guide for buyers. Firms enjoying a good reputation are exempt from shouldering the burden of proof in every new transaction and are relatively sheltered from the competitive threats posed by new entrants. (...) As in all businesses, a good reputation attracts customers and keeps competitors at bay. But it does significantly more than that. By far the most striking feature of a mafioso's reputation is that it saves directly on production costs. Car manufacturers benefit from a good reputation, but they still have to produce cars. By contrast, a reputation for credible protection and protection itself tend to be one and the same thing. The more robust reputation of a protection firm, the less the need to have recourse to the resources which support that reputation.<sup>39</sup>

But there is one more reason why a successful boss can keep his hands off dirty business: the *jōnōkin* system, a bottom-up payment scheme. Individuals and gangs on the lower rungs of the hierarchy pay a monthly fee to the higher ranking bosses and their organizations.<sup>40</sup> It works like a franchise system: small gangs that affiliate themselves with big syndicates can use the latter's »brand name« and therefore increase their power and leverage of intimidation.

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39 Gambetta, *Sicilian Mafia*, 43, 44.

40 Hill, *Japanese Mafia*, 90–91.

## Yakuza Power on the Wane: Aging of the Criminal Society and New Young Malffeasants

Nowadays all of these traditional elements of a yakuza career described above hardly appeal to young Japanese: they dislike rigid hierarchies and obedience (the *oyabun-kobun* system), rigorous training while doing menial tasks for little money and having to postpone gratification to some distant future (the *heyazumi* system), stiff etiquette and ritualistic constraints (*girigake*), pain (bodysuit tattoos and *yubitsume*), physical violence, machismo and fighting, and discipline and hardships (imprisonment).

Many of the city-based gangs in particular are finding it harder to recruit new members. With some gangs clearly in financial straits, the yakuza lifestyle is a lot less attractive than it used to be. Joining a yakuza gang can mean hard work and little income, at least for the first few years. As social commentators frequently opine, Japanese youngsters today are less willing to submit to such hardships. Young Japanese men who might once have joined a yakuza gang are now opting for legitimate and more profitable jobs on the periphery of the underworld, as touts, bar hosts, managers of call-girl agencies and massage parlors, or in the pornography industry and the seedier parts of the entertainment industry. Some are establishing gangs of their own and trying to make money from online scams and credit card fraud, or by growing and selling cannabis.<sup>41</sup>

The competition on the criminal market comes from individuals and small groups dubbed »*hangure*« by the veteran yakuza journalist Mizoguchi Atsushi. The term derives from *han* (= half) and *gure-ru* (= go astray). It denotes their unclear status, somewhere between

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41 Andrew Rankin, »21<sup>st</sup>-Century Yakuza: Recent Trends in Organized Crime in Japan—Part 1,« *The Asia Pacific Journal* 10, 7/2 (2012): 3.



straight (= *katagi*) and yakuza. On a related note, after the Second World War, the term *gurentai* was used to designate a new line of yakuza besides the traditional lines of *bakuto* (gamblers) and *tekiya* (peddlers). *Gure* also has the connotation in Japanese of *gurê* (= grey), as in »grey zone.« Hangure<sup>42</sup> are therefore »half-baked racketeers,« not registered as members of a yakuza gang and therefore not the objects of legislative strictures aimed at yakuza. Thus, they can rent apartments or offices, found companies or NPOs, or even go into public construction without restrictions. They are mostly men in their twenties or thirties who share the interest of making quick money with the yakuza. But unlike them, they do not care for reputation or overblown »manliness.« On the contrary, anonymity is best for their business. Direct contact with their clientele is not necessary. Most of it is done via the internet or over a mobile phone.

Since 2013, the police have preferred to call the hangure *jun-bōryokudan* (semi-violent groups) in contrast to the term *bōryokudan* (violent groups) for full-fledged yakuza. These *jun-bōryokudan* readily fill every vacuum that is left by the decline of the power of the yakuza. They run protection-money rackets, invade the sex industry, go into loan sharking and infiltrate showbiz agencies. Thus, they take over traditional yakuza operations<sup>43</sup>.

Hangure are internet-natives who have grown up in the chilly post-bubble, neo-liberalistic atmosphere. For them, there exist only winners and losers in the world. They have witnessed the money games of brokers and failing banks, and they are part of the computer game generation. And they see their fraudulent activities from this perspective: to make maximum profit with minimum stakes as quickly as possible. Hangure operate in small loose cells or individually and are highly specialized. Well dressed, bespectacled, young and calm, they look harmless and intelligent. But they are cold, self-absorbed

42 As with »yakuza«, hangure designates the individual as well as groups and the phenomenon as such.

43 Yukio Yamanouchi, *Nihon Yakuza »zetsumetsu no hi«: Moto Yamaguchi-gumi komon bengoshi ga mita gokudō no jittai* (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 2017), 166.

and nihilistic. They distrust others and have no scruples about defrauding the elderly of their savings. *Ore ore* («It's me, it's me») scams are representative of the dealings of the hangure. Usually, elderly victims are chosen and contacted by telephone. The hangure have researched their victims' circumstances and on the phone they pretend to be their son, nephew or grandchild (*ore* = «I») who, due to some calamity, urgently needs money. In another scenario, they act as police officers, paramedics or lawyers, and present their respective stories: their involvement in an accident, an injury and the resulting hospital costs, or legal disputes regarding divorce and the like. Then they talk their »relatives« into transferring millions of Yen to a bank account that is managed by a hangure. *Furikome sagi* is the overall term for these frauds or embezzlement of investments, because there is always a bank account involved to which money is transferred (*furikome* = »transfer!« and *sagi* = swindle). In 2004, a peak of 25,700 cases came to the attention of the authorities. The damages reached about 28.4 billion Yen.<sup>44</sup> As a sidenote, *furikome sagi* are seen as a dishonorable and impermissible crime in the world of the yakuza<sup>45</sup>.

The victims of the hangure are mostly the socially deprived: elderly people, multiple indebted individuals, persons living on welfare, or the homeless. They are not only targeted for their money, however. They are also useful providers of family registers and names, which are—for a fee—»borrowed« in order to open bank accounts or buy mobile phones. Prepaid phones are often destroyed after a month or sold to other hangure groups because they contain lists of potential »clients.« Other crimes on their portfolio include the embezzling of welfare support, dealing in pharmaceuticals and drugs, investment scams, Ponzi games, illegal gambling, and sex- and porn industry-related crimes. In the latter, hangure manage host clubs, where champagne is served for exorbitant prices. Should the female customers

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44 Atsushi Mizoguchi, *Yakuza hōkai: Shinsboku sareru rokudaike Yamaguchi-gumi* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2011), 118.

45 Yamanouchi, *Yakuza*, 18.

become unable to pay, they are forced into prostitution and made addicted to amphetamines. Here, the hangure enter yakuza turf and often have to pay protection money.

Usually, most hangure shun contact with the yakuza. Those few who do not have such reservations only connect with the higher ranking, smart executive type. They do not want to tap into their resource of intimidation or violence but their connections. Yakuza bosses have contacts with businessmen, company presidents (particularly in construction or real estate), local politicians, accountants and lawyers. The hangure borrow money from these bosses and launch venture businesses in the IT sector, run dating services, or manage casinos (both real ones in secret locations or virtual ones on the internet). The loans generally amount to 10 million Yen upwards, and the interest rate is about 10%. The yakuza can supervise the business, and should it turn out to be lucrative, they become partners (in crime). Yakuza can also thereby extend their antennas into new types of money-making. Police call such business partners or people in the periphery of the yakuza who profit from them *kyōseisha* (»people living in symbiosis«). This is another unnecessary and meaningless term coined by the police, opines Mizoguchi Atsushi. He also remarks that the police are so strongly focussed on the yakuza that they are blind to the fact of newly emerging criminal groups like the hangure.<sup>46</sup> But hangure progressively occupy niches in the black economy that formerly would have belonged to the yakuza. When I met Atsushi on January 14, 2011 in Tokyo, one of my first questions was: »What do you think about the future of the yakuza?« He looked at me rather quizzically and wryly remarked: »Do they have one?«

A look at the demographics of the yakuza shows how much they are on the decline. They experience an over-aging that is far more pronounced than that of the overall population. According to police data, almost three-quarters of the officially registered yakuza were over 40 years old in 2015, and slightly more than 40% were over 50. Mem-

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46 Mizoguchi, *Yakuza hōkai*, 164–165.

bers in their twenties fell from 10.7% in 2006 to 5.1% in 2015. The yakuza have a severe shortage of new recruits. Its overall membership fell from 86,300 in 2005 to 53,500 in 2014. In the latter year, almost 60% were associate members, whereas ten years earlier, full members exceeded the number of associates.<sup>47</sup> Since 2019 the overall membership of the Yakuza has dropped below 30.000. These figures alone illustrate that the yakuza are on the road to extinction.

After decades of *laissez-faire* attitudes, the police and judiciary have shifted to a policy of harsh repression of organized crime. Stiff legislation aimed at the yakuza was implemented in 1992.<sup>48</sup> It underwent restrictive revisions several times, culminating in 2004 in a clause that can make bosses liable for perpetrations and damages inflicted by their underlings. The anti-yakuza laws are flanked by regional ordinances that came into effect in all prefectures in 2011. They interdict practically any contact between yakuza and ordinary citizens. In 2009, banks declared that they were declining any business with yakuza. They were followed in 2010 by construction contractors, security dealers, real estate agents, life insurance providers and commercial broadcasters, who announced via their national associations that they were severing any ties with the yakuza. This concerted isolation strategy meant a huge loss in business and clientele for the yakuza.

Economic hardship was also said to be one of the main reasons for a schism in the biggest syndicate, the Yamaguchi-gumi. Prior to its split, it comprised almost half of the yakuza population. On August 27, 2015, 13 high-ranking bosses declared their secession from the mother organization and established a new gang: the Kobe Yamaguchi-gumi. Besides internal power struggles, long-lasting misgivings about the amount of the franchise fee that has to be paid monthly to the upper echelon of the syndicate led to the partition. Many of

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47 KKI/KC, eds., *Keisatsu hakusho. Tokushū: Soshiki hanzai taisaku no ayumi to tenbō* (Tokyo: Nikkei insatsu, 2015), 2–3

48 Wolfgang Herbert, »The Yakuza and the Law,« in *Globalization and Social Change in Contemporary Japan*, ed. J.D. Eades, Tom Gill and Harumi Befu (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2000), 143–158.

the lower-ranking bosses simply could not afford their »membership fee« anymore.<sup>49</sup> On April 30, 2017, another group split away from the newly formed gang, naming itself Ninkyō Yamaguchi-gumi. Conflicts and tussles over turf and shares in the underworld economy ensued. This only led to bad press and further repressive actions by the police. It has made the yakuza look like a dinosaur engaged in self-laceration. As the title of the new book of the former consigliere and lawyer of the Yamaguchi-gumi, Yamanouchi Yukio, suggests, the day of the extinction of the Japanese Yakuza (*Nihon Yakuza no »zetsu-umetsu no hi«*) may not be so far away.

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49 For a backdrop, see Wolfgang Herbert, »Sezession, Rezession and Transformation. Umbruch in der Welt der Yakuza,« in *Japan 2016: Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, ed. David Chiavacchi and Iris Wiczorek (Munich: Iudicium, 2016), 258–283.

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