

**Course No. 3507/3508**

**Contemporary Japanese  
Culture and Society**

# Lecture No. 15

## Gambling ギャンブル・賭博

# **GAMBLING**

*... a national obsession.*

***Gambling fascinates, because it is a dramatized model of life. As people make their way through life, they have to make countless decisions, big and small, life-changing and trivial. In gambling, those decisions are reduced to a single type – an attempt to predict the outcome of an event. Real-life decisions often have no clear outcome; few that can clearly be called right or wrong, many that fall in the grey zone where the outcome is unclear, unimportant, or unknown. Gambling decisions have a clear outcome in success or failure: it is a black and white world where the grey of everyday life is left behind.***

**As a simplified and dramatized model of life, gambling fascinates the social scientist as well as the gambler himself. Can the decisions made by the gambler offer us a short-cut to understanding the character of the individual, and perhaps even the collective? Gambling by its nature generates concrete, quantitative data. Do people reveal their inner character through their gambling behavior, or are they different people when gambling? In this paper I will consider these issues in relation to gambling on powerboat races (*kyōtei*) in Japan.**

# Part 1: Institutional framework

Gambling is supposed to be illegal in Japan, under article 23 of the Penal Code, which prescribes up to three years with hard labor for any “habitual gambler,” and three months to five years with hard labor for anyone running a gambling establishment.

*Gambling is unambiguously defined as both immoral and illegal.*

# State hypocrisy

*Yet a series of laws passed over the years allow the state to ignore its own moralistic prescriptions.*

# **Postwar institutionalization**

**Horseracing gambling legalized in 1948  
(Ministry of Agriculture)**

**Bicycle racing, also 1948 (Ministry of  
International Trade and Industry)**

**Car/motorbike racing, 1950 (also MITI)**

**Motorboat Race Law, June 1951 (Ministry  
of Transport)**

**(Takarakuji lottery, also 1948)**

# Official objective:

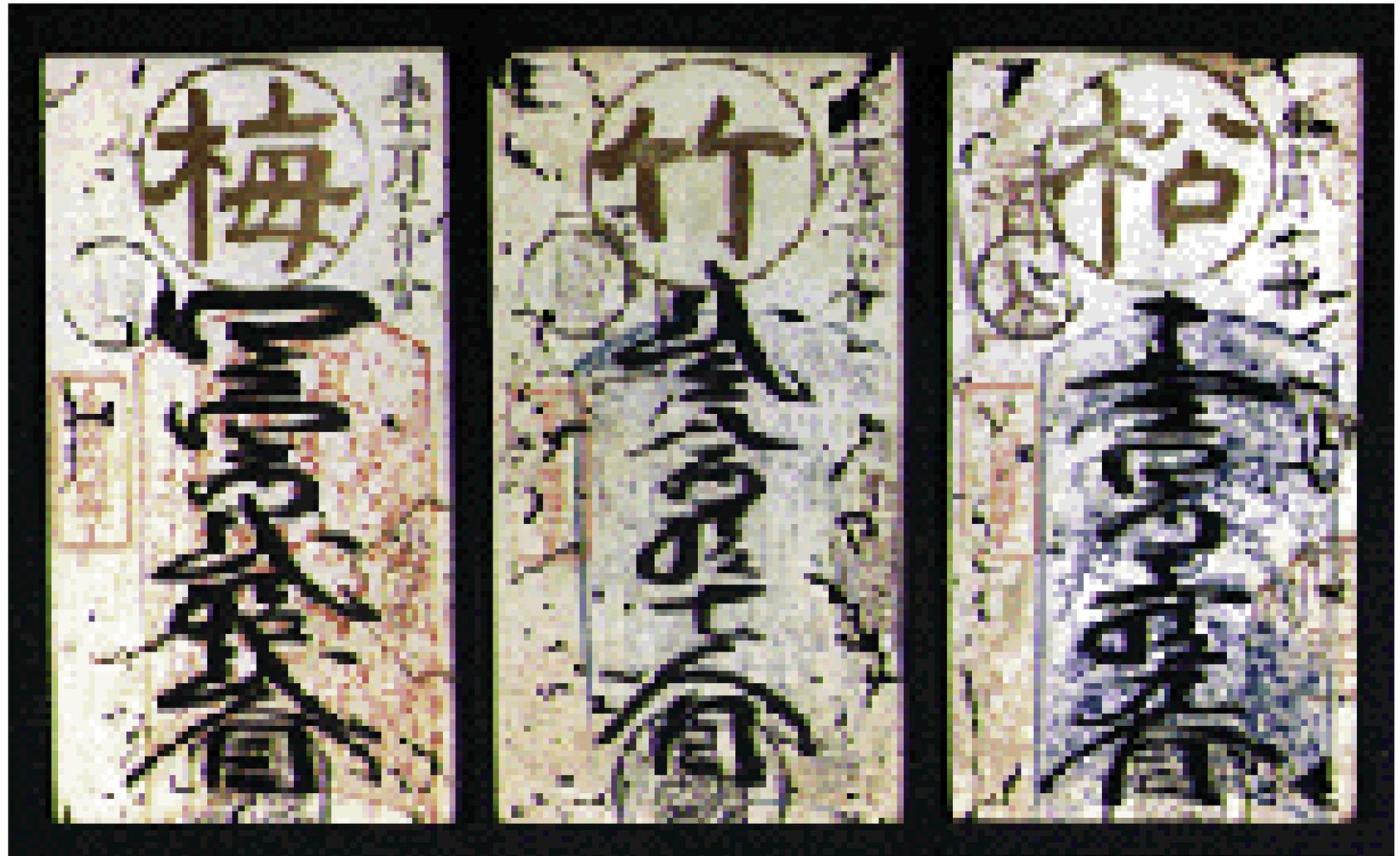
To help fund the reconstruction of infrastructure and industry in war-shattered Japan.

Sixty years later, that objective has undoubtedly been achieved... yet the state continues to sponsor an activity it describes as immoral and illegal...  
*leading to a certain uneasiness.*

# *Takarakuji* 宝くじ – The ‘Treasure Lottery’



# Edo era (?) lottery tickets



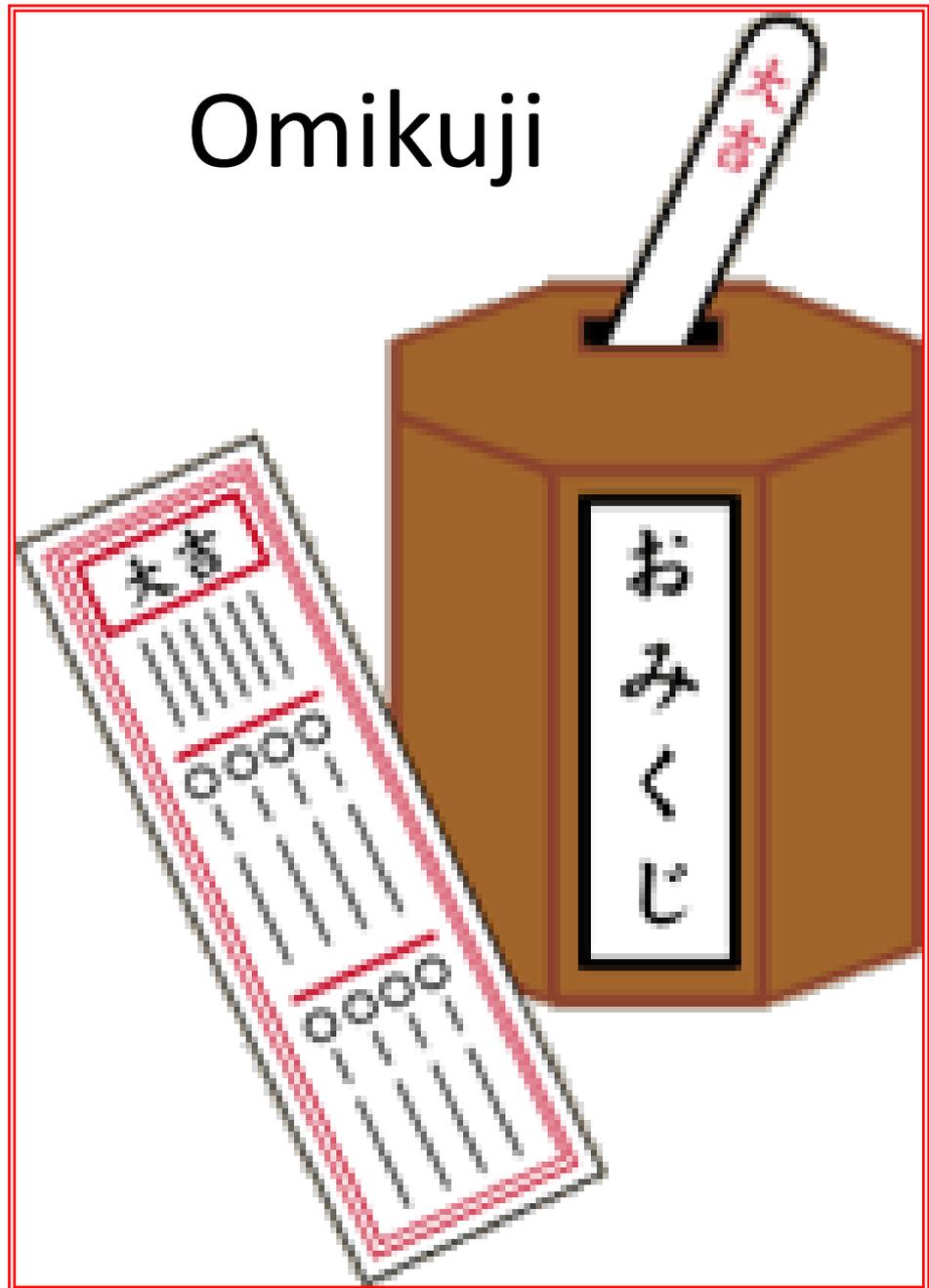
# Religious origins

Lotteries have a history of over 2,000 years in Europe (they were played in ancient Rome)... and about 400 years in Japan.

The first Japanese lotteries were conducted in temples (Ryoanji temple 瀧安寺 in Osaka was probably the very first).

Originally a variation on the omikuji おみくじ, fortune-telling lottery. At first the prize was a lucky talisman (omamori お守り), but soon money prizes arrived.

**Buddhist temples have a long and close association with gambling. The word 'terasen' (寺銭) is still used today to mean the 'house cut' in a gambling game...**



# Ambiguous attitudes...

Encouraged in the early-middle Tokugawa era (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) as a means of raising funds for the upkeep of temples... banned in 1842, banned even more severely in 1868 after the Meiji Restoration... but the ban was lifted in October 1945, and the first government lottery launched to raise money for rebuilding the war-shattered economy. Now a major revenue source.

# Kind of stingy? ちょっとケチ？

**The top 'Jumbo' prize was only raised to 100 million yen as recently as 1996 (in a special lottery to support victims of the 1995 Kobe Earthquake). The highest prize ever was 400 million yen in a lotto game in 2000... very exceptional.**

**Biggest win in UK national lottery: 22.6 million pounds (4,500 million yen... 10 times more). Hundreds of wins over the Japan record.**

# Bigger Jumbos?

The Takurakuji operator often announces record-breaking pay-out lotteries. But they are records in the sense that there are more 100 million yen prizes than ever. They still won't raise the top prize beyond 100 million yen.

*But there is a way to win more!*

The top prize wins 100 million yen, but the two numbers immediately before and after win 50 million yen. So if you buy a series of tickets, you could win  $50 + 100 + 50 = 200$  million yen.

# Lottery tickets sold in lots...

**... most people buy at least ten tickets. One ticket is 300 yen, so you pay 3,000 yen and get a smart sealed envelope with ten tickets. There are two kinds of lot: “bara” and “renban”. Renban lots have consecutive numbers: so if you are lucky enough to buy a renban envelope with the jumbo number, you will win at least 1, usually 2 semi-jumbos.**

**On the other hand, if the first ticket is nowhere near the winning number, there's no need to bother looking at the other nine – they will all be losers too. The bara envelopes have tickets not in order, so you still have 9 more chances of hitting the jumbo.**

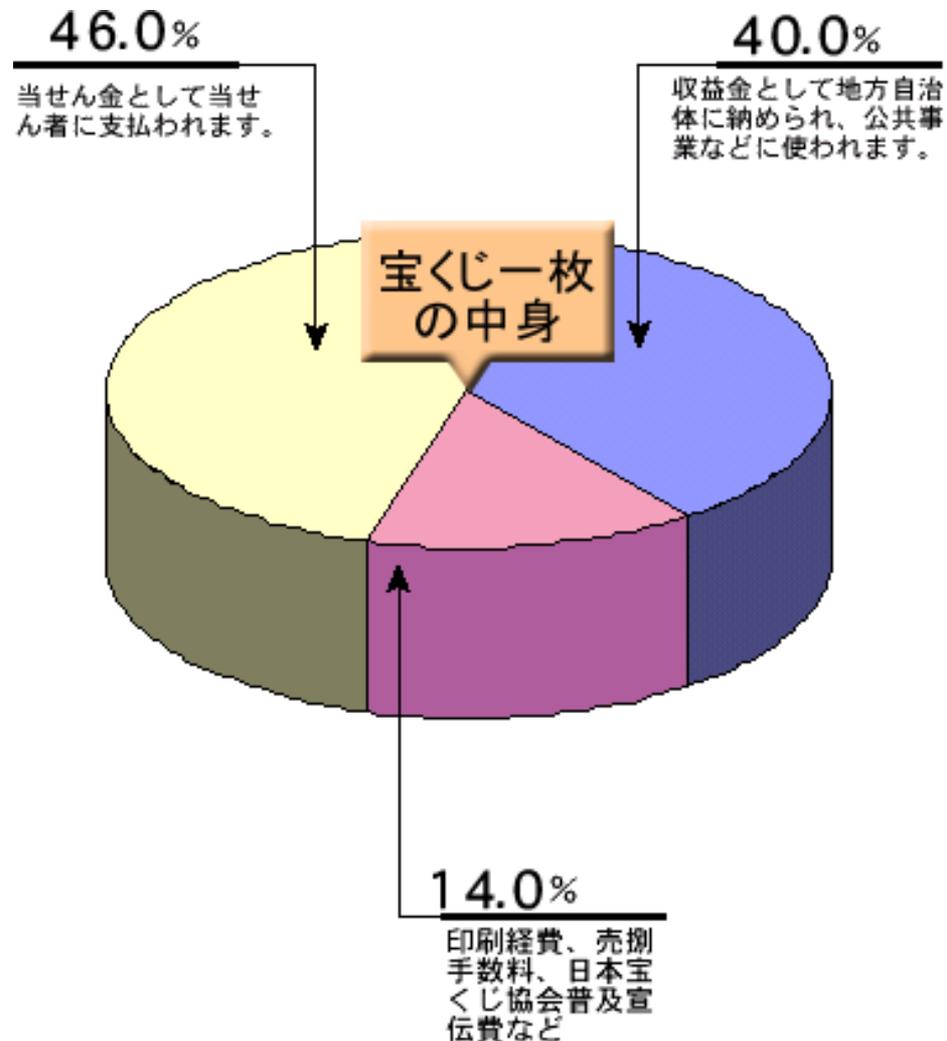
**Not in order – but not exactly random either.**

# **A little something for all**

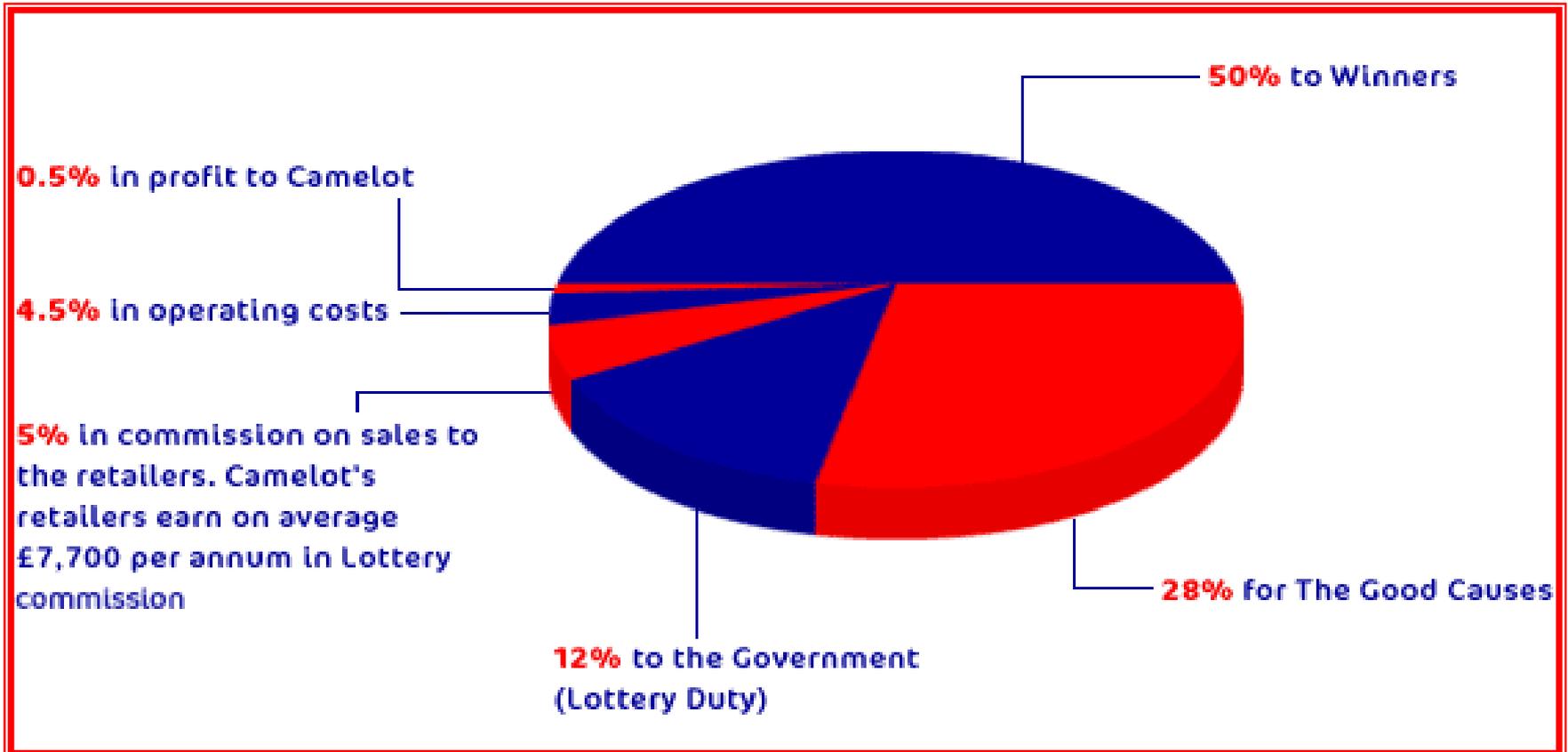
**The ten tickets in a bara envelope include one each ending with the digits 0,1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. The lowest prize in the takarakuji is 300 yen, payable to all tickets with the right single last digit.**

**That means all sets of ten tickets include at least one tiny little win... although the other 9 will not have a chance of that tiny little win.**

46% prizes,  
40% public  
works etc., 14%  
admin



# UK: winners get 50%, gov't + 'good causes' 40%, admin 10%



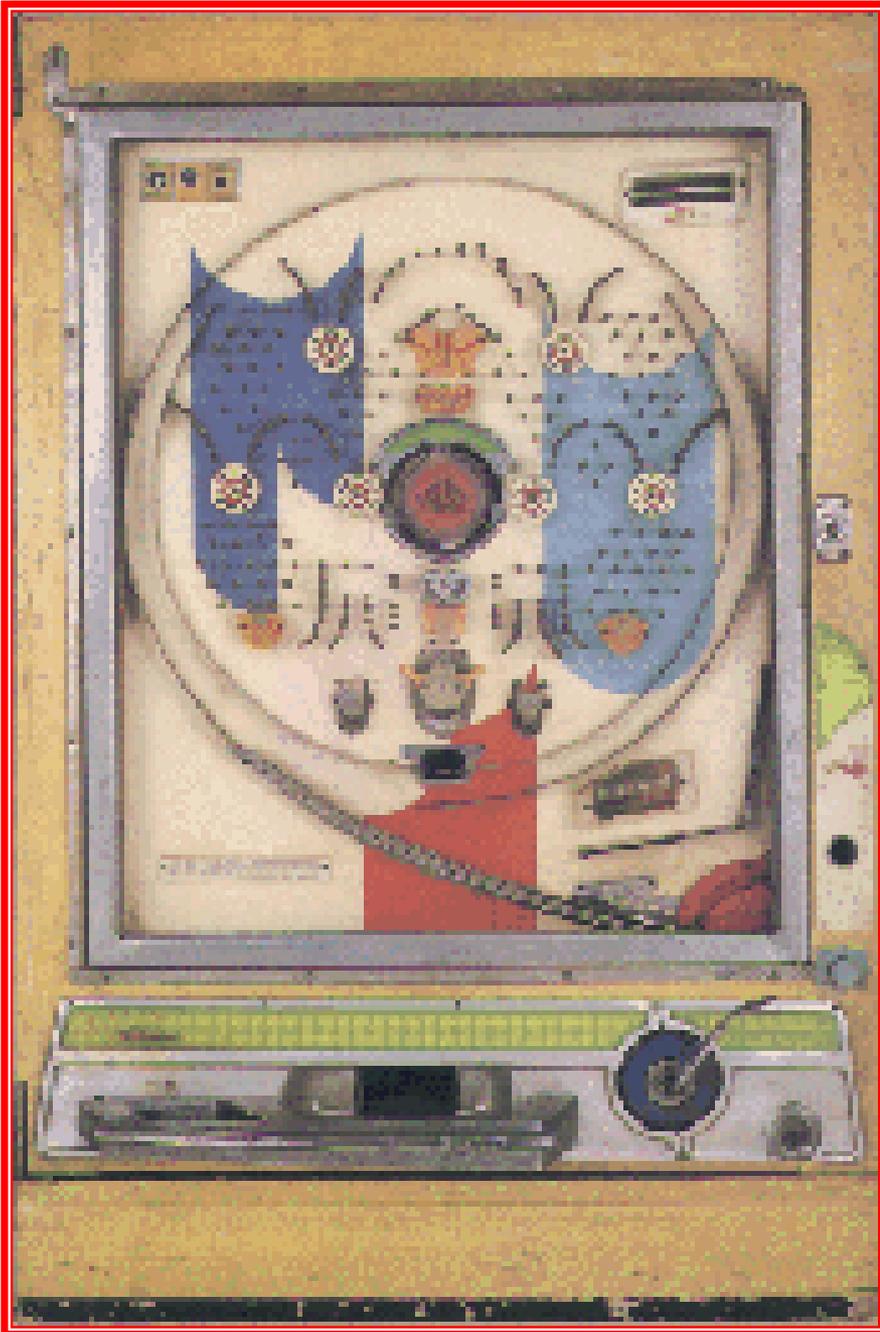


The Takarakuji  
mascot: a  
whale called  
Gu-chan

宝くじのマス  
コット、グー  
チャン

## Gambling (2)

**PACHINKO**



**Early pachinko  
table... an  
upright  
bagatelle. Note  
the manual  
firing device**

**1970s  
style**



***Sammy Co.'s Fire  
Illusion: A  
contemporary,  
highly  
computerized  
pachinko game***



***Olympia Co.'s  
Magic Monster: a  
modern  
'pachisuro'  
machine. The  
word combines  
'pachinko' and  
'slot machine' but  
it's more like the  
latter.***



# The amusement sector of the Japanese economy

Type of amusement	Businesses	Employees (A)	Annual income (B)	A/B Income per employee
Movie theatres	955	14,000	¥265 billion	¥18.9 million
Golf courses	2,878	192,000	¥1,592 billion	¥8.3 million
Mahjong salons	12,735	38,000	¥168 billion	¥4.4 million
Parks / recreation grounds	1,010	59,000	¥709 billion	¥12.0 million
<b>PACHINKO PARLORS</b>	<b>15,433</b>	<b>337,000</b>	<b>¥28,469 BILLION</b>	<b>¥84.5 million</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>68,867</b>	<b>1,032,000</b>	<b>38,481 billion</b>	<b>¥37.3 million</b>

**Source: *Asahi Shinbun Japan Almanac 2002.***

**Figures as of November 1999.**

# From which we may deduce that:

1. Pachinko alone accounts for **74%** of all amusement spending in Japan.
2. The average Japanese person (including children) spends **¥30,000** a year on pachinko.
3. Japanese people spend **100** times more on pachinko than on movies and nearly **20** times more than on golf... though Japanese love of golf and cinema are famous.
4. Pachinko parlors are **4.5** times as profitable as movie theatres and **10** times as profitable as golf courses.

FY2001 Defense Budget of Japan:

**¥4,939 billion**

FY1999 Pachinko spending in Japan:

**¥28,469 billion**

2011 data

12,323 pachinko halls

4.6 million machines



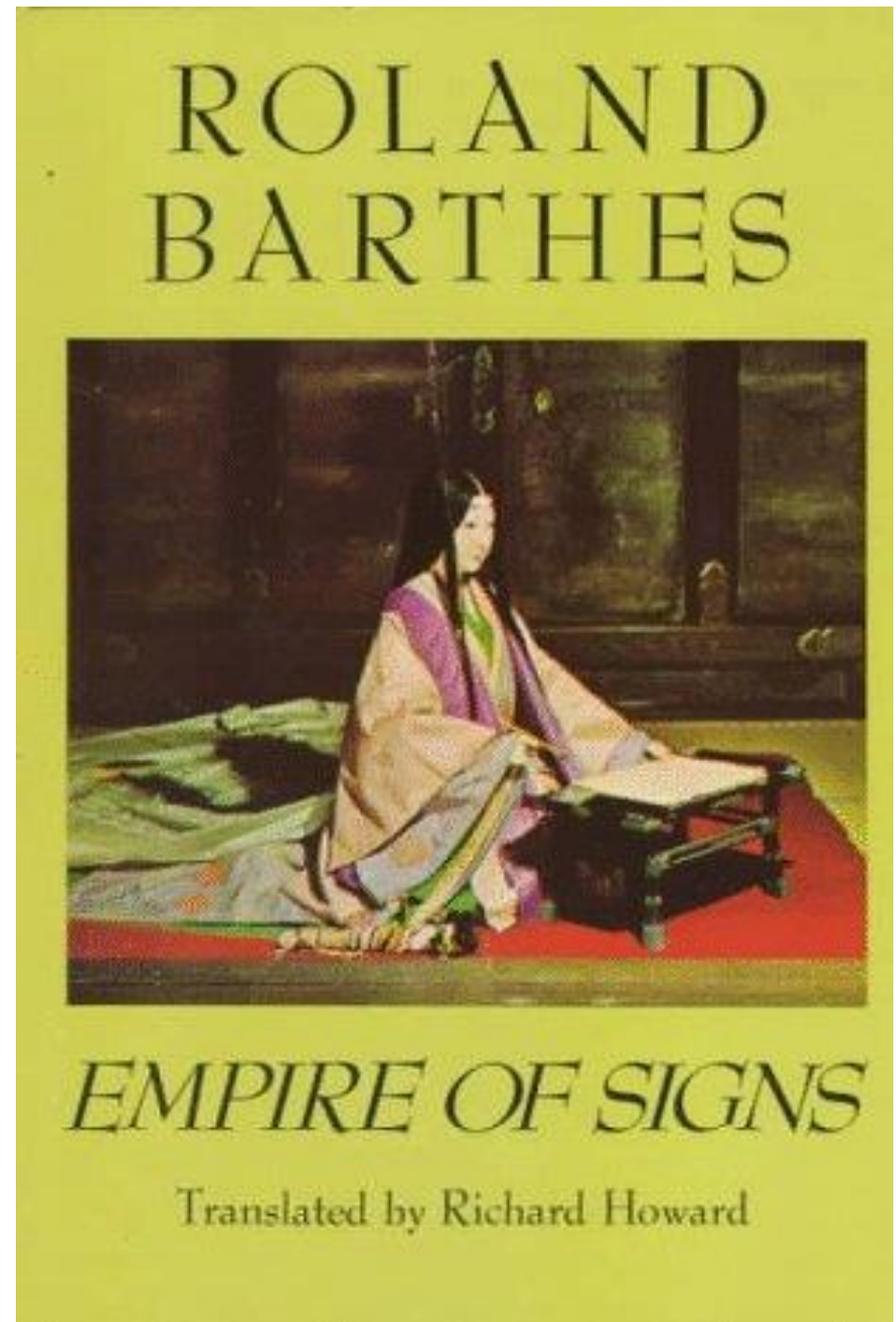
So pachinko is a huge  
phenomenon... a license to print  
money.

*Why?*

***“The parlor is a hive or a factory - the players seem to be working on an assembly line.”***



**Quotation from  
*Empire of Signs*,  
by Roland  
Barthes (1971)  
*L'Empire des  
signes* (1970),  
『表徴の帝国』ロ  
ラン・バルト,  
1974年**





**Roland  
Barthes,  
1915  
to 1980**

**“The pachinko is a collective and solitary game. The machines are set up in long rows; each player standing in front of his panel plays for himself, without looking at his neighbor, whom he nonetheless brushes with his elbow. You hear only the balls whirring through their channels (the rate of insertion is very rapid); the parlor is a hive or a factory - the players seem to be working on an assembly line. The imperious meaning of the scene is that of a deliberate, absorbing labor....”**

## From factory to factory farm, Barthes switches metaphors

**“The machines are mangers (かいばおけ, まぐさおけ), lined up in rows; the player... feeds the machines with his metal marbles; he stuffs them in, the way you would stuff a goose; from time to time the machine, filled to capacity, releases its diarrhea of marbles; for a few yen, the player is symbolically spattered with money.”**

Something sexual and political in pachinko...

**“Here we understand the seriousness of a game which counters the constipated parsimony of salaries, the constriction of capitalist wealth, with the voluptuous debacle of silver balls, which, all of a sudden, fill the player’s hand.”**

**Roland Barthes, Empire of Signs, pp.27-29.**

# But the appeal doesn't travel

Other aspects of Japanese popular culture – judo, karate, karaoke, sushi, Pokemon etc. – have proved very popular abroad. Yet all attempts to transplant pachinko to other countries have failed miserably. For once, we can safely say that this really is “unique to Japan.”

**Atsushi Kubota – a  
'*pachi-puro*'  
(professional  
pachinko gambler)**

**久保田 篤(くぼた  
あつし)、パチプロ**



# How to win at pachinko

- 1. Bet with the streak**
- 2. Bet against the streak**
- 3. Watch the nails**
- 4. Cheat... electronic devices etc.**
- 5. Sweet-talk the management**
- 6. Get lucky?**

# “Generous Nails Corner”



# Lucky balls on a key ring





A book on how to overcome 'pachinko dependence syndrome.'

# Mah-jongg



A friendly game of mahjongg (*mâjan*)

麻雀 マージャン



# A Mahjongg Club



# **An obsessive game...**

**... people play it all night long. Like pachinko, it has also spawned a huge literature of novels and manga.**

**But it is a more sociable game than pachinko. Your opponent is a human being, not a machine. And of all the forms of gambling popular in Japan, this entails the most skill and the least luck.**

# Race betting

**Keiba (horse racing)**

**Keirin (Bicycle racing)**

**Kyotei (Powerboat racing)**

**... the “three Ks” of race betting**

There are 50 cycling tracks in Japan

**The nearest ones to here are at  
Kawasaki and Hiratsuka.**

**レーストラックは50ヶ所。近いのは川  
崎、平塚**

# Powerboats Kyotei 競艇



**On April 1, 2010, the official name was changed was *kyōtei* to *bōtorēsu* (boat race), in a feeble attempt to improve the sport's image.**

***... an interesting example of what I call the “uneasiness” or “restlessness” of this enterprise.***

**In this presentation I will argue that restlessness/uneasiness pervades both the organization of powerboat racing in Japan, and the mindset of the people who gamble on it.**

# Powerboat racing objective:

**“Projects related to motorboat development and other kinds of shipbuilding, the dissemination of maritime thinking, tourism enterprises, promotion of public interest projects in the field of physical education etc., and strengthening of regional finances.”**

# ***Dissemination of maritime thinking??***

***Kaiji shisō no fukyū***; it sounds just as odd in Japanese as in English, but in practice involves publishing books and periodicals about shipping, fishing, maritime environment etc.

**But the real key is “strengthening of regional finances.” In 60 years, public gambling has become embedded in regional public finance.**

**A hefty tax**

**25%** (Very high by  
international standards)

***Even so, many tracks are now operating at a loss, as gambling spending has declined.***

- 1. Incompetent management – industry riddled with *amakudari* appointments from supervising ministries etc.**
- 2. Makes the rationale for continued existence of many tracks even more unclear – they are now draining money from public purse.**

**¥1 trillion = \$12 billion = £8 billion**

- **From modest beginnings, *kyōtei* grew rapidly from the late 1960s until 1991, and from 1972 to 1983 it outstripped the nationally run horse races to be the biggest form of race gambling in Japan. But it went into decline after the Bubble Economy burst: after peaking at ¥2.21 trillion in 1991, sales declined to ¥0.97 trillion by 2005 – a 56% decline. By 2009 sales had dipped to ¥0.94 trillion.**

# Gambling capital of world?

**Japan: (2005) ¥3.26 trillion on horse-racing, ¥0.88 trillion on bicycle racing, ¥0.11 trillion on motorbike racing. Total spend on race gambling **¥5.22 trillion**.**

**UK: (2008-9) in FY2008-9 spent roughly £7.16 billion on horseracing bets and £1.72 billion on dog racing. Total: £9 billion or about **¥1.2 trillion** at £1 = ¥135. Even allowing for Japan having roughly double the UK population, that still shows Japan with about double the amount spent on race betting per capita.**

**US (2007) Gross revenues from gambling (including casinos, lotteries etc) were \$92.27 billion in 2007, which at \$1 = ¥90 is about **¥8 trillion** for a population 2.5 times the size of Japan's.**

**By global standards Japan seems to have a very high propensity to gamble – and that is before one even considers the **¥23 trillion** spent on pachinko in 2008, which dwarfs all other kinds of gambling in Japan and the world. And this in a country known for its high *savings* rate.**

# **Moral ambiguity: The Nara case**

**A scandal occurred in Nara prefecture in 2002, when the prefectural government newsletter carried, for the first time ever, a brief announcement of race days at the local velodrome. The government was widely accused of corrupting public morals by advertising gambling in an official publication, though it had been quietly running the race track for 52 years.**

# So...

**It is OK (sort of) to operate a race track, but not OK to advertise the fact.**

***I call that an uneasy compromise.***

# **Another uneasy compromise**

**Heiwajima boat stadium in Tokyo's Ōta ward is not run by the Tokyo city government. It is run by the city of Fuchū, about 30 miles away on the western outskirts of Tokyo, nowhere near Heiwajima. This stems from the 1969 decision by Tokyo's famous left-wing governor (1967-1979), Ryōkichi Minobe, to abolish all forms of municipal gambling, which he viewed as immoral and as a tax on the poor.**

***So you can gamble in Tokyo, but the city government keeps its hands clean.***

## ***And another in Yokohama***

**The Boatopia off-course powerboat betting center, a smart five-story citadel of gambling, opened in December 2007 in Ōgi-chō, right next door to Kotobuki-chō, Yokohama's main skid-row district. The men who live there, most of them on welfare, include many habitual gamblers. A cynic might compare this project to constructing a cocaine shop next door to a town full of cocaine addicts.**



**Boatopia**

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**Let's Try!**

**Image of Boatopia  
customers...  
actually most are  
working-class men**



やった!  
当たったよ!



次もがんばるぞ!

## **Also run by Fuchu city...**

**... which you may know is home of Fuchu racecourse, the biggest race course in Japan. Ironically, that course is NOT run by the city of Fuchu but by the Japan Racing Association (Chuo Keiba). Nor does Fuchu run the Tamagawa boat race stadium, which is actually *in* Fuchū – that is run by the city of Ōme, some 25 kilometers further along the Tama river.**

**This is murky, morally compromised territory. For the purposes of the present paper, I have merely sketched it in to give an idea of the sociocultural environment in which powerboat gambling takes place.**

**PART 2**

**PHOTO-ESSAY**

信一郎

赤い彗星  
AKAIWA

全国制覇 海野ゆかり



RAIWA  
HEIWAJIMA  
PACHINKO

PEPSI

HEIWAJIMA  
PACHINKO

HEIWAJIMA  
PACHINKO

BIG FUN

CINEMA  
7

RAIWA  
HEIWAJIMA  
PACHINKO

シネマ7  
サンシャイン

GAME PANIC  
TOKYO

RIG  
HEIWAJIMA  
PACHINKO SLOT

激安の殿堂  
ドンキホーラ

ライト#パツゴ  
RIG

HEIWAJIMA

ク 2 ア ハ ウ ス



スタート表示

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心配な裏目ナシ



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# 2-rentan, 3-rentan



# 投票所

第45回 総理大臣杯

3304 (徳島)

**烏野 賢太**

KENTA UNO

★ 一般戦優勝回数 5回



第45回 総理大臣杯

3256 (行方)

**三角 哲男**

TEISUO MISUMI

★ 一般戦優勝回数 7回



第45回 総理大臣杯

3081

**岡本 慎**

SHINJI OKAMOTO

★ 一般戦優勝回数 3回



# ご 注 意

- ノミ屋は法律で禁止されています。購入された方も違法行為として罰せられます。
- ダフ屋は法律で禁止されています。
- コーチ屋の入場は固くお断りしております。被害に合わないよう十分にご注意ください。
- 場内で許可なく物品の販売、広告物の配布及び写真撮影等の行為を禁止します。
- 未成年者の舟券購入は、法律で禁止されています。



強艦乱闘

2015年3月17日 第45回  
SG 総理大臣杯

3/17-18-19-20-21-22  
wed thu fri sat sun mon

NEW WORLD BOAT RACE

6

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4

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1

Panasonic

平和基 11R 準備開始

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥

3/17-18-19-20

祝儀大賞杯

新地プラザ

筑 今垣光











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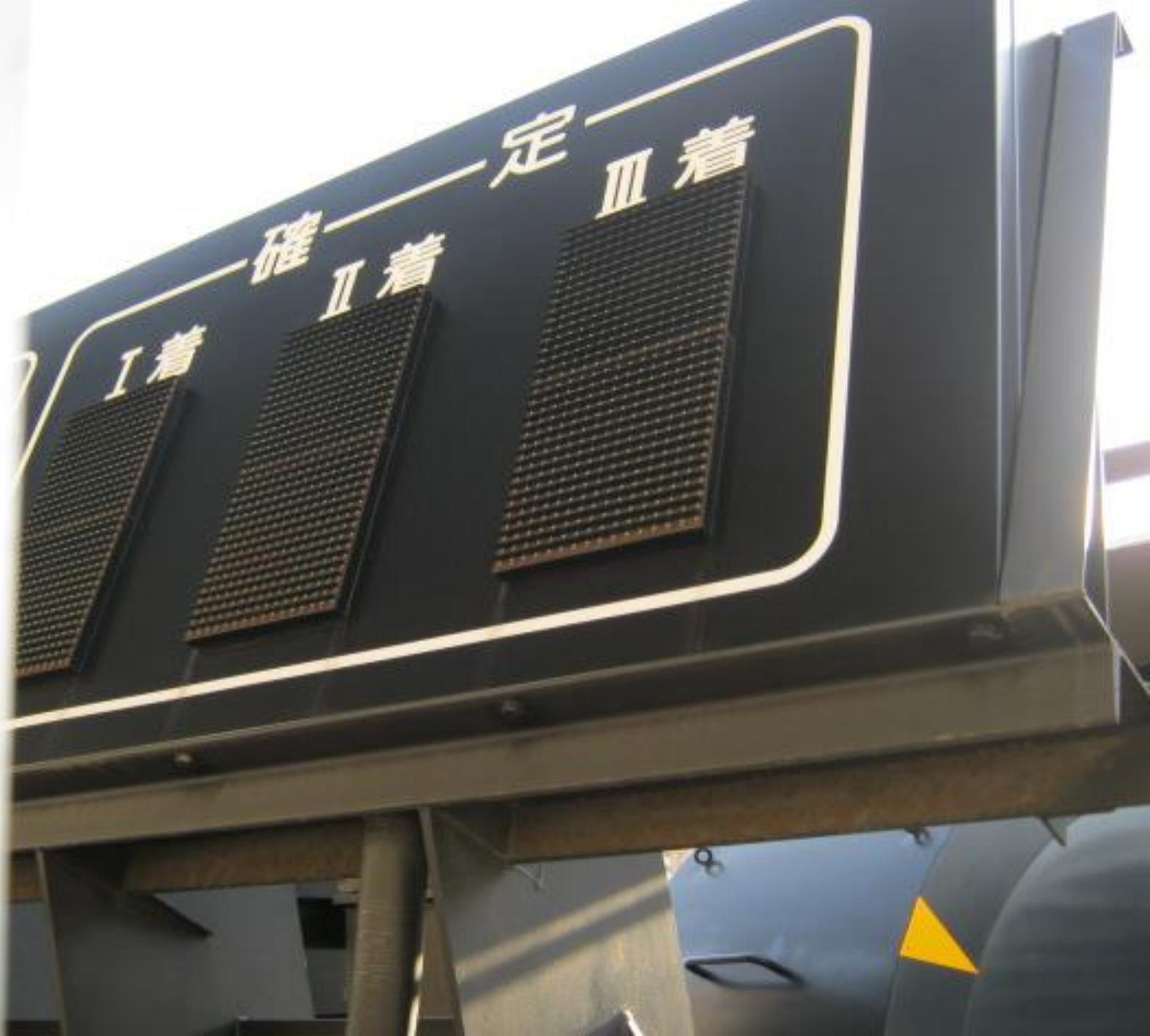


2



1





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II 着

定

III 着





# **Part 3: Some features of Kyotei**

**Compared with other kinds of racing, relatively little emphasis on brute strength. Instead, skill, nerve, technical ability are stressed.**

**So women have a chance, and about 10% of pro racers are women.**

**Age does not matter much either, and there are many racers in their 50s and a few in their 60s.**

6号組		5号組		4号組		3号組		2号組		1号組	
											
3894		4178		4282		3704		3801		3618	
池田 明美	静岡	井口 真弓	三重	中西 裕子	東京	西村 めぐみ	三重	五反田 忍	大阪	海野 ゆかり	広島
	32歳		25歳		24歳		34歳		34歳		34歳
	47.8		47.0		50.6		46.5		47.5		46.5
A2	A2	B1	B1	B1	B1	A1					

**This is an all-women race, but the best will race with the men.**

58.4	13.9	19.1	37.7	40.7	42.6
------	------	------	------	------	------



# Kanae Yokonishi 横西奏恵

“Japan’s strongest  
single mother”





**Akira Mantani**  
**万谷章 66**



**Shunji Kato**  
**加藤俊二 68**

**Boats and engines are standard, owned by the JMRA, and allocated by lottery**



***Engines are kept for a season, and some are thought better than others***



***Only the  
propeller,  
spark plugs  
and helmet  
belong to  
the racer.***

**Racers must  
do their own  
maintenance  
and tuning  
(not like F1  
drivers...)**



# Class of punters

- Boats and bikes – admission 100 yen [c. 70p]
- A cheap day out if you do not gamble
- Popular sanctuaries for homeless men
- 2006 survey of 1,379 men and women over 20:
  - 58.2% had gambled in the last year. Of those:
    - 75.1% had bought a lottery ticket
    - 39.7% had played pachinko,
    - 5.7% had bet on horse-racing
    - 3.1% on bicycle racing
    - 2.4% on power boats (CRS 2006: 1). *Bicycle and boat gamblers appear as a relatively small fringe element of Japanese society.*

# Gender of punters

**2006 survey found 51.3% of women said they had never gambled, against 31.2% of men.**

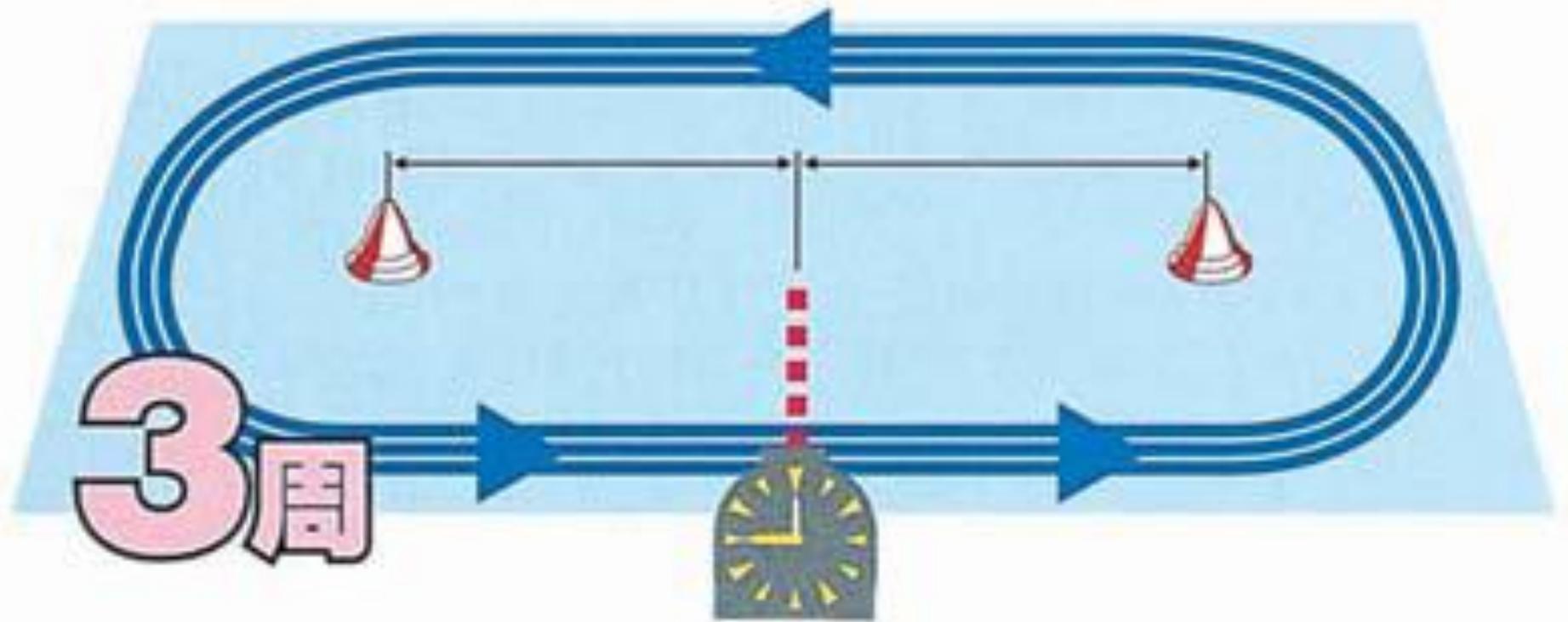
**But that is far more pronounced at boat races, and even more so at off-course betting centers...**

***... it is almost exclusively a man's world.***

# Battle of Six



# The course



# #1 boat wins 40% of races

**Many races are effectively decided at the start line, and the majority are won by the boat that gets round the first turn in first place. Very often that boat will then lead the others round the remaining 2.5 circuits, in a pattern called a *nige*, or 'escape.' Once a boat has established a lead, it is very difficult for others to overtake, because (a) the lead boat can take the inside course at every turn, reducing the distance it has to travel compared to the others; and (b) the pursuing boats will have their progress impeded by the wake from the lead boat.**

**I analyzed the results of 1,392 boat races held from July 12 to 21, 2010. The winning percentage for each lane were: (1) 40.4%, (2) 15.8%, (3) 14.9%, (4) 15.6%, (5) 9.3%, (6) 4.1%.**

**Typically, boats #1 to #3 start on the inside, lining up closer to the start line than boats #4 to #6, which start further back. This is because the inside boats need to make a slow start (*surō*) to avoid overshooting the marker buoy at the turn, while the outer boats need to start with a dash (*dasshu*) as their wider course means they have a greater distance to cover. The #4 lane, as the “innermost of the outside boats” is favored by some racers, and this position is called “the corner” (*kado*). My data in note 9 shows boat #4 doing marginally better than boats #2 and #3 inside it.**

***Makuri*** (wind-round; the winning boat overtakes from the outside)

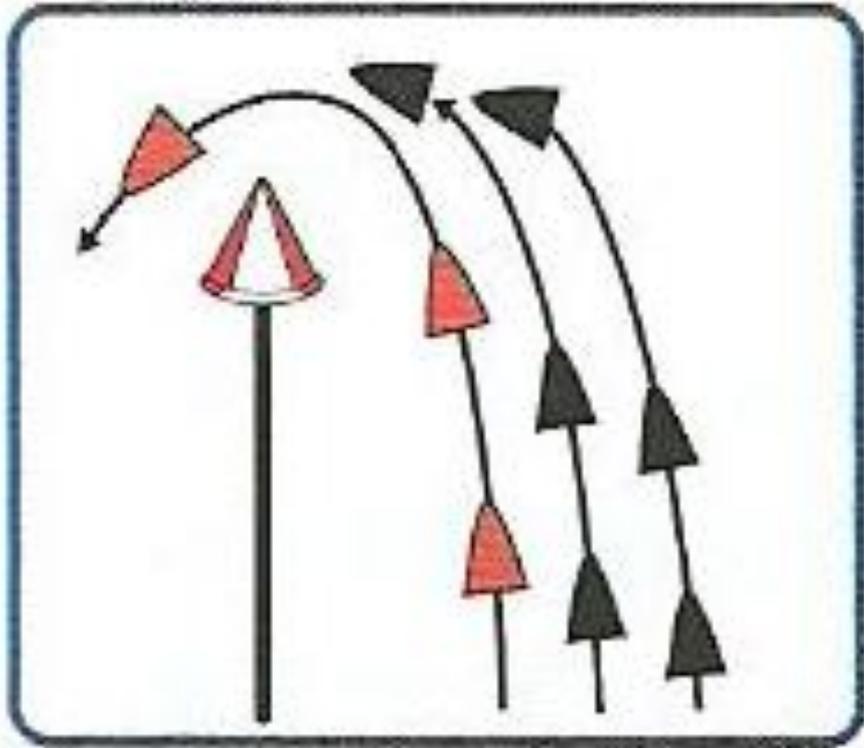
***Sashi*** (stab; outside boat slips inside lead boat at the turn)

***Makuri-kaeshi*** (wind-and-return; the winner goes around the outside of following boats, then slips inside the lead boat; very difficult);

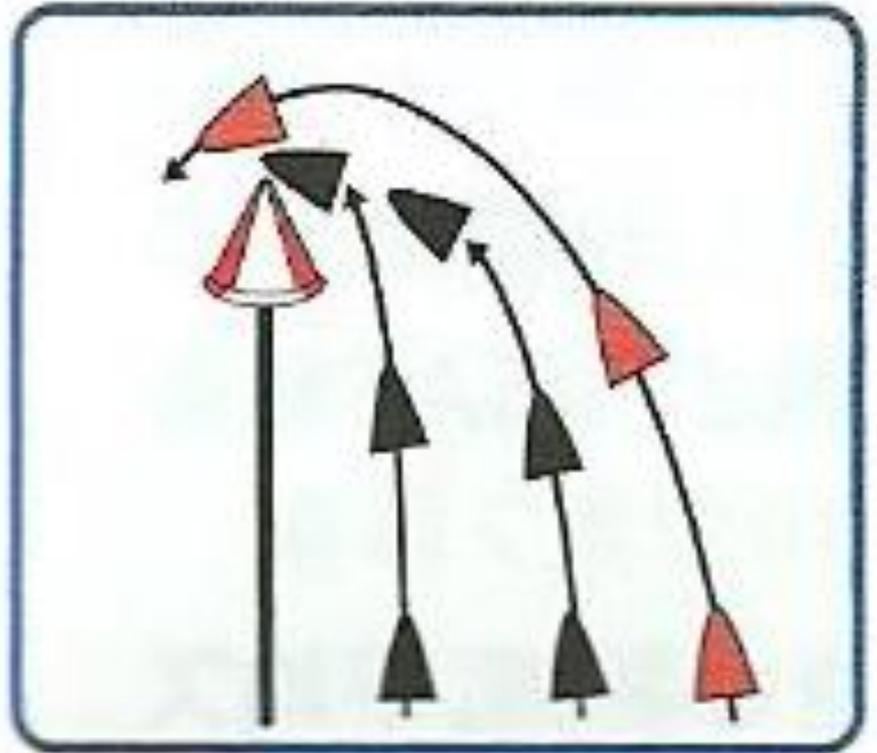
***Nuki*** (lead boat is overtaken on the final circuit);

***Megumare*** (blessing; one or more boats are disqualified and a lower-placed boat gets the win).

# *In-nige* and *Makuri*

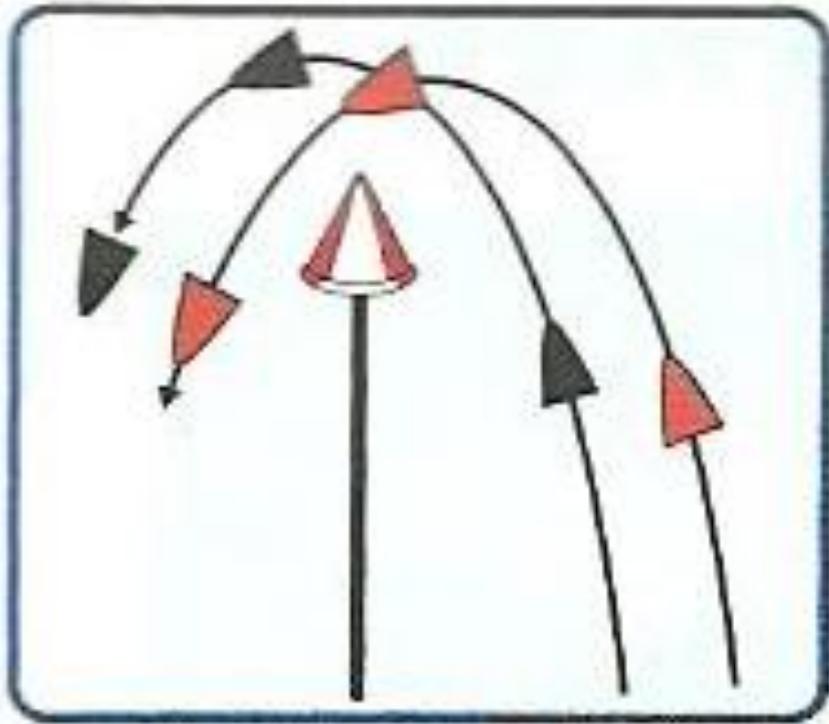


イン逃げ

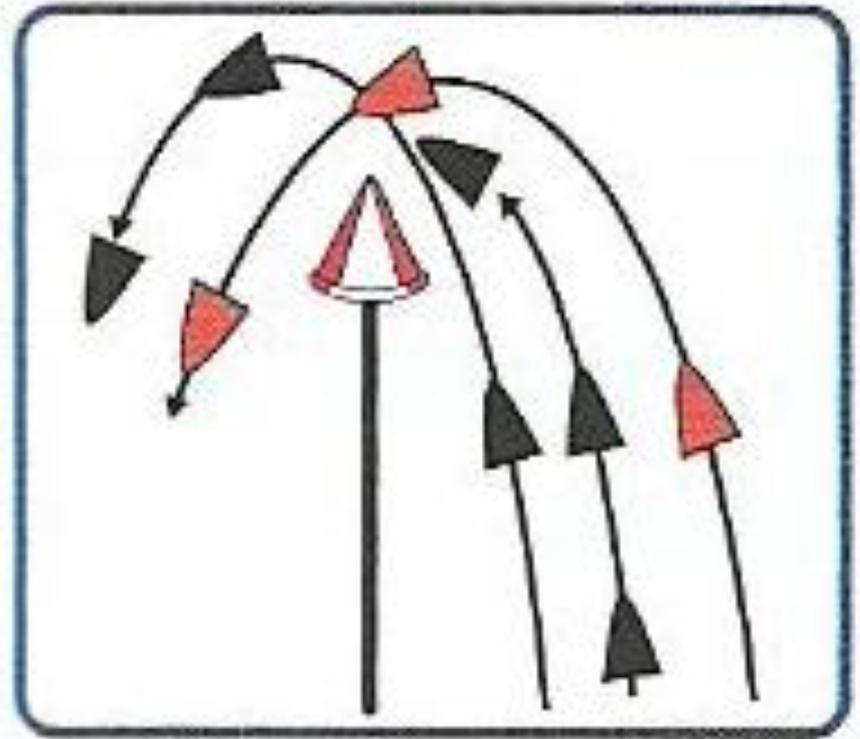


捲くり

# *Sashi and Makurikaeshi*



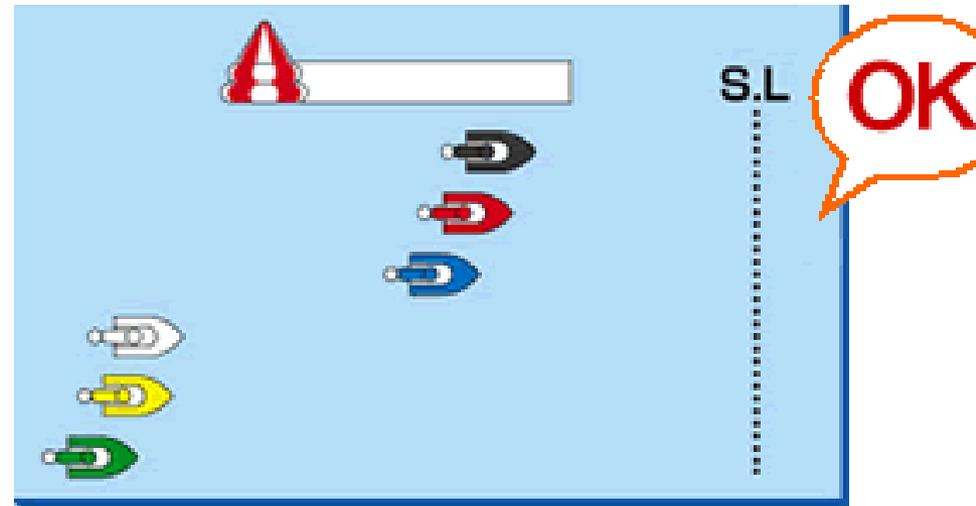
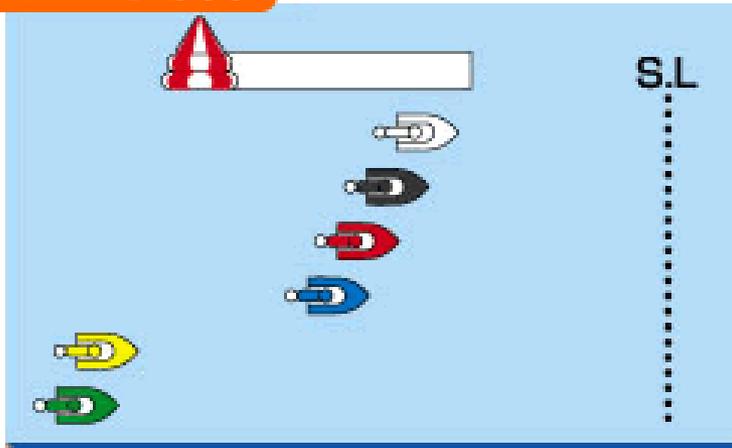
差し



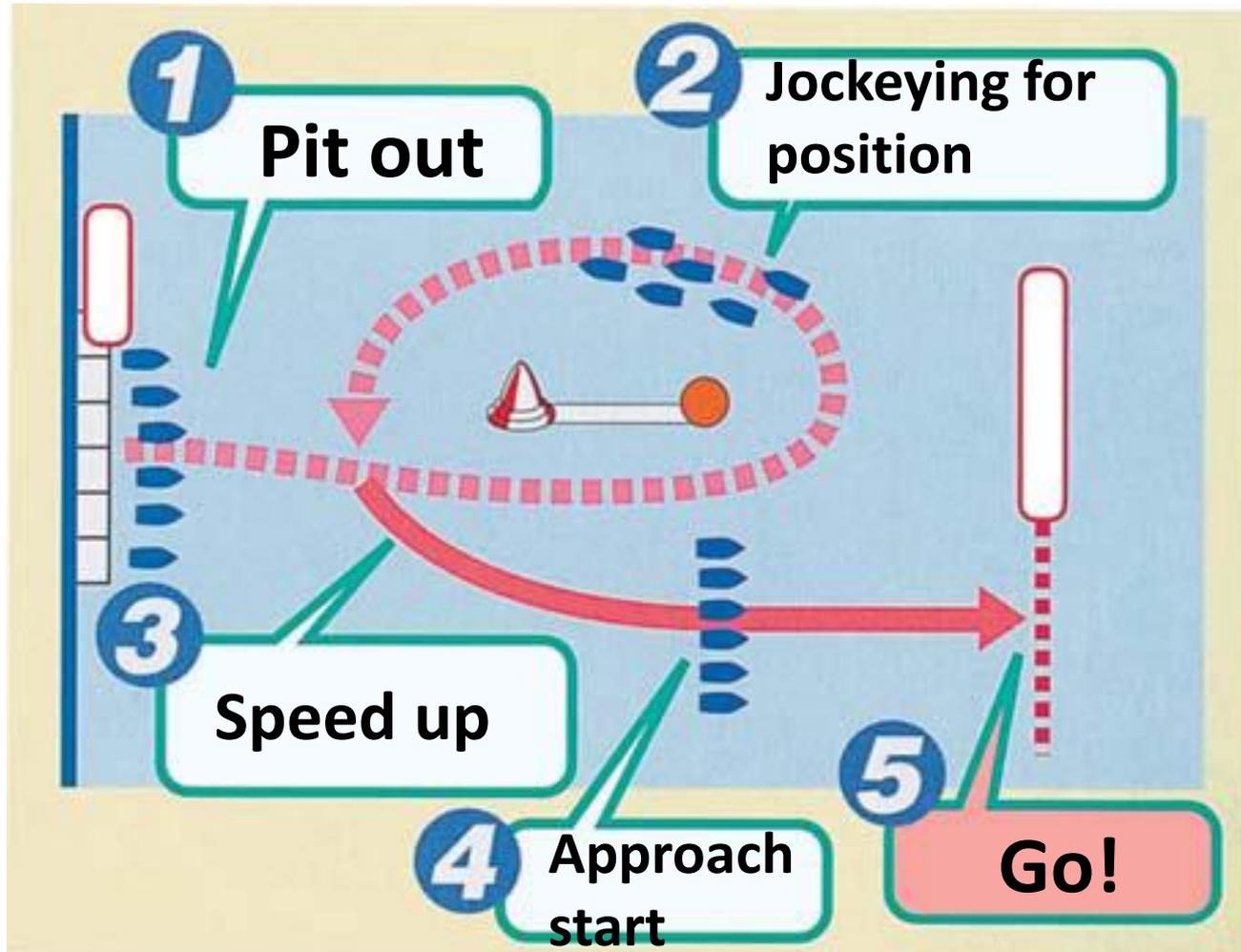
捲くり返し

# Phony war 1: *Staato Tenji* スタート展示

スタート展示



# *Taiki Kodo* Phony war 2



# Is it OK to jockey for position, or not?

There was an attempt in 1996 to ban it, and start all races with the line-up printed on the card. But this was unpopular with punters who thought it made the race more boring. Nowadays enforcing the lane numbers on the card (a style of racing called *shin'nyū kotei kyōsō* or fixed lane racing) is restricted to a handful of novelty races... at some courses only the ninth of the twelve races on the daily card is run that way.

**Nonetheless, grabbing a better lane before the off seems to be relatively rare, and most races start off with the boats in their numerical order (*waku-nari*). Boat racing also has various unwritten rules – inexperienced newcomers are supposed to stick to the outside lanes, for instance. This is supposed to stop them getting in the way of the more experienced racers, but effectively it creates a pecking order.**



**First turn**



**“Auto-ya”**

**“Outsider”**

**Katsuya Awa**

**阿波勝哉**

**“Awakatsu”**

**アワカツ**

**“Mr Chiruto-san”**

**(Tilt 3)**

**ミスターチルト3**



***Awakatsu in action***

# Part 4: General theory of gambling

**I propose a taxonomy of gambling, based on the four principle issues of (1) chance of winning; (2) scale of payout if successful; (3) whether the opponent is a fellow individual or a professional house; and (4) the relative importance of skill and luck in determining the outcome. These elements, I argue, tend to vary in a common pattern, generating a kind of spectrum.**

**Thus poker or mah-jongg are games with a high chance of winning, a relatively small payout (except for high rollers), played against fellow individuals, with much skill involved. At the other end of the scale, when buying a national lottery ticket – in Japan’s case, for the *Takarakuji* – the chance of winning is infinitesimally small; the possible payout is colossal; it is played against a professional house (the national government); and the outcome depends almost entirely on luck.**

**Race-betting and pachinko, the most popular kinds of gambling among day laborers in Japan's skid-row-like *yoseba* districts, are both located around the middle of the spectrum.**

# Race betting

- (1) the chance of winning is generally somewhere in the range between 1 in 2 (as in a game of cards with an evenly-matched friend) and 1 in millions (the Takarakuji);**
- (2) the payout will tend to be more than the few thousand yen in a friendly card game and less than the millions of yen in the *Takarakuji*;**
- (3) one's opponent is somewhat ambiguous, with a professional house (a publically-run race venue or off-course betting center) but a system of betting that effectively pits punters against each other;**
- (4) there is a degree of skill and knowledge involved in picking winners, though luck is undoubtedly the biggest factor.**

# **Parimutuel betting [the tote] vs Bookies**

**A bookmaker can make a mistake, and make a loss on a race. Too many mistakes will bankrupt him. But the tote will never lose.**

**The odds are automatically generated according to the amount of money bet on each outcome, to ensure the house always gets its 25%.**

# ***Tote cannot lose***

**If the favorite wins, the house will pay a small amount of money to a large number of punters; if a rank outsider wins, the house will pay a large amount of money to a small number of punters.**

***But in either case, the computer-generated odds ensure that the house keeps 25% of the staked money.***

**So it feels like betting against the  
house...**

***But in reality the punter is effectively  
gambling against his fellow punters,  
trying to find a winning outcome  
that will not have been spotted by  
too many of the other punters so  
that it will still offer attractive odds.***

# Complex psychological territory

- **25% tax makes it almost impossible to win in the long term.**
- **Long odds mean you will usually lose.**
- **Ascribe win to own sagacity / good fortune.**
- **Blame losses on poor performance by selected contestants.**
- **Ambiguity as to who your opponent is.**

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