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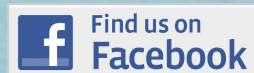
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TOM TOM ENGLISH



Gambling on Japan's future

VOCABULARY

Luminous

=

Giving off light, bright, shining

Doldrums =

A period of stagnation or depression

Appall =

Greatly dismay, horrify

Oversold =

To sell more of something than actually exists; to exaggerate the merits of something

Read the article overleaf and discuss these questions:

1. Have you ever been to a casino? How was it? Did you win or lose? Did you enjoy it?
2. What do you think are the pros and cons of having casinos in Japan? Do you agree with Prime Minister Abe that we should go ahead?
3. What do you think about having the casinos in "integrated resorts"? Is this a good idea or a bad idea? Would it be better to isolate casinos?
4. Why do you think Japan has so many gambling addicts?
5. Do you do any kinds of gambling? Which ones? Why do you do them?
6. When Japan opens the first casino, will you visit? Why? Why not?

VOCABULARY

Panacea =

A solution or remedy for all difficulties, with no downside.

Skid Row =

A run-down part of town frequented by vagrants and alcoholics

Proliferation =

Rapid increase in the number or amount of something

Flush =

Reddening of the skin, usually caused by some strong emotion (embarrassment, excitement etc)

Back in 1998 when Tokyo was near bankruptcy, then-Gov Shintaro Ishihara had what seemed to him a **luminous** idea – a casino. Moneyed gamblers would pour in from all over the world, stimulating the local economy and filling government coffers. Gambling was illegal in Japan; the law would have to be changed; but that's what government is for. It didn't work. The public opposed it – so strongly that the plan was finally scrapped in 2003.

An interesting comparison is Singapore. When they hit financial troubles in the 1980s, leaders there thought of casinos. There was opposition, but it was weathered, and 2 casinos opened in 2010. When Prime Minister Abe toured one in 2014, he saw just what Japan needs to pull it out of its financial **doldrums**. With majorities in both houses of the Diet, his Jimin-to pushed new legislation through opposition objections after only six hours of debate. Casino gambling is now legal in Japan so casinos will follow. What will they bring?

Nothing good, Josei Seven fears, and plenty of bad: gambling addiction, organized crime, prostitution, indebtedness, crime. Even supporters of casinos, the magazine says, were **appalled** at how little debate preceded the legislation. Even from an economic point of view, says Shizuoka Uni sociologist Yoichi Torihata, the idea was **oversold**. “The U.S. casino market is saturated, and revenue is falling in Macao and Singapore.” Clearly it's no **panacea**.

South Korea, says Josei 7, is a cautionary tale. Of 17 legal casinos only one, Kangwonland 200km from Seoul, is open to Koreans; the others are exclusively for foreigners. Kangwonland has spawned the term “casino homeless.” Having gambled

themselves into poverty, victims find themselves stranded in **skid row** hotels or sleeping in saunas. Cars circulate through town with a message written on them: “Dad, don't commit suicide!”

Japan's vulnerability to this sort of thing is already plain. Horse racing, bicycle racing and lotteries are legal, as is pachinko, though technically not classified as gambling. In 2013 the health ministry estimated 5.36 million gambling addicts in Japan – “top in the developed world” says Josei 7.

“The rush you get from gambling”, says psychologist Tomomi Katada, “is like sexual pleasure. It's irresistible. You know you shouldn't do it but can't help yourself.” Not everyone who gambles is an addict, but if there are millions of addicts years before the first casino, it's hard not to fear a **proliferation** of them once they're in operation. Particularly susceptible, says Josei 7, are women (stress from the responsibility of work and home, professional glass ceilings and the poor (the windfall that will make them rich seems so close, a turn of the wheel away).

It's envisaged that Casinos will be embedded in “integrated resorts” where they will occupy just 3% of floor space, the rest being theme parks, restaurants, shopping malls etc. So what's the problem? Josei 7 says the family-friendly environment is part of the problem. The whole family goes together. Mom shops, dad gambles, the kids go to the amusement park. They meet at a restaurant and talk over their day. Dad is **flush** from the excitement of gambling. The kids grow curious, then become gamblers themselves.

Is this really the best way to stoke Japan's economy?