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By J. E. de Becker

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When *The Nightless City* was first published in 1899, it was deemed taboo in polite circles. It is now considered a valuable historical document—albeit still provocative—as a pioneering sociological study of the Yoshiwara Yukwaku: Tokyo's infamous red-light district where the giving of pleasure became both a tradition and a business. A consequence of old Japan's polygamous family system (where men had multiple wives who bore them many children), the Yoshiwara quarter offered a rough road to survival for the surplus daughters, many of whom were sold into prostitution by families who could not afford to keep them. It was thus regarded as a "necessary evil" that thrived from the late nineteenth century well into the 1950s. Despite its dark underbelly of slavery and abuse, the area was celebrated for its veneer of gaiety and the refinement of pleasure. In fact, the Yoshiwara district held such an honored place in Japanese tradition (and sexual tourism) that its demise in 1957 was lamented all over the world. Rich in detail pertaining to the many aspects of Yoshiwara life—folklore, ceremony, costume, erotic practices, and the like—*The Nightless City* is a compelling examination of life behind the teahouse doors. Two maps and over 40 plates of illustrations are included from the original edition.

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