

The Geisha - Evolution and Role in Contemporary Japan

Section 1

Instructor/Title	Professor Arif Iqbal
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【Course Outline / Description】

Painted by Picasso, sculpted by Rodin, entertainers to Queen Elizabeth, Prince Charles, and US Presidents, yet the role and image of the Geisha has often been misinterpreted outside Japan and has shaped Western stereotypes about Japan and Japanese women. Being historically closed in a world of secrecy, not many Japanese either have been able to get access to this world which has it's own rules and etiquette with very little documentation. This course examines the primary role of the Geisha in Japan as an artist and an entertainer encompassing a variety of important social, cultural and historical elements and through the research and use of academic literature, historical photographs, documentaries and movie representations, and conversations with current Geisha, attempts to educate the Asian and Japanese Studies student on the true role and place of these artists in Japanese culture, and in a traditional world which runs parallel and yet is completely different than the modern Japanese world of manga, anime, and robots.

With emphasis on the Geisha of the five Kagai (districts) in Kyoto, this course not only explores the historical and cultural elements, but also introduces this relatively unknown and closed world and gives an account of the daily lives of these women, and examines as to why and how the Geisha have continued to survive and remain prominent over the past several hundred years, and as to what is their current and future role in contemporary Japan?

Section 2

【Course Objectives/Goals/Learning Outcomes】

This course will enable the student to:

- Understand the historical role and evolution of the Geisha
- Contrast Euro-American and Japanese representations of the Geisha
- Understand the daily/working lives and the macrocosm of the Geisha
- Explore the *Gei* of the Geisha in the context of the art culture in Japan
- Discuss the role of the Geisha in Contemporary Japan and the impact of an aging demographic
- Pursue future Geisha Studies as a field of academic research

Section 3 【Class Schedule/Class Environment, Literature and Materials】

	Schedule of Instruction	Work outside of Classroom Activities
Lesson 1 (09/04)	Student, Teacher, and Course Introductions; Setting the Stage for the Semester	Write 1–Page Paper on Image of Geisha in host country
Lesson 2 (09/07)	Courtesans in Asia and Europe; Pictorial Glossary of the Maiko and Geiko World	Watch Movie: Life of Oharu Reading: Kawaguchi, Butterfly's Sisters, Ch. 1
Lesson 3 (09/11)	Historical Perspectives (Heian - Tokugawa) Izumo no Okuni and The Kabuki Movement	Reading: Kawaguchi, Butterfly's Sisters, Ch. 2
Lesson 4 (09/14)	The Tayu; Introduction of the Geisha to European and American audience	Reading: Kawaguchi, Butterfly's Sisters, Ch. 3–4
Lesson 5 (09/18)	Changes During the Meiji Restoration The Miyako Odori	Reading: Kawaguchi, Butterfly's Sisters, Ch. 5
Lesson 6 (09/21)	Evolution of Japanese and Western stereotypes of Japanese Femininity and Masculinity	Reading: Kawaguchi, Butterfly's Sisters, Ch. 5
Lesson 7 (09/25)	Golden Period of Geisha (Post Meiji); Historical Timeline of Geisha Related Developments	Reading: Johnston (A Woman, Sex and Morality in Modern Japan, Chapter 4)
Lesson 8 (09/28)	Historical Timeline (cont'd)	Watch Movie: Gion no Shimai
Lesson 9 (10/02)	Pre and Post-War World of the Geisha	Paper due on Butterfly's Sisters
Lesson 10 (10/05)	The "Postcard Girls" and the "#9 Girls";	Readings: Dalby Part I, Iwasaki Ch. 1–7
Lesson 11 (10/09)	The Atotori (Heiress to the Okiya); Butterfly's Sisters Paper Presentations;	Readings: Dalby Part I, Iwasaki Ch. 1–7
Lesson 12 (10/12)	Butterfly's Sisters Paper Presentations; The Geisha Macrocosm	Readings: Dalby Part I, Iwasaki Ch. 1–7
Lesson 13 (10/16)	Geisha Macrocosm (cont'd); Mizoguchi's Portrayal Of Geisha in Movies - Review of Sisters of Gion	Readings: Dalby Part II, Iwasaki Ch. 8–15
Lesson 14 (10/19)	The Gei of the Geisha; Ties to Kabuki	Readings: Dalby Part II, Iwasaki Ch. 8–15
Lesson 15 (10/23)	Daily Lives/Key Events: Shikomi to Maiko; The Misedashi	Readings: Dalby Part III, Iwasaki Ch. 16–22
Lesson 16 (10/26)	GAIDAI SAI - NO CLASS	
Lesson 17 (10/30)	Daily Events: Maiko - Geiko - Natori Geiko - Retirement; Sakkou - Danpatsushiki -Erikae	Readings: Dalby Part III, Iwasaki Ch. 23–31
Lesson 18 (11/02)	Gei (Cont'd) - Kyomai & the Inoue School of Dance	Readings: Dalby Part III, Iwasaki Ch. 30–38
Lesson 19 (11/06)	The Gei (Cont'd) - Dance, Music, and Entertainment	Paper due on Dalby/Iwasaki
Lesson 20 (11/09)	Movie: Real Geisha, Real Women Discussion of Gion Odori and Field Trip	1–Page Paper on "Real Geisha, Real Women"
Lesson 21 (11/12)	Movie Discussion: Real Geisha, Real Women; Maiko Hairstyles	Identification of Issues facing Geisha in Contemporary Japan
Lesson 22 (11/16)	The Kimono and the Geisha	Short Paper on Field trip and Key Insights/Final Paper Outline Due
Lesson 23 (11/20)	Adopt a Maiko/Geiko Presentation	Adopt a Maiko/Geiko Presentation Due
Lesson 24 (11/23)	Role of Geisha in Contemporary Japan	Listen to Podcast of Ex-Geisha Sayuri's Interview
Lesson 25 (11/27)	Discussions on the Future of the Geisha	Short Paper on Future Role of Geisha
Lesson 26 (11/30)	Role of Ookini Zaidan in Preservation of Geisha Culture; Geisha in other Hanamachi	Prep for Final Research paper presentation
Lesson 27 (12/04)	Final Research Paper Presentations	Prep for Final Research paper presentation
Lesson 28 (12/07)	Final Research Paper Presentations	Prep for Final Research paper presentation
Lesson 29 (12/11)	Final Research Paper Presentations	Research Papers Due
Lesson 30 (12/14)	Final Research Paper Presentations; Course Review; Feedback; Celebration	Prep for Final Exam
Notes	The schedule is tentative; the topics covered on each proposed date may change/expand depending on the understanding background and pace of the students.	

【Textbooks/Reading Materials】

Textbook ①	
Title	Butterfly's Sisters: The Geisha in Western Culture
Author	Yoko Kawaguchi
Publisher	Yale University Press (November 30, 2010)
ISBN	0300115210 (978-0300115215)
Textbook ②	
Title	Geisha of Gion: The True Story of Japan's Foremost Geisha (Memoir of Mineko Iwasaki)
Author	Mineko Iwasaki
Publisher	Downton Press; UK Edition (May 6, 2003)
ISBN	074343059X (978-0743430593)
Textbook ③	
Title	Geisha (paperback version)
Author	Liza Dalby
Publisher	Vintage/Ebury (December 1, 2007)
ISBN	0099286386 (978-0099286387)
Notes	Additional Reading materials will be distributed in class.

Additional Readings adapted from:

- Foreman, Kelly. *The Gei of Geisha. Music, Identity, and Meaning*. London: Ashgate Press, 2008.
- Pincus, Leslie. *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan: Kuki Shūzō and the Rise of National Aesthetics*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Ariyoshi Sawako, *The Twilight Years*. Translated by Mildred Tahara. New York: Kodansha America, 1987.
- Aihara, Kyoko. *Geisha: A Living Tradition*. London: Carlton Books, 2000.
- Burns, Stanley B., and Elizabeth A. Burns. *Geisha: A Photographic History, 1872–1912*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Powerhouse Books, 2006.
- Downer, Lesley. *Women of the Pleasure Quarters: The Secret History of the Geisha*. New York: Broadway Books, 2001.
- Ishihara, Tetsuo. Peter Macintosh, trans. *Nihongami no Sekai: Maiko no Kamigata (The World of Traditional Japanese Hairstyles: Hairstyles of the Maiko)*. Kyoto: Doshosha Shuppan, 2004.
- Scott, A.C. *The Flower and Willow World: The Story of the Geisha*. New York: Orion Press, 1960.
- Gerstle, A.C. *18th Century Japan: Culture and Society*. Routledge, 2012.

Section 4

【Learning Assessments/Grading Rubric】

Final Exam	10	%
Class Participation	15	%
Writing Assignments	25	%
(Term Paper)	25	%
(Presentation)	25	%

Section 5

【Additional Information】

1. Course Introduction

1.1. Introduce the *Geisha*

1.1.1. Define a *Geisha*

1.1.2. Discuss origin of the role

1.1.3. Outline process to become a *Geisha*

1.2. Discuss overall scope of the course and discuss how this class can be used by the foreign student to understand several unique Japanese cultural and historical concepts

1.3. Introduce Course Textbooks

1.3.1. Butterfly's Sisters as academic work on introduction of Geisha to Europe and associated reactions and stereotypes of the image of Geisha

1.3.2. Geisha of Gion as an insider's account of the Flower and Willow World by Mineko Iwasaki - a Geisha considered to be the top in her time. Much of Golden's "Memoirs of a Geisha" were based on conversations with Mineko Iwasaki

1.3.3. Geisha by Liza Dalby is an insider's account written by the first Westerner who worked as a geisha in the Pontocho district of Kyoto. Liza's work as a PhD. anthropology student led to the first real insights inside this closed world.

1.4. Enquiry on historical role and image of female entertainers in student countries

1.5. Discuss (historically) similar professions in other Asian & European countries

2. Pictorial Glossary of the Maiko and Geiko World to facilitate identification and classification

2.1. Define visual differences between a Maiko and a Geiko and a Tayu

2.1.1. Origins of the make-up and the painted face

2.1.2. Elements of a Maiko's Wardrobe

2.1.2.1. Long-Sleeved Kimono

2.1.2.2. From *Handara* to *Darari-Obi*

2.1.2.3. *Okobo*, *geta* and *zori*

2.1.2.4. *Ozashiki kago*

2.1.2.5. Seasonal *Kanzashi* and accessories

2.1.2.6. Different hairstyles reflecting different levels of seniority
(*wareshinobu*, *ofuku*, *sakko*, *yakko-shimada*, and the *katsuyama*)

2.1.2.7. Different make-up reflecting difference in seniority

2.1.2.8. Concept of *Misedashi*

2.1.3. Elements of a Geiko's Wardrobe

2.1.3.1. Short sleeved Kimono

2.1.3.2. Concept of *Erikae*

2.1.3.3. *Katsura* & other ornament styles

2.1.4. Elements of a Tayu's Wardrobe

2.2. Describe various other defining elements

2.2.1. Pictures and significance of *Sanbonashi*

2.2.2. Pictures of various *Maiko* and *Geiko Senjafuda*

2.2.3. Pictures of personalized *Maiko* and *Geiko Uchiwa*

2.3. Use historical and current photographs and videos to introduce:

2.3.1. **FIVE KAGAI OF KYOTO (INCLUDING UNIQUE ELEMENTS ABOUT EACH KAGAI)**

- 2.3.2. *OCHAYA*
- 2.3.3. *OKIYA*
- 2.3.4. *OKAMI-SAN*
- 2.3.5. *ONEE-SAN*
- 2.3.6. *OTOKOSHI-SAN*
- 2.3.7. *KAMIYUI-SAN*
- 2.3.8. *JIKATA-SAN*
- 2.3.9. *OKINI ZAIDAN*

2.4. ANNUAL EVENTS

- 2.4.1. JANUARY - *SHIGYOSHIKI*
- 2.4.2. JANUARY - *HATSUYORI*
- 2.4.3. FEBRUARY - *SETSUBUN/OBAKE*
- 2.4.4. APRIL - ANNUAL DANCE PERFORMANCE
- 2.4.5. JULY - *MIYABI KAI*
- 2.4.6. JULY - GION FESTIVAL
- 2.4.7. AUGUST - *HASSAKU*
- 2.4.8. OCTOBER - *ONSHUKAI*
- 2.4.9. OCTOBER - *JIDAI MATSURI*
- 2.4.10. NOVEMBER - *KANI KAKU NI SAI*
- 2.4.11. DECEMBER - *KAOMISE SOUKEN*
- 2.4.12. DECEMBER - *KOTO HAJIME*

2.5. EXPLAIN RELEVANT TERMS AND CONCEPTS

- 2.5.1. *ICHI-GEN-SAN OKOTOWARI*

3. Historical Perspectives (Tokugawa - Meiji)

Historical review of origin of the Geisha with clarity and descriptions of the differences between *yujo*, *hokan*, *taiko-mochi* and various types of geisha (*shiro*, *korobi*, *kido*, *joro*, and *machi/odoriko*). Discuss impact of Izumo no Okuni on Kabuki and image of female performers. Discuss evolution of the 'women of the mind' versus "women of the body."

4. Introduction to (and reception by) European and American audience. Discuss Western stereotypes of Japanese Femininity and Masculinity

4.1. Discuss author Yoko Kawaguchi's exploration of the Western portrayal of Japanese women and geishas in particular. She argues that in the West, Japanese women have come to embody certain ideas about feminine sexuality, and she analyzes how these ideas have been expressed in diverse art forms, ranging from fiction and opera to the visual arts and music videos. Among the many works Kawaguchi discusses are the art criticism of Baudelaire and Huysmans, the opera *Madam Butterfly*, the sculptures of Rodin, the Broadway play *Teahouse of the August Moon*. *Butterfly's Sisters* also examines the impact on early twentieth-century theatre, drama, and dance theory of the performance styles of the actresses Madame Hanako and Sadayakko, both formerly Geishas who were introduced to Europe.

4.2. Discussion on contrasting Victorian values with Japanese nudes photographed by Baron Raimund von Stillfried. In the mid 1800's nudity was not shameful in Japanese society with

men and women bathing together. While Kusakabe and other photographers photographed women in private poses, it was the work of Von Stillfried's photographs that were an inducement for Westerners to think of the Japanese as a more primitive society (as they were often lumped with images of primitive undeveloped cultures).

5. Golden Period of Geisha (Post Meiji Restoration)

- 5.1. Discuss how as a result of protecting samurai, politicians and noblemen who were successful in overthrowing the Shogunate, Geisha elevated their status in society. Many Geisha were adopted symbolically by noted families to qualify socially for marriage to various revolutionaries, who were now among the leaders of the country. By the mid-1870's, many Geisha were revered heroines and held significant positions in society. Geisha, as a social class became respectable.
- 5.2. Modification of Emancipation edicts of 1872 to allow Geisha to work as entertainers.
- 5.3. Public performances by three *hanamachi* as part of Kyoto Exposition
- 5.4. Start of Miyako Odori, Kamogawa Odori, and Kyo Odori
- 5.5. Ogawa Kazumasa's public exhibition of photographs where the public voted and the Geisha in this era became celebrities.
- 5.6. Patriotic spirit of Geisha in Sino-Chinese War
- 5.7. Soldiers carry postcards of Geisha in the Russo-Japanese war
- 5.8. Geisha as advertising models
- 5.9. Famous Geisha of Meiji, Taisho, and Showa Era

6. Review of the Burns Collection - The "Postcard Girls" and the "No. 9 Girls"

Ukiyo-e prints granted celebrity status to the women they were about. At the end of the 19th century, photographers such as Ogawa produced images of notable Geisha taking their celebrity to another level. In the early twentieth century, with the development of the photographic postcard, collecting images of Geisha became a Japanese passion. The photographic postcard expands the study of Geisha life. Many of the photographs taken in the nineteenth century were reproduced as photographic postcards. All commercial photographers exploited the postcard format, as it gave them a new market to their images. The photographic postcard granted worldwide dispersions of geisha images.

Since the late nineteenth century, the concept of the geisha has been misinterpreted by the Western world. The novels and periodicals of the end of the nineteenth century misguided the public as to the true role of the geisha. Photographers, who provided images of Japanese women, did not accurately label them, allowing the observer to come to his own conclusions and assumptions. To accurately present the life of the geisha, it is important to differentiate geisha from prostitute. Burns' collection identifies many visual clues distinguishing them.

Researching using photographic resources as historic documents leads to new discoveries that can be made when a large number of images are analyzed. Burns suggested that No. 9 girls have often been identified as Geisha but in reality they were prostitutes and lived in a brothel, frequently with the street address No. 9. Through the examination of numerous pictures, it becomes clear that "No. 9 girl" was a euphemistic term for prostitute.

7. Post-War World of the Geisha

- 7.1. Competition from cafe and bar girls as well as nightclub performers convinces Geisha to abandon modernization and emphasize traditional dress and entertainment. They become curators of the arts of the past.

7.2. Discuss Film Director Kenji Mizoguchi's portrayal of post-war Geisha and women's rights issues in movies.

Kenji Mizoguchi, one of the great Japanese film directors and in the company of Ozu and Kurosawa, directed many movies during the Post war years sympathetically exploring controversial issues of rights and dignity for women with socially restricted claims to self-determination. As a class, we will discuss three of his movies focusing on the plight of the Geisha:

- [*Sisters of the Gion*](#) (1936)
- [*The Life of Oharu*](#) (西鶴一代女 *Saikaku Ichidai Onna*) (1952)
- [*A Geisha*](#) (祇園囃子, *Gion bayashi*) (1953)

8. The Geisha Macrocosm

In-depth discussion of the individual roles of all the local businesses needed to support (and being supported by) the presence of the Geisha community (including but not limited to *kimono* and *obi* makers (and their suppliers); *katsura* makers; hair accessory makers; *uchiwa* makers; *ryotei shidashi-ya* (food and beverage providers to the *Ochaya*); *Kamiyui-san* (*nihongami* hair salons for the *Maiko* and *Geiko*); *Tabi, okobo, geta* and *zori* manufacturers; etc.)

9. Transformation of The Artist

9.1. Start as an Apprentice: From Shikomi to Maiko

- 9.1.1. The Start of the Dream
- 9.1.2. Introduction to the *Okiya*
- 9.1.3. Daily life as a *Shikomi*
- 9.1.4. Introduction to *Kyo-kotoba*

9.2. Graduation to the Master: Maiko to Geiko

- 9.2.1. *Misedashi* (Pictorial explanation of event and new role)
- 9.2.2. Discuss "*A Week in the Life of: Koaki, Apprentice Geisha – Schooled in the arts of pleasure*". London: *The Independent*. 1998-08-08.
- 9.2.3. *Sakkou* (Pictorial explanation)
- 9.2.4. *Kurokami* (video and symbolism)
- 9.2.5. *San-san-ku-do* ceremony
- 9.2.6. [*Danpatsu-no-shiki*](#) (Pictorial explanation of event)
- 9.2.7. *Erikae* (Pictorial explanation of event and new role)

9.3. Evolution of the Artist: *Geiko* to *Natori Geiko* to Retirement

- 9.3.1. Explanation of Daily Life & Events
- 9.3.2. New role as a Mentor - Becoming an *Onesan*
- 9.3.3. Further refinement of the Arts
- 9.3.4. Discussion of issues leading to stay/retire

10. The *Gei* of the *Geisha*

- 10.1. Creating a world of healing and "Taking care of the hearts of the customers"

- 10.2. Hospitality & Entertainment
 - 10.2.1. The art of *Omotenashi*
 - 10.2.2. Creating a World of Relaxation through Banter
 - 10.2.3. *Ozashiki asobi*

- 10.3. The Art of Dance and Performance
 - 10.3.1. Repertoire similarities with the world of Kabuki
 - 10.3.2. *Kyomai* & Inoue School of Dance (Gion Kobu)
 - 10.3.3. *Wakayagi* & *Umemoto* Styles (Miyagawa)
 - 10.3.4. *Hanayagi* Style (Kamishichiken)
 - 10.3.5. *Onoe* Style (Pontocho)
 - 10.3.6. *Fujima* Style (Gion Higashi)
 - 10.3.7. Ceremonial Performances

- 10.4. Music of the *Geisha*
 - 10.4.1. *Ko-uta* and *Naga-uta* adaptations in the *Geisha* world
 - 10.4.2. *Ko-uta* as illustrations of *iroke*
 - 10.4.3. Life as a *Jikata-san*

11. Documentary Review and Discussion: Real Geisha, Real Women

Real Geisha Real Women is a documentary by Peter Macintosh about the lives of several women in Kyoto, Japan of various generations who are, or have been *Maiko* and *Geiko*. Their stories are told in their own words as a series of vignettes without the use of a narrator. Rare footage of their journeys outside of Kyoto includes a hometown visit, a trip to Tokyo, as well as travels abroad.

12. Field Trip (November 1-10, exact day TBD): Gion Odori

13. Discussion of Current Issues and Role of Geisha in Contemporary Japan

- 13.1. The Geisha and Tourism
- 13.2. The Geisha and their dependent traditional industries
- 13.3. Interactions with the local communities
- 13.4. Impact of an aging customer demographic
- 13.5. Availability of alternate income generation careers

14. Course Review & Final Exam Preparation