

Inside the Secret World of the Geisha

Section 1

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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 Japanese 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 with its own rules and etiquette, and 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. Leveraging the instructor's personal connections and research, as well as use of academic literature and visual documentation including historical photographs, documentaries and movie representations, this course attempts to provide a complete cultural experience to 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) to the modern Japanese world of manga, anime, and robots.

With emphasis on the Geisha of the five Kagai (performance districts) in Kyoto, this unique 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 and explain 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 customer 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	Student, Teacher, and Course Introductions; Setting the Stage for the Semester	Write 1-Page Paper on Image of Geisha in host country
Lesson 2	Discussion on the Role of Courtesans and Women Entertainers in both Japanese and non-Japanese cultures	Watch Movie: Life of Oharu
Lesson 3	The Tayu; Historical Perspectives (Heian - Tokugawa)	Reading: Kawaguchi, Butterfly's Sisters, Ch. 1
Lesson 4	Izumo no Okuni and the Kabuki Movement; Evolution of the Pleasure quarters (Edo/Kyoto)	Reading: Kawaguchi, Butterfly's Sisters, Ch. 1
Lesson 5)	Historical Perspectives Cont'd;	Presentation Prep: Butterfly's Sisters, Ch. 1
Lesson 6	Student Presentations (Butterfly's Sisters)	Reading: Enlightenment Geisha
Lesson 7	Changes During the Meiji Restoration The Miyako Odori	Reading: Johnston (A Woman, Sex and Morality in Modern Japan, Chapter 4)
Lesson 8	Evolution of Japanese and Western stereotypes of Japanese Femininity and Masculinity; Views on Sexuality	Readings: Dalby Part I, Iwasaki Ch. 1-7
Lesson 9	Introduction of the Geisha to (and reception by) European and American audience	Readings: Dalby Part I, Iwasaki Ch. 1-7
Lesson 10	The Impact of Photography on the image of the Geisha	Watch Movie: Gion no Shimai
Lesson 11	The Golden Period of the Geisha	Watch Movie: Gion Bayashi
Lesson 12	Kenji Mizoguchi's Portrayal of Geisha in Movies	Readings: Dalby Part II, Iwasaki Ch. 8-15
Lesson 13	Daily Lives/Key Events: Shikomi to Maiko; The Misedashi	Readings: Dalby Part II, Iwasaki Ch. 8-15
Lesson 14	Daily Lives/Key Events: Maiko - Geiko - Natori Geiko - Retirement; Sakkou - Danpatsushiki -Erikae	Readings: Dalby Part III, Iwasaki Ch. 16-22
Lesson 15	The Gei of the Geisha - Kyomai & the Inoue School of Dance	Readings: Dalby Part III, Iwasaki Ch. 16-22
Lesson 16	The Gei of the Geisha - Dance, Music, and Entertainment	Readings: Dalby Part III, Iwasaki Ch. 23-31
Lesson 17	Visual Aesthetics: Kimono	Readings: Dalby Part III, Iwasaki Ch. 23-31
Lesson 18	Visual Aesthetics: Obi & Hairstyles	Readings: Dalby Part III, Iwasaki Ch. 30-38
Lesson 19	Visual Aesthetics: Make-up	Readings: Dalby Part III, Iwasaki Ch. 30-38
Lesson 20	Adopt a Maiko & Vocabulary Presentations	Prep for Dalby/Iwasaki Paper
Lesson 21	Adopt a Maiko & Vocabulary Presentations	Prep for Dalby/Iwasaki Paper
Lesson 22	Movie: Real Geisha, Real Women	Comparison/Contrast Paper due on Dalby/Iwasaki
Lesson 23	The Geisha Macrocosm	Listen to Podcast of Ex-Geisha Sayuri's Interview
Lesson 24	Role of Geisha in Contemporary Japan; Future of the Geisha; Role of Oukini Zaidan	Prepare Research paper
Lesson 25	Geisha in other Hanamachi	Final Presentations Due
Lesson 26	Final Research Paper Presentations	Prep for Final Presentations
Lesson 27	Final Research Paper Presentations	Prep for Final Presentations
Lesson 28	Final Research Paper Presentations	Prep for Final Presentations
Lesson 29	Final Paper Presentations; Course Review; Feedback; Celebration	Prep for Final Exam

Notes	There will be no lesson On October 30 due to University Fall Break.
	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】

Textbooks①	
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)
Textbooks②	
Title	Geisha: 25th Anniversary Edition
Author	Liza Dalby
Publisher	Univ of California Press; Anniversary, Updated edition (December 10, 2008)
ISBN	0520257898; 978-0520257894
Textbooks③	
Notes	Additional Reading materials will be distributed in class.

Reference Books①	
Title	Butterfly's Sisters: The Geisha in Western Culture
Author	Yoko Kawaguchi
Publisher	Yale University Press (November 30, 2010)
ISBN	0300115210 (978-0300115215)

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	%
Short Writing Assignments	25	%
(Research Paper/Presentation)	25	%
(Presentations)	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. *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
- 1.3.2. *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

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, *Taiko-obi*2.1.3.2. *Katsura* & other ornament styles

2.1.3.3. Concept of *Erikae*

2.1.4. Elements of a Tayu's Wardrobe

2.1.4.1. Multi-layered Kimono

2.1.4.2. Hairstyles

2.1.4.3. Presence of *Kamuro*

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 (UNIQUE ELEMENTS)

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 PERFORMANCES

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/Christian 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 Japanese photographer Kusakabe and others 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.

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 and 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 from a young girl to an 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* and the *Rules of the Geisha* world
- 9.1.3. Daily life as a *Shikomi*; Introduction to *kyo-kotoba*
- 9.1.4. *San-san-ku-do* ceremony
- 9.1.5. *Misedashi* (pictorial explanation of event and new role)

9.2. Graduation to the Master: From *Maiko* to *Geiko*

- 9.2.1. Discuss "*A Week in the Life of: Koaki, Apprentice Geisha – Schooled in the arts of pleasure*". London: *The Independent*. 1998-08-08.
- 9.2.2. Daily life as a *Maiko*
- 9.2.3. *Sakkou* (Pictorial explanation)
- 9.2.4. *Kurokami* (video and symbolism)
- 9.2.5. [*Danpatsu-no-shiki*](#) (Pictorial explanation of event)
- 9.2.6. *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; Becoming a *Natori Geiko*
- 9.3.4. Discussion of issues leading to stay/retire

10. The *Gei* of the *Geisha*

- 10.1. Creating a world of "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/Temple 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. Introducing Geisha in other Parts of Japan

- 12.1. Tokyo – Differences from Kyoto; Azuma Odori
- 12.2. Tosa Geisha & Tosa's culture of *Ozashiki*

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. Impact of COVID-19 on the Hanamachi
- 13.6. Availability of alternate income generation careers

14. Course Review & Final Exam Preparation