

CHAPTER III

GEISHA IN JAPANESE CULTURE

The Kyoto's *Geishas* were inhabited with unique and curious role in Japanese culture. They were frequent sight in the city as similar with female entertainers in other cities. They were taken many years to hone and refine their artistic and conversational skills. Therefore, they could expertly entertain men in the traditional manner and participate at Japan's colourful seasonal festivals.

A. History of *Geisha*

The *Geisha* system turns up around the middle of the Edo period (1600-1886) but the first appeared in mid-Tokugawa in 1751 in Kyoto and 1762 in Edo (now Tokyo). Originally, the *Geisha* were men male entertainers called *taikomochi* or *hokan* but gradually they became exclusively female. In 1700s their profession were related to the Government-licensed brothel quarters. At the time there were various rank of courtesans and prostitute but the *Geisha* were separated group who summon to entertain their guests with singing and dancing. Though the distinction between entertainment and sex was not always precisely maintained, even some *Geisha* became the mistresses of the very wealthy man.

In Kyoto, the present high-class *hanamachi* (flower town, a licensed *Geisha* community) named Gion was one of the first areas of *Geisha* district and in Tokyo, the districts of *Fukagawa* and *Yanagibashi* were also famous. In Kyoto, *hanamachis* were found the *ochayas* (teahouses where the *maiko* or apprentice

Geisha and *Geiko* or *Geisha* entertain). According to statistic recorded on July 31st 1999, there were 190 *ochayas* remaining in Kyoto's *hanamachis*, employing 195 *Geisha* and 55 *Maiko* (Aihara, 10). In 1920s, the total number of *Geisha* was about 80,000 but in 1930s, the amount of *Geishas* were fewer because Japan was in mobilization for the war. In 1940s, *Geishas* were forbidden to entertain because the situation and condition of Japan was in the war, so most of these women were pressed into factory worker for the war effort. In the late 1970s, the numbers of *Geisha* was around 17,000 (Kodansha, 14).

From the end of Edo period to the present *Geishas* had considerable connection with politics and some of them had been successful working in the political world. These *Geishas* were engaged to entertain at parties of leading politicians, where sake was flow freely and sometimes-important political negotiations were conducted. Although she was supposed to remain silent about what her heard at these affairs but it was interesting that the leading political parties tend to patronize their own groups of *Geisha* (Varley, 204).

B. Profession of *Geisha*

The *gei* of *Geisha* meant *arts*, so the word *Geisha* really means *artisan* or *artist* (Golden, 141). The *Geisha* also called *Geiko* meant a woman of art. The *Geisha* should be mastered in artistic skills and conversational abilities rather than just youth and good looks. Her profession was entertaining the wealthy men, such as, politicians, celebrities, and businessman. She had to have beautiful manners

and a pretty original dialect of Kyoto (*Kyo-kotaba*) although she came from another province.

There were some other occupations, such as, operating a restaurant, bar or shop when she ceased working as *Geishas*. But they could still use their background to take advantage. Sometimes they became the mistresses or even wives of their customers. It was possible that the *Geishas* became the second wives of very wealthy or powerful men. The *Geishas* would quit from their profession when they were married. Usually they considered having a *danna* or patron who was emotionally, sexually and economically involved when she was still working as *Geisha*. Every *Geisha* would try to build up a clientele of dependable favourite customers (*goiiki*), who would call her when they gave parties and contribute to the expenses involved in her public performances of dancing or other arts.

Before the World War II, a *Geisha* generally had to have a patron to help support her and had little say in deciding who he would be. Furthermore, every apprentice had to undergo the “deflowering ceremony” (*mizuage*) with some important customer before she could attain full-fledge *Geisha* status. There could be great differences in the status and behaviour of *Geisha*, largely depending on where they work. The high-class *Geisha* were very discriminating in their choice of a patron, and their relationships tend to be long-term.

C. Training of *Geisha*

The aspiring *Geisha* might take lessons in various traditional arts. Some arts did not directly concern to their skill as entertainers such as, tea ceremony, flower arranging, calligraphy, and painting; but the important arts that direct to mastering such as in classical dancing, playing the *shamisen* (a stringed instrument), and several styles of singing. Even though a woman had no background in the arts when she entered the *Geisha's* life; she might pass an examination at the local *Geisha* registry office, which was headed by the senior members of the *Geisha* union. Afterward, her lessons could start immediately during the trial period, called *minarai*. Those lessons became part of her life as a *Geisha* and she continues it as long as she worked (Kodansha, 14).

Traditionally, a virgin girl was often adopted into *Geisha* houses (*okiya*) for training. This girl called *shikomi* was assigned much of the hard drudgery of housework as part of their discipline and treated like maids or servants. Usually this girl came from a poor family, which was sold by her father when he could not support all the children's need. The father would receive a lump sum in exchange for which his daughter would be trained at the *Geisha* house. Later, the mistress of the *okiya* would turn over to the father a specified percentage of her income. Actually, the young girls sent to the *okiya* were at least able to learn some skills and refined manners; later with a good chance found a patron to pay for their freedom.

From the age of about 13 to 18, this girl used to serve as "apprentice," generally called *Maiko* (dance child) in the Kansai area around Kyoto and Osaka.

The apprentice was wearing a distinctive kimono and hairstyle while they underwent their initial training period. At present, the apprentice stage had all but vanished in Tokyo while the *Maiko* had managed to continue in Kyoto, their numbers were dwindling. One reason for it because the compulsory education law requiring everyone to complete middle school, with the usual age of graduation at 15. This meant a modern-day *Maiko* started out at the age when traditionally she would be getting ready to assume full-fledge *Geisha* status (Kodansha, 14).

D. Organization of *Geisha*

The *Geisha* were divided into discrete groups called *hanamachi* (“flower town”); each organized around it was own registry office (*kemban*). This community provided the focus for a *Geisha*’s private and professional life. The *hanamachi* were highly systemized from the viewpoint of guest and *Geisha*. Every *Geisha* might be register in her particular area and received her assignments through the *kemban* to attend those establishments that were members of the restaurant union (*ryotei kumiai*) of the area. *Ryotei* was a generic term for this kind of restaurant, in Kyoto; establishments where geisha entertain were generally called *ochaya* (teahouse).

The guest who made arrangements for *Geisha* entertainment through these teahouses, and might be abide by the rules of the *Geisha* union (*geigi kumiai*) regarding times of attendance and fees for the *Geisha*. The local *kemban* was the central organizing office that coordinates *Geisha* schedule and also the location of

the “three unions” (*sangyo kumiai*), which were the working elements of each *hanamachi*.

Usually most *Geisha* began their careers by living in the *okiya*. The successful *Geisha* was independence and had her own collection of kimono; or she would be adopted as the “daughter” of an *okiya*; or she had her own apartment. The *okiya* resembled a family or home for the *Geisha*. Majority, the *okiya* was managed by women (often older ex-*Geisha*) who were called “Mother.” The customers were never entertained in the *okiya*, since it was considered the private domain of the *Geisha* off duty (Kodansha, 15).

The customer would contact one of the teahouses to reserve a room (*ozashiki*) and request a certain number of *Geisha*. The manager of the teahouses would contact the *kemban* and the *kemban* contact the various *okiya*. The *kemban* kept record where *Geisha* were working at any time in order to coordinate the supply of *Geisha* with the demand for their services (Kodansha, 15).

E. Fees of *Geisha*

The *Geisha* fees were paid through the same system. The *Geisha* fee (called *hanadai* or *ohana*) applied equally to all *Geisha* in a given area. The customer received a bill from the teahouse including the food, drink, room rental, and *Geisha*. He paid the *Geisha* fees separately from the teahouse and sent a voucher for that amount to the *kemban*. The *kemban* would calculate the amount for each

woman, included the tax (usually 10 percent), also took a small percentage (3 percent) for operating expenses, and turned over the remainder to the *Geisha*, who picked it up in the form of a salary once or twice a month (Kodansha, 15).

The *Geishas* fee were calculated by the hour, it was refer to in units of “sticks,” since the fee was formerly figured by the length of time it took a stick of incense to burn down. One hour generally consists of “four stick,” which was the minimum amount of payment. The full-fledge *Geisha* was received “one stick” or full wages. In addition, the apprentice *Geisha* was used to receive half the set wages. Besides the taxable income, the *Geisha* also received substantial tips directly from the customer. The rate of payment was fixed equally but the popular *Geisha* had more occasions to work (Kodansha, 15).

F. Kimono of *Geisha*

Wearing kimono was one of the things that distinguish between *Geisha* and other women in Japan. The most basic distinction in Japanese traditional clothing was that between *fudangi* (everyday wear) and *haregi* (formal wear). Formal kimonos were those with family crests, and the most common type was *homongi* (dress suitable for visiting). For example: the black crested kimono was wore by an apprentice on the occasion of her debut and when she becomes a full-fledge *Geisha* at the *erikae* ceremony (Aihara, 66). A *Geisha* was formally wore *homongi* when she worked. *Homongi* always silk, although not all silk kimonos were *homongi*. A *Geisha* never wore *fudangi* (wool, cotton, or certain weaves of

silk like pongee) when she was attending ceremony, banquet or other parties (Dalby, 293).

The kimono had changed a little from basic form since the Tang Chinese prototype was adopted by the court ladies of Nara period Japan twelve hundred years ago. The number of robes worn simultaneously had varied from the layered *juni hitoe* (twelve unlined robes) of the Heian period (794-1185), to the usual two layers (*nagajuban*) and kimono today (Dalby, 288). The kimono was totally part of the culture included every aspect of daily life. The garment was influenced by feminine beauty that increased some part of the body (nape, ankle, and hip) and hides others (waist, legs, and bosom) (Dalby, 286).

The kimono did not follow the line of the body unlike the Western dress. The basic shape of the sleeves and the body was rectangular. Winding it around the body and tucking both ends together, double-folded at the front wore it. The right side end might always be folded under the left side. Kimonos had no buttons or fasteners, but were held together with about twelve braids. An apprentice and a *Geisha* wore beneath a kimono undergarment called *hada-juban* on the upper body and *naga-juban*, which was full-length. These garment followed the line of the kimono (Aihara, 62).

The important difference between the standard female kimono and those wore by *Maiko* and *Geiko*, was that the latter leaves the nape of the neck uncovered to the shoulders, while with former, the nape was covered (Aihara, 62).

Kimonos came in only one size, irrespective of the height or figure but to ensure exclusivity. Frequently, a very good quality kimono was handed down from mother to daughter through several generations. And for an *okiya* would keep many expensive kimonos and accessories for use through the years by an apprentice and a *Geisha*.

An apprentice wore long sleeved kimono and a *Geisha* wore long trailed kimono require two tans of material. Ready made kimonos could be purchased in many Japanese department store and specialist kimono stores, but those of higher-grade material such as an apprentice and a *Geisha* wore had to be ordered. The price of kimono was expensive but aside from the matter expense, kimono inherently belongs to a different style and pace of like for example in the *Geisha* world.

An apprentice's neckband was usually red. When an apprentice wore a long trailed kimono, her long *naga-juban* undergarment, which hanged below the hem, was also red. While a *Geisha's* neckband was usually white.

F.1 Other Elements of Dress

- **Obis:** the *obi* (sash) had always fastened the kimono. The *obi* remained fairly simple even when the courtly style of layered robes had disappeared. Twelve layers of flowing robes were regarded as useless, and the ladies of the warrior class wore a single, or at most two or three, robes secured by a relatively show sash at hip level. The *obi* was the most obvious distinction between an apprentice and a *Geisha*. An apprentice's

obi dangles to her ankles and was unique to her. And a *Geisha's obi* was tied square at her back. An apprentice's *obi* was co-ordinated with a wide and colourful *obi-jime* (sash band) and *pocchiri* (sash clasp) decorated with such jewel as jade, coral, pearl and diamond. On the other hand, a *Geisha's* sash band was narrow and her sash clasp was smaller and less ostentatious (Aihara, 66).

- **Foot Wears (*Hakimono*):** an apprentice wore wooden sandals, which stand approximately 10 centimetres high called *okobo*. While a *Geisha* was wore wooden clogs called *geta* or leather sandals *zori*. The colour of the clog's thong varied according to her career: red for the initial period, changing white and later purple. There were two kinds of both *okobo* and *geta*: plain and black lacquered. Black painted usually worn in summer as sweat might spoil plain wood. While in the other season plain ones were more often the rule (Aihara, 70).
- ***Tabis*:** *tabi* was the socks worn with a kimono by both an apprentice and a *Geisha*. The big toe of the *tabi*, which were made from white cotton, was separated. Therefore, that sandals or wooden clogs could be worn easily. The cloth had no elasticity, but *tabi* were designed to retain their shape, even when not on the foot. In most cases, people buy ready made *tabi*, but an apprentice and a *Geisha* usually order theirs to ensure a perfect fit-their attire was their trademark (Aihara, 69).

- **Accessories:** an apprentice and a *Geisha* were carry *ozashiki-kago* (a basket-type of handbag with an opening in silk) when they went to the banquets. In her *ozashiki-kago*, she put *noh satsu* and *senja-fuda* (name cards and stickers bearing the name of her *hanamachi*), a folding fan for the dance, absorbent papers, a hand mirror, lip colour and a *binkaki* (boxwood comb). An apprentice's *ozashiki-kago* was colourful and gaily patterned. And a *Geisha's ozashiki-kago* less flamboyant (Aihara, 70).
- **Kanzashi:** an apprentice wore many *kanzashis* (hair decoration) in her hair. The principal one, the *daikan*, was placed at the front of her chignon and changes each month. A *Geisha's kanzashis* was basically of two types: an ivory comb and a hairpin with jade bead for summer (June-September), and a tortoiseshell comb and a hair-pin with coral bead for winter (October-May) (Aihara, 66).

G. Hairstyles

The average Japanese women wore a kimono and had her hair done in the Japanese style either at home or less usually at the hairdresser's. Usually an apprentice prepared her hair in the hairdresser, it took forty minutes, and it was very expensive. As a result, she went to the hairdresser approximately once a week. When she slept without letting down her hair on an *omaku* (a black-lacquered wooden pillow topped with a small cushion) (Aihara, 71).

At the hairdresser, an apprentice's long hair was stretched with tongs. It was arranged with special paste pomade called *bintsuke-abura*, which made the complicated hairstyle last a comparatively long time. Japanese hair were thick and heavy compared with Westerners, but the hairdresser might still put a pad of artificial hair called *ketabo* in the side locks, or paper inside the body of the hair, to give it extra shape and support.

There were five basic kinds of an apprentice hairstyle. The first was called *wareshinobu*, which stressed an apprentice's loveliness. It was worn in the initial period of her training. A *kanoko*, a red silk ribbon with a white spotted pattern, was worn at both the front and the back of the *mage*, the mass of the hair on the crown. When an apprentice reached the age of eighteen or thereabout, she changed her hairstyle to *ofuku*. This changed also signified that an apprentice had a *danna* (Aihara, 73).

The senior apprentice on special occasion wore two kinds of hairstyle *katsuyama* and *yakko-shimada*. *Katsuyama* was worn for the Gion festival in July. *Yakko-shimada* was worn on formal occasion, such as, the New Year celebration. For one month preceding her debut as a *Geisha*, an apprentice wore a hairstyle called *sakko*, which the top of the piled-up hair was cut. It was showed that an apprentice expresses her resolution and readiness to become a *Geisha*. At this time, an apprentice's *kanzashis* (hair pins) might be tortoiseshell, *bira-kan* or *tamakan*, wore together with red-ribbon cloth at the front (Aihara, 73).

An apprentice had other hair-styled for special occasion, such as, the *Setsubun*, an event that took place early in February. Until the middle 1960s, a *Geisha* dressed her own hair, as did an apprentice. Gradually a *Geisha* began to wear wigs, which called *katsura*. *Katsuras* made of human hair that had been washed, cleaned and dyed a natural colour. Every *katsura* made individually. A *Geisha* might had three different *katsuras*: *shimada*, *mae-ware* and *tsubushi-shimada*. The *shimada* was a formal hairstyle, and the *tsubushi-shimada* was slightly less. *Mae-ware* was worn when a *Geisha* played a male part in a dance performance (Aihara, 73).

H. Make-up

When attended the banquets, an apprentice and a *Geisha* who had been in service less than three years after their debut, always wore the long trailed kimono with *katsura*, white make-up and *geta*. If any element of those set were lacked, they would be a laughing stock throughout the *hanamachi*. After three years' service, a *Geisha* attended the *ozashiki* in the ordinary ankle-length kimono, with simple make-up. A *Geisha* who was over thirty only wore a long trailed kimono with white make-up, *geta* and *katsura* when she performed a dance requiring such attire.

In order to apply white make-up, first an apprentice and a *Geisha* smooths *bintsuke-abura* on her face and the nape of her neck, from her hairline to her back. *Bintsuke-abura* for the face had different qualities to that used in the hair, it was an oil paste that was melted in the hand. Second, the white paste was mixed with

water and applied with a brush, from the neck to the breast and from the nape to the back, using mirrors that were set against each other in order to see the back view. Her white-painted make-up leaves three lines unpainted at the nape; instead of the usual two lines. After the painting was finished, powder was rubbed gently on the skin with a puff. Then the eyebrows were pencilled in. An apprentice and a *Geisha* did all this very skilfully. If they did not draw the eyebrows properly, they had to remove all their make-up and start again, as, unlike normal foundation, it was not possible to make a partial adjustment to this make-up (qtd. on Aihara, 77).

The lips colour of an apprentice and a *Geisha* use came in a small stick that was melted in water after which crystallized sugar was then added to give the cosmetic lustre. In Gion, for the first year after her debut, an apprentice painted only a little lip colour on the lower lip. This might be based on the belief in the past that small lips called *ochobo-guchi* were more attractive. A *Geisha* also painted her lips smaller than she really were though, for a moment, as her make up became clear and distinct, she painted her lips fully (Aihara, 77).

I. Artistic Accomplishments

In the *hanamachi* schools, an apprentice and a *Geisha* took lessons in various artistic disciplines: musical instruments, such as *ookawa* (big hand drum), *kotsuzumi* (small hand drum), *taiko* (drum), *fue* (Japanese flute), and *shamisen* (three-stringed instruments); traditional dancing; narrative and recitative songs

and Noh theatre. Those subjects not included in the school curriculum, such as *haiku* (a style of Japanese verse, in which the poems contain just seventeen syllables), were taught on an individual basis (Aihara, 81).

School hours in the *hanamachis* generally start from ten or eleven in the morning to three in the afternoon. Lessons and practice were on a selective basis, according to individual interest and needs. Unlike most ordinary schools where desks and chair were arranged in rows, the *hanamachi* classrooms which were few and large, had tatami mats on the floor (Aihara, 82).

When an apprentice arrived at school, she first greets the elder *Geisha* already engaged in practice. Even actions such as opening doors, addressing her elders, and entering and leaving a room, were considered part of an apprentice's training. The lessons were given on a group basis and those who make slow progress or do not put in sufficient effort would be told to practice in their own time (Aihara, 82).

Until 1960s some *Maiko* who did not make progress in their dancing or in other artistic accomplishment were forced by their elder *Geiko* to practice in the garden, starting at 5 a.m in summer and 6 a.m in winter. Sometimes the elder *Geiko* struck them if they were not performing well. Such harsh training, which meant to benefit the student, would not be acceptable to day (Aihara, 82).

There was a traditional belief in Japan that the best time to start artistic training was at the age of six, plus six months and six days. This was based on the

notion that art was not acquired through theory but through practice. It was better to start early so that the art becomes part of the body (Aihara, 83).

J. Banquets and Performances

A man who wishes attended to the banquets had to make a reservation with the *okasan* of the teahouse. She informed the *okasan* of the *okiya* about the reservation, which was turned in inform to an apprentice and a *Geisha*. Here, the guests were not allowed to make directly for an engagement to an apprentice and a *Geisha*; and always routed through their *okiya* even a *Geisha* had become independent.

The customs of banquets were differ form other common banquet because an apprentice and a *Geisha* usually dance, perform and play the *shamisen* for an invited group of men who was also enjoyed the food, drink and skilled conversation from the women. A banquet began at about six o'clock in the evening and lasts for between one and a-half or two hours. Sometimes an apprentice and a *Geisha* might stay longer without an extra charge, if they known-well each other (Aihara, 93).

The *hanadai* (charges) for the banquet covering meals and drinks; and fees for an apprentice and a *Geisha* were vary substantially depend on the number of the guests and the number of women who had entertained the men and the type of meals ordered. If a customer wanted to entertain alone with a full-course dinner from a top-class teahouse, the cost was expensive. Because he should paid full the

charge of the banquet from the teahouse. Usually the guests attend to the banquets in groups, they could sharing the cost between them. If the guests were VIPs, they were often invited to the first class teahouse to be entertained (Aihara, 93).

Indicating the cost or banquet the terms generally difficult because it depends on various factors; for example: the duration time of an apprentice and a *Geisha* attending the banquet and the style of kimono that a *Geisha* wore. If a customer seemed richer, the teahouse might ask more money. The teahouse paid all the charged for the banquet on behalf of the guests, including the *hanadai* for the apprentice and the *Geisha* (Aihara, 94).

K. Main Performances

The five *hanamachi* had their own dance school: *Inoue* School in Gion, *Onoue* School in Ponto-cho, *Hanayagi* School in Kamishichiken, *Wakayagi* School in Miyagawa-cho, and *Fujima* School in Gion-Higashi. Each *hanamachi* had own dance theatre; school for an apprentice and a *Geisha* in Gion, Ponto-cho and Miyagawa-cho were established an annexe for this theatre (Aihara, 99).

A performance by an apprentice and a *Geisha* was mainly held in spring and autumn. Starting with the *Miyako Odori* or the Cherry Dance in Gion dance theatre, the *Kamogawa Odori* or Kamo River dance in Ponto-cho, *Kyo Odori* or Kyoto dance in Miyagawa-cho, and *Kitano Odori* or North Field dance in Kamishichiken. The dance performances in the *hanamachis* were popular, not only with people of Kyoto but also with tourists from all over Japan. The dance performances in the *hanamachis* were spectacular presentations with many

apprentices and *Geisha* participating. Kimonos and accessories were ordered specifically for these occasions and were so colourful and unique that they could, even appreciated by those who know nothing about Japanese dance (Aihara, 99).

An apprentice and a *Geisha* work very hard to prepare themselves for the performances. The dance was performed in teams of approximately ten people, so everybody's movements had to be synchronized perfectly. During the dance seasons which last for about a month. There was no time for them to relax, but all who participate in the dance find them a rewarding experience and helping them to improve their artistic ability.

A tea ceremony was conducted before each the performances. An apprentice and a *Geisha* prepared and served tea accompanied by the Japanese confection called *Omaju*. The small ceramic saucer that was used in the ceremony and could be taken home and some costumers could collect them (Aihara, 99).



CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS