Bachelor's thesis

for the academic degree
“Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)”

in the degree program Asian Studies

The Changing Profession of the Geisha

Translation (machine assisted)
Originally submitted in German by

Michael Werker

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1. Introduction

Geisha are still often regarded as a symbol of Japan, just as they were in the past. For many people who are not deeply involved in Japanese studies, geisha represent something that encapsulates Japanese culture in a single person. Geisha are understood as traditional Japanese cultural assets who, despite the modernization and “Westernization” of Japanese society, remain true to their traditions and continue to practice them to this day. The world of geisha is often imagined as a kind of strictly defined culture that exists within modern society. However, these ideas correspond only to a small part of reality.

While it is true that geisha still maintain many traditions of the past, the world of geisha has never been a static world unaffected by change. Since the word was first mentioned in its current meaning in the mid-18th century, the world of geisha has undergone drastic changes more than once. The geisha profession has undergone many changes over time. This was because it had to adapt to the circumstances of the country in order to survive. So, what we understand today as a geisha has come a long way, full of changes and adaptations.

First of all, it should be noted that the number of practicing geisha has changed significantly over time, so that today fewer than a thousand geisha still pursue this profession. It is therefore of particular interest to find out what the geisha world intends to do about its impending demise. The example of a Western geisha will also be used to illustrate this point. Fiona Graham, formerly a geisha in Asakusa, a historic geisha district in Tokyo, is one of the only Western geisha we learned about during our research. Before Ms. Graham, it was Liza Dalby, an American anthropologist who worked as a practicing geisha in Kyoto as part of her research. Fortunately, Ms. Graham teaches a comprehensive course on geisha at Keiō Gijuku Daigaku, Keiō University in Tokyo, thanks to which we were able to attend a geisha banquet and dance and talk to a few of the few remaining geisha. This work will refer extensively to scientific and contemporary texts, but in order to gain a more accurate understanding of the geisha of our time, we also want to include our personal experience in our research.

The following bachelor's thesis will examine and describe the changes in the world of geisha in detail. To this end, the origins and history of geisha, as well as their various services and areas of work over time, will be analyzed. Furthermore, the competition between geisha and other forms of entertainment will be discussed in order to better understand the changes in the world of geisha. Finally, based on this research, an attempt will be made to describe the development of the world of geisha up to the present day and to draw a comparison between the geisha of today and those of the past. What status have geisha acquired over time? What is their status today? Are geisha a dying breed of artists? What methods do geisha use to ensure their survival? Where possible, we will attempt to answer these questions in detail. To this end, we will take a closer look at the example of Ms. Graham.

The sources on these topics are limited, especially in English and German-language texts. Nevertheless, in order to complete this work, we were able to find some authentic texts that provide deep insight into the world of geisha. Unfortunately, there were a few very promising books that could not be obtained through the usual channels. These texts would certainly have a positive effect on a future revision, but unfortunately they must be disregarded this time. In order to better understand the geisha world of today, it is essential that we also look at internet articles and interviews with contemporary geisha.

As a final point in this introduction, a note on terminology. Although the artists are often collectively referred to as geisha in today's media, this is not entirely correct. The geisha who practice their profession in Kyoto are called geiko. Young geisha are often referred to as maiko, but only the young geisha from Kyoto call themselves this. In Tokyo, they are called hangyoku, which means “half price.” For the sake of clarity, we will use the terms geisha and maiko unless it is clear that we are referring to artists from these places.

2. The Geisha

For many people, the fascination with Japan is still strongly represented by geisha. The geisha is an entertainer. She offers highly stylized, traditional arts, paired with a touch of eroticism and care for the customer. The distinction between the business of

the geisha and that of the prostitute has not always been clear. However, we will address the topic of prostitution and geisha at a later point. If we limit ourselves to appearances for now, geisha can be described as follows: over a mostly deep red underkimono, called a nagajubon, they wear at least one, sometimes several kimonos. Maiko usually wear colorful kimonos with elaborate patterns and colors, while after their debut they tend to wear simpler versions without patterns. The sleeves of the kimono worn by maiko often hang down to the floor, while the sleeves of fully trained geisha are kept short. The kimono is held in place by a wide belt called an obi. The obi is tied in a large bow at the back of the geisha. A typical obi is about four meters long and sixty centimeters wide. The way the obi is tied depends on the geisha district and the age of the geisha. On her feet, she wears tabi (white socks with the big toe separated from the other toes) and geta (wooden sandals) or zōri (bast sandals). The white makeup that has become so characteristic of geisha was formerly made from white lead and ground fruit, and today is made from rice, and is called oshiroi. It is usually applied very thickly to the entire face and neck. However, a pointed pattern is left exposed at the nape of the neck. The neck is exposed due to the deep collar of the kimono, allowing a glimpse of the uncolored neck. The lips are painted red and the eyebrows are drawn on. The lips are painted to appear narrower than they actually are. The position of the eyebrows is also often adjusted. According to Buruma (1984: 89), the custom of altering a woman's natural face in such an artificial way stems from the fact that nature is only revered by the Japanese when it has been transformed by humans: “[...] [Artificiality] is often valued for its own sake.” (Buruma 1984 : 94) Nowadays, it is customary for only maiko to wear white makeup every day. Fully trained geisha only wear it on special occasions or when requested by customers. Geisha tend to use many different styles to style their hair, although in the past, due to strict regulations, geisha were only allowed to wear the so-called shimada style. Maiko and geisha often wear various types of hairpins and combs with decorations in their hair. Geisha have long been trendsetters in kimono fashion. Kimonos worn by geisha become fashionable, as per Dalby (1992 : 30). After Japan opened up, a few geisha tried to incorporate Western clothing into their style. However, this was rejected by the geisha world. According to Dalby (1992 : 31) the kimono is adapted in its design to the architecture and interior design of typical Japanese rooms. This can be seen, among other things, in the fact

that it is very difficult to sit on a chair in a kimono. In addition, the most beautiful angle of the kimono, the back, would be covered by the chair. Only in seza, the Japanese way of sitting on the lower legs, does one notice the supportive function of the kimono. This allows one to appreciate the full beauty of the kimono, which is not fully appreciated from the front but from the back. Since geisha traditionally work in zashiki (a Japanese-style hall), the connection to kimono has been preserved to this day. However, zashiki does not only refer to the hall, but the term is also used as a synonym for geisha work. (Buruma 1985 : 89, 94; Dalby 1992 : 30-31; Lühl 1983 : 136-137, 201-202; Masuda 1957 : 288, 291; McCormick 1956 :203; Narushima 1874 : 53; Pekar 2003 : 273)

The work of a geisha, both in the past and today, involves entertaining guests, which often takes place in the context of alcohol consumption. She is expected to keep the guests in good spirits by employing all her skills and refilling their drinks. It has always been customary for geisha to be taught music, acting, and poetry from childhood. Conducting stimulating conversations is also part of a geisha's repertoire. Geisha who are able to keep their guests entertained with their conversational skills are extremely popular. However, a lot has changed from earlier times to the present day. We will discuss these differences and, in particular, the development of these differences in more detail in the following chapters. (McCormick 1956 : 203)

At the age of five to seven, future geisha were adopted by geisha houses. However, this adoption was only a formality used to comply with the law. Human trafficking had long been prohibited in Japan. In reality, these adoptions were often more like sales. Around 1926, only 18% of geisha stated that they had entered the profession voluntarily. Often, the poverty of the people, especially in rural areas, was exploited to buy children cheaply for geisha houses or brothels. The money paid was considered a loan and had to be repaid by the geisha in the future. The costs of training, accommodation, and food also had to be covered by their work. As a result, geisha were often placed in a position of dependency from which it was difficult to escape without help. The geisha lived together in the okiya (geisha house) under the guidance of their okaasan (geisha mother). Young geisha often addressed the older geisha as oneesan (older sister). The geisha district was called hanamachi (city of flowers). Usually, just a few weeks after arriving at a geisha house, the training to become a geisha began. The lessons were often conducted by former geisha and

later also by the kenban (the geisha office), where they were also taught reading and writing. More on that later, however. The children were first taught manners and then dancing, poetry, the art of conversation, singing, and playing instruments. Today, these students are generally called maiko. Once the maiko had completed her training, she was introduced to all the teahouses and inns in the district. She brought small gifts with her to secure the favor of the owners. Now that she had officially become a real geisha, the two-year phase known as marugakae (covering all expenses) followed. All of the geisha's earnings now went to the geisha house, which in return provided her with clothing and food. After these two years, the oshūgidori phase usually began, during which the geisha was allowed to keep her tips but still had to hand over her wages to the geisha house. She also had to buy her own everyday clothes. As a rule, the geisha's period of service lasted about ten years. However, it often happened that the parents of a geisha asked the geisha mother for money again, thus extending their child's contract period. The geisha herself had little influence in this process. After the official period of service, the geisha was free to do as she pleased, although the majority became kanbangari. This term can best be translated somewhat freely as “borrowed sign,” which of course refers to the name sign of the geisha house. This meant that she was allowed to keep all her earnings for herself, but had to pay the geisha house for food and license fees. Due to all these adversities, there were only a few geisha who were able to pay off their former debts on their own. However, most geisha already had a patron after their debut, who was something like the geisha's partner and gave her gifts in the form of clothing, makeup, or even money. Rich and generous patrons bought their geisha out of the geisha house. Sometimes this led to marriage, but often the geisha became concubines or even had to work in their patrons' businesses. It can therefore be said that even after leaving the geisha house, geisha were often not truly free. (Garon 1993 : 715; Lühl 1983 : 136 – 138; Masuda 1957 : 150, 179, 188; Narushima 1874 : 26; Stein 1998 : 303)

It is also important to mention that there were different types of geisha. There were geisha who highly valued their art and enjoyed a very high reputation among their clients. These were mainly employed in the prestigious hanamachi. However, there were also so-called onsen geisha (hot spring geisha) or machi geisha (city geisha), who offered less art and more physicality. These were often only formally

trained in the arts. In the course of this work, we will return to the onsen geisha later. (Dalby 1983 : 167, 235-236; Tiefenbrun 2003 : 23)

2.1 The emergence of an artist

Surprisingly, the first geisha who can be traced by name were not women, but men. It was not until around 1750 that the first female geiko was registered in Kyoto. Only after that was the first female geisha registered in Edo, now Tokyo, after which the number of geisha increased. However, it took centuries of development to finally establish the term geisha (meaning female artists) and arrive at this result. As early as 730, there are reports of courtesans who used singing, poetry, and storytelling to entertain their customers. Writings from the 11th century testify that female artists also played instruments to entertain drinking guests, who were mostly male. In the 12th century, the art of dance was added to this. Although these arts were all practiced by courtesans at that time, they are also found in this combination among geisha today. With the introduction of coin currency in the Muromachi period (1333-1573), there was an increase in the number of courtesans who, it can hardly be put any other way, were put in brothels and made available to anyone who had the necessary money. As attempts were made to control this early on in Japanese history, Yoshiwara, the most famous entertainment district in Edo at the time, was established in 1617. It was Hideyoshi who made this decision. The aim was simply to banish prostitution to a controllable area. However, the artists gradually transformed into pure prostitutes, leaving entertainment entirely to the geisha, who at that time were still male. The geisha entertained the customers before they ultimately spent the night with a courtesan. Prostitution was prohibited outside the licensed districts, which is why any form of entertainment artists who performed outside these districts was gradually banned. This was mainly because, although there were indeed pure artists, they were increasingly being imitated by prostitutes. This ultimately led to the ban on the art. Therefore, around 1750, the artists moved to Yoshiwara, where male geisha provided entertainment at that time. It was hoped that by practicing their art in a licensed area, they would be able to avoid the danger of being banned by imitating prostitutes. As a result, the number of female geisha increased steadily and the term soon came to be used only for female entertainers. In Kyoto, the equivalent of

Yoshiwara at that time was the Gion district, and in Osaka, it was the Shimanouchi district. (Buruma 1985 : 100 ;Lühl 1983 : 135 ; Stein 1998 : 294 – 298; Tiefenbrun 2003 : 28-29)

Geisha enjoyed great popularity and thus became fierce competitors to the courtesans and prostitutes in Yoshiwara. Around 1779, complaints from brothel owners led to geisha being placed under state control. In Edo, for example, the so-called Kenban was introduced. This was an office that was supposed to monitor the activities of geisha and, in particular, regulate their employment. Later, a Kenban was introduced in all official geisha districts, although not always under this name. Yoshiwara was thus designated as the place of residence for geisha in Edo. This meant that they were only allowed to leave the district under strict conditions. The Kenban also rigorously intervened in the clothing and style of the geisha. Geisha were no longer allowed to use more than one comb or hairpin. Their kimonos had to be simpler than those of the courtesans. In addition, they were only allowed to style their hair in the shimada style. The Kenban also decided which young girls were eligible for geisha training. Every effort was made not to recruit the most beautiful young girls as students, but to choose the less attractive ones instead. Furthermore, efforts were made to place geisha apart from courtesans. They were also only allowed to be summoned to the zashiki in groups. If one did not comply with these rules, one could expect to be banned from working for several days. However, the Kenban did not only have negative effects. Since geisha were now only allowed in Yoshiwara, the Kenban ensured that all illegal geisha activities in other districts disappeared. This meant that geisha themselves no longer had to fear being banned. However, it should also be mentioned that many who copied geisha at that time simply changed their names and continued to offer similar services. Thus, the geisha in Yoshiwara were able to defend their status as the only geisha solely through their name and the fact that there were instruments that only they were allowed to play. Soon, however, around 1846, the geisha in the Yanagibashi district of Edo, for example, began to engage in erotic seduction games with their customers. This did not mean, however, that they prostituted themselves for their customers. The thrill of being able to conquer a geisha was stimulating for many customers and greatly increased the popularity of geisha. There are also sources that report that the thrill of the game was greater than the ultimate sexual act. Even today, it is often understood

that the thrill lies in imagining something that can never become reality. (Lühl 1983 : 134-136; Masuda 1957 : 150, 281, 283; Narushima 1874 : 37; Stein 1998 : 298-299; Tiefenbrun 2003 : 28-29)

Around 1860, geisha in Yoshiwara were more of a supplement to the courtesans, who still enjoyed great popularity. At that time, the rules of kenban, which governed the outward appearance of geisha, were becoming increasingly relaxed. Geisha were now once again able to wear magnificent kimonos like those of courtesans. This was mainly due to a new law passed in 1872. This law was to bring about far-reaching changes that also affected the world of geisha. Since many geisha and prostitutes at that time had effectively been enslaved in geisha houses since childhood and were miserably in debt, it was decided that geisha should no longer be traded like animals and should no longer be burdened with debt through this trade. Geisha who had been kidnapped or enslaved against their will were allowed to leave the geisha house and return to their homes. Among other things, the Meiji government decided that prostitutes would now need a license for sexual contact and geisha would need a license for their arts. Although sexual contact could occur between clients and geisha, geisha were not considered prostitutes by the government. An interesting effect of this law was that while the number of prostitutes declined, the number of geisha doubled in some districts. At that time, there was now a license for geisha arts and a license for prostitution. It was not uncommon for a geisha to hold both licenses. Despite this law, there were, of course, less prestigious districts where geisha still faced the same conditions as before. (Lühl 1983 : 136; Narushima 1874 : 20; Tiefenbrun 2003 : 22, 35-39)

When the Russo-Japanese War broke out in 1904, the geisha supported the war and formed a kind of union for this purpose. This union now also determined rules within the geisha world. They decided who was allowed to become a geisha and could also expel a geisha in the event of a violation of the rules. However, with the increasing number of geisha, it became increasingly difficult to enforce these rules, which were not backed by law. In the 1920s, there were approximately 80,000 registered geisha in Japan. The popularity of geisha among foreigners visiting Japan contributed to a huge improvement in their reputation. However, the emergence of hostesses made life difficult for geisha. By 1934, there were only 72,000 geisha left in the country. The geisha world had thus evolved from a subculture of courtesans to a

culture of respected artists who were even capable of setting trends. During the war, most teahouses were closed and geisha had to find other work. After the war, the Japanese government feared that American soldiers coming into the country would rape women en masse. Therefore, all geisha and prostitutes were gathered together to satisfy the soldiers. However, General MacArthur forbade soldiers from entering these brothels, and as early as 1947, a ban on prostitution was enacted, but it did not produce the desired result. Geisha were not included in this law. In 1947, there were only 2,478 geisha left in the country. (Dalby 1992 : 30-31; Garon 1993 : 730; Tiefenbrun 2003 : 33, 40-42)

Finally, a law passed in 1956 prohibited geisha from engaging in sexual contact with their clients. On March 31, 1958, prostitution was completely banned throughout Japan. Suddenly, 55,000 official prostitutes found themselves unemployed. Of course, this did not end prostitution itself; it simply went underground. In 1964, before the Olympic Games were held in Tokyo, there was a renewed effort to eliminate prostitution. It is interesting to note, however, that geisha were not banned by the 1958 law. This shows once again that there was a clear distinction between geisha and prostitutes. (Buruma 1985 : 103, 130-132; Lühl 1983 : 8; Tiefenbrun 2003 : 28)

In the past, geisha were trained from childhood. However, as part of the reforms of 1958, it was stipulated that children had to attend school until the age of 15. This made it difficult for geisha, as their training was normally supposed to be completed by the age of 15. In the 1970s, the number of geisha nationwide rose again to 17,000, but then declined steadily. The reason for this was the emergence of many modern forms of entertainment. By 1985, geisha were already facing the problem that there were hardly any women left who would voluntarily choose to become geisha. For most, there was no longer any economic pressure that could have pushed them into such work. Career opportunities for women were much more diverse than before. The importance of the teahouse had declined, and the few customers were no longer as adept at dealing with geisha as they once had been. Compared to the newly added entertainment options such as nightclubs, bars, and massage parlors, interacting with geisha also required significantly more expenditure, which many men were no longer willing to pay. In 1999, there were only 195 geisha

and 55 maiko left in Kyoto. In 2007, there were about a thousand geisha left in all of Japan. (Buruma 1985: 98-99; Demetriou 2011b; Tiefenbrun 2003 : 44-45)

While the maiko population in Kyoto returned to a level similar to that of 1965, when there were 76 maiko in Kyoto, with 71 maiko in 2006, the geisha population has steadily declined. Since 1965, it has fallen from 548 geisha to 202 geisha in 2006. By 1970, there were only six active hanamachi in Kyoto. However, one of them, called Shimabara, has disappeared over time, leaving only five. Shimabara has become a museum. In 2007, there were only 196 geisha left, but 77 maiko. While the geisha population is declining, the maiko population is increasing. This can certainly be seen as an indication that there are still Japanese women who would like to become geisha, but do not want to pursue this profession forever. In 2005, there were only 342 geisha in total in the six hanamachi of Tokyo. It is interesting to note that Yanagibashi is no longer one of the active hanamachi. (Dalby 2007; McCurry 2005)

2.2 A profession in transition

As can be gleaned from the previous chapter, geisha at that time actually emerged as artists who wanted to offer their art to customers rather than their bodies. The reason artists went to Yoshiwara at that time was because they feared imitation prostitutes who threatened to bring about a government ban by cheaply copying the arts and pairing them with sex. At first, they were only a supplement to the courtesans. They were supposed to entertain customers while they drank or sweeten the waiting time for the courtesans. As time went on, geisha threatened to steal the courtesans' attention thanks to their arts, so they were forbidden from playing certain instruments and wearing particularly beautiful kimonos. However, as already mentioned, these bans were lifted by 1872 at the latest. When geisha did not go to the zashiki, they often simply stayed at home. There were also annual dances in which the young maiko in particular took part to showcase their learned arts. (Lühl 1983 : 134-135, 138; Masuda 1957 : 161; Stein 1998 : 297-298; Tiefenbrun 2003 : 27)

2.2.1 Geisha and prostitution

At this point, we would like to address an issue that has been raised repeatedly throughout the history of the geisha profession. There has been much debate, especially in Western literature, about whether geisha are prostitutes or not. Since we will return to the aspects of Western literature later, we will only say this much: Europeans who came to Japan at that time had hardly noticed the development of the geisha and could therefore only form an impression of the situation at that time. It is true that geisha offered their bodies to their clients during certain periods of their long history. Although the frequency of these sexual encounters varied from geisha to geisha, as did the number of clients, around 1929, for example, three-quarters of geisha stated that they also slept with clients. Despite this considerable number, however, it would be premature to describe geisha as prostitutes in general. (GARON 1993 : 712-713; LÜHL 1983 : 7-8; PEKAR 2003 : 277, 288-289; RAMSEYER 1991 : 95-96)

Until 1958, and unofficially in later years, there were enough prostitutes in Japan who functioned solely as such. Ryūhoku Narushima wrote the following on this subject in 1860:

> Those who offer intimate services but no arts are usually called jorō. Those who offer arts but no intimate services are called geisha. [...] Normally, men who buy prostitutes want to sleep with them. But those who hire geisha should enjoy their artistic performances and not sleep with them.
> (NARUSHIMA 1874 : 32)

Certainly, not everyone shared this view. However, a distinction was made between prostitutes and geisha. Not only did a geisha cost a lot of money, but you could also rarely be sure that you would be able to spend the night with her at the end of the evening. Geisha at that time often spent the night only with their patron. Since this represented a kind of partnership and usually ruled out sex with multiple clients, one cannot speak of prostitution per se. The ritual of mizuage (defloration of a prostitute or geisha) should not be overlooked here. When a geisha made her debut, she was usually still a virgin. Spending the first night with a new geisha was desirable enough, especially for customers who had already taken a liking to the girl during her hangyoku period, to pay a high price for her virginity. It was usually the future patron

who paid this price to be able to sleep with the geisha. Mizuage largely disappeared after World War II, especially after 1956. Its mention in Arthur Golden's book, Memoirs of a Geisha, caused outrage in the geisha world. Nevertheless, there is a statement from a geiko from 2005 who, while doubting the existence of mizuage today, does not want to completely rule out that it is still practiced at times. (Lühl 1983 : 8; Masuda 1957 : 160; McCurry 2005; Narushima 1874 : 32; Tiefenbrun 2003 : 12, 25, 32)

If a geisha had a regular partner, the kenban would also inform the inns that the geisha was not available for overnight stays. In addition, most geisha were free to refuse a customer at any time. Of course, this was not always enforceable. It also depended on the district in which a geisha worked and how high her reputation was. But in general, it was more the game with the geisha than the actual sex that made the whole thing so appealing. Many geisha saw sex with customers merely as a source of additional income, especially since they often could not refuse sexual acts due to the relationship between them and the customers. At this point, it is appropriate to quote Narushima once again.

> If you get someone to deviate from their established activity, then, when you think about it, it's no different than setting a stuck, immovable stone rolling.
> (Narushima 1874 : 32)

Especially after World War II, many geisha were employed as prostitutes, but strictly speaking, this does not mean that geisha can be equated with prostitutes. At that time, the artistic aspect of the profession and the actual definition of geisha, as established by the government in 1872, no longer applied. So, if we disregard this difficult period and consider that it is of course impossible to make the same statement about the work of all geisha working at that time, the following can be said: Although there were times when sex was more or less practiced in the geisha world, the distinction between prostitutes and geisha can be understood due to the artistic nature of the profession and the relationship between art and sex, but above all because one could not simply go to a geisha to sleep with her. It was often the customers who initiated the transition from artistic entertainment to sexual acts. However, it must always be remembered that the boundaries were sometimes

blurred. (Buruma 1985 : 100, 103; Garon 1993 : 730; Lühl 1983 : 8, 138; Masuda 1957 : 167, 238, 269; Mura 1988 : 22; Narushima 1874 : 32, 37; Pekar 2003 : 277; Tiefenbrun 2003 : 22, 28, 36, 41)

2.2.2 Geisha in Western thinking

But how is it that, especially in Western thinking at the time, no distinction was often made between geisha and prostitutes? When dealing with such a topic, one must of course bear in mind that the current state of research differs drastically from that of the past. It was men who went to Japan and wrote down their own experiences. These reports were then read by other men and supplemented with their own experiences. Depending on where these men went, they were presented with a different picture of the country. For example, the following statement from 2003 about the Western view of geisha in literature can be found:

> Beauty, artistry, erotic sophistication and naivety of heart, friendliness, accessibility, even submissiveness, and yet the distance of exotic strangeness are some of the aspects of the complex Western admiration of Japanese geisha. (Pekar 2003 : 288)

However, the same publication on European travelogues contains the following:

> In general, however, travel reports made little distinction between geisha, chaya-on (teahouse girls), and jorō (prostitutes) [...]. (Pekar 2003 : 291)

This wording seems a little strange, as it is now generally agreed that it was the geisha, and not ordinary prostitutes, who tried to impress their customers with their skills. The question arose as to whether the geisha was a high-class cultural figure or a morally reprehensible prostitute [...] (Pekar 2003 : 288-289). First of all, many travelers to Japan did not know much about the background of geisha life. For example, there are texts from 1856 that credit geisha with a “careful upbringing” (Wilhelm Heine quoted in Pekar 2003 : 289) and describe them as “models of female education” (Wilhelm Heine quoted in Pekar 2003 : 289), completely ignoring the fact that in 1856, in many places, it was actually more a case of slave trade and child

prostitution. However, there are also other opinions from before the turn of the century that already made a strict distinction between geisha and prostitutes. We know that the Japanese understanding of jorō, geisha, and other entertainers was much broader than that of visitors to Japan at that time. Although a geisha did offer erotic services, she was not considered a simple prostitute among the Japanese. The boundaries between the individual groups were not clearly defined, which posed a problem for Western visitors with their much simpler ideas. This problem was further complicated by the fact that, due to the high popularity of geisha at the time, even the most artistically untalented pleasure girls were presented to foreign visitors as geisha. Even after World War II, any woman who earned her money by entertaining men, whether sexually or not, was considered a geisha gal. Considering that visitors to Japan at that time regarded all women who had sexual contact with a client as prostitutes, it is easy to understand how this confusion about the term geisha arose. Today, the general opinion is that, even if there were exceptions, geisha were not and are not prostitutes. (Pekar 2003 : 277, 288-289, 291)

2.2.3 Masuda Sayo

To gain a better understanding of the work of geisha, let's take a look at an autobiography. There are a handful of geisha who have written autobiographies, including Iwasaki Mineko, who served as the model for Arthur Golden's book. However, let's take a closer look at the example of Masuda Sayo. She was not a typical geisha, but one of the many onsen geisha who lived in the shadow of the famous and highly respected hanamachi at that time. Her story is interesting because it differs from what many people imagine the life of a geisha to be like. Masuda Sayo, born in 1925, was sold to a geisha house in Suwa at the age of twelve. Suwa is located in Nagano Prefecture. Masuda worked in the geisha house for seven years and was bought out by her patron, whom she called Lonpari, at the age of 19. During the seven years she spent in the geisha house, she completed her training and then worked as a geisha. (Masuda 1957 : 123, 288; Stein 1998 : 303-308)

However, before she officially began learning the arts, Masuda had to dust, do laundry, and run errands in the mornings. She had to carry the geisha's instruments and clothes for them and, according to her own account, was not treated very well. A

month after she arrived at the geisha house, she was sent to Kenban to attend geisha school. There she learned to play the shamisen, a Japanese stringed instrument, the tsuzumi, a Japanese hand drum, and dancing. Reading and writing lessons were also given there, but these were not considered particularly important at school. (Masuda 1957 : 124-126)

At the age of 14, Masuda officially became a hangyoku. As usual, Masuda took a rickshaw ride through her neighborhood that day and introduced herself to the inns, teahouses, and restaurants there. As a hangyoku, it was her job to go to the zashiki and pour alcohol there. The sequence of events at a “drinking party” (Masuda 1957 : 161) in Suwa around 1940 was as follows. First, a hangyoku dances to the singing and music of the geisha, then the geisha dance, and after the celebration ends, only those who sleep with the geisha remain. (Masuda 1957 : 150, 161)

Masuda made her debut as a geisha at the age of 16. The geisha examination was conducted by teachers of various arts and geisha from her own geisha house, in the presence of the police and the Kenban. When a geisha is requested, a messenger from the teahouse or restaurant is first sent to the Kenban, which then informs the geisha house. Payment is also made through the Kenban at this time. Here, one can clearly see the strict control exercised by this institution. After passing the examination, Masuda first visited the customers who had been kind to her in the past and finally went to the zashiki with the customer she hoped would become her patron. In fact, the mizuage ritual was performed between Masuda and Lonpari. After he claimed her virginity for himself, Masuda, according to her own account, was sold by the geisha mother to other customers under the pretense that she was still a virgin. At the age of 18, Masuda received her oshūgidori. At the turn of 1943 and 1944, at the age of 19, Masuda was finally bought out by her patron, the Lonpari, and moved out of the geisha house. (Masuda 1957 : 150-151, 165-166, 179, 188; Narushima 1874 : 48)

We will only touch briefly on the difficulties Masuda had to overcome during her life as a geisha. In order to examine the work of a geisha, we will limit ourselves here to the broad outlines of events. Masuda was not brought to the geisha house until she was twelve years old. This is quite late when you consider that the usual recruitment age at that time (1937) was six to eight years old. When reading Masuda Sayo's autobiography, it quickly becomes clear that Masuda was actually treated like

a slave by the geisha mother. After all, her entry into the geisha house was more like a sale. Considering that Masuda was sold by her to several men for sex, one can speak of temporary forced prostitution in Masuda's case. However, Suwa as a district cannot be compared to Yoshiwara or Yanagibashi. Yanagibashi was home to geisha who enjoyed a very high reputation. Likewise, the clients were mostly of high social standing. The geisha in Yanagibashi could reject their clients at will if they did not want to sleep with them. They did not have to fear any repercussions for such behavior. Suwa is more notable for the fact that, according to STEIN (1998 : 307), its clientele consisted of “local manufacturers and mafia bosses who considered it their right to buy young girls for money as they pleased.” Artistic training was therefore merely a pretense to enable one to call oneself a geisha. Masuda's case is an example of an onsen geisha who performed this profession under very difficult conditions and by no means voluntarily. (STEIN 1998 : 303-308)

3. The artist in today's world

Today's geisha have it easier in many ways than their sisters of the past. However, there are also some new difficulties that the geisha world must overcome in order to survive. As we have already seen, there are only about a thousand geisha left in Japan today. Most of them are located in Kyoto, Tokyo, and Osaka. We know that preserving traditions in a rapidly changing, modern world has put geisha to the test. For many customers, hiring a geisha for a zashiki has simply become too expensive. High-ranking politicians who still wanted to enjoy such entertainment suddenly found themselves facing protests from the Japanese population. It was frowned upon for politicians to use Japanese taxpayers' money to visit expensive teahouses and be entertained by expensive geisha. As a result, politicians are now more cautious, and the geisha world has lost another customer base. (FUJIOKA 2007)

If you want to spend an exciting evening enjoying the nightlife in Tokyo or Kyoto today, there are many options available.

> Demand for geisha has declined. You can now go to a club or ‘snack’ bar to talk with a hostess. (Itoh Osamu, quoted in LE 2009)

Various clubs and bars, as well as hostess clubs and karaoke bars, have been using new media for some time now in order to keep up with the times. They don't have to worry about preserving their traditions as long as their customers are happy. Geisha, on the other hand, face the problem of wanting to preserve their traditions while attracting new customers. The geisha world is too exclusive and secretive to cater to today's mass entertainment options. It is a fact that geisha are in danger of simply disappearing. Let's take a closer look at what the geisha world is doing to prevent its demise. (Fujioka 2007; Le 2009; Lies 2008)

3.1 Training and work

The world of geisha has undergone some innovations and changes in recent times that would previously have been unthinkable. In order to ensure their survival in today's world, geisha in many places are quite clever. However, attracting customers is not enough to prevent the ultimate disappearance of geisha. Because if there are no new geisha, the profession will not continue, even with existing customers. In the following, we will examine how the recruitment of new geisha has changed and what innovations there are. In Kyoto, there was once a rule that only girls from Kyoto and only through a recommendation could be accepted into the ranks of maiko. In 1975, this rule was finally abolished because the number of maiko had declined dramatically. Girls from outside Kyoto were now also allowed to enter the geisha world as maiko. In 2007, around 90% of maiko were not originally from Kyoto. Interestingly, maiko who study in Kyoto also have to carefully learn the dialect of the region. Despite their origins, they are expected to create the illusion that the old tradition has been preserved. The example of the geisha Komomo, who entered the profession through email contact with a geisha from Kyoto, is particularly noteworthy here. Modern recruitment methods have also found their way into the geisha world. Geisha houses now also search for new students on the internet. Although the film Memoirs of a Geisha was widely condemned by the geisha world, this does not change the fact that it was also very popular in Japan. Modern media such as films and series that feature fictional geisha as protagonists generate interest among young girls today. In particular, a website in Kyoto that provided information about geisha music, dance, and customs to the public is credited with great success in

recruiting new maiko. In 1995, there were still thirty maiko in Kyoto, but by 2005 there were already eighty. At the very least, this can be considered a partial success. (Dalby 2007; Demetriou 2011a; Lies 2008)

In the past, it was mainly poor families who sold their children to geisha houses out of necessity. The children were victims who were forced into such a life for the sake of self-interest. Nowadays, geisha choose this profession of their own free will. Even though there are certainly stricter and less strict geisha houses, they are not exploited and harassed as they were in the past. Today, you must be at least 18 years old to begin training as a geisha. This is, of course, a significant change from the past, when many geisha did not work much longer than until their mid-twenties or thirties. Since the training of a maiko normally takes several years, geisha today are usually older. A rule has therefore been introduced that geisha above a certain age only have to train in the arts for at least one year, and if they are already over 20, they can become geisha directly without having to complete the maiko period. However, those who have successfully completed their maiko training are held in much higher esteem. Kyoto is an exception to the age rule, as training can begin there from the age of 15. Kyoto is therefore often preferred. This is also reflected in the growing number of maiko. (Dalby 2007; Fujioka 2007; Gilhooly 2011; Narushima 1874 : 45; Stein 1998 : 305)

Although training is still governed by strict rules and a rigorous schedule, geisha are no longer treated badly as they were in the past. Previously, geisha were driven into the profession by their families' poverty. When the country was prosperous, fewer new students entered the profession. The maiko who enter the geisha world today do so of their own free will. They choose to live a strict life, but they have more freedom than their sisters in the past. For example, they can meet their friends or enjoy themselves in the city during their free time. Even today, lessons in various arts, calligraphy, flower arranging, tea ceremony, musical instruments, singing, and dancing are a prerequisite for making one's debut as a geisha. Even if you start directly as a geisha because you are already too old, you will be trained in these arts. An example of a modern maiko's schedule looks something like this: Lessons take place from 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. After that, the young geisha has a few hours of free time until 4:00 p.m., when preparations for the evening program begin. It takes about 45 minutes to apply the maiko's makeup.

Preparations are usually finished by 6:00 p.m. On a normal evening, the maiko has 3-4 zashiki and returns to the geisha house around 1:00 a.m., where she removes her makeup and takes a bath. She often only has one day off every few months. (Demetriou 2011b; Lies 2008; Stein 1998 : 305; *The Independent*[1], 02.05.2013)

Nowadays, once you become a geisha, you can pursue this profession for life. Older geisha are now more common than in the past, as their numbers have simply declined. However, many new apprentices do not see the profession of geisha as their life goal, but rather as a part of their career that they would like to give up at some point in favor of marriage or further education. „I want to become a geisha, but right now I don't know if I want to be in this world for ever." (Koaki, quoted in *The Independent,* 02.05.2013) Since geisha are not allowed to marry, there is no other option but to leave the profession if they want to commit to someone. However, since geisha are no longer bound to the geisha house by the strict rules of the past, it is up to the geisha herself to decide how long she wants to continue in the profession. (Lies 2008; Narushima 1874 : 45)

3.2 Geisha stay in business

Not every geisha has resigned herself to the decline of the geisha world. The many innovations in geisha services throughout the country show that the geisha world is by no means dormant. In the following, we will examine what exactly geisha are doing to preserve themselves. The internet as a platform for sharing information has already been mentioned in an earlier section. More and more geisha, geisha houses, and teahouses are using the internet to promote their services, especially to younger customers.

> In the old days, people only got to know geisha through introductions, but now people rely on the Internet to gather information, Miyagawa-cho has introduced themselves on the net. They're more flexible than some of the more traditional geisha areas, they want people to have fun -- and this is working for them. (Aihara Kyoko,quoted in Lies 2008)

Since geisha no longer have as many customers as they used to, the old method of word-of-mouth advertising and introductions by regular customers no longer works.

[1]http://www.independent.co.uk/news/a-week-in-the-life-of-koaki-apprentice-geisha--schooled-in-the-arts-of-pleasure-1170322.html

The internet offers the opportunity to draw the attention of modern customers to what is on offer without incurring excessive costs. Web blogs have also been extremely popular in Japan for years. There is almost no other country where more blog entries are written than in Japan. A few years ago, some maiko and geisha recognized this trend and started their own blogs. One of the best-known blogs is probably that of Ichimame, who wrote about her life as a maiko back in 2007. Her blog is no longer being updated, but it is still available on the internet. There is even an English version of her entries. This also shows that geisha are well aware that there is great interest in their profession from abroad. (HARDEN 2007; *Kamishichiken Ichi*[2], 02.05.2013)

But it's not just the advertising used by geisha to attract new customers that has changed since then. More and more teahouses are refraining from rigidly adhering to their old traditions. In the Mukojima district of Tokyo, the Sakurajaya teahouse realized back in 2002 that it would be difficult to survive if it only allowed regular customers to enter.

> Back when we were busy, we wouldn't have to do anything and customers would be at our door. We used to choose who came in. Not any more. We let everyone in now. (Amemiya Kazuko, quoted in FUJIOKA 2007)

The owner of Sakurajaya had the idea of organizing bus tours that allow up to thirty tourists to participate in a banquet with six geisha. Each customer only has to pay around 10,000 yen (currently around 78 euros). This is a big difference from sums such as 80,000 yen (currently around 623 euros) per guest for a better, private engagement. Other teahouses also offer the opportunity to participate in a banquet with a group of guests. We will come back to this later. (FUJIOKA 2007)

The owners of a traditional ryokan (inn) in Kyoto's Gion district, called Shinmonso, have come up with a completely different idea to bring geisha into the public eye. In the summer, several maiko are hired to entertain customers from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the beer garden on the roof of the ryokan. The maiko go from table to table and chat with the dining customers for a while. At 8 p.m., they perform a traditional dance on stage and then leave the inn. Other inns have also discovered this offer and now offer a kind of geisha package that includes entertainment with the

[2]http://www.ichi-kyoto.jp/index.php?catid=3

artists in the price. According to a spokeswoman for Shinmonso, this was launched because the number of guests had declined.

> We introduced the service because before, fewer guests were visiting the inn. We also wanted people to learn more about maiko and geisha. Many more people are able to see them now. They have attracted a lot more customers. (Sprecherin des Shinmonso, quoted in DEMETRIOU 2010)

According to the inn itself, this innovation has brought in significantly more customers than before. Others have also expressed positive views about this development. After all, it is usually the high costs and complexity that deter tourists from hiring a geisha or maiko. (DEMETRIOU 2010; *Gion Shinmonso*[3], 02.05.2013)

In some cases, the geisha houses themselves have taken initiatives to attract new customers. For example, Koito, the geisha mother of the aforementioned Komomo, not only wrote one of the first geisha blogs, which ultimately led Komomo to her, but also opened a bar on the upper floor of her geisha house. The idea is to make it easier for new customers to enter the world of geisha. For a small fee, you can chat with the geisha of the house and have a drink. (LIES 2008)

A teahouse called Hamacho in Kochi has come up with a different plan to compensate for the absence of its traditional male clientele. It has launched banquets exclusively for women. For a small fee, women can eat, drink, and be entertained by geisha for two hours. There are more and more career women who meet in groups to go out for a drink. It is precisely these women that the new plan aims to attract to the traditional world of geisha. Although many women still consider entertainment by geisha to be purely a male preserve, the number of interested women has risen significantly in recent times. According to INOUE (2013), around ten groups book this special offer every month. In Tokyo, mixed-gender banquets have begun to be organized, with those who wear kimonos receiving a significant discount. The normal price is 9,500 yen (currently around 77 euros), but with a kimono, you can enjoy the offer from as little as 6,500 yen (currently around 50 euros). This is intended to expand the target group for geisha and thus make it easier for them to survive. (INOUE 2013)

[3] http://www.shinmonso.com/english/maiko/index.html

Not only geisha, geisha houses, and teahouses are thinking about how to make geisha more popular again, but also local non-profit organizations and city administrations in districts where hanamachi are located. In Kagurazaka, Tokyo, for example, an NPO has taken on the task of organizing geisha performances to make them accessible to the public. The belief there is that geisha should be accessible to everyone in order to preserve them as part of the country's culture. The idea is that it is very difficult to maintain a culture that tries to hide away in its own world. Geisha performances are not only popular with men, but surprisingly also with women. Tourists are another important target group for such events. Foreign tourists in particular are being targeted for geisha performances. In Kyoto, there is a festival that takes place every year on February 25 and is dedicated to plum blossoms, among other things. Geiko and maiko were also invited there to perform a grand tea ceremony for the guests. In 2007, thirty geiko showed off their skills to a long line of visitors. The city administration of Shimoda in Shizuoka has introduced another interesting strategy. The geisha of the once-thriving geisha district have almost all disappeared. Only five remained in 2011. So, without further ado, an initiative was launched to hire new geisha. These geisha are to be paid a salary by the municipal administration. The geisha will receive this salary for six months during their training phase and then, after their official debut, continue to work in Shimoda. The city administration hopes that this will lead to a permanent increase in the geisha population and boost Shimoda's popularity. (Demetriou 2011b; Fujioka 2007; *Kyoto Shimbun*[4]*,* 02.05.2013)

Nowadays, the world of geisha has become much more open to newcomers from abroad. Liza Dalby and Fiona Graham are just two examples, but in 2011 Isabella Onou, a Romanian from Bucharest, also joined the ranks of Western geisha. In April, after her geisha debut in Izu-Nagaoka, Shizuoka, she was given the name Fukutaro. What is interesting about Ms. Onou is that she did not try to enter the world of geisha, but was approached by a geisha who eventually became her oneesan. According to Ms. Onou, she was encouraged several times to join the geisha. The high demand for Fukutaro suggests that geisha customers are also very interested in a Western geisha. For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned at this point that a woman from Ukraine, under the name Ibu, is currently working as a geisha in

[4]http://www.kyoto-np.co.jp/kp/topics/eng/2007feb/02-25.html

Anjo. Although there are many sources on this, the quality of these leaves much to be desired, which is why this news should be treated with caution. (Gilhooly 2011)

In addition to the two Western geisha, another special feature has made its way into the ranks of geisha. Eitaro Matsunoya is 26 years old and is currently the only male geisha in Japan. However, this term must be used with caution. The earlier geisha, who entertained customers in brothels before the heyday of female geisha in 1750, were called geisha by name, but never dressed like their female successors later on. They were men who played music to entertain customers. These still exist today, but are no longer called geisha, as the term has become synonymous with female artists over time. Matsunoya is not one of the former male artists, but dresses in the robes of female geisha. He also wears the same makeup, the same wig, and performs the same arts as his female colleagues. His mother, also a geisha, was committed to preserving the geisha world. After her death, Matsunoya did not want to give up his mother's wish and took over her geisha house in Omori, Tokyo. However, he did not just manage the house, he also became a geisha himself. Matsunoya had been learning Japanese dances since childhood and had previously appeared in the role of a female geisha with his mother at a banquet. (Tiefenbrun 2003 : 33; Torres 2012; Witte 2012)

Before we move on from this section, let's look at a few more minor examples. Some city administrations have agreed to cover two-thirds of the geisha's fee in order to attract more customers and tourists to the area. A teahouse owner in Kanazawa offers geisha performances at weddings. In Beppu, located in Oita Prefecture, there is a nonprofit organization that has opened a free geisha school. The training is expected to last two years. (Kobayashi 2012)

All these examples clearly show how much the world of geisha has already changed. Even though some still resist, many have already realized that it is essential to move with the times in order not to be left behind.

> History changes, so if you just offer the same thing it's no good. The service you provide has to match the age. We need to keep providing things the world needs. If we're not needed anymore, all we can do is disappear. (Komomo, zitiert nach Lies 2008)

Unfortunately, it must be added at this point that all attempts by the geisha world to secure a new place in the modern entertainment world have not yet led to the desired success. The decline in the geisha population has not yet turned into an increase. However, we can say that the decline in geisha numbers has at least slowed down over time. Since there are still a significant number of maiko, it remains to be seen how the geisha population will develop. However, it is important to remember that the hard work of the geisha is not only aimed at increasing their own numbers. They also want to find new customers and introduce people to the knowledge and pleasures of the geisha world. At least in this respect, the geisha have been successful. (Dalby 2007; Demetriou 2011a)

3.3 The downside of popularity

In this short section, we want to address an interesting but also alarming problem. Declining customer numbers have forced geisha to venture into new areas. Now, many Western tourists or people who don't know anyone who can introduce them to the exclusive world of geisha can also enjoy a brief encounter with geisha or maiko. However, there is another way to encounter them. In the streets of Gion, in Kyoto, maiko and geisha can occasionally be found on their way to their clients or back to their geisha house. Precisely because they have become so rare, they are sought after, adored, or even hunted by many tourists. This has led to many problems in Gion in recent years, as tourists and photographers harass the artists on their way with their intrusiveness. It is becoming more and more common for frightened maiko, followed by a group of tourists, to squeeze through the narrow alleys of Gion. This is not only annoying, but also dangerous.

> [...]a Japanese tourist hit his subject in the face with a camera lens while trying to take a closeup. (Johnston 2009)

Residents attribute this behavior primarily to insufficient information provided by the city. Although there are a few notices on the websites asking people not to harass maiko, this is not enough. Every year, fifty million tourists find their way to Kyoto.

Geisha are sought-after subjects for snapshots. However, the secrecy of the geisha world, especially in Gion, makes this very difficult. (Johnston 2009)

4. Close-up of the Geisha world

When you delve into the world of geisha, you will eventually come across one name: Liza Dalby, an American anthropologist who is considered one of the leading experts on geisha. Not only did she live among geisha for a while to study their world, but she also participated in banquets as a geisha in 1975. Her website, as unprofessional as it may seem, offers a wealth of research findings and useful links to information about geisha. Dalby also served as a consultant on the film Memoirs of a Geisha. Although the content of the film is often criticized by the geisha world, the content of the book on which the film is based is considered by historians to be quite accurate. The geisha, who despite the many changes over the centuries have nevertheless refused to abandon their traditions, especially in recent times, allowed Dalby access to their world. They saw Dalby as someone who understood them and who could show the West a true picture of their world. The fact that she was allowed to do so reveals much about the changes in the world of geisha today. (Hyslop 2010; Allison 2001 : 397)

However, as important as Liza Dalby's pioneering work is, it is not the main topic here. As mentioned in the introduction, we want to focus on Fiona Graham, an Australian anthropologist who entered this world in the course of her documentation and research on geisha. In contrast to the long, hard training that most young maiko, or hangyoku, have to endure today, Graham's geisha training lasted only one year. This was because Graham was already 43 years old at the time of her debut. According to Graham, aspiring geisha who are already over 20 are free to enter the profession as hangyoku or geisha. This rule has been criticized by many geisha. Graham worked as a geisha in Asakusa for over three years before her connection to the local geisha house was terminated. According to her own statement, this was because her geisha mother had fallen ill. However, there are also newspaper articles reporting that Ms. Graham did not follow the traditions of the geisha world and was therefore asked to leave. However, it cannot be the task of this paper to judge

Graham or to find out exactly what happened. (Graham 2011; Haworth 2009 : 1-3; Ryall 2011)

Ms. Graham is particularly important because she teaches a course on geisha at Keio University in Tokyo, which takes place once a week throughout the semester. During the course, students are not only introduced to the world of geisha through Ms. Graham's lectures, but are also encouraged to conduct their own research on geisha districts and to contact geisha. Furthermore, during the semester, whenever possible, students attend geisha dances, banquets, and other events related to geisha. This is extremely important, especially in relation to the geisha world of today, as it is very difficult to report on it without having gained experience in this field oneself. In this sense, Ms. Graham is actively contributing to making the geisha world more accessible to the public. First, let's take a look at how the geisha world presented itself to students in 2011. (Graham 2011; *Keio University*[5], 02.03.2013)

4.1 My Kimono – Your Kimono

As already mentioned, dressing a geisha in a kimono is an expensive business. It is no coincidence that geisha used to have a patron who could afford such costly items for them. Today, this tradition has faded into the background, but that does not mean that kimonos no longer cost a fortune. Precisely because of the gradual disappearance of the geisha world and the decline in customer numbers, an alternative must be found. Surely many geisha houses own large quantities of kimonos, and not every geisha will have her own complete wardrobe, but at some point a new kimono must be purchased, and that is expensive. In the past, a new kimono was purchased at the slightest sign of wear and tear. Today, good quality used kimonos can be obtained at kimono sales, for example. Hundreds of kimonos and fabrics are laid out in a small room, and according to Ms. Graham, interested private individuals, geisha, and geisha mothers come to the sale to get a good kimono at a reasonable price. (Image 1) Kimono rental services are now also available, but these are aimed more at private kimono wearers. For a long time, this was unthinkable for many Japanese people. Many kimonos fall victim to Japan's high humidity because they are not properly cared for. Often, daughters have simply

[5]http://www.ic.keio.ac.jp/en/download/iccourse/2012/2012s_graham.pdf

forgotten or never knew how to properly care for an expensive kimono. In recent years, however, a service has been developed that professionally stores, airs, and cleans kimonos and delivers them to customers as needed. (Fujioka 2007; Dalby 1992; Lam 2011; *Kimono Project*[6], 02.05.2013)

4.2 Dance into June

In Japan, there are certain dance events held at fixed times of the year, called odori (dance). Every geisha district that considers itself important holds at least one such dance per year. In the Shimbashi district of Tokyo, for example, this is the azuma odori (dance of the east). Young hangyoku as well as young and old geisha take part in this dance. It takes place in the Shinbashi theater at the turn of the month from May to June. If you wait in front of the theater to be let in, you can see geisha and hangyoku being viewed with genuine enthusiasm by people passing by. The performance itself is very traditional. Singing and dancing take place against an elaborate stage set that changes rapidly between scenes. The older geisha play the shamisen or yokobue from small booths at the edge of the stage. There are also male actors, but they are only accessories. It quickly becomes clear who the spotlight is on here: the geisha, who perform their art on stage for all to see. It is striking that there are professional geisha connoisseurs sitting among the audience who call out the name of a geisha when she appears. This is a custom that used to be practiced by the audience, but has died out today due to the fact that the audience does not know the geisha. In order to preserve this tradition, announcers have now been hired. In addition to the actual play, another special feature caught our attention, drawing our attention to the changes in the world of geisha. After the play, several geisha were found in the corridors chatting with the visitors. They eagerly approached the foreign visitors and spoke to them in English, even shaking their hands. They explained that they were naturally interested in the international visitors and would be happy to talk to them about various things. This clearly shows that there are some geisha who are very keen to move with the times in order to establish contact with interested parties and customers. (Arita 2008;Grunebaum 2010; Buruma 1985 : 99)

[6]http://www.kimonoproject.com/eventinfo/307-20130101.html

4.3 Ichimatsu

We have already seen that there are teahouses that have tailored their offerings to modern times in order to stay in business. When visiting one of these teahouses in Asakusa with a group of about twenty people, everyone present was able to see for themselves the artistry with which geisha entertain their customers. The atmosphere in the Ichimatsu teahouse was very traditional. Although there is also a Western-style lounge, the rooms where the geisha entertain their customers, as well as the garden and corridors, are all preserved in Japanese style. The actual hall, zashiki, contains neither chairs nor Western tables, but only cushions on which visitors are seated and immediately served a Japanese meal. A total of four geisha looked after the twenty visitors, poured them sake, and engaged them in lively conversation. (Image 2) A geisha named Fumika had already made her debut some time ago. She performed a traditional dance, displaying a lantern bearing her name. She said that in the past, geisha used these lanterns so that they could be recognized in the dark when out and about (Image 3). In addition to Fumika, an older geisha, a hangyoku, who performed a fan dance, and Ms. Graham entertained the guests. Ms. Graham played the yokobue, accompanied by the shamisen of the older geisha. (HAWORTH 2009 : 3)

Drinking games, visitors were told, were a firm tradition at the zashiki. To the rhythm of an increasingly fast shamisen song, visitors and geisha had to take turns either touching a bowl or picking it up, with the other person then having to tap the empty spot. Anyone who lost their rhythm or made a wrong move had to drink. The faster the game became, the more difficult it was, and the visitors had trouble keeping up with the geisha. (Image 4) One can imagine how such a game could have lifted the mood in a zashiki at that time. Even after the banquet, the geisha were available for conversation and willingly allowed photos to be taken of them, including with the visitors. The visitors were told that it was important to make the geisha more accessible. After thanking everyone warmly, the visitors left the teahouse. The friendliness and openness of the geisha, especially towards the foreigners who attended the banquet, made it clear how much the geisha strive to make a good impression.

4.4 Dialogue with a western Geisha

We had the opportunity to talk to Ms. Graham in person before the end of the geisha course at Keio University. Ms. Graham, who certainly has her enemies in the geisha world, gave us important insights into this otherwise very secretive group. Ms. Graham believes that the gradual decline of the geisha world is mainly due to the fact that many older geisha are not sufficiently engaged with modernity. They do not know, or do not want to know, how they could change their business model to compete with modern entertainment options such as karaoke, hostess clubs, and dance bars. In many places, it is still the case that without an introduction, one cannot enjoy an evening in the company of a geisha. Not only are there many customers who are no longer willing to pay the exorbitant sums involved in hiring a geisha, but there are also many customers who simply do not know how to establish contact with geisha houses and teahouses. Ms. Graham wants to change this. She believes that group banquets such as those held at the teahouse in Akasaka are an important step in the right direction. She says that the geisha world is often still more of an elitist club that unjustly closes itself off to new customers. Many geisha also report in newspaper articles that many of their customers are older businessmen. Young customers are rarely seen. Ms. Graham believes that this is not due to a lack of interest, but simply to the uninviting business model of geisha houses. Ms. Graham has made herself unpopular with some members of the geisha world by revealing well-kept secrets, such as the easy-to-use tsuke-obi (an obi that does not need to be tied, but simply tucked into the belt). Ms. Graham wants to make the world of geisha accessible in order to preserve it, but she often encounters resistance. Of course, Ms. Graham's statements should be taken with a grain of salt, as they only reflect the opinion of a single person. However, it should not be forgotten that Ms. Graham has gained an insight into the geisha world that few Westerners can rival. So her words should at least be kept in mind when dealing with the geisha world. (Lies 2008; Fujioka 2007; Buruma 1985 : 99)

5. Conclusion

In the course of this bachelor thesis, we have been able to examine several aspects of the historical and contemporary world of geisha. We have discussed what geisha are, how they came into being, how they have changed, what subgroups exist, and what innovations can be observed in the present day. In the following, we will present a brief summary of the results and conclude by examining whether we have been able to answer the questions that occupied us at the beginning of this work.

The geisha world is not the traditionally stagnant world that is often imagined. Even though there are many geisha, geisha mothers, and teahouse owners in the geisha world today who fear change, that does not mean that change has not happened. We have seen that many factors have brought about change in the geisha world. In the past, drastic measures were taken to ensure survival, such as the move to Yoshiwara. But influences from outside the geisha world have also contributed to its transformation. The strict requirements of the Kenban, the law of 1872, World War II, the arrival of foreign tourists—all these events had a major impact on geisha and their profession. We have seen that, especially in Kyoto, there are geisha houses that try to hide from the changes of modern times. However, when you consider that the geisha world used to be much more open to trying new things, such as wearing Western clothing, this seems a little strange. It almost seems as if these geisha houses are unjustifiably afraid of change.

We have seen that competition is inevitable, precisely because of the increasing diversity in the entertainment industry. This has to do with the changing status of the geisha world in the eyes of the Japanese. While traditional geisha entertainment is still quite expensive, there are many inexpensive ways to pass the time. Whether alone or with colleagues, nightlife offers many options. The decline in popularity of the geisha world is partly due to the fact that other offerings such as hostess clubs, nightclubs, and karaoke are now among the more popular forms of entertainment. Due to its strict rules and secrecy, the geisha world has lost much of its popularity, which is reflected in the lack of customers and the small number of geisha trainees. In the past, hiring a geisha was a highly respected way to enjoy oneself. Today, this is only appreciated by older customers, and the younger generation has little interest in it. We can see this above all in the fact that geisha

themselves claim that young customers are rather rare. But what about the geisha themselves? Considering that most geisha were forced into the profession in the past and were often treated badly, the current situation is clearly a positive development. Women who want to become geisha today do so of their own free will. Although there are not as many maiko as in the past, they all have their own motivation for entering the profession, even if many no longer see it as a lifelong occupation. In summary, it can be said that geisha have clearly lost their status as entertainers, especially in competition with other forms of entertainment. However, geisha have changed for the better in that they now pursue their profession out of conviction. It is therefore quite tragic when one considers that although geisha are now free to choose their profession, it is in danger of disappearing.

This is exactly what we have observed based on the declining number of geisha. Slowly but surely, geisha are becoming fewer and fewer. Their world is disappearing, but not all geisha are going down without a fight. We have seen from many examples in the present day that, on the whole, geisha are quite willing to explore new areas of work in order to regain more public attention. In recent times, geisha houses, teahouses, and inns have made many attempts to attract new customers and provide employment for geisha. Many of these attempts aim to bring customers together with maiko or geisha in a simple and inexpensive setting. This takes the form of bars or beer gardens, for example, or even free events where geisha perform. The aim is to reach as many people as possible in order to lower the price. Greater flexibility has also been developed in the recruitment of new geisha. Although the training is still tough, entry into the world of geisha has been greatly simplified, especially for older beginners. Not only foreigners but also men have been accepted into the world of geisha. This seems to be having a very positive effect on the geisha world, not least because of the press coverage. Looking at all these points together, it can be said that geisha are trying to become more public through their work and through new entrants. They also use the internet to provide an insight into their world. However, we have found that there are exceptions who are not taking any action.

However, the example of Fiona Graham showed us that, despite recent openings, the geisha world is still sensitive to forced changes from outside. Ms. Graham was heavily criticized for her approach to promoting geisha and revealing

their secrets. Change and development are two important factors that must not be forgotten when preserving the geisha world. However, it is important to note that change that happens too quickly is often met with incomprehension. Change must be aimed at adapting to the modern outside world, but it must begin from within. Geisha have recognized that their world is changing. Many have realized that it is more important to save the geisha from extinction than to cling to old traditions.

This is exactly what we experienced in our personal encounter with the geisha. They know that their survival as artists is at stake. They know that they have to reach out to people if they don't want to be ignored. Even though not much has changed in terms of the disappearance of the geisha, it is not too late. The profession of geisha has changed significantly over time, but it must not stand still now. If they can expand their public appearances and affordable offerings, there is hope. The geisha world must evolve with the environment in order to keep up. And it is important that the geisha world itself discovers its possibilities and exploits them. Only then can the world of geisha survive and continue to present itself in all its beauty in the future.

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7. Appendix

Images:

Image 1: Kimono sale in Tokyo.

Image 2: Banquet at the Ichimatsu teahouse in Asakusa, Tokyo.

Image 3: Geisha Fumika performing a dance. (Ichimatsu teahouse, Asakusa, Tokyo)


Image 4: A maiko playing a drinking game with a guest. In the background: a geisha and the Western geisha, Fiona Graham. (Ichimatsu teahouse, Asakusa, Tokyo)

Glossary:

Azuma odori: A geisha dance performed at the Shinbashi theater (Dance of the East)

Geiko: Name given to geisha in Kyoto

Geta: Wooden sandals

Hanamachi: Geisha district (City of Flowers)

Hangyoku: Name given to junior geisha in Tokyo (Half price)

Hostess club: A club where scantily clad hostesses serve drinks.

Jorō: Prostitute.

Kanbangari: Phase in which the geisha keeps her earnings (borrowed sign).

Kenban: The geisha office.

Machi: (Machi geisha) Geisha who tended more toward prostitution (city geisha).

Maiko: Junior geisha, originally from Kyoto

Marugakae: Phase in which the geisha hands over all her earnings (covering all expenses)

Mizuage: The ritual defloration of geisha and prostitutes

Nagajubon: An underkimono

Obi: A wide belt for tying the kimono

Odori: Dance

Okaasan: The geisha mother

Okiya: The geisha house

Oneesan: The geisha sisters

Onsen: (Onsen geisha) Geisha who tended more towards prostitution (hot spring geisha)

Oshiroi: Geisha makeup

Oshūgidori: Phase in which the geisha is allowed to keep her tips

Ryokan: Inn

Seza: Japanese style of sitting on the lower legs

Shamisen: Japanese stringed instrument

Shimada: A geisha hairstyle

Tabi: White socks with two toes

Tsuzumi: Hand drum

Yokobue: Transverse flute

Zashiki: A Japanese-style banquet hall, the geisha's workplace

Zōri: Bast sandals