



Japanese Orientalism: A Feminist's Perspective In The Study Of Arthur Golden's *Memoirs Of A Geisha* (1997) And Mineko Iwasaki's *Geisha, A Life* (2002)

Aditi Bashyas
Dr. Baishalee Rajkhowa
The Assam Royal Global University
Guwahati, Assam

ABSTRACT:

The representation of women in literature is one of the most important forms of 'socialisation', since it provides the role models which will portray acceptable versions of the 'feminine' and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations. Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997), is based upon the life story of Mineko Iwasaki, a renowned Geisha during the 1960s and 1970s, and reveals the darker sight of Orientalism. This paper attempts to analyse *Memoirs of a Geisha* with its counterpart *Geisha of Gion: The True Story of Japan's Foremost Geisha or Geisha, A Life* (2002), putting forward an argument by comparing these two texts as cultural phenomena symbolizing orientalism of the East as a sexualized and eroticised object to be commodified by the West through the feminist perspective for centuries, the cases of women's exploitation have happened without any substantial solution to end it as yet. All around the world we come across many bitter stories of such exploitation experienced by women in society. Orientalizing of women often implied them as a means of objectification that appealed to the Western audience. This can be observed in the case of geisha, Japanese artists who entertained their guests with no sexual intent but instead became an object of desire and refined sexuality, an enticing exotic creature to the West due to the inaccurate representation. Fiction has the potential to be more entertaining than fact. This research paper aims to apply Edward Said's idea of Orientalism (1978) to study the fictional devices used by Arthur Golden in telling the geisha story in his fiction and what the real story is.

KEYWORDS- orientalism, feminism, geisha, discourse, patriarchy

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I. INTRODUCTION

In Japanese culture, the role of geisha has evolved over hundreds of years to arrive at the iconic cultural stature we recognize today. Even though geishas are generally referred to as female entertainers, the first geishas were not female but male, appearing around the year 1730. In Tokyo, male geishas were called Taikomochi, Hokan, Tayu who specialize only in traditional Japanese arts in contrast to courtesans (yujō) at banquets. It was only twenty years later that female geisha came into the picture in the forms of odoriko (dancers) and shamisen players and they quickly took over the profession, dominating it by 1780.

A Geisha (GEI 'performing arts' + SHA 'person') is an art person who practices and performs the 250-year-old art of GEI ("artistic skills"). Also known as geiko or geigiis, a geisha is an entertainer who represents the traditional art forms of Japanese culture and has long embodied the height of refinement. The word "Geiko" mostly represents geisha in the Kyoto dialect. They should be skilled in various art forms such as dancing, playing traditional musical instruments as well as serving in the tea party. Their distinct appearance is characterised by long, trailing kimono, traditional hairstyles and oshiroi make-up. Being a geisha was one among the few ways a woman-or even an individual of "common birth" could achieve wealth, status and fame. Most of the geisha were either sold off by their parents or come to Geisha houses or Okiya willingly as a means to earn money and fame. But Until World War II, women who were geisha had no choice but to be geisha. They were born into the trade or forced to hitch it to survive. Many of these girls were sold to the geisha houses when

they were around five and worked as house servants and maids until they were old enough for their training to begin. These girls were looked upon as investments and were kept from leaving the Geisha houses by obligating them to pay off their debt for training and maintenance. To settle their debt quickly, the custom of mizuage was created. This was a coming-of-age ceremony where their virginity was being sold to the highest bidder.

The Japanese always considered the Geisha profession to be highly respected and have always recognized Geisha apart from prostitution. Geisha is even considered to be a living treasure. Also known as Geiko or Geigiis, a Geisha is an entertainer who represents the traditional art forms of Japanese culture and has long embodied the height of refinement. They had to be skilled in various art forms such as dancing, playing traditional musical instruments as well as serving in the tea party. Apart from entertaining guests, they also have male patrons called *Danna* or "husbands" or "protector". Not only were they have to maintain the geisha like mistresses, but they also had to pay for her kimonos, accessories and training and other necessities. As the total cost could run in the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of dollars, Geisha chose Wealthy and influential Danna's to maintain the cash flow. As having a Danna can be a difficult task so they often funded a geisha for decades, so in return, the geisha was supposed to be devoted to him exclusively. Few geishas even married their danna's after their wives have died and also gave birth to Danna's children. But in the old days, many geishas did choose to marry influential samurai-turned-politicians and used their connections and skills to advance their husband's careers. There has always been a distinction between geisha who worked as prostitutes and those who didn't. Geisha who worked at hot spring resorts belonged to the lowest rank. The geishas, who belonged to the highest rank complied to the other services that was expected of them. These women earned "points" by sleeping with customers that went to pay off the debt they owed to their geisha houses. Geisha commonly do not indulge in sex or prostitution, even though it is a part of their allure. However, occasionally, if the mood, the man and the money were right, they sold their bodies or served as mistresses to wealthy men who took care of them, but are not supposed to utter one word about it. This act was more out of the means to clear off their debts to the geisha houses.

After working as house servants and maids until they were old enough, these girls, referred to as Maikos are assigned to their senior geisha and thus, they start their training as the geisha apprentices. They endure several more years of training their cultural and entertainment skills to become a full-fledged geisha. There are differences between a maiko and a geisha regarding their age, appearance, and skills. Maikos are often decked out in flamboyant colours while geishas tend to be more demurely dressed. Whereas a Geisha is an expert on how to initiate and maintain a conversation in any circumstance that makes patrons feel calm, relaxed, or happy, a maiko in training would speak less and usually nods or smiles during a conversation. Maiko would attend the dance school every day and practice shamisen playing until she is perfect. Geiko is a professional who can dance, play shamisen, and perform tea ceremonies.

In Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997), the geishas have been portrayed as prostitutes who are willing to have sex for money. When Iwasaki read the book's Japanese translation, she seemed to be seemingly agitated and even talked about it in an interview by Gary Tegner in his "Memoirs of a Geisha" muse vents sleep at author, *The Japan Times*. "Everything is wrong," she said. "In the book, a Geisha was beaten with a hanger and crippled. There is a very strict rule that 'Maiko' (apprentice Geisha) and Geisha should never be beaten. We are precious goods and the livelihood of the 'Okiya' (Geisha houses) depends on us." (Iwasaki). Even though Iwasaki bluntly rejects such accusations, the Western audiences found the story of the fictional Geisha, Sayuri (Geisha name of Chiyo) believable and rather entertaining, leaving the Japanese audiences not as intrigued. It led to a huge controversy where Japanese readers believed that she has done everything the main character of the book has done. In 2002, Iwasaki published her own memoir, *Geisha of Gion: The True Story of Japan's Foremost Geisha or Geisha, A Life* (2002), to correct the errors done by Golden in portraying her story and the Geisha culture. Even though Iwasaki's story seems to be uneventful, it paints a very different picture from what Golden had written in his fiction.

A fictional autobiography of a Japanese geisha during the 1920s and 1930s that immediately became a bestseller in the United States is based upon the life story of Mineko Iwasaki, a renowned Geisha during the 1960s and 1970s. It talks about when a nine year old girl Chiyo, sold by her father to Nitta Okiya comes to be one of the most renowned geishas of her time.

Memoirs of a Geisha (1997) can also be considered as a lyrical book, powerfully depicted to engender the experience of feeling hauled to another world. Due to the traditional code of silence held between geisha in regards to their clients, Twasaki alleged that Golden had agreed to protect her anonymity if she was interviewed about her life as a Geisha.

"Geisha may not take any formal vow of silence, but their existence is predicated on the singularity Japanese conviction that what goes on during the morning in the office and what goes on during the evening behind closed doors bear no relationship to one another, and must always remain compartmentalized and separated. Geisha simply do not talk for the record about their experiences" (Haarhuis, p 8).

But after the Japanese edition of the novel was published, Golden was sued by Iwasaki for breach of contract and defamation of character which was settled out of court in February 2003.

Even though many critics have praised the work for its portrayal of an obscure and little-understood part of Japanese culture and have marvelled that a white American male should write such a work, it seems to be heavily influenced by white supremacy.

Unlike in *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997) where Chiyo was being sold to a Geisha house in *Geisha, A Life* (2002), Iwasaki makes it clear that she was not sold. "In fact, if I hadn't entered the karyuki I think I would have become a Buddhist nun. Or a policewoman" (Iwasaki 5). The book talks about her day- to- day life as a young girl who is given the choice to become a Geisha. Although her family was fairly high class, it lacked resources, so it was the best way for Iwasaki and her sisters to receive more education. The book takes the readers into a sealed world only few people have seen. Iwasaki writes extensively about how the strict rules and regulations baffled her, and how those rules strangled the profession. The book also contains poignant photos from her past. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To explain the life of a Geisha as embodied in Japanese culture.
- To discuss the impacts of Orientalism on *Memoirs of Geisha* as opposed to the autobiography *Geisha, A Life*.
- To analyse the role of patriarchy played in Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* through a feminist's perspective.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher has reviewed literature both national and internal in order to unravel the topic under consideration.

Acar, Adam. *Geisha Research: Stats, facts and why women are interested in Geisha than Men* (2021)- According to the author, people often use the word 'geiko' and 'geisha' interchangeably because the two words mean the same thing except the fact that the word 'geiko' is only used in Kyoto. Geishas are professional artists who excel in traditional Japanese arts and crafts such as shamisen, playing, dancing and tea ceremony.

Astuti in *A Comparison between Novel and Movie Version of Arthur Golden's Memoirs of a Geisha: A Structural Analysis* (2007) finds out the similarities and differences between the portrayal of characters in the movie and the book where she uses a structural analysis to differentiate between the setting of the place, plot, point of view and on the limitation of characters and characterisation. While in the novel there is a depiction of one character called Sayuri, in the movie there are two characters, Sayuri and Hatsumomo.

In *The Second Sex* (1908), Beauvoir, Simone de, attempts to confront human history from a feminist perspective. Man occupies the role of the self, or subject and woman is the object, the other. This book chronicles de Beauvoir's effort to locate the source of the profoundly imbalanced gender roles.

Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) argues that being born as a male or female based on their genitals does not determine behaviour of a person. She questions the terms and concepts that are generally taken for granted including the divide between sex and gender. The task of feminism, therefore, is to theorise gender and feminism politics without reference to women or the 'natural' female body.

In Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Vintage (1997), Arthur Golden portrays the struggle of a little girl named Chiyo, when she is being sold to an okiya or a geisha house to be a geisha. This fictional novel has certain biographical elements to it as it is based on the character by Mineko Iwasaki, a retired geisha he had interviewed.

The book *Geisha, A Life* (2002) by Iwasaki, Mineko, presents itself as an autobiography of Mineko Iwasaki's life experience as a geisha translated by Rande Gail Brown. Arthur Golden taken her life story as the base for his famous work *Memoirs of a Geisha* where he portrays Iwasaki as Chiyo who along with her older sister has been sold to a Geisha house by her own father.

The book by Rodriguez, Martin G Agustin and Rodriguez, Marie Leal Ara, *Gender and Society: The Whys of Women, Their Oppressions, and Paths to Liberation* (2003) tackles the problems of discrimination against women. It talks about what has been done about it, and what more should be pursued to liberate them for their own human fulfilment.

In his book *Orientalism* (1978), Said, Edward traces the current period of Orientalism to about 1870, when most colonial expansion into the non- Western and non-European world began, culminating in World War II. Europe and the United States regarded the non-Western world as the Orient, a place with people who that could be described as strangers, others, and outsiders.

Thakur & Saini in *The Alienation and Manipulation of Geisha in Cultural Structures of Japan with special Reference to Arther Golden's 'Memoirs of Geisha'* (2017) depicts the circumstances which force women into the profession of a geisha. The paper also portrays the exploitation and the origin of geisha tradition, which is considered as a cultural heritage of Japan. It also reflects the role of tradition. Culture, history, economy and prostitution which contribute to the marginalisation of geisha in personal and professional areas. The paper

minutely studies the importance and place of music and dance in geisha's life and tradition, a tradition which is considered as a cultural heritage of Japan.

Wahyu, Saptoningrum Diyah in his paper *Symbolism in Arthur Golden's Memoirs of a geisha* (2009) explains that an author is a person who can awake the imagination of the readers by paying attention to the words. The written word is a symbol and its meaning is the dictionary meaning of the work, spoken or written. But often the written word effects its purpose without the intervention of the spoken word.

Zhang, Song Nan in *The Ballad of Mulan*, (1998) also known as the Songs of Mulan, retold by Zhang is of a legendary character in Chinese literature in the Northern and Southern Dynasties, best known in the modern day from the Disney filmed adaptations.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research paper follows Edward Said's Theory of Orientalism, Stuart Hall's Theory of Discourse and Simone de Beauvoir's Theory of Feminism.

Orientalism is the representation or contemptuous depiction of 'The East', i.e. the Orient, being fabricated by the West. It often involves seeing the Eastern culture as exotic, backward, uncivilized, and at times dangerous. As mentioned in Edward Said's book *Orientalism* (1989) it is a way by the West of seeing that imagines, emphasizes, exaggerates and distorts differences of the Eastern countries and its cultures as compared to that of the Western countries

Discourse, in simple language, is referred to "a coherent or rational body of speech or writing; a speech, or a sermon". But as defined in "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power (1992)." In *Essential Essays, Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*, the author talks about the particular way of representing "The West" and "The Rest" and the relation between them. The Reception Theory of Hall based on the concepts of encoding and decoding. It also focusses on the textual analysis by the audience in the form of opposition and negotiation.

"Feminism" is derived from the French word *Feminisme* in the nineteenth century. The term feminism can be used to describe political, cultural or an economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. In works such as Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* which contains a detailed analysis of women's oppression and a foundational tract of contemporary feminism. Also in Judith Butler's 1990 book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, she argues that being born male or female based on their genitals does not determine behaviour. Instead, people learn to behave in a particular way based on society expects a gender should act or perform just to fit into society.

IV. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

"Some people have difficulty telling the difference between something great and something they've simply heard of" (Sayuri 115).

The whole Western fascination with Geisha began in the late 19th century when European missionaries and traders started travelling to Japan since the 16th century. In 1853, U.S. Naval Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Edo Bay, now referred to as Tokyo, as an emissary from President Millard Fillmore, to open Japan to trade and diplomatic contact with the West. Since the colonial age that preceded World War II, the West has held the privileged position of interpreting the world through Western eyes, of constructing and exploiting the prominent reality. As mentioned in Edward Said's book *Orientalism* (1989) it is a way by the West of seeing that imagines, emphasizes, exaggerates and distorts differences of the Eastern countries such as Asia, Arab, and its cultures as compared to that of the Western countries such as Europe and the U.S. It often involves seeing the Eastern culture as exotic, backward, uncivilized, and at times dangerous. "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the "Orient" and the "Occident" (Said 2). Said even argues that as the Orient are unknown to the West and still a mystery so therefore, it is a place to be explored and colonized. The West describes the Orient by romantic, exotic expressions, but Orientalism hides the context beneath its scholarly and aesthetic idioms (Said, 1989). Being born and brought up in the United States, Arthur Golden's work speculates the American culture on their representation of the Eastern history and culture. Golden's devices present the Orient as a commodified Western object: a fiction of the East but written by the West, for the West, yet received by the West as reality (Akita 3). The word Orient is not only a Western word, but also a Western construction. Although some people of the Orient have since gained independence and power, the experiences of racism, exploitation, colonization, and oppression continue (Said, 1989). In October 1997 Arthur Golden published his fictional account of a Geisha's life story which became a sensational hit within months. As a white man, Golden never experienced the world of Geisha in first hand, so while writing his fictional novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* he wanted to make the story as close to reality as possible. *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997) starts with a Translator Note by Jakob Haarhus, who is the fictional translator of the story and to whom Nitta Sayuri narrated this story. It's about a girl who is sold into a Geisha house and raised to become one of Japan's most celebrated Geisha before the World War II. The story begins with a nine-year-old Chiyo who comes from a fishing village in Yoroido. Along with her older sister Satsu is being sold and sent to the Nitta

Okiya (a Geisha house) while her older sister is sent to the brothel. The reason Chiyo's father sold her to Mr. Ichiro Tanaka, the wealthiest man in the village cause he took notices of Chiyo's beautiful blue-grey eyes. Here Chiyo meets another girl named Pumpkin who is about her age. Together Pumpkin and Chiyo struggle through the daily life of being treated as nothing more than slaves to the resident Geisha, Hatsumomo. We see Hatsumomo, being jealous of Chiyo's unique eyes, even tries her hardest to make Chiyo's life as miserable as possible. Such as falsely accusing her of stealing, making her destroy an expensive kimono of another Geisha. On a particular occasion while running some errands for Hatsumomo, Chiyo felt so overwhelmed over her life's woes that she ended up crying near a stream. Here little Chiyo meets the Chairman who shows his kindness by offering her his handkerchief to wipe her tears and even giving her money to eat some shaved ice. Touched by his kindness, Chiyo is determined to become a Geisha so she could accompany the chairman one day and have a standing in this cruel world. Not long after this encounter, a Geisha named Mameha arrives at the Okiya who was one of the top highest earning Geisha during that time. Upon taking notice of Chiyo's beauty she convinces Mother to reinvest in Chiyo's education by saying that she will take on Chiyo as a "Miako", a Geisha apprentice. Mother (the greedy and materialistic who controls the Okiya) sees this as an opportunity to make money from Chiyo again and agrees to Mameha's plan. Chiyo thinks that Mameha is only taking her on as a protégé in order to infuriate her rival Hatsumomo. She learns tea ceremony, how to play shamisen, how to sing and dance. After completing her training, Chiyo takes on the name "Sayuri" as her official Geisha name. On her journey as a Geisha, through Mameha she met many people such as introducing her to the wealthy businessmen Toshikazu Nobu and Chairman Ken Iwamura. Seeing the Chairman she realizes he is the same man who comforted her years ago. Mameha wants to make Sayuri a success in Kyoto by having Nobu as her Danna instead of the Chairman. So she makes Nobu and a doctor nicknamed "Dr. Crab" start a bidding war over Sayuri's mizuage — the ceremonial taking of a young Geisha's virginity. After months of developing relationships with the two men, Dr. Crab finally pays a record amount for Sayuri's mizuage. The plan works and Sayuri gains a reputation as a highly coveted Geisha.

As a cultural text, the story of *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997) incorporates oriental traditional cliché and the romantic story of a woman within the narrative pattern that the West portrays the Orient. Even after interviewing the muse of this story, Mineko Iwasaki, a real Kyoto Geisha, Golden heavily altered the facts from Iwasaki's true story in unflattering ways in order to suit the Western audience. This led to Iwasaki filing a lawsuit against Golden claiming she had agreed to assist him as an anonymous party. She ended up writing her own autobiography *Geisha, A Life*, (2002) just to correct Golden's mistake in his representation of Japan and the Geisha culture. The Japanese always considered the Geisha profession to be highly respected and have always understood Geisha apart from prostitution. Geisha is even considered to be a living treasure. But After World War II "Geisha Girl" became a slang term used by American soldiers to describe prostitutes. Due to lack of knowledge and misinterpretation, Western infatuation with Geisha is grounded in the belief that they were highly decorated, high-class prostitutes. As mentioned in the previous chapters there is a huge difference between a Geisha and a courtesan; be it their different skill sets, their different styles of clothing and housing etc. But in Arthur Golden's *Memiors of a Geisha*, he made Geishas out to be prostitutes—willing to contract money for sex—which Mineko Iwasaki claims it as absolutely false. There were many instances where *Orientalism* was at work below the surface of Golden's project. Through exoticization and sexualization of Japanese culture and Geisha, Golden created a distance between the Orient and the Western target audience (Akita 3)

The use of a Translator Note cleverly gives the story this tint of realism, making it look as if the book is actually a true story, a truthful biography of the geisha Sayuri, who never really existed. By doing so the author hides his own thoughts and words behind her character, so they become her thoughts and opinions. This technique of disconnecting himself is in itself orientaling the story, making it alien and exotic, making him a mere transmitter. This gave the impression to many readers that everything that was said in that book was the truth, and this novel "not only doubles as a novel and historical text but assumes a status as something in between" (Allison 387).

The mere beginning of the story is vastly different from that of Iwasaki's real story. In *Memoirs of Geisha*, Chiyo was harassed and bullied by the people in the Geisha house. She became a victim of jealousy and was even accused of stealing. In reality, she was treated much better by her colleagues and senior Geiko, had more freedom about her life and future plans. Golden tried to shape Chiyo's story as "Cinderella" story with a Western sensibility with Sayuri as the Princess and the Chairman as her Prince Charming. Despite the fact that Sayuri is just twelve years old during her encounter, the age gap between her and the man is very big just like it usually is in all fairytales. Sayuri, who up until then had been against the notion of becoming a Geisha, changes her mind at the sight of the Chairman.

"I prayed they [the Gods] would permit me to become a Geisha somehow. I would suffer through any training, bear up under any hardship, for a chance to attract the notice of a man like the Chairman again". (Golden 126)

As the story progresses, we witness the typical American fairytale genre and how it is true and it is meant to be. As expected, the Chairman and Sayuri's love transgresses the age difference and problems thrown to them and end up together despite the fact he is a married man and a father too. Like in most fairy tales, the main protagonist remains pure and innocent even when they suffer many hardships. But unlike them, their counterparts suffer due to their misdeeds they might have done to the main protagonist. While all the women around her seem to be corrupted at one point or another – with Hatsumomo and her evilness, Pumpkin having to end up as a prostitute in Osaka after the war - she stays pure and innocent in thoughts thanks to her love for the Chairman (Noguera 18).

All these Western plot devices Arthur Golden used because, despite illustrating a Japanese story, he is an American who is writing for the American public which ultimately rendered this novel as an American novel. He cannot escape his own handicaps (not being Japanese as well as not being a woman) but still strives to convince the Western public that it was the reality. America had been the enemy of Japan for years, which was proved with the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki dropped on 6th and 9th August, 1945 respectively. This was also widely believed to have played a decisive role in convincing Japan to surrender and bringing about an end to World War II and the Americans moving their troops to Japan. This act made it quite obvious that after the killing of thousands of civilians, the Japanese were not going to change their views about them any time soon.

However, when Sayuri first encounters the Americans in the *Memoirs of a Geisha*, she does not seem disappointed or resentful with them at all: "All the stories about invading American soldiers, raping and killing us had turned out to be wrong; and in fact, we gradually came to realize that the Americans on the whole were remarkably kind." (Sayuri 400). Being an American himself, Golden tries to portray the Americans as some kind of savior who, despite the fact that they defeated Japan, were kind with them. He completely refutes the real factual history of raping and killing. In order to make the West better than the East, because Japanese men were reimbursing prostitutes and Geishas to entertain American soldiers. It is shown that they were generous to them even having women waiting for them back at home.

"Weren't these the very American soldiers we'd been taught to hate, who had bombed our cities with such horrifying weapons? Now they rode through our neighborhood, throwing pieces of candy to the children" (Golden 400).

This alone is a gives away on the fact it is an American enacting it and not a Japanese. Also adding to this sense of otherness, (Oreints) Sayuri remarks on the differences between the Americans and the Japanese.

As cited in the above chapter, the world of Geisha is, as said, a secretive one, even to their own country. When Western started their interactions with Japan, especially after World War II, the allure of the unknown and the "mysterious creatures" that dressed and looked nothing like Western women created a certain fascination. However, in her own book *Geisha: A Life*, Mineko Iwasaki argues that most of what Westerners mostly experienced, especially after the 1920s, were prostitutes passing themselves as Geisha. Thus, this illusion of Geisha travelled West and became known as the fancy word for a Japanese prostitute. Iwasaki also argued that the ritual of mizuage, or as Golden calls the ritual in which a Geisha sells her virginity to the highest bidder, never existed. Even the word "mizuage" seems alien to the Japanese reader. The ritual of mizuage, was more of a courtesan's tradition than a Maiko's. Traditionally, a ceremony like mizuage do exist, but for a Maiko it was a change in hairstyle that symbolized it as the next step to becoming a Geisha and in Iwasaki's case her mizuage involved no sex at all as described in Golden's work. Iwasaki's *Geisha, A Life* can be considered as a rewriting to Golden's *Memoirs of Geisha* to clear the miscommunication that occurred between her, the Japanese community and the world.

IV.I Orientalism in Japan and China

Orientalism has its own unique place in Japan and China. Orientalism has created types and stereotypes, which helps the West to "know" and "understand" the Eastern history and culture better. Such an example is of how the *Ballads of Mulan* (400 A.D), an oldest version of Mulan's story, is being presented by Disney as the first Disney Asian movie. In *The Ballads of Mulan* (400 A.D), the main protagonist Mulan is shown as a multifaceted personality who showed her love for her country and her family by grooming herself as a boy to go to War instead of her father. She served for twelve years, and was offered a high-ranking military position for her efforts in the War by the Emperor. But instead, she asked for a swift horse so she can go home. The most interesting part is that throughout the years of service, no one was able to tell that Mulan was in fact a woman. Due to *Ballads of Mulan* (400 A.D) being a short poem, Disney was able to be more creative and include their own elements on it. But the animated movie adaptation of Mulan was being heavily stereotyped; from its songs to the characters' appearances. Disney's Mulan is not faithful to the ballad or Chinese culture. The most noticeable form of orientalism present in the movie is the combination of Japanese and Chinese culture such as clothing (Kimonos), white face makeup, and hair styles presented throughout the movie. If we look into

both of these Asian countries' cultures and traditions, be it their attire, make up, hairstyle etc, it vastly differs from each other.

The main reason Mulan joined the army in the ballad is first and foremost her filial piety, which is the primary virtue of children in traditional Chinese culture but the film suggests that the primary reason is devotion between father and daughter, as well as Mulan's quest for her true self and identity. Many academics have been insightful about how Disney's adaptation interpolated its stereotyped images of Chinese culture into Mulan's story in order to inject it into a western framework. Moreover, the depictions of the film on China are stripped of their context and incorporate historical inaccuracies like the episode with the matchmaker, the presence of the Huns, the presence of the sanctuary for the ancestors, the clothing, and the presentation of the villains as darker. Perhaps most importantly, the Disney iteration perpetuates oriental stereotypes by confusing racial and gender perceptions, where the other Oriental is both effeminate and irrational, and this representation serves as a motive for the conflict. In terms of the negative portrayal of Chinese culture under a highly sexist cultural regime, Mulan, as the major surrogate of the Western feminist ideal, not only led a struggle against the nation's invaders, but she also managed to save the country, but it is also a fight against a culture dominated by Chinese men and oppressive of women's voices.

Both *Mulan* and *Memoirs of a Geisha* can be deemed as prime examples of the effects of American culture in their representation of the Eastern history and culture; such as adding Western elements into their works to make it more appealing to the Western audience. Due to such both Golden and Disney animations have drawn heavy criticism from Asian Communities all over the world for whitewashing and damaging their reputation.

IV.II The role of patriarchy played in Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997)

Females have always been seen for their sexual objectification from the eyes of a male spectator or the "Male Gaze". In a patriarchal society, the dominant place belongs to men's position, so it is natural men regard women as inferior to them and must do everything they want. In patriarchal society, the positioning of a man as a superior and a woman as inferior creates the pattern of sex role behaviour which entrenched deeply in the mind of both man and woman. It means in a world where men have the dominant hand, women are nothing but a commodity which is to be used and exploited. Feminism seeks to understand how far the relation's gap is between men and women in society. Men had full control over women's life; be it at home or in society. As Beauvoir said, "she is always under men's guardianship; the only question is if, after marriage, she is still subjected to the authority of her father or her oldest brother—authority that will also extend to her children—or of her husband" (Beauvoir, p 106). Women, moreover, had not the right to vote, to participate to social life and it was only after the Feminist Movement in the 19th century (The Three Waves of Feminism) that women were finally considered as human beings. Feminism movement started to resonate louder since Betty Friedan's book entitled *The Feminine Mystique* first published in 1963 in the United States. "All oppression creates a state of war. And this is no exception" (Beauvoir, p 151)

In Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997), the geisha, as women, find many conflicts dealing with gender problems and a lot of conflicts among the characters which describe the phenomena of gender inequality which happened in Japanese society. Golden's book tried to present an implication of patriarchy that portrays women as powerless sexual objects who can only thrive in the society only if she has a man to back her up.

There are four aspects in *Memoirs of a Geisha* that make the novel really interesting. It tells the story of a young girl, Chiyo, who is sold into the life of a geisha by her father and her struggle as a geisha to find love. Portraying the novel very much like a Cinderella story in Japan with Chiyo as the Princess and The Chairman as her Prince Charming who after overcoming all the hurdles and obstacles, finally come together as one. The second aspect is where Golden wants to explain how women are subordinated and exploited in patriarchal society. This novel also shows woman's position, woman's role, woman's right, and women's participation in leading her life as a geisha, and there are also many forms of subordination, oppression, exploitation, and violence toward woman. Third, Golden wants to say that in order for women to gain her rights she must struggle for it. And lastly, in order to get their rights as human beings, women should be smart and talented.

In *Memoirs of a Geisha* Sayuri's character goes through four kinds of women's exploitation which is closely related to the strong patriarchal culture occurring in various areas in the world. In form of slavery is when she is being sold to the Geisha house, Sexual harassment being suffered from mizuage auction and being undressed by the Baron, violence is being she was beaten because of Hatsumono's slander, being slapped by her and also when Mameha forced her to cut her leg, and subordination such as limiting her from managing her own money, from choosing her *Danna* and not even be able to go outside of the okiyo on her own. Sayuri's struggles to be brave and smart in order to take important decisions to change her life and gain independence. And the character conflict with herself and character conflict with her surrounding environments which are presented in the plot shows her journey from being a naive, scared girl to becoming one the renowned geisha of her time.

For centuries, the cases of women's exploitation have happened without any substantial solution to end it as yet. All around the world we come across many bitter stories of such exploitation experienced by women in society. For example, women's unfair treatment such as the Sati system in India, a historical Hindu practice, where the widow has to sacrifice herself, generally by sitting atop her departed husband's funeral pyre. Another example is the African ancestors who killed the wife and daughter of a man on the day that man was dead. This clearly portrays women that they have no existence of their own without their husbands. Feminism emphasizes on the analysis of women's role to fight against the defence of patriarchy hegemony. The patriarchy system uses violence and stereotyping to suppress the power of women and their sexuality creates women's exploitation all over the world. Women have no power to protect their body as men hold the control over the important decision in social, political, and religious institutions to control women in public and private spheres. They exploit women's bodies to satisfy their desire and to get huge benefits. In *Memoirs of a Geisha*, being the main character, Sayuri suffers from the exploitation since she was ten years old, several days after coming to the okiya. Mother tells Sayuri-

"Well, little girl, Mother told to me, —you are in Kyoto now. You'll learn to behave or get a beating. And it is Granny gives the beatings around here, so you'll be sorry. My advice to you is: work very hard, and never leave okiya without permission. Do as you're told, don't be too much trouble, and you might begin learning the arts of a geisha two or three months from now. I didn't bring you here to be a maid. I'll throw you out if it comes to that" (Golden, 1997, p 44).

As we know that a geisha's daily activities need much money to pay her daily expenses such as her kimonos, hair etc which can be quite expensive. So, they get men to be their danna (men who are ready to pay their expenses). On the contrary, if someone is ready to be their danna, these men will demand to be served by geisha specially, usually they want the geisha "just" to be their secret wife or mistress, without any rule or law agreement between them.

The strong patriarchal culture in the society, the influence of the capitalist system in Japan, and women's stereotypes are the main causes of the exploitation cases without any worthy refund. Due to geisha's performance being the most popular entertainment for people in the early nineteenth century in Japan, as a result it encouraged the numerous okiya (house of geisha training) businesses to put more emphasis on educating prospective young girls to be geisha entertainers. Geisha training is extremely difficult and requires a very strong physical and psychological pressure. And once a woman becomes a geisha, she will have no freedom to maintain her rights to determine her own life.

Sayuri, in order to clear her debt to Okiya she has to find herself an influential Danna who would not only pay her debts but also pay for her expenses and be successful in the geisha community. As Mameha described "Cheer up Chiyo-san, there is an answer to this riddle. My danna is a generous man and bought me most of these robes. That's why I'm more successful than Hatsumomo. I have a wealthy danna. She hasn't had one in years". (Golden, 1997;167)

From the novel, we can see the problem that is reflected by geisha's life. It is described that the function of geisha just to support men's power and domination. It is illustrated that men's habitual in Japanese culture is usually to collect mistress or geisha. They do this because they want to show their superiority in Japanese society if they are ready to pay geisha's expenses. During Sayuri's training under Mameha, before becoming a full-fledged geisha, she has to undergo mizuage. As explained by Mameha in *Memoirs of a Geisha*, mizuage is "The first time a woman's cave is explored by a man's eel. That is what we call it mizuage." (Golden, pg 265). The price of Sayuri's mizuage breaks the history as the highest mizuage auction price for the total amount is over than 11,500 yen. After learning this, Mother directly decides to adopt her in order to make all the money from her mizuage auction and her future income as a professional geisha so it can be claimed to the okiya.

"It goes without saying that this is why she adopted me. The fee for my mizuage was more than enough to repay all my debts to the okiya. If Mother hadn't adopted me, some of that money would have fallen into my hands and you can imagine how Mother would have felt about that. When I became the daughter of the okiya, my debts ceased to exist because the okiya absorbed them all. But all of my profits went to the okiya as well, not only then, at the time of my mizuage, but forever afterward. The adoption took place the following week. Already my given name had changed to Sayuri; now my family name changed as well. Back in my tipsy house on the sea cliffs, I'd been Sakamoto Sayuri. Now my name was Nitta Sayuri." (Golden, 1997:320)

In both the above cases, Sayuri was only able to achieve success through the help of wealthy men; from paying for her expenses to selling off her virginity in order to show her worth. Such acts only make women the victims of men's domination and superiority. "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth." (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*)

Both physical or psychological violence that happens to women is because of the women's stereotypes in society. They are described as vulnerable, powerless, and fragile figures. In *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Sayuri

suffers from both physical and psychological violence since the day she entered the Okiya In the hands of Hatsumomo, Mother and the Baron, even Mameha. Such an incident that occurred to Sayuri was when she was harassed by the Baron, who was Mameha's danna. In geisha tradition, they are prohibited from expressing their feelings and body to men who are not their danna. Even though many people claim geisha as nothing but prostitutes, a true geisha will never destroy her reputation by doing something dishonoured. As Sayuri started gaining popularity throughout Gion, she also caught the eye of Mameha's danna. So, one day he invited her over to a party in his mansion where in the name of showing her his beautiful kimono collections, he tried to undress and sexually harass her. That harassment is described in the following scene: "I experienced a moment of panic now that I knew the Baron really intended to undress me. I tried saying something, but my mouth moved so clumsily I couldn't control it; and anyway, the Baron only made noises to shush me. I kept trying to stop him with my hands, but he pushed them away and finally succeeded in removing my obijime. In a moment the Baron let the obifall in a pile to the floor, and then unfastened the datejime the waistband underneath. I felt the sickening sensation of my kimono releasing itself from around my waist. I clutched it shut with my arms, but the Baron pulled them apart. I could no longer bear to watch in the mirror. The last thing I recall as I close my eyes was the heavy robe being lifted from around my shoulders with a rustle of fabric" (Golden, 1997: 298).

In Arthur Golden's book the author tried to present an insinuation of patriarchy that portrays women as powerless sexual objects who can only thrive in the society only if she has a man to back her up. The novel reflects the gender inequality issues in their manifestations, such as gender subordination, women marginalization, gender and violence, and so on. Because of this concept, it causes men to determine their position at a higher level than women in society. The problem happens because people still regard women as powerless or subordinate than men. This assumption creates male-dominated situation, where men are more powerful and they take total-control in society.

The main causes of women's exploitation occur in this novel are the strong patriarchal culture, the influence of capitalism system in Japan at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and women's stereotype by the society (Ninda Arum Rizky Ratnasari, p 77). Even being the main character Sayuri, initially was portrayed as a weak figure who does not have the power to fight against the exploitation. Particularly, after Sayuri starts maturing, her mind becomes more open and her experiences dealing with exploitation since she was a kid lead her on a consciousness that she deserves to get a better life. She starts fighting for her dream to gain a freedom and from oppression. There were events where her struggles reflect her desire to fight by showing her rebellious side like sneaking out from the okiya to meet her sister, trying to escape from the okiya, learning hard to be a geisha, refusing Nobu's proposal to be her danna, expressing her secret love to the Chairman, leaving the okiya and moving to New York and opening a Japanese tea house business.

Based on feminism perspective focusing on women's exploitation, Sayuri's struggles in *Memoirs of a Geisha* and her fight against the exploitation, as described by the author, portrays a girl who is considered as weak and vulnerable can achieve success in gaining her independence. In conclusion, the novel represents women in general who can gain their independence by overcoming the stereotypes imposed on them. They should be clever and brave to take the important decisions in their life no matter how much struggles they have to go through. "On the day when it will be possible for woman to love not in her weakness but in strength, not to escape herself but to find herself, not to abase herself but to assert herself – on that day love will become for her, as for man, a source of life and not of mortal danger" (Beauvoir, p 800).

V. CONCLUSION

"Orientalism continues to be perpetuated, despite technological advances, posing barriers to better intercultural understanding and communication" (Akita, P 9).

Orientalizing of women often implied them as a means of objectification that appealed to the Western audience. This can be observed in the case of geisha, Japanese artists who entertained their guests with no sexual intent but instead became an object of desire and refined sexuality, an enticing exotic creature to the West due to the inaccurate representation. Fiction has the potential to be more entertaining than fact. Although entertaining, fictions can affect the whole perspective of how the world looks upon other cultures and their history. In *Memoirs of a Geisha*, 'Sayuri's' experiences as the Orient is based on a Western perception. It becomes her autobiography so that the authenticity of the Orient is secured and not scrutinized for their faults. The colonized have no power to resist the colonizer's gaze and power of interpretation. But the pretty idioms, expressions, and excuses cannot hide the colonizing nature of the book.

Since the beginning of the novel, Arthur Golden sexualizes Sayuri since she was a little girl, first from when her virginity is being checked and afterwards when it is sold to the best buyer during her mizuage. Being a white man, his orientalized mind just like other Western writers focuses too much on the exotic, sexy side rather than the cultural side. While reading the book some women to a certain extent might find themselves relating with Sayuri's struggles as a woman in a man's world. But her obsession for the Chairman, that drives her to succeed in life, to become a geisha even though she wanted to escape the okiya before meeting me and when she

finds the prospect of being with him is stripped away from her, she falls into complete sadness and finds the world void of happiness. This made her character less strong and relatable. Thus, the novel didn't look like a story of an empowered woman, but it shows a woman who seems to be obsessed with the only man who showed her kindness and dedicated her whole life trying to please and get that man. The novel seems more like the Disney story of Cinderella, where Sayuri is the Princess, Hatsumomo as her evil sister, Mameha as her fairy Godmother and Chairman as her Prince Charming. Although most readers grow to dislike Hatsumomo's character throughout the novel due to her evil intentions towards Sayuri, she can be considered as the only one that seems to defy the norms imposed by their patriarchal society on womanhood. Like getting a lover when she is not allowed to, instead of taking a danna (protector) to pay for her expenses. Unlike Sayuri and Mameha, she wants economic independence without the need for a danna. In the novel we see how she works her charms to make men follow her and do her biddings. She is fully capable of using her womanly charms and she is everything an oriental woman ought not to be according to Western standards and thus making her the villain of the story.

West's tendency to blend all Asian cultures into one spectrum has led to much confusion as evident in Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* as well as in the Disney movie *Mulan*. In *Mulan*, the Asian culture is presented in a somewhat exotic way. It is what Western people consider the "typical" Asian culture, which has continuously been represented in Western cinema. In both *Myth of Mulan* and *Memoirs of a Geisha*; the story is being white washed without any adequate research which leads to misconception of the Eastern culture. Disney's appropriation of Chinese culture is a deeply faulty mimicry and simultaneously reinforced the existing racial and gender ideologies through deprecating Chinese culture as an Oriental tyranny and dissolving feminism into the cultural and racial hierarchy. Due to such misinterpretation just to please the Western audience, the Eastern History is being neglected to the extent where the facts presented by the West are being perceived as reality.

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