

## **Geisha**

A geisha, geiko, or geigi is a traditional female Japanese entertainer, whose skills may include performance of various Japanese arts, such as classical music and dance, and playing instruments such as the shamisen (three stringed guitar). Though popular western belief may usually indicate that geisha are prostitutes, this is not the case. True geisha are strictly entertainers, though some prostitutes have marketed themselves as geisha over time. For instance, during occupied Japan, prostitutes that dressed like geisha, known as "geesha girls", solicited their services to American GIs, which may have carried the image of geisha as prostitutes back to the United States. Though true geisha definitely flirt with men and make playful innuendos, it is understood that nothing more can be expected.

Because true geisha usually have an aide to help in the difficult process of dressing them in their elaborate clothing, which could take over an hour, a surefire way to recognize the difference between a geisha and a prostitute is to note the position of the bow of their sash, or obi. If the obi is in the back, they have been dressed by someone else, and are certainly not prostitutes. If the obi is in the front, and the clothes less complicated, they may be a prostitute, because the obi must be in a position for the ease of removal and replacement several times a day. Prostitution was not illegal in Japan before the Anti-Prostitution Law of 1956, but there was a strict separation distinguishing geisha and prostitutes, and the more refined geisha were not allowed or required to solicit sex, even though there was often intense pressure to do so within the geisha house.

Though in the 1920s there may have been upwards of 80,000 geisha in Japan, today it is estimated that there are only 1,000-2,000, mostly in the resort town of Atami. Many geisha are reserved in 30 minute or hour-long segments, and some traditionally offer their services in the time it takes to burn a stick of incense. High class geisha such as Momowaka would probably charge a minimum of \$500/hour/customer.

Geisha traditionally begin training at a very young age, and though some girls were sold as children to geisha houses, this was not as common in reputable districts. Many geisha were daughters of other geisha who were brought up as either successors or raised by the geisha house. There are traditionally three stages of geisha training. The first stage of training is called "shikomi," and involves difficult maid-work with the intent to "make" and "break" the girls. The shikomi attended training classes at a geisha school, and this tradition still exists in order to train the girls in the traditional dialect, traditions, and dress.

Once a young recruit was proficient in the geisha arts, especially in dance, she was promoted to the second training stage, "minarai." This is a short stage, only about a month or so, and is the equivalent of an on-the-job internship. There are no housekeeping duties; the focus is on field training, and although minarai attend banquets and other events, they do not participate at an advanced level. They work with the "okaa-san" ("mother") to learn techniques not taught in school, such as conversation and gaming.

The third stage of training is called "maiko," and this stage can last for years. Maiko are geisha apprentices, and follow a senior geisha mentor at all times. Their relationship is important, as the senior "onee-san" ("big sister") teaches her maiko "imouto-san" ("little sister") everything about her job, including proper ways of serving tea, playing shamisen, dancing, and more. The maiko have provided the false stereotype of a geisha to westerners with their white make-up and elaborate kimono. In reality, however, true geisha wear a more subdued makeup style, to show her own natural beauty, and only apply white make-up for formal occasions or special dances. After a period that may last from a few months to a few years, depending on the region, the maiko is promoted to a full-fledged geisha, and is able to charge full price.

There are many circumstances where a woman recruit can skip the training stages, and begin her career as a full geisha. For instance, any woman above 21 is generally considered too old to be a maiko, and can become a full geisha as soon as she's initiated. However, those who do endure the training stages are more respected as professional geisha.

## **Mama-san**

The term originally comes from Japanese, where it is a term for a woman who works as a supervisor at a bar, nightclub, brothel, or similar business. The suffix -san is a polite honorific attached to a person's name or title. The familiarity with the term by U.S. soldiers in Japan after WWII probably has had some influence in its spread to other Southeast Asian countries.

It should be noted that the term *mama-san* in Japanese is emphatically not a polite reference to a mother, and should never be used as such.

### The Shamisen

The shamisen (lit. three taste strings), also called *samisen* or *sangen*, is a stringed instrument played with a large pick called a “*bachi*.” Though it’s about the same length as a guitar, the neck is longer, slimmer, and without frets. The rectangular body, known as the *do*, is covered on both sides with skin, like a banjo. Though recently, some types of plastics are being tried, the best shamisen are typically made with cat or dog skin, and on some, the position of the animal’s nipples can still be seen.

The three strings have typically been made of silk, though nylon is increasingly becoming the norm. The *bachi* was traditionally made of ivory or tortoise shell but is now usually wooden, and shaped like a ginkgo leaf. The shamisen has derived from the *sanshin*, which came from Southern Okinawa in the 16th century, and which itself evolved from the Chinese *sanxian*.

### Hanafuda

The game that we see in Boss Inaso’s gambling parlor is a card game called Hanafuda, which is still played today in variations such as “Go Stop.” Hanafuda (“flower cards”) are Japanese playing cards used to play a number of games, but the name can also refer to the game itself, or at least a variation of it. Private gambling during the Tokugawa Shogunate was illegal, but card game gambling was so common that attempts to restrict gambling and ban games just prompted the creation of new games, and a wide variety of playing cards. Once the government realized that the populace would always play some sort of card game, laws against gambling began to relax, and the eventual result was the modern game of Hanafuda, which was a combination of traditional Japanese games with Western-style cards. In 1889, Fusajiro Yamauchi founded a small company called Nintendo and created Hanafuda cards made of mulberry tree bark, after which the game began to really take off among *yakuza* gambling parlors. Despite its focus on video games today, Nintendo still produces Hanafuda cards in Japan. The game itself is similar to bridge, but there are many different variations. A deck consists of 12 suits of four cards each, all with images associated with arbitrary point values. The most popular games only concern themselves with certain combinations of taken cards.

**“This is the Hannya Shinkyō, the Bhuddist “Heart Sutra.” See liner notes for details.”**

The Hannyashinkyō is a Sanskrit Buddhist chant that is one of the main doctrines of Buddhism, and one of the most popular sutras. Literally “the Great Heart of Wisdom Sutra,” the original text was written in Tibetan Sanskrit, then translated into Chinese, and then into Japanese. This particular sutra is recited by Daikatsu’s wife a couple times throughout the film, and it appears below, as recited:

Bussetsu maka hannya-haramita. Kanjizai bosa gyōjin hannya-haramita jisho ken go-un kai kū do issai kū yaku Sharishi shiki fu I kū kū fu-i shiki shiki soku ze kū kū soku ze shiki ju sō gyō shiki yaku bu nyo ze... Sharishi ze sho hō kū sō fu shō fu metsu fu ku fu jō fu zō fu gen ze ko kū chū... shi yaku mu rō shi jin mu ku shu metsu dō mu chi yaku mu toku i mu sho tok’ko. Bodaisatta e han-nya haramita ko shin-mu kei ge mu kei ge ko mu u ku fu on ri issai ten dō mu sō ku gyō ne han. San ze sho butsu e... han-nya ha ra mi ta ko toku a noku ta ra san-myaku sanbodai ko chi han-nya haramita ze dai jin shu ze dai myō shu ze mu jō shu ze mu tō dō shu nō jo issai ku shin jitsu fu ko ko setsu han-mya ha ra mi ta shu soku setsu shu watsu...

(“The Buddha’s teaching of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā: Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva was practicing profound Transcendent Wisdom (*prajnaparamita*), and discerned clearly that the five psychophysical constituents were empty, and thereby became free from all suffering. Oh Śāriputra... form is emptiness, emptiness is form, form is no other than emptiness, emptiness is no other than form. Of sensation, conception, predilection, and consciousness the same can be said... Oh Śāriputra, all things are characterized by emptiness, they are neither born nor do they perish, they are neither tainted nor immaculate; neither do they increase nor decrease. Therefore, in emptiness, no old age and death, no extinction of old age and death. There is no suffering, no origination of suffering, no annihilation, no Noble Paths. There is no wisdom and no attainment because there is no object to be attained. The Bodhisattva, because of their entrusting Transcendental Wisdom, has no obstacle of mind, because there is no obstacle, there is no fear. Being free from all perverted views, ultimate Nirvāṇa is reached. All the Buddhas of the Three Worlds... entrusting Transcendent Wisdom, attain perfect Awakening. One should, therefore, know that the *prajñāpāramitā* is the great mantra, the mantra of great

Wisdom, the highest mantra, the peerless mantra, which is capable of allaying all suffering; it is true and not false. Thus, the prajñāpāramitā mantra is to be delivered.)

**“Chairman Horikawa here and my Dad said that they were once infatuated with a Gidayu singer who looked a lot like you.”**

Takemoto Gidayu (1651-1714) was a joruri chanter who created the Gidayu style of chanted narration for Japan's puppet theatre, which has been used ever since. The term “Gidayu” has now become the term for all joruri chanters, such as Momowaka's mother. Takemoto Gidayu thought of his musical style as a contemporary creation, even though he acknowledged the traditional forms which joruri drew upon. He was known to poke fun at those who valued tradition and lineage over skill and a beautiful performance. Gidayu also established frameworks for the joruri structure, which would have five acts performed over the course of an entire day, each one with a particular function. The narration of a play was to be chanted alone, along with the spoken or sung lines of each character. The chanting style shifts dramatically between singing and speaking, and chanters very rarely perform simultaneously, usually switching places with another chanter between acts. Many of these rules have remained unchanged throughout the history of the Gidayu style.

**“I... I'm going to dance □‘Ichi-no-tani.’”**

The Ichi-no-tani is a dance which refers to the Battle of Ichi-no-tani, one of the most famous battles of the Genpei War, which took place on March 18, 1184 at the legendary Ichi-no-tani fortress at Suma, to the west of present-day Kobe. The Battle of Ichi-no-tani is the last recorded instance in which crossbows were used in a Japanese siege. One of the most celebrated acts of single combat in all of Japanese history occurred during this battle, when 16-year-old Taira no Atsumori was killed by Kumagai no Naozane. This event, as well as that of the entire battle, has been dramatized many times through *noh*, *kabuki*, and in popular fiction. There's no telling which play this dance refers to, possibly the *Ichinotani Futaba Gunki*, a joruri and *Kabuki* play which relates the battle's events.

**”When did you have your mizuage?”**

The mizuage (literally, “hoisting from water”) was a Japanese ceremony undergone by a maiko (apprentice geisha) to signify her coming of age. Once a virgin maiko was deemed ready to come of age, the okasan would choose a suitable patron who could pay for the privilege, usually an older man. Sometimes the process would be very elaborate, spread over a week, whereby the patron would slowly prepare the maiko for the mizuage intercourse (with his fingers). On an auspicious night, he would take her virginity, and the maiko's topknot of her hair was symbolically cut, followed by a party for the maiko. After the ceremony, the maiko was allowed to “turn her collar,” which meant that she could wear the white collar of a geisha instead of the red worn by apprentices. Her hairstyle also changed from the “split-peach” style (*momoware*) to the more mature style worn by older women called the “*ofuku*.” Mizuage was not a secret ceremony. In fact, it was common for a group of maikos to share the same patron, and it was something to be celebrated with gifts and sweets.

**“You dance the ‘yasuna’ so well.”**

The Yasuna dance was based off a 7-role *kabuki hengemono* (“transformation dance”) called “*Miyama no Hana Todokanu Edaburi*.” First staged in March 1818, the play featured a role called “*Kosode Monogurui*” (“the short-sleeved garment madness”), which became the basis for the Yasuna dance. Onoe Kikugoro VI created his own version of the dance in 1922, which became extremely popular and is still frequently performed today.

**“I don't want to. Come on, show me the Charleston.”**

The Charleston is a dance popularized in the U.S. by a 1923 tune of the same name, which was named for the South Carolina city and which originated in the Broadway show *Runnin' Wild*. The Charleston was originally developed in African-American communities, but became an international craze throughout the 1920s. Despite its origin, the Charleston is usually associated with white flappers and the speakeasy, where young women would do the “provocative” dance as a way of mocking those who supported Prohibition. A slightly different version of the Charleston evolved throughout the 1930s, which suited the swing jazz music of the time, often referred to as the “Swinging Charleston.” Both forms of dance can be done alone or with a partner, and though they contain a basic 8 steps, the style of the dance can widely vary depending on the performer.

**“I’ll leave your udon here.”**

Udon is a type of thick wheat-based noodle usually served as a hot noodle soup in a mild broth. In its simplest form, the soup is composed of udon noodles, dashi (Japanese soup stock), mirin (sweet rice wine), and soy sauce. It's usually topped with green onions, but the toppings vary widely from region to region. Other toppings include tempura, abura age (tofu pockets), kamaboko (fish cake), mochi, or a variety of vegetables like yam, onions, radish, or okra. Udon with a dark brown broth is typically associated with eastern Japan, while a light brown broth is used in western Japan. In the summer, udon is often served chilled, and toppings are generally chosen to reflect the seasons.

**“You know Sakamoto Ryoma?”**

Sakamoto Ryoma (1835-1867) was a loyalist leader of a movement to overthrow the Tokugawa bakufu (Shogunate Government) during the Bakumatsu period of Japan. He supported the Sonno joi political philosophy, which revered the Emperor but was against Tokugawa. Ryoma envisioned Japan without any feudal trappings, and was inspired by the example of the United States where “all men are created equal.” He was assassinated at the age of 33 in 1867, but his legacy lives on.

**“You know Nakaoka Shintaro?”**

Nakaoka Shintaro (1838-1867) was a samurai during the Edo period, who hailed from the Tosa Domain of feudal Japan. Like Sakamoto Ryoma, he played a crucial part in the Sonno joi political movement. He worked with Sakamoto for the conclusion of the Satsuma-Choshua Alliance, and also formed and led the Rikuen-tai in trying to overthrow the Shogunate government by force. He was assassinated along with Sakamoto in 1867.

**“You know Takechi Hanpeita?”**

Takechi Hanpeita (1829-1865) was born in Kochi City as the son of a goshi (rural samurai), and earned a reputation as a gifted swordsman early in his life. After encountering the Sonno joi movement, he founded the anti-Tokugawa, pro-Emperor Tosa Kinno-to Party, and recruited Sakamoto and Takechi into the group. The group was very active and was responsible for the murder of Yoshida Toyo, but Takechi was eventually forced into exile as a ronin, and he met the same fate as his colleagues, when he was arrested and ordered to commit seppuku.

**“...if he ever crosses the sea and sets foot in Shikoku, I'll have his head.”**

Shikoku is the smallest and least populous of the four major islands of Japan, and consists of four prefectures: Ehime, Kagawa, Kochi, and Tokushima. Across the sea in Honshu lies the Wakayama, Osaka, Hyogo, Okayama, Hiroshima, and Yamaguchi Prefectures, and the west in Kyushu lies the Oita and Miyazaki Prefectures. Shikoku is known for its farming, and famous for its 88-temple pilgrimage associated with the priest Kukai.

**“Don’t underestimate... us Tosa people.”**

Tosa is the name of a district, town, and city found in the Kochi Prefecture of Japan. The Kochi Prefecture was formerly called Tosa no kuni (Tosa Domain). However, the “Tosa” name is still widely used to describe the region and culture. During the Edo period, the feudal Tosa Domain played an important role in events of the late Tokugawa shogunate, as mentioned in association with the three Sonno joi loyalists above.

**“‘Hiki-iwai’: A payment to the geisha house that buys a geisha out of her contract.”**

The hiki-iwai (literally, “the celebration of being pulled”) refers to a geisha retirement ceremony whereby a patron pays off a geisha’s outstanding debts so that she may become his mistress. Many geisha leave to get married, and some open up their own businesses like bars or restaurants, a common way for retired geisha to live since there are few careers open to middle-aged women in Japan. The hiki-iwai ceremony itself is relatively simple. Retiring geisha distribute boxes of cooked rice to colleagues and teachers, which may contain red rice or red beans mixed in to convey mixed emotions surrounding retirement.

**“But your body is a commodity, you know? Have you lost weight?”**

Though there are now more overweight people across the world than undernourished people (1 billion vs. 800 million), malnutrition and hunger have traditionally been a worldwide problem, and beauty standards obviously differ in nations of excess. The transition towards an obese world has transformed the ideal body image into one of near-impossible thinness in Western cultures, but in most period films like this one, losing weight is almost always associated with poor nutrition and health, such as a lack of protein, iron, vitamins, and other minerals.

#### **“Have you entered a name in your family registry yet?”**

A family register is a registry used in several countries such as Japan to track genealogical information. In many countries, official recognition of certain status or events is not effective until registered in the family registry. For example, a marriage in Japan is only legally effective when such a filing is recorded in the household register, known as a “koseki.” The Koseki has been used since the 6th century, when it was introduced under the ritsuryo system of governance. The modern koseki appeared in 1872, following the Meiji Restoration, and is slightly more comprehensive than that of other countries in the world, besides perhaps Germany and China.

The koseki fills the function of birth certificates, death certificates, marriage licenses, and the census, and is based on family rather than the individual. Only Japanese citizens can register in a koseki, because it serves as a certificate of citizenship. The law requires all Japanese households to report all updates to the registry to their local authority, who compiles the records within their jurisdiction. Marriage, adoptions, and paternity acknowledgments only become legally binding once they are recorded in the koseki. Anyone whose name is listed on a koseki, even if the name has been crossed off due to divorce, is legally able to get a copy of that koseki in person or by mail.

#### **“I think we’ll go to Manchuria.”**

Manchuria is the historical name given to the vast region of northeast Asia, which falls within China and, depending on the definition, parts of Russia. Following the collapse of the Manchu Qing Dynasty in 1911, the name of the region was officially replaced by “Northeast” in the newly founded Republic of China. Manchuria was known for its shamanism, ginseng and tigers, and between WWI and WWII, it became a political and military battleground. Japanese influence extended into Outer Manchuria following the Russian Revolution of 1917, but it reverted to Soviet control in 1925, and the Japanese were forced to withdrawal.

In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria, and Inner Manchuria was detached from China by Japan's installation of a puppet government. The area (then called Manchukuo) became a brutally-run industrial powerhouse in which local Russian and Chinese populations were subjected to harsh rule and systematic campaigns of terror and intimidation. There was also an emigration campaign to Manchukuo, whereby the Japanese population rose by over 500,000 in 8 years (the plan was for 10 times that amount). The region was used as a base to invade the rest of China, which backfired against Japan. The end of the '30s saw clashes between the Russians and Japanese, with many Japanese casualties, and by the end of WWII, China and the Soviet Union recaptured the territory.

Manchuria has always been an important region for rich minerals and coal reserves, with fine soil for crops. Pre-WWII Japan took advantage of Manchurian raw materials, and probably could not have carried out much of the conquest of Southeast Asia or risked attacking Pearl Harbor if it wasn't for the Manchurian resources.

#### **“We’ll get on a ship at Shimonoseki. Meanwhile, wait here.”**

Shimonoseki is a Japanese city located in Yamaguchi Prefecture, at the southwestern tip of Honshu. The city was officially founded on April 1, 1889, and is known for its annual large catch of the fugu fish. The current population is around 300,000, but since February 2005, the city has merged with the towns of Hohoku, Kikugawa, Toyota, and Toyoura to form the new city of Shimonoseki.

#### **Cast and Crew**

**Hideo Gosha (Director)**

Hideo Gosha was born on February 26, 1929, in Tokyo. After graduating with a business degree from Meiji University, Gosha worked for several years as a reporter for Nippon Television. By 30, he moved to Fuji TV where he became Chief Producer and Director. One popular show he produced, *Sanbiki no Samurai* (Three Outlaw Samurai), caught the eye of Shochiku Studios and he was soon offered a contract.

His first film, also called *Three Outlaw Samurai* (an adaptation of the television series), premiered in 1964. A brilliant debut, the film not only marks the beginning of Gosha's distinct style, but also features the first of twelve collaborations with the actor, Tetsuro Tamba (who also appears in *The Geisha*). Its success opened the door for other television shows that eventually made the transition to the big screen, most notably the *Zatoichi* series. Throughout the decade, Gosha directed several more critical and commercially viable films, including three films, *Gohiki no shinshi* (Cash Call Hell), *Goyokin*, and *Tenchu!*, which marked the first of ten collaborations with Tatsuya Nakadai.

During the 1970s, Gosha turned his attention to the *Ninkyō* (Yakuza) film genre. His first film of the decade, *Shussho Iwai* (The Wolves), was the first *Ninkyō* film released by Toho Studios, a significant milestone because Toei Studios had more or less a monopoly on the genre.

Although he was nominated as Best Director four times by the Japanese Academy, Gosha won only once, for the 1983 film *Yokiro* (The Geisha). He passed away on August 30, 1992, and the next year he received a posthumous Lifetime Achievement Award.

### **Masaru Sato (Composer)**

One of the most prolific composers in film history, Masaru Sato was born on May 29, 1928, in Toru City, Hokkaido. He was raised in Sapporo, and studied at the National Music Academy. He later served as an assistant at Toho Studios under Akira Kurosawa's composer, Fumio Hayasaka, and his official career began at age 27, when he completed the unfinished score to Akira Kurosawa's *I Live in Fear: Record of a Living Being*. From 1956-1965, he worked with Kurosawa on such films as *Throne of Blood*, *Sanjuro* and *Red Beard*.

Sato's award-winning credits include over 300 compositions for film and TV, including an astonishing 18 film scores in 1959. His diverse body of work includes dramas, thrillers, comedies, documentaries, animes, as well as four *Godzilla* films. He is particularly known for using popular Western styles and jazz in his music. Sato passed away on December 5, 1999, in Tokyo.

### **Ken Ogata (Daikatsu)**

Ken Ogata was a legendary Japanese actor, born July 20, 1937, in Tokyo. He's well known for his numerous film roles, particularly Shohei Imamura's *Vengeance is Mine* and *The Ballad of Narayama*. He also enjoyed a long career in television, from his breakthrough role in the 1965 drama "Taikoki" to the lead of the 1982 "Chushingura." Ogata passed away at the age of 71, on October 5th, 2008, shortly after finishing his role in the TV drama "Garden of the Winds." His long-term contribution to acting has been recognized by the Japanese government with high-ranking awards such as the Order of the Rising Sun.

### **Kimiko Ikegami (Momowaka)**

Kimiko Ikegami was born January 16, 1959 in Manhattan, New York, and moved to Kyoto at the age of 3. She attended Tamagawa University, and with the encouragement of her kabuki actor relatives, turned to acting. Her TV debut was in the 1975 show "Maboroshi no Pen Friend," and her film debut came the same year in the film "Hadashi no Seishun." Her long film and TV career is also supplemented by her 1984 song, "Nagasarete," which was the theme song for the show "Kiryuin Hanako no Shogai." She was nominated for the Best Actress Japanese Academy Award for her role in *The Geisha*, but lost to Rumiko Koyanagi (Hakujasho). She is best known in the U.S. for her major role in *House* (Hausu), the legendary Japanese cult horror film.

### **Atsuko Asano (Tamako)**

Atsuko Asano was born March 4, 1961, in Tokyo. Her breakthrough role was in 1976 with the film *Eden no umi*, and she's gone on to appear in over 20 films, including her latest 2008 horror film, *Akanbo shōjo* (Tamami: The Baby's Curse). However, Atsuko is mostly known as a top star of romantic comedy TV dramas. Throughout the latter half of the '80s and the '90s, she was one of the most popular TV romantic comedy actresses in Japan,

and some of her roles in TV dramas made history with record-breaking ratings. She also won the Best Supporting Actress Japanese Academy Award for her role in *The Geisha*.

### **Mitsuko Baisho (Ode-san)**

Mitsuko Baisho was born November 22, 1946, in Ibaraki Prefecture, and studied at the Shochiku School of Dance and Music. She's a highly-accomplished actress, best known internationally for her prolific work with Shohei Imamura, including the films *Zegen*, *The Eel*, *Ballad of Narayama*, and *Vengeance is Mine*. She also appeared in two Akira Kurosawa films, *Dreams* and *Kagemusha*. Her award-winning breakthrough role was in Hideo Gosha's 1969 film *Hitokiri (Tenchu!)* and besides *The Geisha*, she's also appeared in Gosha's *Bandits vs. Samurai Squad*. She's received a score of awards for her work, including several Japanese Academy Awards. She was also nominated for the Best Supporting Actress Japanese Academy Award for her role in *The Geisha*, but the award ended up going to Atsuko Asano.