Memoirs of a Geisha in Film: Authenticity, Gender, and Orientalism

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Director Steven Spielberg received permission to make the film version of Arthur Golden's mega-best-seller *Memoirs of a Geisha* back in 1999, but the project never seemed to get started, as Spielberg got caught up in various other projects. When he passed on the job of directing the film to Rob Marshall, it should have been easy to guess that the interpretation of the work would change radically. Instead of a *Schindler's List*-type human drama aiming to be historically authentic, we could expect *Chicago* in Kyoto, something only quasi-realistic and full of music and dance. That is just what we got under Marshall's direction. The director succeeded visually and cinematographically in creating a lovely and fantastic environment for Golden's story, but many of the human and historical touches that were what made the novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* so good, and that we might have expected from a Spielberg-directed film, have been lost in the glitter.

Cinematically speaking, there are many good aspects to this film. The visual product is beautiful, the costumes, set, and music excellently done. Much of the acting is also very good. This essay is not, however, meant to be a review of the film, just released this month, but rather to address certain aesthetic and critical issues that arise when a book that was written by an American man about a fictional yet factually-based Japanese geisha goes to film in a Hollywood production. There is little that can be said about the book's story itself by now, as it has been analyzed and criticized in almost every conceivable way. In this essay, I wish to address the manner in which

Golden's novel was interpreted in order to make this film, and, more importantly, the issues of cross-cultural representation that have arisen in the process. Three such issues immediately come to mind. First is the matter of authenticity, of how well the film captures the lives of Gion geisha in the 1930s and 1940s. Just how true to what we know from other historical evidence is this representation? Second is the issue of gender representation that also crosses cultural divides. How are these female geisha portrayed in a film made mostly by men, taken from a book written by a man? Thirdly, we have the question of orientalism: a Japanese setting, a California set; Japanese geisha played by Chinese actresses; Japanese history, American novelists and directors. The issue of orientalism in representation is one that simply cannot be ignored here. In just what ways might the film be guilty of this, and what does that mean for us, and much more, for Hollywood? I want to address these and other issues in the essay that follows.

Chinese Divas

To begin with, I wish to briefly take up one of the criticisms most frequently made of the film by Japanese people, most of whom have yet to see the film: namely, that it is wholly improper to have the two lead geisha roles played by Chinese actresses. This is seen as a sign of orientalist, or maybe even racist, stereotyping on the part of the American producers and an insult to Japanese tradition. Certainly the most authentic film possible would have had Japanese actresses speaking in Japanese throughout the film, but apart from doing that, the question comes down to whether there is anything especially wrong with having Chinese actresses playing Japanese roles. For comparison's sake, we might point out that in the making of Japanese films, the case has usually been that any white actor is thought to be capable of playing a character of any European nationality.[1] This has

never been seen as a problem. Nor does anybody think that Robert DeNiro should, for example, be limited to playing Italian-American roles. And in any case, the production company is owned by Japanese, so the final decision was basically in their hands.[2]

After seeing the film, my impression was that outside of the few incidents where Zhang's Japanese pronunciation was off, something which would surely be irritating to Japanese viewers, the Chinese ethnicity of the actresses was simply not an issue. There were no other occasions where I felt, "She's not doing that in the Japanese manner," or "Wow, here it's clear that she's Chinese." Sure, they did not walk perfectly in kimono, and none could really dance in the proper manner, but it is doubtful that any otherwise acceptable Japanese actresses could have been found who could have done these things much better. The most authentic option would have been to choose actual geisha for the roles, but geisha are not actresses, so they don't usually have to memorize scripts; they are personally unknown even among Japanese and thus would add no box office appeal, and they are notorious for not wanting to associate with outside attempts to represent them or their lives.

Regarding this position I think that most people, and almost all non-Japanese, will agree that Zhang Ziyi and Gong Li gave fine performances in the roles they were chosen for. There is really no reason to think that there were any usable Japanese actresses who could have done a better, or even more natural, job. This initial point aside, I would like to move on to other, far more pertinent criticisms of the film.

The Language Game

The very fact that this movie is in English presents us with several problems. First of all, it's just all a bit weird, especially seeing as few of the

main actors can speak English properly. The exceptions are the Malaysian Michelle Yeoh, and also the Japanese Yuki Kudoh, who lives in the United States and has already starred in several English-speaking roles, most notably in *Snow Falling on Cedars*. What we have here is a movie set in early Showa-period Japan that uses Chinese and Japanese actors speaking in halting English. Maybe for Hollywood this kind of linguistic suspension of disbelief poses no problem, but let's just imagine this from the opposite point of view. Imagine a Japanese director making a film about some aspect of American culture that is very popular in Japan, say, for instance, jazz. What if we came across *The Memoirs of a Jazzman*, a Japanese production based on a book about a 52nd Street Bebopper by a Japanese novelist. The dialogue is completely in Japanese, with the lead role played by a Cameroonian actor who speaks broken Japanese with a French accent. Even without giving the character blue eyes, who in the world would take such a film seriously? I suggest that even no Japanese could stomach such a ridiculous scenario. Yet, this is exactly analogous to the movie that Marshall gave us, except that, well, this was Hollywood, and it was made in America, and well, American movie people seem to have the hegemonic authority to do that kind of thing.

There were two paths that could have been taken to avoid such a ridiculous scenario. One was to do the entire film in Japanese, with an all-Japanese cast, and subtitle it in English. The other was to use actors of Asian decent who were fluent speakers of English: Asian-Americans, for instance. Either of these options would obviously have made for a move believable movie. The first, of course, was out of the question from the start. Golden's original is in English, of course, and even if the writer would have stood for his work being converted into Japanese, it is quite likely that the American movie-going public would not have. Whether it only comes from a basic cultural narcissism or whether the Hollywood industry is more actively involved in keeping foreign-language films out of proper distribution and off

TV in the U.S. than people realize, the fact remains that the American public's aversion to foreign-language films seems to be as strong as ever. It would have been truly interesting, however, to see such a movie—a wholly American production with a Japanese cast, filmed in Japan. A fascinating idea, but in that case, you might ask, what need would there be for the American part of the deal? Why couldn't some Japanese director make just such a film? Of course many films have been made relating to the world of the Geisha. We can look back to Mizoguchi Kenji's classic *Sisters of Gion* (*Gion shimai* 1929) and *A Geisha* (*Gion bayashi* 1953), or more recently, Fukasaku Kinji's *The Geisha House* (*Omocha* 1999). All of these were much more realistic treatments of the world of the Geisha, but they all also lacked the excitement of *Memoirs*, its brilliant cinematography and fantastic sets and costumes, and (therefore?) none ever got to be particularly well-known in the U.S. We are thus probably safe to say that the Americans were needed for the money brought into the deal by Hollywood producers, as well as for the very American-sounding story line that Golden's book provided.

When the first English lines of dialogue in the movie are spoken, the viewer is slightly confused as to what is happening. The Japanese or Chinese accents stand out, and are at times a bit hard to decipher. I wonder if this was seen as a drawback by the producers, or whether it was actually something they aimed for, a certain oriental quaintness that has so often been tacked on to Asians' speech in Hollywood. Consider the recently passed-away Japanese-American actor Noriyuki "Pat" Morita, who first became known as Arnold in the T.V. series *Happy Days* and is better known as Mr. Miyagi from the *Karate Kid* trilogy. The scripts for this great comic actor were usually either filled with disparagingly humorous miss-pronunciations (as Arnold) or sagacious "Oriental" profundities (Miyagi). Never could he ever simply be a regular Asian-American man who spoke perfect English! So maybe the bad English was in this film viewed as a plus,

acting to continually remind viewers that this was taking place in a different world.

How would the film had turned out with Asian-American actors in all the roles? I can imagine Lucy Liu doing just about as good a Hatsumomo as Gong Li did, although just who should have been cast in the lead role of Sayuri is not such an easy guess. Such a choice would have had benefits beyond making the film more audibly pleasing: it would have enabled Marshall to retain much more of the historical detail and psychological complexity of Golden's novel. As it is, the lack of English ability of the main actors caused much of the finesse of Golden's writing to be lost. It often is not clear what is happening in the lives of the characters. Why is Sayuri so rapt with the Chairman? So hated by Hatsumomo? More importantly, though, the reduction of dialogue seems to lead to the inner lives of the Geisha being reduced to cliché: love versus duty/fate, rivalry between women. The characters become one-dimensional in a way that takes much away from Golden's work.

So why weren't fluent English speakers used? I have yet to do enough thorough research into the history of these production decisions, but certainly it had something to do with the recent popularity and expected drawing power of Zhang Ziyi, star of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which was one of the first Asian-made films to become a mega-hit in America. Maybe some in Hollywood sensed the rising popularity and importance of Chinese cinema in general, linked of course with the notion of this as the "Chinese Century," and saw such a move as a way to bring the two industries together. As a result of being thrown into the American spotlight with this film, for example, veteran actress Gong Li now has a full schedule in Hollywood for the next few years. With *Miami Vice* already completed, she is currently working on *Behind the Mask*, the third Hannibal Lecter film. Although she put in a solid and often moving performance as the seductive,

cruel, and vengeful Hatsumomo, one wonders how Gong, now 40, still lovely but without the youthful charm she possessed in her films made with Zhang Yimou, will be re-created in America. I for one do not dare to hope for anything even close to her performances in *Ju Dou or Raise the Red Lantern*, especially if she has to perform in English. Even if she could still produce such brilliant and important work, I doubt that there is anyone in Hollywood who would write such meaningful parts for her.

At any rate, the decision was not made to use English-speaking actors. Whether this was to gain a positive orientalist touch added by accents, to make a stronger connection between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry, or simply to capitalize on the perceived drawing power of Zhang Ziyi remains to be shown.[3] We cannot overlook that fact that there is not a very large number of high-profile Asian-American actors available, and very few with any kind of power to draw a crowd simply with her name.

On the topic of language, one more point needs to be made. I personally found many of the occasions where Japanese was used in the film extremely irritating. To be sure, the Japanese words thrown in now and again (*O-nee san, O-kaa san, Konnichi wa, okiya, danna, etc*) added a certain quaintness and light air of authenticity to the film (though I would like to know how this was perceived by a viewer with no knowledge of Japanese). It was the whole dialogues conducted in Japanese that were more problematic. In the first scene, Japanese is spoken when the nine-year-old Chiyo and her sister are taken from their home, but the dialogue switches to English once she reaches the Nitta *okiya*. This gives one the impression that Japanese is the inelegant language of the peasants in the countryside, whereas English signifies the language of class and elegance. Another rather conspicuous example is that the Japanese soldiers who come to close down Gion during World War II are all speaking Japanese. Since at this time they would have been at war with the Americans, this works to distance them, painting the

militarists in wartime Japan as something entirely other than the world of the geisha. This of course is nonsense, since even in this story the Chairman and Nobu were both soldiers in colonial Manchuria, and currently are working in manufacturing for the war effort, and historically speaking, it is quite misleading to imply that the geisha world was somehow anti-militaristic in any sense. The whole mixture of languages seems to fall apart when Sayuri meets the American colonel. That they speak freely in English seems rather ridiculous indeed, completely covering over the meaning that the American occupation had not only for geisha, but for all the Japanese citizenry.

In conclusion, for me, the stilted English simply did not work. The "oriental" effect, whether intended or not, of poorly pronounced Asian English harkened back a little too much to the days when such accents were exaggerated for a very racist comic effect. It appears as if neither of the two options discussed above where ever taken seriously by the makers of the film. Neither would have generated even a fragment of the publicity of the path taken, and neither would have made for a movie so easily digestible and sellable at the same time. Unfortunately, however, either one of the other choices would likely have made for a better film. It seems to be that little to nothing would have been lost except publicity or digestibility for a lazy audience unwilling to read subtitles. Actresses could have been found to play the parts as well, and to look just as beautiful, as the ones that were used, without sacrificing so much in terms of content.

Geisha as Prostitutes and Geisha as Women

The film's treatment of the existence of geisha as a group of women in a line of work that, while rejecting direct male control, clearly depends upon the patronage of men, furthermore of men who are basically unable to see

the geisha wholly outside of a context wherein they are objects of sexual desire—that is to say its treatment of geisha as engendered beings constantly living under the male gaze—fails completely. All of the main female characters come off as extremely one-dimensional.

The mother of the Nitta house is portrayed as greedy and ruthless, a woman whose very existence is concerned with nothing but money. There is no place in her life, it seems, for love, sex, or fun of any kind, nor even for any of the aesthetic culture normally associated with the geisha. She seems more like an evil stepmother of the Western fairy-tale variety, and we are never given any hints as to why. As Liza Dalby stresses in her work *Geisha*, this was practically the only business area in Japan that was run by women. Men were allowed no say. Dalby sees this as a reason to praise the whole enterprise, and also as a rebuttal to anyone trying to portray them as the mere playthings of men (Dalby pp. xiv-xv). While there must have been greedy characters among real geisha, and while the film should be applauded for including a sense of the business side of the world (as too should Momoi for her acting), the complex business situation is really simplified far too much. Moveover, as for the stresses of the industry, the skill it necessitated, the subtle business relationships that made up the entire quarter, and the way in which these women had to cooperate in order to survive in a chauvinistic society, these are topics that are not at all broached in this film. The main characters in the film are stereotypes, many of which are far too common in the history of Western representations of Asian women: greedy spinsters, seductive and calculating dragon women, and innocent butterflies.[4] Whereas even Golden's book (although not completely avoiding stereotype or cliché) was far more complicated in its characterization, the film version makes it all too simple. What virtue, humanity, or pain is there to be found in Hatsumomo? What kindness or humor in the mother? What sexuality or desire is there in Sayuri or

Mameha? Even their ambition to make Sayuri the top geisha in the quarter is portrayed merely as retributive justice against Hatsumomo, Mother, and, in the end, the unfair system wherein little girls could be sold into a life of sexual slavery (although of course nothing definite is said about that system, where it came from, or how it has been manipulated and re-defined in today's Japan).

In the film version of *Memoirs*, female emotions are reduced to greed, competition, dirty forms of hidden lust, revenge, and, most disappointingly of all, the childish devotion of a young girl to the man she sees as her "prince in shining armor." Is this an adequate theme in a story of the only women in Japan who, as a group if not individually, controlled their own lives outside the reach of male dominance? Is this notion of the highly-skilled and extremely successful woman who really just wants to be the wife of her beloved (and much older) man a realistic portrayal, or is it a reflection of the desires of a certain type of man in American society today, one who feels threatened by skilled and successful women? Let us not forget how Western men who feel uncomfortable with "aggressive" women have long shown a desire for the (supposedly) demure, passive, subservient beauties of Asia.

In this point, however, the movie's greatest failure is also the novel's. For all its brilliant detail and painstaking character development, Golden's basic story line just doesn't work. It is just too American, too un-Japanese. To take the most glaring example, the ending is entirely out of place. Describe it variously as a "fairy tale" ending, or a "Hollywood" or "Cinderella" ending; it certainly is not a Japanese ending. A typically Japanese ending would have the Chairman die prematurely and Sayuri find a adequate though passionless life with Nobu, or else either kill herself or take the tonsure. Of course, no Japanese ending could really be a happy one, and Golden knew this would fail to please an American crowd. Even in comparison with Golden's Sayuri, though, the character scripted for this film is neither an

interesting geisha nor an interesting woman. Certainly lack of dialogue is one major reason for this, but another is the one-dimensional character of her infatuation with the chairman. This is a completely uninteresting way to represent a geisha, and ends up relegating what is meant to be a talented and vivacious artist to the role of a little girl waiting for her hero. Even with her feelings for the chairman considered, she is basically asexual in the film. Hatsumomo is the dragon woman/whore; Sayuri is the delicate, virginal butterfly.

Alongside this simplistic sexual dichotomy attached to the two main characters, the film also goes too far out of its way to impress upon us geisha are not prostitutes. The point is repeated to the point of silliness, but simply having the geisha protest over and over does little to lead the viewer to understand the delicate situation in which these women existed. Moreover, the protestations become even less convincing when we see Sayuri's virginity being auctioned off to the highest bidder. That's precisely what a prostitute is, isn't it? Why not give more information, why not explain the economic situation of the geisha, as well as the rules and customs relating to their relationship with customers? If we had actresses with proper English skills, it might have been easier, but it is just possible that the question was meant to be left ambiguous, or even left as a slight tease.

The repetition of the point that geisha are not prostitutes may have been a partial result of the huge fuss raised by Iwasaki Mineko, the Geisha whose life Golden originally fictionalized to create his *Memoirs*, and who later brought suit against Golden and has vigorously campaigned that his story of geisha being purchased, particularly in the act of *mizu-age*, just strengthens the Western misconception that geisha are a kind of prostitute.[5] Golden's novel treats the issue very delicately, however, explaining historically the ways in which geisha received payment and for what. Furthermore, in later interviews and discussions he has continually stressed that geisha cannot be

considered prostitutes.[6] The movie, however puts in so much effort trying to convince us of this point, with no real intelligent explanation of the issue, that the effect might just be opposite the intended one. Seeing the attention this issue has been given in the reviews of the film I have read so far, maybe they should have left more of the notion of geisha as sex worker in.[7] In the film, the details of the ***mizu-age*** are almost completely left out, in a way reminiscent of the suggestive or minimalist manner in traditional Japanese film making, but very un-like Hollywood. The effect, however, is to see a girl "who is definitely not a prostitute" selling her virginity to a man, and then the issue is closed. Much worse, though, is the contradictory message given by the scene were Sayuri and Pumpkin join the Japanese businessmen and the American military officers in the hot spring bath. The American colonel quite naturally assumes that Sayuri can be possessed sexually, but she strongly protests that geisha do not sell their bodies, and even if she would, he could not afford it. The irony here is that, especially at that time but even today, for a top geisha it would be far more mortifying to be naked in public with a group of men than to have sex with a customer. The Christian-American view of celibacy and sexual virtue, which lies at the bottom of this scene as well as the general approach that this movie takes to the issue, certainly had no counterpart in the Japanese geisha quarters. That such a geisha would subject herself to the embarrassment of public nudity in front of her customers (who also happen to be foreign occupiers) is actually far less likely than that she might have sex with a customer for reasons other than love. The inclusion of this scene, which has no counterpart in Golden's novel, is simply preposterous. The only possible reasons for adding such a scene as the give the film a little skin and voyeuristic suggestiveness

The entire manner in which the sexuality of geisha is represented in the movie is misguided. We are presented with two choices, the path of the wanton tramp such as Hatsumomo and the later Pumpkin (both of whom

end up dissipated and lost), or the single-minded, self-sacrificing dedication of Sayuri and to a lesser extent Mameha (more self-sacrificing in her case, as she knows she will never be her Baron's wife and thus cannot even admit her feelings for him). What exactly does it mean to have a *danna*? What would their relationship be, seeing as geisha are, in Mameha's word "not concubines, but neither are we wives?" What happens to the children when geisha get pregnant? Is Hatsumomo's love/desire for the errand boy Koichi really so strange? Even if she is not allowed to marry, why can't she have a sexual relationship with him? These problems are never addressed in the film, leaving a big question mark as to what the love lives of geisha are really like. Golden's book, while being the source of the ridiculous Cinderella story, does in fact do a much better job handling these issues. That geisha, living in a world that turns on sexual difference and desire, are young women too, and sometimes have affairs with men, either customers or otherwise, is dealt with quite naturally in the book, where even Sayuri is shown dallying with young men, but this point is lost in the movie version. What we end up with is a puritan, dualistic vision of female sexuality that betrays both the nuance of Golden's book and the reality of geishas' lives as women. Moreover, it is a vision that differs little from the very often racist clichés that we have seen in Western representations of Asian women over the last 100 years and more.

Authenticity and Orientalism

One basic criticism of *Memoirs of a Geisha* is that authenticity and real cultural understanding were sacrificed for elements that were expected to bring in a greater draw at the box office. Of course, whether or not these inauthenticities shall function as planned and actually lead to a big draw is something that, even after we know the numbers, we will only be able to

guess at. We will know if the movie made lots of money or not, and whether or not it got awards, but we can never do more than guess how a more authentic version might have fared. The basic assumption in planning the movie seems to have been that the (American, in particular) movie-viewing public is not interested in authenticity, that it actually dislikes it, but critics are almost universally panning Marshall for pandering to the box office, for sacrificing the chance to make a faithful representation of Golden's book (which is usually assumed or judged to be a faithful representation of the geisha quarters) and instead creating a whimsical fantasy based on nothing but his own artistic impulses.[8]

To be sure, little in the movie is strictly authentic. Even someone completely unknowledgeable about geisha might guess that the styles of kimono and hairdo are quite hard to accept as something anyone would wear in 1930s Japan. Open necklines and backs, wild hair flowing all about, unkempt sexuality. These make for Hollywood sex appeal but are far from the real thing. To take just one extremely inauthentic example, there is Sayuri's debut dance. This is supposed to be the Miyako Odori, the "Dances of the Capital," Gion's yearly dance pageant. Sayuri debuts as a maiko, and has a solo dance (how this might happen, even though she has just recently, it seems, re-started her dance lessons, is not explained in the film). Her hair is down, she has glitter and black eye shadow on her face, and a wild, flowing kimono. She dances an avant garde piece wherein she acts as if she were being blown about in a storm, ending up writhing nimbly on the stage. The film work here is superb, and the music used in this scene, John Williams' rather rocked-up version of the *ji-uta* shamisen music that would really have been used, is fantastic. But not a thing is real. Maiko never dance alone at such dances, nor do their outfits vary from the styles they usually wear. Nor do they writhe around on the stage. Here we see the Rob Marshall of *Chicago* doing his thing.

I suppose that for someone who never saw a geisha dance, but was interested in watching "Asian Beauty" flaunt itself, this would make for a quite enticing scene. It is a little hard to bear, however, for anyone with the slightest idea of what the Miyako Odori is really like. The important issue here, I think, is whether a director is justified in creating such inauthentic images and putting it in a movie where, although he may not be standing up and telling us that this is real, most non-Japanese viewers will assume that it is.[9]

Edward Said gave a word to the situation wherein the Westerner in a position of hegemonic superiority looked at the culture of the Middle East or Asia and took it upon himself to describe that culture, taking away the voice of the native people and substituting his own for theirs. As we all know, he called this "orientalism." Notwithstanding the fact that the world today is not that of the age of high empire which Said treated, or that the hegemonic relationship between the United States and Japan is very different from anything that appeared in that time, this word as Said defined it almost perfectly applies to what Marshall, and Golden for that matter, have created. The white American male has become the voice of the Japanese geisha.

The theoretical issue of orientalism as it applies to cross-cultural representation in the 21st century is a complicated one that I cannot enter into here (and the issue of gender representation is just as complicated). I myself would never propose that a non-Japanese must, on that account, refrain from expressing his views of Japanese culture, or that males ought to wholly refrain from making representations of females. The point I see is that in making a representation of another culture, there is a responsibility that must be borne by the director or writer. It is not necessarily the responsibility to represent something "authentically," because authenticity is not something that is just out there to be grasped, but rather is itself something constructed by various players.[10] It is not a responsibility to show

another culture in a favorable light, or even as certain members of the cultural sphere depicted would prefer to have it represented—even if they are "authorities." I think that there is, however, a responsibility to somehow create correct, or real, representations. In the diplomatic sphere, distorted representations of the other are referred to as propaganda. In the interpersonal sphere we usually call them lies or slander. But what happens when a work of art such as film or a novel makes false, distorted, or fantastic representations? Sometimes it is called inauthentic; in some specific cases it is termed Orientalism. In the present global community, it is both inevitable and necessary that we at times create representations of other cultures. Thus the issue of orientalism as Said defined it some 30 years ago needs modification in order to remain meaningful in the contemporary world. One aspect that needs to be developed is the idea that this is a problem only referring to Euro-American representations of "the Orient." Another is that in an era where representations are inevitable, how exactly, by what ethical or political standard, are we to judge them?

Rob Marshall's *Memoirs of a Geisha* is a cinematic construction that bears strikingly little resemblance to what we know about the real thing. In an effort to impress American audiences, a fantasy world has been created that is a far cry from the historical reality of the geisha quarters in Japan. Marshall calls the film a fable, implying that it was not meant to be "authentic." So he has confessed to creating historical fiction. But is that confession enough? Whatever the director may say, this is a movie about the Gion geisha quarter in Kyoto, Japan, in the period from 1929 until the late 1940s. Even historical fiction must, to be good, be historically accurate. Arthur Golden's *Memoirs*, even with its Cinderella story line, tried hard to give an accurate historical portrait of the life of a Gion geisha in this time period. Although very well received generally, there are many voices that claim that he failed, and some, including his main informant, have accused

him of misrepresenting the culture of that world. The film version, however, completely lost touch with the fact that this story represents a culture that actually existed. It has tried neither to be authentic nor accurate, and I think in doing so, not only has it been unfaithful to its subject, but has lessened itself as a work of art. The fact is that the world of pre-war Gion was fascinating. It was interesting enough that a more faithful representation of it would have made for a much better movie. The biggest shame here is that the folks from Hollywood were so stubbornly and selfishly set in their own ways of seeing things that could not realize this point. It is in this regard, more than in any other, that we might be correct in regarding the film as orientalist.[11]

Notes:

1. I personally have twice been solicited for work as an acting extra in Japanese productions. In one case, I was to play a Russian sailor, in the other, a German diplomat.
2. For a little more on this controversy, see Janice Page's review for *The Boston Globe*. Ebert, for his part, basically dismisses the whole controversy: "I am not disturbed in the least that the three leading Japanese characters in the film are played by women of Chinese descent. This casting been attacked as ethnically incorrect, but consider that the film was made by a Japanese-owned company; the intent was not to discriminate against Japanese, but in favor of the box office" (Ebert). Many critics writing for lesser-known newspapers or internet blog writers have, however, claimed that the feel of the movie was in fact ruined or at least harmed by the use of Chinese actresses. I have yet to find one who could really explain just how, though.
3. Initial estimates seem to say that Zhang's presence has added little to the drawing power of the film in America. While it is too early to make any definite conclusions, Brasor for one claims that she is really not well-known to American audiences, and that her name was not even mentioned in American trailers. This stands in marked contrast to the situation in Japan, where these actresses are well known and according to Ebert, "Zhang and Li outgross any Japanese actress."

4. For more about this categorization into the types of dragon lady and butterfly and its history see Honey, p. 5, Marchetti, especially chapter 5, and Murakami. While it certainly it would be going too far in to try to boil down all Western representations of Asian women into one of these two types, these works show quite well just how much of the representation of Asian woman follows these stereotypes. While Gong Li's Hatsumomo is of course the perfect Dragon Lady, one might point to the *okiya* mother, played by Momoi Kaori, as an older version of this role. Many of the reviews of this film that I have seen have stressed the will power displayed by Zhang's Sayuri. I failed to notice anything of the kind myself. Indeed, she appeared to be more of a Butterfly, unable to do anything by herself, and, it turns out in the end, having gotten everything because of the Chairman's attraction to her. She, in response, is as faithful and dedicated as any Puccini heroine, although her B.F. Pinkerton is a Japanese gentleman, and not an American naval officer.
5. After reaching an out-of-court settlement with Golden, Iwasaki published her own version of her memoirs, *Geisha of Gion*. A discussion of her criticisms of Golden's work is included in Prasso pp. 208-210.
6. See, for instance, Golden's interview in *The Secret Lives of Geisha*.
7. Both famous television critic Roger Ebert and New York Times Reviewer Manohla Dargis feel free to express their opinions on the question of whether or not geisha are "really" prostitutes, a question which both coyly answer in the affirmative: "I know, a geisha is not technically a prostitute. Here is a useful rule: Anyone who is "not technically a prostitute" is a prostitute" (Ebert), and "Geishas aren't typical sex workers; they're superclassy sex workers who sell their virginity to the highest bidder... and rely on steady male patronage. But while serving a new customer every six months certainly sounds less untoward than, say, turning six tricks a night in a day-rate motel, who's kidding whom?" (Dargis). Of course, the crucial error that almost every Westerner who approaches this question makes is to forget about history (and most Japanese make the same error, for instance Iwasaki Mineko, who talks solely about her post-war experience being brought up as the adopted daughter and would-be successor of her okiya, and refers little to the history of the occupation or its origins). While geisha today certainly are nothing like prostitutes, choosing both their livelihood and their partners as freely as anyone else, and no more selling sex for money than the average Japanese (or American) housewife, things certainly were different in the 1930s, when girls could be sold to brothels, and when, as demonstrated much more clearly in Golden's book, geisha mothers would try to recoup as much of

their investment as possible through things like *mizu-age*. The fact that these things really did happen is also attested to in Dalby's discussion of the *mizu-age* ceremony (Dalby pp. 109-111). Trying to define what geisha are un-historically will always end up being misleading.

8. See, for instance, reviews by Clinton, Shoji, and Pais to get a glimpse of this criticism.
9. Marshall himself, at the Tokyo press conference marking the premier of the film, called it a "fable." See Brasor.
10. It is my experience that in regard to anything relating to geisha, the question of what is authentic is a nearly impossible one to answer. In a world where art, business, ethnic tradition and sexuality are mixed as thoroughly as they are here, maybe it is only natural that just about every individual has a different idea of what the real geisha is. We only have to compare different accounts by different geisha, or by their customers, to see that there is no one essential geisha, nor just one authentic account of Gion.
11. この論文は2002年度の関西大学文学部の共同研究の成果である。

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