

**RESPONSE TO NEGATIVE STEREOTYPE OF GEISHA AS FOUND IN
ARTHUR GOLDEN'S MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA**

A Thesis



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ABSTRAK

Dalam penelitian ini penulis menganalisis citra negatif yang diberikan oleh kaum Barat terhadap sosok wanita penghibur asal Jepang atau lazim disebut Geisha yang sosoknya bertolak belakang dengan citra negatif yang selama ini dilekatkan pada diri mereka. Proses perbaikan citra Geisha ini ditampilkan dalam novel Memoirs of a Geisha karya Arthur Golden. Penulis memaparkan data-data yang lebih akurat yang berfungsi untuk memperbaiki semua citra negatif yang dilekatkan kepada sosok Geisha. Hal tersebut tersirat dari dua tokoh utama Geisha dalam novel ini, yaitu: Sayuri dan Mameha.

Penulis memaparkan berbagai macam teks dan bahasa yang merujuk kepada citra negatif sosok Geisha untuk melihat bagaimana kaum Barat menggambarkan sosok mereka dan juga memaparkan teks dan bahasa dari novel Memoirs of a Geisha yang menyuguhkan informasi yang lebih akurat tentang sosok seorang Geisha. Tujuan yang sama juga terdapat didalam pendekatan Analisis Wacana yang dikenalkan oleh Michell Foucault untuk mengungkap makna tersembunyi dibalik teks atau bahasa dalam sebuah karya sastra untuk meluruskan suatu masalah..

Setelah penelitian ini berhasil diselesaikan, penulis menemukan bahwa citra negatif yang diberikan oleh kaum Barat terhadap Geisha tidaklah benar diakrenakan dari kurangnya pengetahuan mereka terhadap profesi seorang Geisha. Melalui tokoh Geisha Sayuri dan Mameha mereka memaparkan seluk beluk dunia Geisha dan memberitahu proses mereka dalam menghibur tamu yang ternyata bertolak belakang dengan cara yang dilakukan oleh seorang pelacur.

Kata Kunci: Image of Geisha, Discourse, Response to Negative Image of Geisha

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. The Background of the Study

Throughout the world there are different images in stereotyping Geisha. Stereotype as stated by Nadra Kareem Nittle in a site About.com, “Stereotypes are characteristics ascribed to groups of people involving gender, race, national origin and the other factors. These characteristics tend to be oversimplifications of the group involved,” however for example for most westerners Geisha always stereotype as a negative image such as prostitute, sex slave and icon of sexual pleasure just because their position as entertainer in their society. This different image about Geisha is caused by the different background knowledge and cultural values of each society. For most Westerners, the image of Geisha or woman as entertainer always stereotyped by wearing sexy dress that can show the shape of the body and giving sexual pleasure. The western world focuses a lot on outward beauty, shape of the body and body language of a woman.. This different image of Geisha can be proved with a statement from an article entitled Misconception about Japan’s Geisha Women by R.L Hanlon:

‘There exists another reason why a geisha may be thought to be a prostitute and this is because many young virgins were "de-flowered" by men at a high price. This practice was known as "mizuage" (<http://www.helium.com/items/1013003-misconception-about-japans-geisha-women>).

From quotation above the writer sees that most of Westerners judge Geisha is the same as prostitute because the word of “mizuage”. Westerners literary translate the word of “mizuage” as an action selling Geisha’s virginity in order to become a sex slave

for the man who get the highest price of a Geisha's virginity. Actually the word of *mizuage* refers to a ceremony or a contract for a Geisha who wants to start her debut and does not has a function to make Geisha as a sex slave for the man who win their highest price even if the man won the Geisha's virginity he have no right to do sex with the Geisha.

The different images about Geisha lead to cross-cultural misunderstanding in the middle of Western society. This cross-cultural misunderstanding will not find the way out or the clear understanding about the image of Geisha if Westerners do not try to find the more accurately image of Geisha. One of the theories that can help us to clarify the misunderstanding and misconception about the image of Geisha is Discourse by Michell Foucault. Discourse has similar way of thinking to help us in adjusting negative image or misunderstanding that developed in society. It can be seen from a brief explanation about Discourse given by M.Keith Booker in his book entitled A Practical Introduction to Literary Theory and Criticism:

“Foucault's influence on literary studies is most clear in the recent turn from criticism of specific texts to “cultural studies”, or the examination of the participation of various kinds of texts in the broad phenomenon of culture. Particularly prominent in this turn to cultural studies is the recent rise of the new historicism, an approach to literature as cultural practice...” (Booker 119).

From the quotation above the writer assumes that cross-cultural misunderstanding about the image of Geisha in the middle of Western society is caused by the less of Westerners' knowledge in interpreting a culture from a country. Western society estimate woman as entertainer in Japan or usually called Geisha only from their

own point of view and stereotype woman as entertainer in Japan or Geisha into Western culture. That is the failure of Western society in interpreting the meaning of Geisha. Actually, the opinion about negative image of Geisha is not absolutely true. Till now, it is still a debate about Geisha's image. Many people regard geisha as women workers that is just the same as common prostitutes or sex slave because of this problem, the writer thinks that it is interesting to discuss about the meaning of geisha itself and their role in Japanese culture.

Western society related Geisha as prostitute because they only know and just think Geisha's works are serving their guests as prostitutes usually do. On the other hand, many people argue about this assumption, too. They regard that geisha are quite different from prostitutes, because they know geisha are high class entertainers and talented women workers in entertaining people. For some evidence, we can take a look to people's expectations and opinion from Zendo in social question entitled What are You Opinion about Geisha:

“... It is one heck of a lot of work to learn all of the skills needed in dance, music, conversation, poetry, demeanor, clothing, money management, and so on. Modern Japanese women have a number of career choices available to them these days, so any that choose to become geishas must be very dedicated. Legitimate geisha are not sex workers. They are single and may choose to have a relationship with a client, but they are not required to do anything more than flirt. In Japan, men are amused by the illusion of that which is never to be, and the geisha is skilled in the art of making men feel desirable and witty without ever having to even touch the client.”(<http://www.SFGate.com>)

It can be seen from the quotations above that there is a reader who really appreciate the existence of Geisha and their job among the people who misunderstand of Geisha. It gives clear meaning that geisha are absolutely different from common prostitutes. The reader who give her opinion above tell that a Geisha is not allowed to have intimate relationship with their client even to touch the client because Geisha is prepared to entertain the guest by showing their skills not by showing their body.

Based on the phenomena about the misconception of Geisha's image that is still negative image in Western society, it guides the writer to choose a novel by Arthur Golden entitled Memoirs of a Geisha to become the writer' research in order to find the real meaning and concept of Geisha and their roles to Japanese society.

Memoirs of a Geisha is a novel that tells us about the life of a Geisha named Sayuri who come from fisher village called Yoroido. She was sold and sent to Okiya in order to prepare to be a Geisha in the future. This is a profession that she never thought before she comes to Gion, a district in Japan that becomes the training centre of Geisha. A profession that allows her to knows more about various kinds of Japanese traditional art and skills that useful for her job. The word of Geisha comes from *Gei* and *Sha*. As Arthur Golden states on the novel Memoirs of a Geisha:

“The “gei” of “geisha” means “art”, so the word “geisha” really means “artisan” or “artist”. (Golden 93)

From the definition that given by the novel, Geisha is professional woman who creates art and have job as entertainer for their guest who come into their teahouse. The word entertaining here does not refer to “sexual pleasure” because a man who comes to Geisha's teahouse will not have an opportunity to do sex with the Geisha but showing various kind of traditional art of Japan and having social chat with their guest. In getting

those skills a Geisha must pass training from Geisha's school. Their training consists of playing musical instruments, most singing, dancing, conversation and social skills, tea ceremony and ikebana, a traditional flower arranging technique.

The writer has some reasons why she is interested in conducting her research on novel Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur Golden. Firstly, the writer wants to reveal the common westerner's misconception about the image of Geisha who is Japanese's culture but still have negative image for Westerners and have positive image for Japanese society. The writer called that misconception is cross-cultural misunderstanding because between Western society and Japanese society they have their different own words in stereotyping the image of Geisha. Secondly, Memoirs of a Geisha is a novel that allows us to know more about a country, Japan. There are so many interesting things from Japanese society that can be a study for us, especially about their heritage and tradition. Japan is a country which can be maintaining their tradition during the modernization, one of them is Geisha. This novel reflects the image, social life of Geisha, and big roles of Geisha to Japanese society who is never realize by others.

Thirdly, the writer does not find any students from English Department of Andalas University have ever analyzed a novel Memoirs of a Geisha by applying Discourse by Michell Foucault. It influences the writer chooses this novel as her research. For addition, Memoirs of a Geisha has been adapted into movie produced by Steven Spielberg and directed by Rob Marshall. Hopefully this research can be useful to enrich writer's knowledge in Discourse especially and help people to find the other image of Geisha.

1.1. The Identification of the Problem

A novel Memoirs of Geisha is an interesting and informative novel. Through Memoirs of a Geisha the reader will find many data that useful to find the more accurate information about the image of Geisha. There is misconception and misunderstanding about image of Geisha in the middle of Westerners' society. As people always debating about negative and positive image of Geisha they forget that Geisha actually have big roles to Japanese society.

1.2. The Scope of Study

To limit the analysis, the writer discusses to the big problem about misconception and misunderstanding toward image of Geisha as found in Golden's Memoirs of a Geisha.

Concerning to the purpose, the writer emphasises the analysis on;

1. What are the negative images about Geisha as found in various kind of texts?
2. What are Arthur Golden's experience of life relate to image of Geisha?
3. What are the positive images about Geisha as found in novel Memoirs of a Geisha?

1.3. The Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to reveal the cross-cultural misunderstanding about the image of Geisha in the middle of Western society and to find the real meaning or the truth about Geisha. Most of them still debating their image without trying to find the more accurately about image of Geisha.

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION

Cross cultural misunderstanding between Japanese and Westerners about the concept of woman as entertainer or Geisha brings the different image about Geisha. For example, Westerners always relate and stereotype Geisha to negative image. The statement from Western people totally different to Japan as the country that really appreciate their culture and one of them is Geisha. This misunderstanding about image of Geisha brings the impacts to the position and the existence of Geisha in the world. In fact, the writer easily can find many texts from internet and literary works that refers to negative image of Geisha.

In Memoirs of a Geisha, we are not only serves by the life story of Sayuri who are formerly known as a daughter of fisherman from fishing village in the Sea Coast of Japan until her reaches her dream as promising Geisha in Japan but also leads us know more about the true life of Geisha. Most of people in the world always dealing with their own perception that a Geisha is a Prostitute who available for men and serve them with the shape of their body and Discourse helps us to find the truth of the Geisha. Discourse has an aim and motivation to show the hidden meaning of a problem through the text and language in a literary work. The novel Memoirs of a Geisha contains much information that we need to clear that misunderstanding.

After analyzing Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur Golden the writer concludes that this novel is a key to search the facts that never known before, especially for Westerners about the life of Geisha and all things around them. The hidden meaning of Memoirs of a Geisha is to breaking the entire negative image of Geisha through the life story of a Geisha named Sayuri by showing the facts that changes Westerners' perception from negative to be positive about Geisha. All the more accurate data about the image of Geisha will lead Westerners to change their point of view.

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