

GAMBARAN KEHIDUPAN GEISHA DALAM NOVEL *MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA* KARYA ARTHUR GOLDEN (PENDEKATAN MIMETIK)

THE PORTRAYAL OF GEISHA'S LIFE IN *MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA* BY ARTHUR GOLDEN (MIMETIC APPROACH)

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Abstrak

Artikel ini adalah sebuah kritik sastra yang meneliti tentang gambaran kehidupan geisha dalam novel *Memoirs of A Geisha* karya Arthur Golden. Penelitian ini fokus pada diskusi tentang gambaran kehidupan geisha yang terdapat dalam novel *Memoirs of A Geisha* yang mencakup 3 sisi kehidupan geisha, yaitu: tingkatan pelatihan, seni, dan gaya dari geisha dengan menggunakan pendekatan mimetic. Tiga sisi kehidupan geisha yang terdapat dalam novel memiliki deskripsi yang sama seperti yang ada dalam realita. Namun, ditemukan juga perbedaan antara gambaran yang terdapat di novel dan di realita, yaitu dalam penamaan *maiko*. Akhirnya, dengan menggunakan pendekatan mimetic gambaran kehidupan geisha digambarkan dengan baik dalam novel *Memoirs of A Geisha*, khususnya tingkatan pelatihan, seni dan gaya geisha.

Kata Kunci : Gambaran, Kehidupan, Pendekatan Mimetik

Abstract

This article is a literary criticism that analyzed the portrayal of a geisha's life in the novel *Memoirs of A Geisha* by Arthur Golden. This study focused on the discussion about the image of geisha's life in *Memoirs of a Geisha* novel which included three sides of geisha's life, namely: the level of training, the arts, and styles of geisha. This study used mimetic approach. The three sides of geisha's life contained in the novel had the same description as it existed in the reality. However, there was a difference in naming *maiko* between the description of geisha's life in the novel and the description in the reality. Finally, by using a mimetic approach, the life of was described well in the novel *Memoirs of a Geisha*, particularly in the levels of geisha's training, art and style.

Key words : Portrayal, Life, Mimetic Approach

I. INTRODUCTION

For many years the world of the geisha, often referred to as the flower and willow world, has perplexed and intrigued people around the world. The most common image of a geisha is a white faced, red lipped, kimono clad and glorified prostitute, but in truth they are so much more (Moulton, 2009:3). A true geisha is a person of art. A geisha can be summarized as a person to “perform” arts. The geisha’s identity consists in “performing” so called traditional Japanese art.

Novel can reflect the reality well. It is supported by the definition of the novel in *An Introduction to Fiction* that the novel is picture of real life and manners and of the time in which it was written (Kennedy, 1987: 226). One of the novels that portrayed the reality is a novel written by Arthur Golden, *Memoirs of A Geisha*. It’s a kind of Japanese culture novel that depicts about geisha’s life, such as the steps of being a geisha, the style of geisha, the art, and etc. Moreover, *Memoirs of A Geisha* tells about the unique life of Geisha. Geisha is a part of culture and history in Japan. It has many roles and steps to be a famous geisha.

Geisha, like all Japanese nouns, has no distinct singular or plural variants. The word consists of two kanji, *gei* meaning “art” and *sha* meaning “person” or “doer”. The most literal translation of geisha into English would be “artist” or “performing artist” (*Hephaestus Books*, 2011:39).

Geisha needs some training to be a good geisha. In Kyoto, girls often begin their geisha training at a young age by joining an *Okiya* or geisha house. There are two stages training of geisha, they are: *shikomi* and *maiko*. *Shikomi* is the first stage to become a geisha (*Japan Fact sheet*, 2007:1-2). When a girl first arrives at *Okiya*, which will be her new home, she will not automatically dive into her apprenticeship. First, she will spend approximately one year as a *shikomi* (Moulton, 2009:7). As *shikomi*, girls serve as house maid. Housekeeping duties are purposefully made difficult in “make or break” fashion.

A *maiko* is essentially an apprentice and is therefore bonded under a contract to her *okiya* (*Hephaestus Books*, 2011:42). A *maiko* will start her formal training on the job as a *minarai*, which literally means “learning by watching” (*Hephaestus Books*, 2011:43). Before she can do this, she must find an *one-san* (“older sister”: an older geisha acting as her mentor). Its purpose is to establish an important bond between older sister and junior sister during the *maiko* training. Moreover, when a girl will begin her training to become a geisha, at this time, she will experience her *misedashi* (the debut ceremony for a new

apprentice geisha). However, the most important part of her *misedashi* is when she is bound to her *one-san* during a ceremony called *san-san-kudo* (the ceremony that binds and apprentice geisha to her *one-san*). The apprentice is given a new name, usually including one of the characters from her elder sister (Moulton, 2009:8).

Geisha study and perform several genres of *shamisen*, song, percussion, and dance, and are unique in the context of the traditional arts in Japan because they are multi-disciplinary artists in contrast to highly specialized professional musicians, dancers, or actors. (Foreman, 2008:1). It begins their study of music and dance when they are very young and continue it throughout their lives. Every dance uses gestures to tell a story and only a connoisseur can understand the subdued symbolism (*Hephaestus Book*, 2011: 47). The dances are accompanied by traditional Japanese music. The primary instrument is the *shamisen*. Moreover, beside *Shamisen*, there are many kinds of Japanese Music that has to learn by geisha, although finally geisha is advised to learn one or two instrument especially. It is very important for geisha to learn music instrument. The musical instruments that geisha learns are: The *Ookawa*, *Taiko*, *Fue*, *Nagauta*, etc.

Geisha always wear kimono. Unlike a regular kimono, a geisha's **kimono** exposes her neckline -- in Japanese culture, this is considered the most sensual part of a woman (<http://people.howstuffworks.com/geisha4.htm>). The kimono is the most costly and important aspect of geisha's appearance. True geisha kimono must meet certain standards; they differ considerably than kimono worn by women who are not geisha, as well as from those worn by apprentices.

One of the most memorable aspects of the geisha is her makeup. However, a fully fledged geisha wears a minimal amount of make up; it is, in actuality, the apprentice who wears the full face of white make up on a regular basis. Make-up makes the geisha is more beautiful and make all people feel impressed. They have unique make-up because their make-up is different from the other women generally. Geisha has many styles of hair. It starts from the young geisha till becoming a full geisha. A *maiko* must have grown her hair long during her *shikomi-san* and *minarai-san* stages so that her own natural hair can be dressed up. Each hairstyle indicates the period of a *maiko's* apprenticeship that she has currently reached.

Mimetic approach is applied in this study because the researcher wants to have a better comprehension on *Memoirs of A Geisha*, Arthur Golden's literary work that portrayed the real life of Geisha in Japan. Mimesis means imitation (from the Greek, it has

been pronounced both “*mim-e-sis*” or *mim-ay-sis*). The work as imitation of life, Aristotle called the art of writing a tragedy *mimesis*: the imitation or re-creation of an action that is serious and complete itself (Kennedy, 1987:410). It means that mimetic approach is finding the similarities between the works and reality. The goal of it is to know how far the works depict the reality itself to find the truth.

Another definition, *mimesis* describes the relationship between artistic images and reality; art is copy of the real. *Mimesis* describes things, such as artworks, as well as action, such as imitating another person. *Mimesis* can be said to imitate a dizzying array of originals: nature, truth, beauty, mannerism, action, situation, examples, ideas (Potolsky, 2006:1). It can be concluded that mimetic can be imitate all of the part of life of community and place that is described in art or literary work.

To know more about the portrayal of geisha’s life in the novel, this article used mimetic approach while seeing all the aspects related to the *mimesis* such as the historical life of geisha in Japan specifically about their life.

II. METHODOLOGY

This analysis used descriptive qualitative method where it described all aspects about geisha’s life stated in the novel while comparing the real life of geisha in Japan. The data are taken from the quotations of the novel by selecting it based on the life of geisha.

III. ANALYSIS

A. The Stages Training of Geisha

1. Shikomi

The first stage to become a geisha is *shikomi*. *Shikomi* is the training where a young girl learns how to work hard and has a good ability in serving the other person, how to respect the mother in *okiya* (Geisha houses) and senior of geisha to survive in life. The girls in *Okiya* have to work enthusiastic, diligent and impassioned. In *Memoirs of A Geisha*, it is also explained how a girl works in *okiya* when she is in very young age.

“Well, little girl,” Mother told me, “You’re in Kyoto now. You’ll learn to behave or get a beating. And it’s Granny gives the beatings around here, so you’ll be sorry. My advice to you is: work very hard, and never leave the *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 month from now. I didn't bring you here to be a maid. I'll throw you out, if it comes to that (*Golden*, 1997:50).

The quotation above is the dialogue between Chiyo as a new young girl in *okiya* and *okiya*'s mother. The dialogue occurs when Chiyo arrives in *okiya*. A mother explains Chiyo that she is in Kyoto, exactly in *okiya* or geisha's house. A mother tells Chiyo that she has to work hard in order to be easier to begin her training of being a geisha. In that conversation, it is clearly seen that how hard living life in Kyoto. Everything that happened in the *Okiya* depend on herself, it depends on the seriousness of her work.

To get better comparison between the description in the novel and the reality, it can be seen from this quotation that "When girls first arrived to the *okiya* they were expected to survive the first stage of training known as *shikomi*, which involved hard manual labor as maids who were subject to the beckoned call of their seniors. The work was exceedingly difficult, and was intended to test the strength, will, and integrity of the young novices"(http://www.streetdirectory.com/travel_guide/217677/travel_and_leisure/geisha_flowers_of_the_willow_world.html).

2. Maiko

Maiko is the next training after *shikomi*. It is the most difficult training after the first. *Maiko* is an apprentice. In this stage, *maiko* learns more about how to be a good geisha in the field. It is done by watching the senior of geisha, namely *minarai*. To do this, the young geisha has to have the older sister that is bond her to be the younger sister. In this case, the bond of the younger and the older sister is very important to develop the harmonious relationship. Beside that, the main point of it is to teach the young geisha in the field from the sister. About the older sister, it can be seen from the quotation that:

I should explain just what Mameha meant by "older sister", even though at the time, I hardly knew much about it myself. By the time a girl is finally ready to make her debut as an apprentice, she needs to have established a relationship with a more experienced geisha. mameha had mentioned Hatsumomo's older sister, the Great Tomihatsu, who was already an old woman when she trained Hatsumomo; but older sisters aren't always so senior to the geisha they train. Any geisha can act as older sister to a younger girl, as long as she has at least one day's seniority (*Golden*, 1997: 149).

According to the statements from the quotation above is explained that a young geisha has to establish relationship with the senior of geisha who has more experience in

her job. It is very helpful a young geisha in her career. The portrayal above has the similarity with the reality about a young geisha and the older sister. It can be known from this explanation “A *maiko* will start her formal training on the job as a *minarai*, which literally means “learning by watching” (*Hephaestus Books*, 2011:43).

Besides the similarities about *maiko* that are described in the novel and reality. The difference is also shown in the novel. It is shown through the statements below:

My new name came from "sa," meaning "together," "yu," from the zodiac sign for the Hen-in order to balance other elements in my personality-and "ri," meaning "understanding." All the combinations involving an element from Mameha's name, unfortunately, had been pronounced inauspicious by the fortune-teller (Golden, 1997: 195).

Chiyo as the younger sister of Mameha has new name as in the quotation above. Her new name is Sayuri. It can be known that in Sayuri name, there are no elements that consist of Mameha's name. The reason of it is because all of the elements in Mameha name do not bring the luck for Chiyo. So, Mameha gives “Sayuri” name as new name of Chiyo as the advice from her fortune-teller. The finding above is different from the theory. In the theory is explained that:

“Moreover, when a girl will begin her training to become a geisha, at this time, she will experience her *misedashi* (the debut ceremony for a new apprentice geisha). However, the most important part of her *misedashi* is when she is bound to her *one-san* during a ceremony called *san-san-kudo* (the ceremony that binds and apprentice geisha to her *one-san*). The apprentice is given a new name, usually including one of the characters from her elder sister” (Moulton, 2009:8).

The quotation explained that when the young girl bound with the older sister, the older sister will give new name that consists of the characters name from her elder sister. The different thing of the giving name in *maiko* stage is one of the different point that can be found in *Memoirs of A Geisha* novel.

3. Art for Geisha

Geisha is an artist who has good ability in art. Geisha not only accompany the guests in the teahouses but also she has to perform the arts in front of her guests. Geisha is professional women who entertain customers with various performing arts. Some arts that usually are learned by geisha such as: dancing, singing, playing traditional musics and tea ceremony, as it is quoted in *Memoirs of A Geisha* that “As I learned from Pumpkin,

beginning my training meant going to a school in another section of Gion to take lessons in things like music, dance and tea ceremony” (Golden, 1997: 51).

It is suitable with the definition in *Hephaestus Books* that Geisha, like all Japanese nouns, has no distinct singular or plural variants. The word consists of two kanji, *gei* meaning “art” and *sha* meaning “person” or “doer”. The most literal translation of geisha into English would be “artist” or “performing artist” (*Hephaestus Books*, 2011:39).

4. Style for Geisha.

Clothing

Clothing is one of the important things for geisha. As an artist and exclusive women in Japan, geisha has to give attention to their clothing in order to they look beautiful. The geisha’s clothing is different in each time. It depends on her debut. From kimono, it can be differentiate where the apprentice and geisha. The apprentice geisha wear the colorful and brighter kimono. While geisha is simpler that the apprentice kimono. The clear description is quoted below:

Every afternoon during the week leading up to my debut, auntie dressed me in the complete regalia of an apprentice geisha and made me walk up and down the dirt corridor of the *Okiya* to build up my strength. In the beginning I could scarcely walk at all, and worried that I might tip over back ward. Young girls dress much more ornately than older wome, you see, which maen brighter colors and showier fabrics, but also a longer obi (Golden, 1997:192).

From the quotation can be seen clearly that in the afternoon before Chiyo begins her debut, she is an apprentice geisha trained to walk around the *Okiya*, in order to she becomes stronger than before with her new style of kimono. Firstly, Chiyo could barely walk and scares to falling. The auntie prettifies Chiyo with the colorfull kimono. Her kimono is brighter as an apprentice. Beside that, her obi is longer than geisha. It means that the kimono of apprentice geisha is more complicated than geisha.

Make- Up

Make up is also one of the important things for geisha. Geisha has the unique makeup. She uses the white makeup in her face and uses the red lips. To make it clearer with makeup of geisha, it can be seen from some quotation that is followed by the explanation below:

She tore a small piece of wax from one the bars and, after softening it in her fingertips, rubbed it into the skin of her face, and afterward of her neck and chest. She took some time to wipe her hands clean on a rag, and then moistened one of her flat makeup brushes in a dish of water and rubbed it in the makeup until she had a chalky white paste. She used this to paint her face and neck, but left her eyes bare, as well as the area around her lips and nose. If you've ever seen a child cut holes in paper to make a mask, this was how Hatsumomo looked, until she dampened some smaller brushes and used them to fill in the cutouts. (Golden, 1997: 71).

How geisha apply their makeup can be known from the quotation above. Hatsumomo as a geisha at that time, she applies a white makeup in her face. So, she looks like wearing a mask in her face. For the first, she takes a small piece of wax and soften it using her finger. She applies it to her face, neck and chest. The function of this wax is to assist the makeup in adhering the makeup and also keep it from getting the kimono. After that, she uses her flat brush to plunge in the bowl of water and rub it to her makeup until it made up the white paste. After the white paste is made, she uses it to her face, neck and chest. But, she does not apply it in her mouth and eyes. It pictured the difficult process of makeup that is used by geisha.

The quotation has the same statements with the theory about the process of applying makeup for geisha. In *Hepaestus Book* said that “The application of makeup is hard to perfect and is a time- consuming process. Makeup is applied before dressing to avoid dirtying kimono. First, a wax or oil substance, called *bintsuke-abura*, is applied to skin. Next, white powder is mixed with water into a paste. (Hepaestus Book, 2011:50-51).

Hairstyles

The hairstyle of geisha is varying. It also depends on the stages of geisha. Through the hairstyle, the people can differentiate between the apprentice and geisha. *Shikomi* girl will dress up her hair with *Wareshinobu* style. It is the first style when a girl in the first training. *Wareshinobu* style as the first style is quoted below:

The interior of the school building seemed to me as old and dusty as an abandoned house. Down at the end of the long hallway stood a group of six or eight girls. I felt a jolt when I set eyes on them, because I thought one might be Satsu; but when they turned to look at us I was disappointed. They all wore the same hairstyle-the wareshinobu of a young apprentice geisha (Golden, 1997: 62).

Wareshinobu style is the first hairstyle of a girl who has in the first training of being a geisha can be clearly seen from the quotation above. When Chiyo and Pumpkin go to school to learn some arts, Chiyo see six until eight girls. They make their hair in the same style that is called by *wareshinobu*. It indicates that the first style of the hairstyle is *wareshinobu* because this style is used when she in the first training.

Wareshinobu hairstyle is also explained by Moulton in his book *GEISHA Behind the Painted Smile* that “The first style, the *wareshinobu*, is worn in the initial period of her training, including the occasion of her *misedashi* (the debut ceremony for new apprentice geisha). It is easily the most elaborate style and is meant to stress the loveliness and youth of the apprentice (Moulton, 2007: 15).

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the life of Geisha is depicted well in *Memoirs of A Geisha* novel by Arthur Golden. The life of geisha in this thesis is described on three sides; they are the stages training, the art and the styles of geisha. Those three depictions are covered in the novel well. All of the description are the same as the theory explained. But, there is one of the different point that is found, it is about naming in the stages training. When *maiko* is bound by the senior of a geisha, her name will be change. The changing of *maiko* name usually consists of the character name of the older sister. In the novel, Mameha gives the new name to Chiyo without consist of her characters name. Her fortune teller tells that if Chiyo uses the characters name of Mameha, it would not bring the lucky to Chiyo.

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