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The Discourse of Geisha:
In the Case of *Memoirs of a Geisha*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the hidden perspectives and ideologies behind the discourse of geisha in the case of *Memoirs of a Geisha*. This study considers *Memoirs of a Geisha* as an event that consists of different cultural texts and their social and historical contexts, in which the discourse of geisha is embodied. It is a qualitative study using the theory of discourse analysis and in-depth interviews and fieldwork. In discourse analysis, this study utilizes the analysis of authenticity, which is regarded as the core of discourse of geisha, aiming at explaining how and why the discourse of geisha is organized and narrated in different texts, exploring the standing point of different theoretical criticisms, and discovering the complicated relationships between cultural texts and their contexts. In addition, the media critique study of the movie is also employed in the analysis of discourse of geisha based on two points; firstly the controversy the movie caused reignited the discourse of geisha into focus; secondly, it dramatically brought and invited the topic of national identity of Japan and China in contemporary times, which extensively enriches the discourse of geisha and endows it the realistic significance.

Keywords: discourse analysis, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, authenticity, national identity.

Acknowledgement

This thesis stands at the end of a long journey, which led me through three countries, three universities during the past half a year. This study reveals my major academic interests, discourse analysis, gender, and fictional creations. I have been obsessing with images and worlds that are created in fictions, considering they are the most magical creatures. Meanwhile, they serve as the mirror of the real world, and offer an effective pathway to understand its diverse aspects. In my journey to pursuit the magic of fictions and the beauty of knowing, I would like to express my gratitude to many people:

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Statement of Research Question

Memoirs of a Geisha is the title of an American novel that claims to write about Japanese traditional culture and the title of its Hollywood movie adaptation. It tells a story about a country girl who is sold into a geisha house and raised to become one of Japan's most celebrated geisha captivated Japan before the Second World War. Both the novel and the movie have achieved considerable success after they were released. As a cultural text, the story of *Memoirs of a Geisha* integrates oriental traditional cliché and the romantic story of a woman within the narrative pattern that the West portrays the Orient. Furthermore, the controversy and representations in this story irritated the muse of this story, Mineko Iwasaki, a real Kyoto geisha, which led to a law case and spurred her to publish her own autobiography to clear her name. Therefore, *Memoirs of a Geisha* is not only a solo pop culture product, it also links oriental traditions, geisha narrative patterns and western narrator, which is of significance in discourse of geisha.

Memoirs of a Geisha as a novel

In 1997, Arthur Golden wrote the best seller *Memoir of a Geisha*. Golden is a member of the Ochs-Sulzberger family (owners of the *New York Times*) and Harvard-educated elite, specializing in Japanese art and history. He published this novel after interviewing Mineko Iwasaki in 1992, a highly successful former geisha, for which he spend two weeks at her place in Kyoto. This novel became extremely popular after its release: it spent 58 weeks on the New York Time bestseller list, has sold more than four million copies in English, and has been translated into thirty-two languages around the world. Furthermore, the novel was so popular that it was voted as one of the top 100 good reads by BBC reviewers (*BBC News*, 2003).

Memoirs of a Geisha as a Hollywood movie

In 2005, the Hollywood movie *Memoirs of a Geisha*, which is based on Golden's novel,

continued and prolonged the “geisha boom” across the West and East. Directed by Rob Marshall, and casted by the most famous Chinese actresses, *Memoirs of a Geisha* reached the domestic box office of 5.7 million dollars and the oversea box office of 10 million dollars.¹ Furthermore, there has been a tourist boom in Japan since the launch of this movie, including a growing visitor numbers to Japan and the increased interest with a raft of product themed around geisha and the movie (Bamber, 2006).

The movie *Memoirs of a Geisha* achieved more than just commercial success. It was nominated for six Oscar Awards, and eventually won three of those: Best Cinematography, Best Art Direction and Best Costume Design.

Memoirs of a Geisha as controversies

Memoirs of a Geisha has aroused a wide range of controversies around both the novel and the movie. After reading the novel, Mineko Iwasaki sued Arthur Golden in court in 2001, claiming Golden’s use of her name constituted a breach of contract and wrongly linked her with episodes in the book that she calls inaccurate and defamatory (Tegler, 2001). This case was finally settled out of court and Golden ended up paying Mineko an undisclosed sum of money (CBC News, 2005).

As an irritated response to *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Mineko Iwasaki decided to write her own experience and thus published her autobiography in 2003, saying that what she has written is the real version of geisha life (Tang, 2003). For the sake of defending geisha’s reputation, Mineko Iwasaki became the first geisha who reveals to the public the geisha life in the 300-year long history of the geisha world. Her autobiography sold well in the west and was translated into many languages soon after its release.²

¹ *Memoirs of a Geisha* was released on 9 December, 2005, and the widest release was 1654 theatres. The close date of box office was 12 March, 2006. See Box of *Memoirs of a Geisha* on the website of Box Office Mojo.

² After hitting the shelves in the U.S. in October, Iwasaki’s book made the top 10 bestseller list in San Francisco within a week, it is translated into German, Spanish, French, Swedish, Dutch at the year of its release. See anice Tang’s article “Celebrated Geisha’s Tell-ALL a Hot Item”, The Japan Times, 28 Feb, 2003.

The movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha* caused nationalist criticism in the counties of Japan and China. Japanese media criticizes it as “misinformation and prejudice” (Tanaka, 2006) due to its inaccuracies about Japanese culture, whereas China media tends to consider its Chinese cast insulting because of nationalism sentiments caused by Japan’s occupation in history.

1.2 Aim and Structure

Based on the research problem presented above, this study considers *Memoirs of a Geisha* as a branch of discourse of geisha that consists of cultural texts, and social and historical contexts. The aim of this study is to decode the hidden ideologies behind the discourse of geisha in the case of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, by describing, analyzing and interpreting cultural texts, and social and historical contexts in which they are embodied. To achieve this aim, a threefold structure is applied. Firstly, it will provide a comparative textual analysis, in order to interpret the standing point and narrative pattern of each text. Secondly, theoretical models will be applied in textual analysis, trying to formulate the meaning of existence by explicating the content of texts. Thirdly, beside textual analysis and academic research, social response and critique will be taken into account, with the purpose of addressing this issue in a broader spectrum and context.

1.3 Source

The sources in this study are composed by data collection and field work. Data collection consist of abundant Chinese reviews and critiques about *Memoirs of a Geisha*, as well as the English version of main Japanese newspapers¹ and some major international media², by which I collected data for my media critique analysis. I also conducted three interviews in my field work. First one was with Gaye Rowley, the

¹ *The Daily Yomiuri, The Japan Times, Financial Times.*

² Like BBC, *Economist, The Independent*

professor of English and Japanese Literature at Waseda University. The second one was with Sakai Kanichi, a geisha expert and an owner of a geisha ornament's shop. The third one was with Komomo, who is a top geisha in Gion, Kyoto. All interviews were face-to-face and consisted of diverse geisha-relevant topics.

Site-visits were of similar importance for my study. I entered the field as an attentive observer. Site-visits do not only include places where geisha normally gather, like Tokyo and Kyoto, but also other five cities I have been. The atmosphere I felt and the experience I had in Japan endowed me inspiration and guide for my study.

1.4 Ethical Consideration

The major objects of my research, the novel, the movie, the autobiography, and critique are public sources and do not require permissions.

People who I interviewed are fully aware of the aim and method of my study, and they do not ask for anonymity.

1.5 Disposition

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter consisting of three chapters is to elaborate the methodology of this study. In the first step, it offers a general literature review that scrutinizes and summarizes the exiting research, in order to reveal the academic basis of this study. Secondly, it is devoted to the introduction and application of discourse analysis, and the third chapter shows that authenticity can be regarded as a pathway to interpret discourse of geisha in the case of *Memoirs of a Geisha*.

The second chapter and the third chapter are the main body of this thesis. The third part is an explicit analysis of discourse of geisha in different cultural texts and

representations by interpreting their authenticity, through which this study is able to integrate kaleidoscopic cultural texts and their contexts. The fourth part examines the relation between the social response to *Memoirs of a Geisha* (mainly the movie), in which the discourse of geisha is repeatedly represented, and analyzes how national identity is embodied in the nationalism discussion in both Japan and China.

The fourth chapter is the conclusion, which is a summary and discussion of the discovery and result from analytical parts.

2 Methodology

2.1 Literature Reivew

Existing research on *Memoirs of a Geisha* has mostly focused on comparisons between the novel and the movie from the perspectives of orientalism and feminism. Orientalist research concentrates on the misreading and inaccuracy of Japanese traditional culture and the representation of exotic fantasy in *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Tanaka (2006) makes a compelling analysis about the comparison between the novel of *Memoirs of a Geisha* and its Japanese version, proving Arthur Golden creates an “imaginary Japan”, instead of an authentic one to his readers, by pointing out the incorrect information and racism in his novel. Corliss and Philadelphia (2006) state the most important stance of the movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha* is how the director envisioned Japan, not what Japan really is. Allison (2001) did a quantitative study among *Memoirs* readers, and observes the fact that the quest for “truth” is central to the novel of *Memoir of a Geisha*, which accords with readers’ expectation and contributes significantly to its popularity. Generally speaking, the main argument among orientalist discussions is that *Memoirs of a Geisha* (both novel and movie) fosters readers to indulge oriental fantasies created and constructed from a western perspective.

When it comes to prior research on gender perspective, research tends to criticize *Memoirs of a Geisha* on portraying the geisha as an irrational and highly erotic creature by using and exaggerating sexualized symbols. Akita (2009) includes all the sexualized symbols appeared in the novel, arguing that they are aliens in Japanese culture, for example, the sexualizations of blood and water. Furthermore, he argues that using the first narrative is to establish male orientation and dominance with the help of woman’s language.

Generally speaking, academic research on *Memoirs of a Geisha* mainly focuses on the application of theories. This study will leave the theoretical criticisms aside,

focusing on discourse analysis for two main reasons. The first reason is that theoretical criticisms have been done sufficiently and effectively. There is no need to repeat those insightful arguments. Secondly, theoretical criticisms consider *Memoirs of a Geisha* (whether the novel or the movie), as a solo cultural text, not as a complicated event which relates to various fields. Discourse analysis enables an integrated study in which the solo cultural text will be put in broader social and historical contexts and the origin of different theoretical criticisms will be scrutinized in order to gain a deep understanding of the hidden ideologies behind it. This study regards *Memoirs of a Geisha*, as a breach to decode the complex human society, instead of a fleeting simple pop cultural product.

2.2 Discourse Analysis as Method

Discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis

Discourses are concerned about both linguistic and contextual factors. Language processes a double function, communication and the ability to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups and institutions, which is connected with its context (Gee, 2005). In addition, Norman Fairclough (2003) views discourses as that not only they “represent the world it is (or rather it seems to be)”, but also “they are projective, imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions ” (p.124).

Based on linguistic study, discourse analysis considers how language, both spoken and written, enacts social and cultural perspectives and identities (Gee, 2005). Thus, in Gee’s theory, discourse analysis includes two aspects: the first is the analysis of language-in-use; the second is the analysis of non-language meanings within language-in-use, for example, ways of acting, interacting, feeling, believing, valuing and various sorts of objects, symbols, tools and technologies. The aim of discourse

analysis is to discern rules which govern bodies of texts and utterances (Fairclough 2003: 125), discover perspectives and implications, and reveal socio-psychological characteristics of persons rather than text structures.

Among different fields in discourse analysis, this study will apply critical discourse analysis because it is a type of discourse analytical research that is productive in interpreting ideological effects and social problems (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 271-80), which accords with the aim of this study. According to Van Dijk, critical discourse analysis “primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk 2001: 352). This study highlights the inseparable relationship between text and its context, aiming at revealing social, political and historical factors within discourse. In doing so, two important parts are required.

The first one is textual analysis. Texts are parts of social events, and one significant way in which people can act and interact in the course of social events is to speak or to write (Fairclough 2003: 21). This study considers the discourse of geisha as it is embodied in four different texts: the novel of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the geisha’s autobiography (*Geisha: A Life*), and the controversial debate in media. Texts are shaped by linguistic factors and the power of social structures, and social elements which are associated with particular areas of social life. Action and social relation, representation, and identification are three main aspects of meaning in texts (Fairclough 2003: 39).

Texts refer to their authors, who make their own voice and position in the texts. In the case of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the identifications of authors, like the white male author of the novel, the Hollywood director, the former geisha and the media of different countries (Japan and China), help shape the bodies of their texts as well.

Text analysis is an essential part of discourse analysis, but discourse analysis is not

merely the linguistic analysis of texts (Fairclough, 2003). Discourse is constructed objects of signification rooted in a specific social environment (MacDonell, 1986) and it differs in degree of repetition, commonality, and stability over time (Fairclough 2003: 124). Therefore, it is important to find out the voice-maker behind texts, to discover narrative structure and texting meaning from abundant and skillful strategies and narration, and to decipher the social and historical relations and perspectives.

2.3 Authenticity as a Pathway in the Case of *Memoirs of a Geisha*

In the case of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, doing discourse analysis require a clear and effective pathway due to its complexity. The complexity lies in the fact that *Memoirs of a Geisha* became a significant cultural and social event. It largely exposes geisha world that has been considering as mysterious and erotic to public by utilizing the advantage of an English-speaking writer who is able to reach a broader range of audience, the global film distribution network of Hollywood, a real geisha's memoir, and the debates in media which involves China as another important role in the whole event. The secret geisha world has become the hot talk of the street. Based on its complexity, doing discourse analysis of *Memoirs* refers to decoding the representation of oriental culture from the western perspective (a white male American writer, a Hollywood product), and the fact that a celebrated former geisha broke the silent rule, which is not highly appreciated in oriental geisha world (Dalby, 1983). In addition, the controversial debates it caused address not only the inaccurate representation of Japanese culture, but also the historical issues between China and Japan as I will explain in below.

Even though *Memoirs of a Geisha* is complex, authenticity analysis acts as the effective pathway to interpret it because authenticity analysis hits the core of narrations in cultural texts and concerns in theoretical criticisms. *Memoirs of a Geisha*, as a cultural text based on both the way the West perceives the Orient and

the way the Orient reviews itself, has a focal point, which is the existence of an authentic Orient. Authenticity, by definition, refers to be genuine or real. It is “ultimately an evaluative concept, however methodical and value-free many of the methods for establishing it may be” (Van Leeuwen 2001: 392). Alternatively, authenticity is seen as the ideal that is highly valued by individuals and groups. It is not a state of being an objective process of representation, instead, it refers to “a set of qualities that people in a particular time and place have come to agree represent an ideal or exemplar” (Vannini and Williams 2009: 3). In the case of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the authenticity of the Orient is applied in the frame of narration, fictionally and autobiographically, based on two dimensions, the representation of the oriental customs and history. On the one hand, in order to embody the oriental customs, it requires a documentary depiction of local manners and feelings, seeking for the atmosphere of “on the spot”. On the other hand, it aims at “living back in the history” with the help of reproducing historical details and returning to historical scenes, trying to achieve the “emotional realism” (Chronis and Hampton, 2008) built by a desire for experience to be based in the genuine fact. *Memoirs of a Geisha* indicates not only the perspective that the West/ the Orient narrates the Orient, but also the perspective that the present narrates the history. As for *Geisha, A Life*, in which Iwasaki intends to shape the authentic image of geisha based on her life course, the authenticity is both a moral quest toward the value and practice of self-discovery and an effort to identity and stability (Lewin and Williams: 2009).

As for theories applied in *Memoirs of a Geisha*, orientalism, feminism and national identity building, authenticity also play a vital role. As an evaluative concept, authenticity is concerned about the relationship between representation and its object. In the case of *Memoirs*, orientalists and feminists criticize on how the fictional representations created by the West or men distort the authentic version of the Orient or women, whereas nationalists resent the inaccurate representations of their countries. According to Duara (1998), authenticity “primarily refers to an order or regime which invokes various representations of authoritative inviolability” or “a

regime of power that repeatedly constitutes itself as the locus of authority” (Duara 1998: 294). By emphasizing the authenticity in cultural texts, theoretical criticisms concern that the power relation in the authentic process of objects reveals the West/man’s authority on narrating and inventing the Orient and woman. All in all, authenticity in *Memoirs of a Geisha* is more about the embodiment of power relation, rather than just the portray of material objects or interpretation of local culture.

By utilizing authenticity analysis as a pathway in the discourse of geisha, this study is able to re-examine *Memoirs of a Geisha* as a social and cultural event, explaining its popularity, identifying the core standing point of different theoretical criticisms, and deciphering hidden ideologies behind controversies.

3. Authenticity in Discourse of Geisha

3.1 Authenticity in Cultural Texts

The authenticity in the novel

Memoirs of a Geisha is a novel that intends to expose the mysterious geisha world rather than a novel that focuses on historical romantic love story. Quantitative research among *Memoirs'* readers reveals that the authenticity of this novel contributes largely to its popularity because most readers love reading it as they believe it is almost a real story (Allison, 2001). For those who consider the ancient geisha as a remote, close and puzzling object, Golden attracts them with a lucidly written English novel that interprets the symbol of the mysterious oriental culture. The representation and emphasis of the novel's authenticity is not only the readers' expectation, but also the author's endeavor. In the book and beyond, the authenticity works as a nested "Russian Matryoshka", wrapping up a fictitious story with many layers of authentic embodiment.

The dedication of this novel, "To Mineko, thank you for everything", is the first significant hallmark of authenticity. Mineko Iwasaki was one of the most celebrated geisha in history, and her legendary life is well-known in Japan. Golden visited her place in Kyoto and interviewed her for one week before he wrote the novel. Therefore, the dedication makes it plausible for readers to link up the real life of a geisha to the fictitious story of a geisha, what is more, to equal one with another, which contributes largely to the authenticity of the novel.

The first person narrative and the autobiographical style in this novel further convince readers. In the beginning of the novel, he writes:

Suppose that you and I were sitting in a quiet room overlooking a garden, chatting and sipping at our cups of green tea while we talked about something that had happened a long while ago, and I said to you, "That afternoon when I met so-and-so... was the very best afternoon of my life, and

also the very worst afternoon.

Memoirs of a Geisha, p.1

An elder, experienced geisha opens her mouth to tell her own life, recalls and comments on the past with an incontrovertible tone of voice. The beginning invites readers into a certain circumstance in which they intend to listen to the authority and drop their guard to what they hear. The first person narrative was the outcome of a repetition of practices. In the original draft, Golden chose the third person narrative, but failed to make up a fluid, convincing story. After abandoning a 800 pages draft, he changed it into the first person narrative, being as a famous geisha and transforming a fictional story into an oral history of an individual (Italie, 2001).

The ending of the novel also favorably contributes to its authenticity. The main narrative of the four pages ending, entitled "Translator's note" is a fictional character Jakob Haarhuis, a Japanese history professor of New York University. Professor Haarhuis tells the close connection with Japanese culture he has and how the protagonist, Sayuri, came to record her memoirs. Here the author not only enriches the character of Sayuri with vivid historical details, for example, saying that there was a long report about her in a history monograph, but also represents the "translator's/author's observation on Sayuri, complementing her own subjective narrative in the novel. In addition, the voice of a Japanese history profession legitimates the authenticity of Sayuri's story by utilizing the academic authority telling more personal details about her, by which reshapes her, as a star, to an ordinary individual (Allison, 2001).

The last evidence is, albeit obscure, paramount to the authenticity of this novel. The author of the novel, Arthur Golden went to Harvard University and Columbia University, majoring in Japanese history and art. His ivy education and professional background endorse his fictional work with authority because readers intend to overlap her background and her fiction while reading it (Allison, 2001).

According to the analysis above, Golden's intention to blur the personal and professional voice is conscious, and the *Memoirs of a Geisha* is both a novel and a historical text, "a good authentic fiction" (Allison 2001: 387). The ambiguity in between is beneficial to the popularity of the novel, for the discourse analysis, it acts as the core of oriental discussion, which will be elaborated later.

The authenticity in the autobiography

Mineko Iwasaki, born on November 2, 1949 in Kyoto, was one of the most valued geisha in Japan's history. She was trained to be a geisha since the age of five, officially became a geisha at the age of fifteen, and retired at the age of twenty-nine. She has a legendary career: she was the geisha who attended the most *ozashiki* (Japanese style banquet) and made the most earning, and she was loved by many celebrities. She remained in a romantic relationship with a famous actor for five years, and ended up marrying a talented artist. After retiring, she ran her own business and lives a comfortable life. As the geisha who is successful in both artistic attainments and commercial value, and has a happy ending with her personal life, she appears as the paragon of a successful geisha in every respect (Tegler, 2001).

In 1992, Arthur Gordon visited Mineko Iwasaki's home in Kyoto, and interviewed her for almost one week. Thereafter, he finished his novel, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, and wrote a grateful dedication on its cover, "To Mineko, thank you for everything". But Iwasaki was irritated when she read this novel and the dedication. She accused that Golden violated their confidentiality agreement and disparaged her reputation by using inaccurate information and insulting Japanese traditional culture (Gearty and Bill, 2001).

I demanded that he take my name out. But he said that he felt personally obliged to acknowledge me. "I've made you famous," he told me. I told him that it didn't matter how he felt, I was bothered. "Everything is wrong." [...] "If I don't sue, Arthur will have gotten away with insulting

traditional Japanese culture. It is not only rude to me, but to all women” (Tegler, 2001).

In 2003, Golden's publisher settled with Iwasaki out of court. As one of the most successful geisha in history and the inspiration of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, she is granted authority and judgment of geisha life by her identity herself. She was not satisfied with disapproving this novel in person only; she demanded a negation against this novel in a broader social dimension through a law suit. In doing so, she was able to prove the story in Golden's novel is not only fictional, but also incorrect and insulting. Appealing to law reveals Mineko Iwasaki's desire to protect her authority of being a spoken person of geisha culture and legitimate her version of geisha story.

Iwasaki later published her own autobiography, which makes her the first geisha who broke the silence rule and begun to tell her own life and professional career in geisha history. This book was published as *Geisha: A Life* in the U.S. and *Geisha of Gion* in the UK. She writes about her childhood, her experience of becoming a successful geisha and the details of geisha's profession to the public. She is eager to show a very different portray of geisha in her book rather than the one shown in Golden's novel, in order to correct and clear geisha's name (Gearty and Hutchinson, 2001).

Compared with the fictionality of novel, the genre of autobiography is granted more legitimacy of authenticity. Autobiography as a mainly first person genre and first person narrative in general, underlines the authenticity of the story told (Schipper, 2000). Although both *Memoirs of a Geisha* and *Geisha: A Life* are written in the first person, an autobiography does not require a voice maker under the guise of a false character, nor employ various complicated narrative effects. It is a way of recording history with extensively personal characteristics. Being authentic is the ideal state of autobiography. In the novel, the real author hides behind the fictitious characters, whereas in autobiography, the real author remains constantly present, being as the omniscient narrator throughout the whole book (Schipper, 2000). Mineko Iwasaki's autobiography, *Geisha: A Life*, strikes a strong pose of emphasizing authenticity

against fiction. The name of Chinese version of *Geisha: A Life* is translated into *Zhen Zheng De Yi Ji Hui Yi Lu (The Real Memoirs of a Geisha)*.

The authenticity in the movie

Memoirs of a Geisha as a Hollywood movie, its authenticity has been generally questioned by media and professionals. The criticism focuses on three aspects: the geisha image and scenario setting, the plotline, and the Chinese cast. Firstly, for the image design, in the movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the white makeup is not as exaggerated as the way it should be, and the hair is not the typical style that geisha normally wear. The stylists explained that it would be more scaring and complicated if they designed the geisha image in a correct way, because most audiences would not get used to see the exaggerated makeup and the actresses would not be able to handle their acting when wearing a heavy wig (Ai 2005: 92). There is also a considerably discrepancy between the fictional and the real version of geisha.

The actresses are way too thin. When you look at any picture of geisha or any geisha in person, you will know the real geisha usually have chubby figures. But in the film the actresses are skinny.

Prof. Gaye Rowley (interview, February 1, 2011)

Furthermore, the scenario setting is also highly-flawed. For instance, the solo dance scene is also unlikely in the prewar period in Kyoto. No young geisha would wear glitter eye-shadow and dance solo on a stage with artsy blue lighting (Kaori, 2005).

Ironically, the plotline of *Memoirs of a Geisha* as a novel has been criticized as “unreal and insulting”, the movie of the same name was denounced as betraying the authority of Arthur Golden’s heavily researched novel by making it into a Harlequin romance (Brasor, 2005). The plotlines that do not conform to the facts in the movie are deliberately enlarged into visual spectacle. The sensuous scene makes a valid example. A much older Japanese businessman and a young geisha would never engage in physical contact in broad daylight during the 1940s (Kaori, 2005).

The geisha expert, Sakai Kanichi, concluded the impression he had towards *Memoirs of a Geisha* in a simple sentence:

This is just wrong. When you look at the actress, you know that is fake.

Sakai Kanichi (interview, February 13, 2011)

The most important and common criticism towards *Memoirs of a Geisha* authenticity is its Chinese cast. As a movie that portrays Japanese women and expresses Japanese traditional culture, its main actresses, Zhang Ziyi, Gong Li, and Michelle Yeoh, are Chinese. The controversy it caused will be explicitly explained in the second part of the thesis. Here I will interpret how its authenticity is questioned by its cast.

Komomo, who once lived in China and now is a top geisha in Kyoto, makes her own comment about the movie:

When I lived in China, the impression my Chinese friends gave to me is that they are different people from us. Even though they are actresses, I still have no idea how they can act as Japanese geisha in a movie. We usually are not satisfied when we watch some geisha movies made by Japanese, not mention a geisha movie made and casted by non-Japanese (Ai 2005:69).

Besides the professionals' opinion, media also interprets the non-Japanese cast is the main reason why the whole movie does not look right (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2005). In addition, media tends to attribute the movie's success to its fashion design and the fame of its original novel. *Financial Times* argues that the leading character in the movie is the clothes and the cut is more shapely and much sexier to western eyes (Hunme, 2006). American critics who dislike the movie tended to regard the original novel, which was a huge best seller in the United States, is the only real "star" of the project (Brasor, 2005). All in all, in the case of the movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, its authenticity is questioned by every respect, and the critic tends to consider whether

the plotline is authentic or not does not contribute to its popularity and success. As the response to above, the director Marshall explained the reason why he chose Chinese cast is because China has “the best actresses in Asia” (Ai, 2005), their outstanding acting and star power qualified this movie. Above all, it can be seen that the authenticity in the movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha* is neither the emphasis of the story nor the major concern of its film-making.

3.2 Authenticity as a Pathway

Authenticity and orient

As a unique cultural creature, geisha are embodied in Japanese historical and social environments. Geisha literally mean “art people”, and they are professional entertainers who perform traditional Japanese arts at banquets or teahouses. This profession appeared in the seventeenth century, prospered in the nineteenth century, and declined hugely after the Second World War (Dalby, 1983). Traditionally, geisha began their training at a very young age¹, which includes arts training and entertainment training. Years of strict professional training enables geisha to master the Japanese traditional arts, such as dancing, poetry and music. They had been the fashion leader in the past in virtue of the exquisite Kimono and make up they wore. Since they gather in the pleasure quarters apart and preserve Japanese traditions cautiously, they are regarded as “the essence of Japanese beauty” and “more Japanese” than almost any other definable group (Dalby, 1983). Their unique characteristic also drew the West’s attention. Ever since the nineteenth century, westerners who arrived at Japan have been intrigued by geisha. This fascination has spawned plenty of fictional creations, from *Madame Butterfly* to Arthur Golden’s *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Downer, 2000). In the transformation in the western narrative of geisha, orientalism has been the central issue.

¹ Traditionally, some girls were bonded to geisha house as children. But this practice disappeared in the 1950s with the outlawing of child labor. Now girls cannot begin their professional geisha training until they finish their primary education by the age of 17. In Dalby, Liza (1983), *Geisha*, University of California Press.

In 1887, Pierre Loti (1850-1923) wrote *Madame Chrysanthemum*. Being a naval officer, Loti made up a story about a romantic story between a mariner and a geisha on the basis of his own personal and professional experience. Inspired by *Madame Chrysanthemum*, and based on a short story "Madame Butterfly" by John Luther Long (1861-1927), Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) created a world-famous opera "Madame Butterfly". This opera tells a sad story in which an American naval officer falls in love with a Japanese geisha, but he ends up abandoning her, as a result, the geisha committed suicide.

As the most popular geisha texts, they have been criticized as orientalism due to two reasons, the biased description of the oriental landscape and custom, and the subordinate status of woman. In the novel of *Madame Chrysanthemum* Loti pictures the Japanese scenery and geisha life as a pure observer, however, posing as a rational, mature and "normal" westerner, the landscape of the Orient in the late nineteenth century under his description is irrational, depraved, childlike, and "different" (Said 1978: 40). As for the opera of *Madame Butterfly*, the stage design is in accordance with the original intention of *Madame Chrysanthemum*, portraying the "tiny, artificial and fictitious world" of the Orient (Wisenthal 2006: 8). The second point, which serves as the most important one, refers to the subordinate role of women. In *Madame Chrysanthemum*, the geisha is the victim of an arranged marriage based on money, whereas in *Madame Butterfly*, the geisha surrenders herself to fulfill a sado-masochistic fantasy of dying for love (Degabriele, 1996). In both texts, the protagonists are highlighted as being women with oriental characteristic, instead of being geisha. Authors pay no attention to the artistic role that geisha carry on, neglect their performance and exaggerate the sensuous feature and feminine characteristic in geisha culture. Geisha as individuals are vague and ambiguous because their professional skills and artistry are ignored and their personality is masked by her exaggerated makeup (Degabriele, 1996). Whether told in the first person narrative of *Madame Chrysanthemum* or the third person narrative of *Madame Butterfly*, the authenticity is not the major concern. The portrayal of

Japanese culture and custom in both texts are abstract and biased, meanwhile, the professional and artistic aspects of the geisha is weakened largely, instead, the most significant labels they possess are being oriental and being woman (Sheppard, 2005).

In the case of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the authentication of the Orient contributes significantly to the orientalism criticism it has caused. Different from above both *Madame Chrysanthemum* and *Madame Butterfly*, *Memoirs of a Geisha* internalizes the Orient from “the other” to the narrator itself: the western author does not highlight his superior status, instead, he embodies himself as a Japanese geisha who tells her own life story. Being authentic is a rhetorical strategy that convinces the identity of the story teller; meanwhile, it makes a romantic story as a culture-interpretative text. For example, when Sayuri, the protagonist, tells about the unfinished makeup on the neck, she tries to link it with western women’s legs:

“I must tell you something about necks in Japan, if you don't know it; namely, that Japanese men, as a rule, feel about a woman's neck and throat the same way that men in the West might feel about a woman's legs. This is why geisha wear the collars of their kimono so low in the back that the first few bumps of the spine are visible; I suppose it's like a woman in Paris wearing a short skirt.”

Memoirs of a Geisha, p.46

The paragraph above exemplifies the interpretive characteristic of *Memoirs of a Geisha*. The narrative structure of this novel is about how a former geisha tells a western professor who specializes in Japanese culture about her life. This structure ensures the story of the geisha is watched, recorded and narrated in the western point of view. Moreover, the author endeavors to figure out the equivalent in the West that helps explain the oriental culture which is different from the West. However, there is a paradox in this narrative. It is not necessary to explain the geisha culture in a detailed way if the geisha is telling her story to an expert. The explanation is that the author of this novel attempts to interpret the knowledge

about geisha culture to most western readers by comparing geisha custom with western custom that readers are fairly familiar with. In general, the narrative structure locates the spoken person of the Orient in the view sight of the West by setting up the fictional listener/ recorder as westerner. Consequently, this novel is able to adopt the geisha culture into the western knowledge system, being authentic is the central strategy to do so with the help of the authority of the geisha and the professor's endorsement.

In addition, another impressive aspect in this novel is the detailed depiction of Japanese traditions and customs, including the food, the clothing geisha normally need, the particular courses that geisha are supposed to take, their daily routine, etc. See example below:

As I say, my early-morning lesson was in the little drum we call *tsutsumi*, [...] I studied them all at one time or other. A drum may seem like an instrument even a child can play, but actually there are various ways of striking each of them, such as-for the big taiko-bringing the arm across the body and then swinging the drumstick backhand, you might say, which we call *uchikomi*; or striking with one arm while bringing the other up at the same moment, which we call *sarashi*. There are other methods as well, and each produces a different sound, but only after a great deal of practice.

Memoirs of a Geisha, p.108

This paragraph describes the geisha lesson and the instrument used in that lesson in an explicit way, which is one example to show the interpretive characteristic of this novel. Edward Said mentions an orientalism of "culture archives" (Said, 1978), namely, a detailed of category of tradition, custom, a historical and personal (albeit fictional) narrative, which constructs an oriental museum or archive. In the case of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the author establishes an oriental world by loading plenty of detailed knowledge about the oriental culture, in which the Orient is re-constructed and re-examined (Allison 2001:390). The purpose of being authentic is to enrich its knowledge of the Orient, in order to build the beliefs, perspectives and powers about

the Orient. From this point of view, the authenticity of the novel bleaches the existence of the real Orient.

The relation between authenticity and Orientalism in *Memoirs of a Geisha* lies in the fact that being authentic results in the reconstruction of the Orient in the view sight of the West. First of all, being authentic contributes largely to build the authority of narrative. Since this novel adopts the interpretive strategy as the narrative structure, it is vital to organize plotline and attract readers by establishing a convincing circumstance, in which authenticity plays a crucial role. Secondly, the author produces an oriental world by virtue of the enrichment of knowledge about the oriental culture, traditions and customs. However, this novel does not intend to document the real version of the Orient, instead, its purpose is to present an “imaginary Orient” that fits the plot of the story by stating authentic details of the Orient. In general, *Memoirs of a Geisha* carries the orientalism tradition that exists in geisha texts, feminizing the Orient by emphasizing the feminine characteristic in the oriental culture. In addition, *Memoirs of a Geisha* reconstructs the Orient in a more convincing way by laying stress on the authenticity of the text.

Authenticity and gender: the pure geisha

Mineko Iwasaki’s autobiography, *Geisha, A Life*, emphasizes personal authenticity since she claims it is based on her life course. Contrary to the sensuous image of geisha in Arthur Golden’s *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Iwasaki attempts to shape the pure image of geisha in her autobiography. Personal authenticity refers to “both an individual’s experience of authenticity and to the interpersonal dynamics surrounding the information and maintenance of authentic social identities and personas” (Vannini and Williams 2009: 6). Shaping pure geisha reveals Iwasaki’s assessment to her personal life and profession, as well as to her social identity and status. This part is to elaborate how the authentic role of gender is embodied in the discourse of geisha as both individual and collective practice (Vannini and Williams, 2009).

Geisha are female profession in general.¹ Thus, the gender role of geisha is of special significance in discourse of geisha. Geisha originally appeared in the pleasure quarters and their identity is blurred with prostitute in popular opinion (Downer, 2000). The confusion between geisha and prostitute springs from an indiscriminate collapsing of a wide variety of categories of geisha.² Geisha's profession requires them to perform Japanese traditional arts, and communicate and please clients in the banquets. In the past, they did not involve in casual sexual relationship with their clients, however, they often had a *danna* (patron) to support their career (Dalby, 1983). Regardless of the confusion, they were officially excluded from the category of prostitute in Japan's 1956 Prostitution Prevention Law.

The confusion between geisha and prostitute reveals the sensuous aspect in geisha's profession, which is highlighted in *Memoirs of a Geisha*. The author exaggerates the sensuous aspect of geisha and makes this the major spectacle of the Orient. Arthur Golden describes plenty of symbols that consist of sexual implications about geisha culture, and specifies several sexual relationships that the protagonist, Sayuri, has in her whole life. The highlight of erotic geisha has aroused criticism from feminists. For example, Akita (2009) argues that *Memoirs of a Geisha* portrays the geisha as an irrational and highly erotic creature to meet male's sensuous pleasure. In addition, the strategy of using woman's language and being as woman's spoken person agrees with the orientalist perspective that the voice of the Orient is taken by the West.

In response to the exaggeration of sensuous aspect of geisha, Mineko Iwasaki wrote her own autobiography, as the name correction of authenticity and the protection of historical subject, in which the most crucial strategy is to purify the image of geisha.

¹ The first geisha were male when they appeared in the seventeenth century. Female geisha appeared in the eighteenth century. By 1780, the female geisha outnumbered the male geisha. By 1800, a geisha, unmodified, was a woman. In Dalby, Liza (1983) *Geisha*, University of California Press, p.56-57.

² There are different categories of geisha in Japan and they hold different attitude of their sexual relationships. For example, the normal geisha in Gion, Kyoto do not have casual relationships with their client. But the *Onsen*, literally, the hot spring resort, make themselves available for men on a regular basis. In Dalby, Liza (1983) *Geisha*, University of California Press, p.163.

In Iwasaki's autobiography, *Geisha: A Life*, she endeavors to shape a pure, noble and authentic geisha based on her own experience, from three main aspects, namely, stressing on geisha's artistic accomplishments, innocent sisterhood and individual independence.

First of all, stressing on geisha's artistic accomplishments contributes greatly to the purification of geisha image. Mineko Iwasaki states that geisha accept artist training from early age and live in the *okiya* (the Japanese style tea house) until they quit or retire from their profession. Contrary to what the public takes for granted about geisha, geisha themselves lack sexual knowledge due to their extremely strict professional training and enclosed living environment, even though they are the among few Japanese women who have the frequent and regular interaction with men. She addresses that *mizuage*, the ritual deflowerment of geisha, which is highlighted in both the novel and the movie, does not exist in her and her peers' geisha career, and not even mention any other casual sexual relationships. The most powerful evidence for her argument is her romantic relationships with Toshio and Jin, showing that she devotes herself in committed relationships that are based on true love.

Sisterhood and independence are another two main aspects that Iwasaki addresses in her autobiography to purify the geisha image. On one hand, in the story of *Memoir of a Geisha*, struggles and rivals among women is an important thread to attract the readers and audiences. In her autobiography, Mineko Iwasaki mentions many people who helped her with her career, intending to declare that in geisha community, which exclusively consists of women, being scheming is not the main characteristic. On the other hand, in *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Sayuri, the protagonist, does not have personal independence. She devotes her entire life to pleasing and loving the Chairman, even the decision of becoming a geisha is to earn more chance to meet this man. In Iwasaki's autobiography, being an independent woman is crucial for her purity and nobility. She lays stress on the fact that she made every single important

decision, from entering geisha world, doing her own business to dealing with her personal life. She is proud of herself that she is able to attain economic self-sufficiency and positions of authority and influence on her own merits.

The strategy for personal authenticity is to provide a substantial amount of empirical evidence to suggest that authenticity does matter (Franzese, 2009), in the case of Mineko Iwasaki, she is eager to present an authentic geisha world by disclosing concrete details about her private life and inside stories about geisha profession. And the main feature in her authentic process is the purification of the image of geisha. According to Mary Douglas (1966), being pure requires the “coding practice”, namely, creating a range of embodiments of taboo and limit, during this process, the most important means is to classify objects. In the case of *Geisha, A Life*, Iwasaki considers sexuality taints the noble role of artist that geisha are supposed to play. To purify the image of geisha, she tries to make a distinctive classification between geisha and prostitute by highlighting geisha’s artistic achievements. Furthermore, defending for innocent sisterhood and independence reveals Iwasaki’s endeavor to perfect the image of geisha by proving their spiritual and material purity, which keep them far away from the worldly filth.

Personal authenticity demonstrates twofold points, on one hand, purifying geisha shows that Iwasaki values highly herself and her profession. On the other hand, considering personal authenticity links relative social identity and context, shaping pure geisha stands for the respect for Japanese social convention and social order. Mary Douglas (1966) identifies purity as the “care for hygiene and respect for conventions” (p. 7), which reveals two emphasis of purity, the nobility of human body, and the established, mature social order. The rules of hygiene vary at different societal contexts, thus, the understanding of purity is located in a broader social framework. Douglas propounds a theory about purity, arguing that purity is regarded as a normal and appropriate state of social order because it helps maintain a set of social relationships and set up boundaries of human activities. Dirt, on the opposite,

is regarded as “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966: 36), severing as the abnormal and inappropriate state of society. If a certain social order intends to proceed, it must exclude impurities and filth and set up the concept of purity. In addition, purification is associated with some certain social status or strata, the respect for purity is to indicate identities and maintain the social order (Douglas, 1996). Given the fact that geisha perform Japanese traditional arts and represent the essence of Japanese traditional beauty, they enjoy the glory of being the “curators of tradition” (Dalby 1983: 74). Thus, violation of geisha’s purity implies the disrespect for Japanese tradition, and the Japanese social order that has long been establishing in Japanese society. Iwasaki’s purification of geisha intends to brilliant Japanese tradition and shape the positive image of Japan. It is evident that Iwasaki explained that Golden’ “insulting traditional Japanese culture” was the main reason that she sued him (Tegler, 2001).

Participants involved in personal authenticity are very prone to speak about the “true self” and make it sound real and objective (Franzese 2009: 99), through which they intend to meet certain social implications. However, personal authenticity does not necessarily approach the realness or the genuine aspects of objects. Iwasaki unintentionally wrote contradictory parts in her autobiography. For example, she insists sisterhood of geisha is positive, yet she consistently complains about the intense rivals among geisha. As for her defense for *mizuage*, it is contradictory to the fact that *mizuage* did exist in geisha’s history (Dalby, 1983). Nevertheless, the contradictions in her autobiography further prove her desire to purify the image of geisha, in order to legitimate the text and shape a favorable image of Japan.

The Commoditization of Authenticity

Since the debut of geisha in seventeenth century, they are regarded as one significant representation of Japan (Dalby, 1983). However, the profession of geisha began to decline in the early twentieth century, when the Modernization process was prevailing in Japan. Being modern was nearly completely identified with the adoption

of Western things (Dalby 1983: 74). During this process, geisha realized that following the modern fashion blindly would lead them in danger of losing that which made them special as geisha. Then, the traditional profession made its decision in the era of Modernization: geisha became curators of tradition, instead of being fashion innovators (Dalby 1983: 74). As a result, this decision brought about a paradox, on one hand, the profession of geisha survived because of traditional Japanese characteristics they carry on; on the other hand, they are on the wane in Modernization, existing as a “living fossil” in Kyoto and Tokyo.

As geisha were losing popularity in Japan, they began to gain interest in Hollywood due to their merits in film industry (Gina 1993: 178). Film products require high profit as they involve a high investment, in the case of geisha film, the exotic oriental landscape and mysterious, beautiful geisha served as the perfect spectacle for advanced film technology and the appetite of American audience, meeting the demand in film market. After the American occupation of Japan (1945-1952), as Japan gained more exposure in the U.S., films involving geisha reached their peak (Marchetti 1993: 178). But the context of *Memoirs of a Geisha* has largely changed. As Japan’s economic strength has leapt into the front rank of the world and Japanese culture has gained the increasing exposure and influence across the world, the representation of visual spectacle of the Orient and sensuous aspect of geisha profession are not sufficient to succeed in achieving a considerable payoff.

Beside the two strategies mentioned above, another important one that *Memoirs of a Geisha* utilizes is to abandon the pursuit of authenticity, in order to highlight a great romantic story that transcends age, time and uncertain destiny. The abandonment of authenticity is embodied in two aspects. First of all, the movie fails to ensure the authenticity of all oriental details, instead, it refers to the oriental culture and geisha profession by exaggerating symbolic characteristics, such as *sakura*, *kimono*, and white makeup, to remind audiences that the story is within an oriental context. As for many inaccuracies and misinterpretations that scholars and critics pointed out in

the story, for example, the incorrect sexual metaphors, the inappropriate behavior of geisha, are neither the original intention in design nor the emphasis of filmmaking. The director, Rob Marshall elaborated as,

The challenge for me as a Westerner was to bring this world to life [...] It was really an artistic impression of that world. In other words, a personal fantasy (Brasor, 2005).

The second aspect is the non-Japanese cast. The makers of *Memoirs of a Geisha* believe Asian people have similar facial features, so they don't see much difference if Chinese actresses play geisha in a movie about Japan (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2007). The "authentic orient" that has been emphasized tremendously in the novel and the autobiography fades in its exaggerated setting and custom, yielding to the "forever love" of a poor couple who trap in their uncertain destiny. It is the transcending and legendary love that hits the core of the movie's ambition.

The abandonment of authenticity is part of the "commodification process of the symbols of authenticity" (Duara, 1998). Commodified authenticity does not imply authenticity per se but rather a search for a sustained contradiction that allows consumers to be connected to a range of values roughly aligned with authenticity (Otuka 2008: 3). It creates nostalgic forms of authentic goods, meanwhile, it concerns market value and makes exclusivity universally available. The movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha* is a not a documentary about Japanese culture, instead, it is a commercial product under the cover of a universal emotional pattern that entitles a foreign culture by shaping, distorting and abstracting the representation of a nation. In doing so, the product is able to offer the appealing exotic charm and nostalgic sentiment, meanwhile, provide a story and emotion that can be easily understood by most people among diverse cultures, in order to gain the maximum benefit across the world. The purposes of commodified authenticity are to produce the sense of timeless and to cross the great divides among cultures and spaces, in order to sell product or service (Otuka, 2008). By commodifying the symbol of authenticity, the

geisha, *Memoirs* breaches the demarcation between the two spheres of the market and authenticity (Duara 1998: 308).

The strategy of treating authenticity in the movie differs from the novel and the autobiography; however, different strategies lead to the similar destination: establishing the authority of their narrations, and achieving and legitimating their objectives. After all, the analysis of authenticity integrates the discourse of geisha from different texts, and enables to investigate the core concern in the view of theoretical criticisms.

4. Critique Review

4.1 Media critique as a context

Discourse analysis requires the interpretation of text and its context. The analysis of authenticity offers a pathway in textual analysis of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, whereas media study plays a significant role in its context because it reflects the current concerns towards the cultural texts, especially in the case of *Memoirs of a Geisha*. The novel has been controversial since its release, and academic reviews and critiques about it have been emerging, which mostly involve theoretical criticism of the content of the novel, as discussed above. With the broader exposure of the movie of *Memoir of a Geisha*, it has caused a wider range of nationalism criticism, in which Japan and China as two major players (Macartney, 2008). The criticism not only refers to the text of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, more importantly, it develops the discourse of geisha to a more extensive social and historical spectrum. This part will review and analyze the major viewpoints in criticism of the movie in Japan and China, and concludes that they imply the anxiety of national identity in both countries.

4.2 Japanese media

Japanese media gives basically negative comments on the movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, which mainly focus on the misinterpretations of Japan traditional culture and custom showed in this movie. The most striking and common criticisms are against the misbehavior an unqualified artistic performance of geisha (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2005), the incorrect understanding and interpretation of custom in Kyoto during the 1940s (Kaori, 2005), and the English dialogue that deprives the geisha of their characteristic (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2005). As for the controversial Chinese cast, even though some Japanese media makes severe criticism, saying that “the leads are played by non-Japanese, which is one reason why the whole project never looks quite right. Their acting is just too overblown, too loquacious, too bereft of the refinement that one would expect in such practitioners of the "arts" (the “gei” in

geisha)”, but most media take the relatively mutual stance. They think the Chinese cast is feasible and “tolerant” (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2005) in a movie about Japan, and their acting fit well in this geisha movie (Hume, 2006). Japanese media generally accept the director, Rob Marshall’s statement that the choice of cast was based on their acting ability and star power over race (*BBC News*, 2005). Over all, it is the highly inaccurate representation of Japan and the ignorance of Japanese characteristic, not the ethnicity of the cast that irritates Japanese media.

4.3 Chinese Media

The main criticisms and reviews about this movie are from Internet, instead of mainstream media, because the movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha* was banned in mainland China. Critique concentrates on two issues, gender order and historical complex in this movie. Some Chinese audiences feel offensive to see the most fragrant Chinese actresses playing geisha, who are meant to cater men’s pleasure and are easily confused with prostitute in popular opinion (Ai, 2005). Furthermore, the sexual and sensuous scenes in this movie caused strong social resentment among Chinese audiences who have seen this movie overseas (*Nanfang Daily*, 2006). Another important issue showed in most critique is the historical complex that China processes toward Japan. Firstly, the story takes place in 1930s and 1940s, overlapping Japan’s invasion and occupation of China. Anti-Japanese sentiment also remains strong in China, which is subject to the fact that brutal atrocities occurred during Japan’s occupation and the negative attitude that Japanese government adopts towards its behavior at wartime (Coonan, 2006). Secondly, geisha were utilized as a tool for Japanese militarism propaganda during the Second World War (Ai 2005: 66). In 1930s, the annual spring ball in Kyoto was to celebrate the triumph of Japanese military. Thirdly, in the movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the two main male characters who are beloved by the female protagonist, are active during the Second World War and make a fortune of it. The passive role in gender order integrates with the victim role in historical complex, making a number of Chinese audiences express outrage at

the prospect of Chinese actresses playing Japanese geisha.

The ban from Chinese government officially makes a negative response to the movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha*. While China's State Administration of Radio, Film and Television approved the film for distribution, senior government officials reversed the decision amid controversy over ethnic Chinese actors playing Japanese characters (*BBC New*, 2006). Although officials did not offer reasons to ban this movie, critics believe it is highly relevant with the anti-Japanese sentiment in China and worries the release of this movie will lead to more severe consequences.

4.4 National Identity Building

Although Japanese media and Chinese media focus on different critical prospects in this nationalism discussion, they share the similar concern: the dissatisfaction of their invisible national identity and the desire to stress their national identity. According to Benedict Anderson (1983), the origin of nationalism requires the definition of the concept of nation. He argues that nation is “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 1983: 6). In his theory, an “imagined community” is not based on face-to-face interaction between its members, instead, it is based on a mental image of their affinity. Therefore, the concept of nation is socially constructed by individuals that belong to the given nation. Based on this concept of nation, nationalism refers to “a consciousness of belonging to the nation, together with sentiments and aspirations for its security and prosperity” (Smith 1993: 72). In the nationalism discussion in the case of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the concern that has been repeatedly stressed is the national identity of Japan and China. National identity, by Anthony D. Smith (1993), refers to “complex constructs composed of a number of interrelated components – ethnic, cultural, territorial, economic and legal-political” (Smith 1993: 15). National identity signifies bonds of solidarity among members of communities united by shared values, symbols and traditions. Particularly, national symbols, customs and

ceremonies are the most potent and durable aspects of national identity (Smith 1993: 77). They embody the consciousness of belonging, making it visible and distinct for every member, by which they are able to evoke instant emotional responses from all strata of the community.

The concern of national identity in the discourse of geisha implied in Japanese media is threefold. First of all, geisha as a significant representation of Japan, the distortion and misinterpretation of its image is detrimental to national identity of Japan. In addition, *Memoirs of a Geisha* has reignited the realistic anxiety of geisha tradition in Japan. Regardless representative role of Japanese tradition that geisha play, this profession has been on a decline since last century. What is worse, a number of Japanese are not aware of geisha's professional characteristic and historical thread (interview, Prof. Rowley, February 1, 2011). Concentrating on criticizing the inaccurate knowledge showed in the movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha* reveals critics' concern that this movie, which is of extensive exposure and a wide range of audience, instills wrong impression about Japanese tradition into Japanese who know little about geisha. Considering the intimate relation between national representation and national identity, the inaccurate interpretation of national representation threatens the integration of national identity. Thirdly, the dissatisfaction about Chinese cast and desire for Japanese cast imply Japan's eager to identify itself with the help of the platform of Hollywood product. "(In Hollywood movies), Chinese and South Korean actors and actresses who resemble Japanese are often used. But they cannot convey the true essence of Japan as they are not familiar with the culture" (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2007).

In the case of China, the concern of national identity lies in the emphasis of cast's nationality. On one hand, criticisms against Chinese cast in *Memoirs of a Geisha* apply the theory that as individuals who share the consciousness of belonging to China, are supposed to protect its pride and honor. In the "imagined community" of China, Chinese actresses' involving in roles that are relevant with China's miserable

history embarrasses Chinese people's common feelings, even in fictional creations. Thus it can be seen that the emphasis of cast' nationality is to underline their Chinese characteristic, in order to highlight the status of national identity. On the other hand, critics are discontented with blurring Chinese faces with Japanese features. According to the director, Rob Marshall, the reason why *Memoirs of a Geisha* chose Chinese cast is that China has "the best actresses", however, Chinese media tends to see that "best actresses" can play characters with Chinese features in Hollywood movies, through which the identity of being "China" is much more visible (Ai, 2005).

The nationalists in both Japan and China claim that they cannot see a distinct national identity in the movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha* due to the inauthentic image of geisha. Given the status of being one significant representation of Japan, geisha offer the imagined sense of belonging to Japan. Tainting the authentic image of the representation of Japan and blurring it with Chinese characteristic cause the invisibility of both countries in this movie.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary and Discussion of Findings

This study showed how discourse of geisha is narrated and represented in diverse texts and contexts in the case of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, and how it is integrated in the view of orientalism, feminism, commodification process, national identity. As mentioned in the introduction, *Memoirs of a Geisha* is regarded as a case under the discourse of geisha, which contains different cultural texts and their relative contexts. Among various methods in discourse analysis, authenticity analysis offers an effective pathway to understand discourse of geisha as it agrees with the major representative characteristic among different cultural texts, and the main concern of theoretical criticisms. To do so, textual analysis is considered. By examining how authenticity is produced and its function in cultural texts, it came out with the finding that under the similar aim of establishing authority and legitimating narration, being authentic is the inspiration and characteristic of both the novel and the autobiography, however, it is not focal point of the movie.

Authenticity study integrates the discussion of orientalism, feminism and commodification analysis. Orientalism critics argue that being authentic in the novel is to portray the oriental culture by creating a detailed, cultivated “oriental archive”, through which this novel is able to establish the authority that the West narrates the Orient. In the view of feminism, being authentic is to reshape the “pure image” of geisha, in order to contradict the sexism showed in the novel. As for the movie, the distortion of authenticity refers to the commodification process of authenticity, and in doing so, this movie is able to abstract the authority embodied in authenticity, making commercial benefits with the help of a universal storytelling frame.

The controversy the movie caused is so influential that it cannot be neglected in the analysis of discourse of geisha. Media critique study reveals complicated historical complex brought China into this controversy and enlarged it into a social hotspot.

Although media in China and Japan focus on different criticisms towards *Memoirs of a Geisha*, they share the similar expectation: the eager to shape national identity. Japanese media concerns the misinterpretation of Japanese traditional culture, namely, the geisha culture in a Hollywood movie which can reach a number of audiences lays a positive effect on establishing national identity, whereas Chinese media highlights the nationality of the cast, aiming at stressing particular historical complex and distinctive characteristic that China possesses.

Authenticity and media critique study act as the integration in discourse analysis of geisha as they deal with both cultural texts and their social and historical contexts, enabling this study to decipher the hidden perspectives and ideologies behind discourse of geisha.

5.2 Limitation and suggestions for future research

The main limitation in this research is the lack of Japanese literature and source. Since I do not understand Japanese, I can only use English and Chinese source. Although the novel and the movie are in English and the autobiography has its English version, it would be much more precise if Japanese literature and critique are employed.

The discourse of geisha is a broad topic and I only take *Memoirs of a Geisha* as a case to gain a look at its complexity. It is embodied in a great deal of novels, movies and critiques, which allows to explore how this intriguing image is narrated in texts and how it relates to its context. It would be interesting to do the comparative study of discourse of geisha across time and space.

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List of interviewees

Gaye Rowley, Professor at Waseda University, notes taken during the interview, February 1, 2011.

Sakai Kanichi, geisha expert and an owner of a geisha ornament's shop, February 13, 2011.

Komomo, geisha in Gion, Kyoto, February 13, 2011.