

PRESS RELEASE

New standard work published: "The History of Geishas in Japan – A Journey Through Japan's Cultural History"

At this time, interest in Japanese culture is growing steadily worldwide. "The History of Geishas in Japan – A Journey Through Japan's Cultural History" is a comprehensive work that delves deeply into the fascinating world of geishas while simultaneously offering a broader perspective on Japan's cultural development. The book, accessible to both Japanologists and readers interested in culture, closes a significant gap in German-language literature on the subject.

The geisha – hardly any other figure in Japanese culture is more internationally known and yet so often misunderstood. This new work traces the complex history of these cultural figures, from their origins in the 17th century to the present day in the 21st century. The author achieves a balancing act: The book demystifies persistent Western clichés without destroying the magic that surrounds the world of geisha to this day.

What distinguishes this book is its historical depth and cultural breadth. The history of geisha is not viewed in isolation, but rather embedded in the larger social, political, and artistic developments in Japan. The author guides readers through the epochs of Japanese history—from the Edo period through the Meiji Restoration to the postwar period and the challenges of globalization. In doing so, the transformations of geisha tradition become understandable as a reflection of a changing Japan.

The chapters on geisha training, which rigorously and comprehensively encompasses the traditional Japanese arts: music, dance, calligraphy, tea ceremony, and the art of conversation, are particularly insightful. The book makes it clear that geisha are far more than the superficial stereotypes popularized in the West—they are true artists and preservers of centuries-old cultural traditions.

The research for this work took the author to the traditional hanamachi (geisha districts) of Kyoto, Tokyo, and other Japanese cities, where he searched for active geisha, maiko (geisha apprentices), and okaasans (headmistresses of geisha houses). These primary sources lend the book authenticity and provide insights into a world that is sometimes inaccessible even to Japanese people. The historical research is based on Japanese documents that have previously received little attention in the West, providing new perspectives on the development of the geisha profession.

The author pays particular attention to the social position of geisha throughout history and their relationship to changing gender roles in Japan. The book also presents the complicated and often misunderstood distinction between geisha and other entertainment professions in a differentiated manner. The book does not shy away from addressing difficult topics such as the exploitation of young women in earlier times or the challenges of war and occupation, while always remaining respectful and balanced in its presentation.

A special chapter analyzes the portrayal of geisha in literature, art, and later in film – from the ukiyo-e woodblock prints of the Edo period to contemporary international films and novels. This particularly highlights how Western projections and fantasies

have distorted the image of the geisha, but also how Japanese artists themselves have interpreted and reinterpreted the geisha as a cultural symbol.

The book concludes with a consideration of the current situation of geisha in Japan, their strategies for adapting to modern society, and efforts to preserve this cultural heritage for future generations. The book also raises the question of the tradition's sustainability in an increasingly globalized world.

The author Hermann Candahashi, who has studied Japanese culture and history for more than two decades, combines academic rigor with accessible, vibrant language in this work. His personal experiences in Japan, where he spent time and was able to establish close contacts with various sections of the population, are incorporated into the work without losing his scholarly distance.

"The History of the Geisha in Japan" is more than just a book about a specific cultural tradition—it is a key to understanding Japanese aesthetics, social structures, and cultural values. Amidst the current growing interest in Japan through manga, anime, and Japanese pop culture, this work offers a deeper insight into the traditional roots that feed the fascinating blend of tradition and modernity in contemporary Japan.

The book is aimed at a broad audience: Japanologists and cultural scientists will find new research perspectives, while readers interested in culture will find an accessible, yet never superficial, introduction to the subject. It will also be of particular interest to travelers seeking a deeper understanding of Japanese culture beyond the tourist perspective.

The publication comes at a time when interest in traditional Japanese culture is growing not only in academic circles but also among the general public. At the same time, the geisha tradition itself faces major challenges: declining numbers of active geisha, economic pressure, and competition from modern forms of entertainment are calling the survival of this cultural form into question. The book thus also contributes to the discussion on the preservation of intangible cultural heritage in a globalized world.

"The History of the Geisha in Japan – A Journey Through Japan's Cultural History" is available in hardcover, paperback, e-book, and audiobook formats. It is now available in German, English, and French from bookstores.

The central theme throughout all chapters is that geisha should not be viewed as an isolated cultural phenomenon, but rather as an integral part and reflection of Japanese society and its transformation over the past four centuries. Particular emphasis is placed on the tensions between preservation and innovation, between cultural authenticity and economic necessity, and between Japanese identity and global cultural exchange.

The book consistently emphasizes the agency of the geisha themselves – they are not portrayed as passive objects of male fantasies or social constraints, but as active creators of their tradition, who had to assert themselves and adapt in various historical contexts. This perspective corrects both Orientalist Western stereotypes and simplistic feminist critiques that often fail to grasp the complexity of cultural and social reality.

The testimonies of active geishas of different generations included in the book are particularly valuable, providing insight into their motivation, their artistic practice, and their self-image. These

voices, which have so far received little attention in Western literature, make the book an important primary source for future research.

The book's methodological approach combines historical, ethnographic, art historical, and cultural studies approaches to provide a holistic view of the geisha tradition. It considers both macro-historical developments and the micro-level of individual life paths and artistic practices.

The author's thesis that the geisha should be understood as a "living tradition" – a cultural practice that is constantly changing and being reinterpreted without losing its continuity – offers a fruitful approach to understanding cultural traditions in modernity in general. Beyond its specific subject matter, the book thus contributes to the current cultural studies discussion on tradition, authenticity, and cultural change in globalized societies.

The author, who was already known as a cultural ambassador with a focus on Japanese cultural history before his engagement with Japanese culture, also brings a comparative perspective to this work, allowing occasional comparisons with European phenomena such as salon culture or courtly culture without obscuring the specifics of Japanese tradition.

His personal experiences in and about Japan, to which he repeatedly returned, lend the book a lively, authentic quality that combines scholarly precision with narrative power. The numerous anecdotes from his encounters with representatives of traditional Japanese culture lighten the academic presentation without diminishing its substance.

Particularly noteworthy is the care with which Japanese terms are introduced and explained. Instead of relying on simplified translations, key concepts are left in their original Japanese form and explained in their cultural context. The extensive glossary in the appendix makes the book easily accessible even for readers without Japanese knowledge.

The book fills a significant gap in the German-language literature on the subject. While there are already several well-founded works on the history of geisha in the English-speaking world, a comparably comprehensive, scholarly-based, and at the same time accessible work for a wider audience has been lacking in the German-speaking world. The few existing German-language publications on the subject are either outdated, too superficial, or too academically specialized to do justice to the broad interest in Japanese culture.

About the Author

The author is an expert on Japanese culture and religion, known for his books, and has published numerous articles on these topics. He spent several years, with interruptions, in Japan, where he intensified his knowledge in various places and cities. His field research took him to numerous regions of Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, and gave him deep insights into local traditions and customs. In addition to his travels, he also sees himself as a cultural mediator and has authored numerous books on Japanese spirituality and folklore. He is particularly interested in the connection between traditional ideas and modern society, as well as the intercultural dialogue between Japan and Western cultures.

"Japan's World of Spirits and Demons" is one of his most comprehensive works to date and the result of intensive research and personal encounters.

Availability

"The History of the Geisha in Japan – A Journey Through the Cultural History of Japan" is now available in three languages ??(German, English, and French) in bookstores, as a hardcover, paperback, e-book, and audiobook. Further information, excerpts, and event information can be found on the publisher's website.

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THE HISTORY OF GEISHAS IN JAPAN

An excursion through Japan's
cultural history



Hermann Candahashi

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