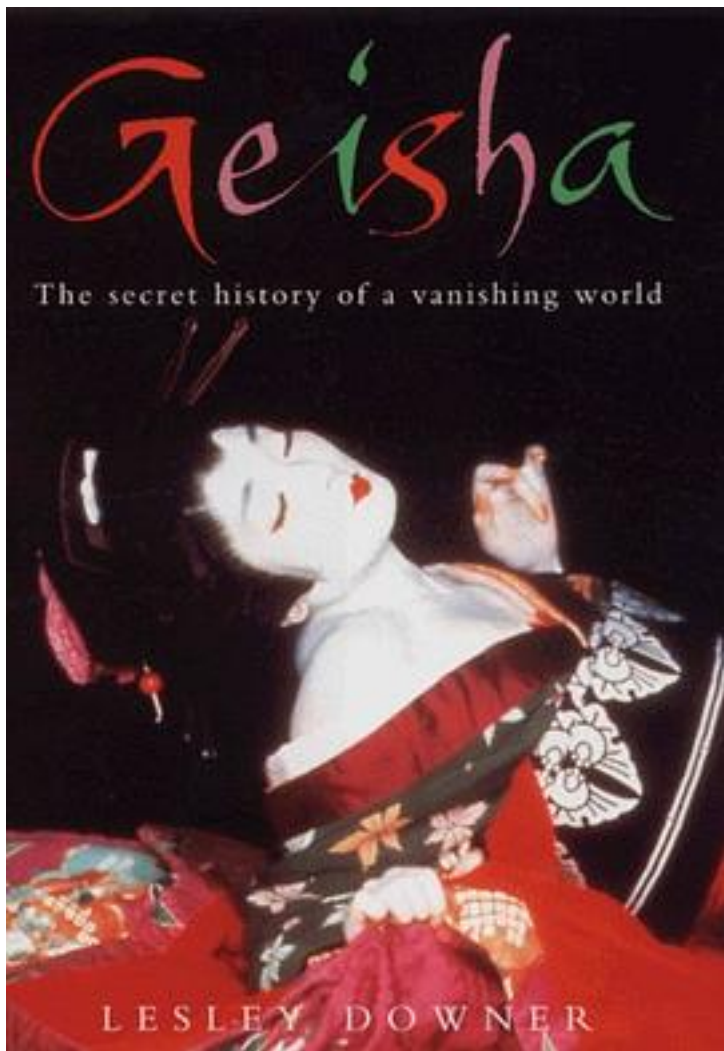


Geisha



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出版者:POWERHOUSE BOOKS

出版时间:2006-12

装帧:精装

isbn:9781576873366

Japanese geisha and courtesans intrigue and fascinate Westerners. During the mid-nineteenth century, Japan opened its doors to the world and became an essential destination for travelers. Tourists desired images of landscapes and traditional Japanese culture, which Japanese photographers provided. They created souvenir albums consisting of hand-colored photographs individually chosen by the tourist. Many are so beautifully painted that they challenge modern sensibilities familiar with color photography. The photographic conventions were inspired by the aesthetics of the noted colored woodblock print medium of ukiyo-e and the privately published surimono. These works depicted the "floating world"--courtesans, geisha, and entertainments--which also were intriguing subject matter for tourists. In the seventeenth century, the social category of entertainer, or more exactly hostess and companion for men, was established--the geisha, Japanese for "artist." Geisha are professional hostesses who train in the art of pleasing men, by performing traditional dance, playing instruments and singing, and intelligent conversation and humor. They were experts in tea ceremony and all aspects of dining. Their aim was to simulate the ambience and impression of Feudal Japan. It took years for an apprentice geisha (Malko) to learn the art, but the result was wealth, renown, and celebrity. This book, *Geisha: A Photographic History, 1880-1910*, documents the intimate life and culture of the nineteenth-century geisha. It portrays these artists in a cultural reality created by staged studio photography, private scenes, and rare outdoor images. The geisha is pictured performing her daily rituals and various arts--bathing, dressing, hair styling, dining, dancing, and playing instruments. Images of courtesans and other working women are presented alongside the geisha to show all sides of this enchanting aspect of Japanese culture. Completing the story are insightful essays on the history of nineteenth-century Japanese photography, the social history of the geisha, and the history of the opening of Japan.

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