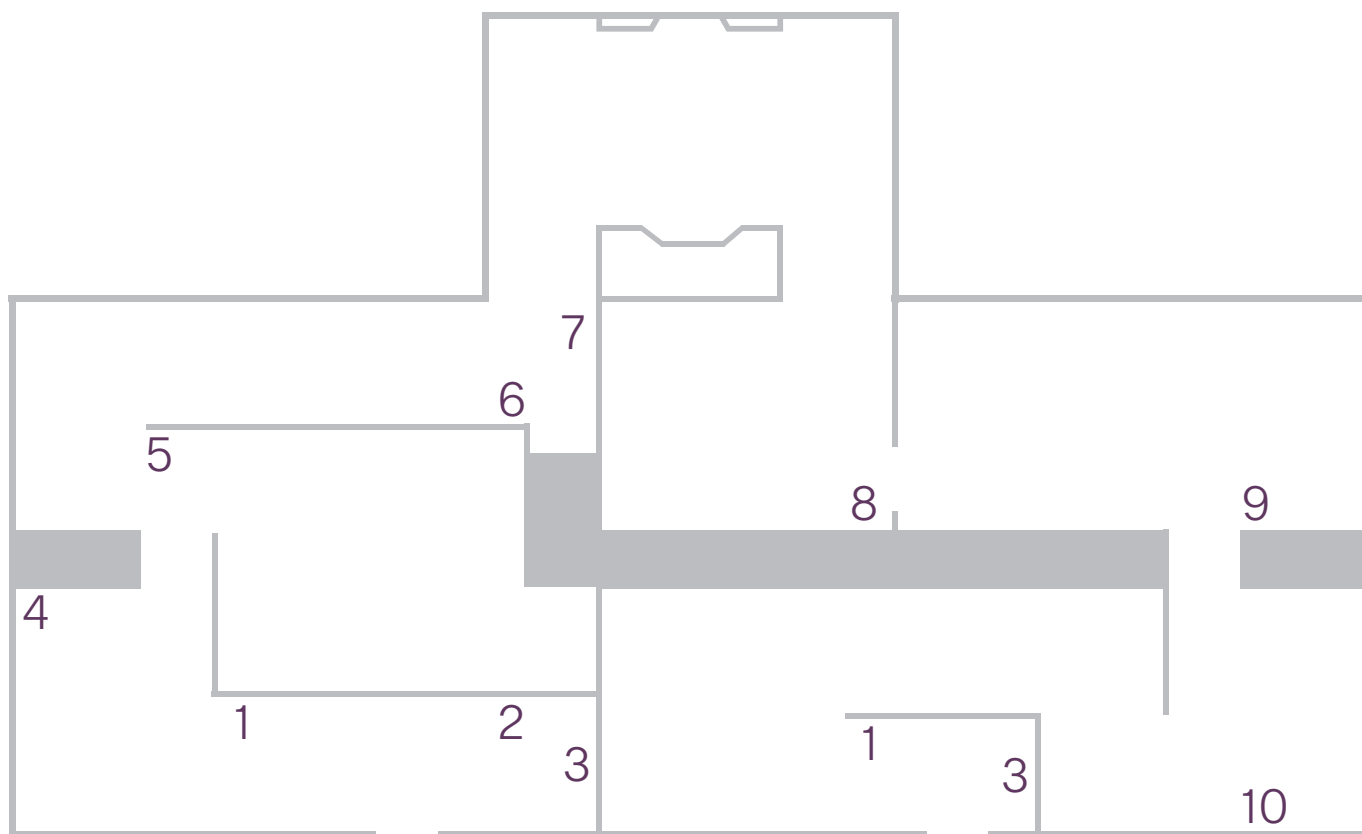


TEXT TRANSLATIONS

Russel Wong
IN KYOTO



PLAN OF THE GALLERY

1 Russel Wong in Kyoto

ACM received much positive feedback on *Life in Edo / Russel Wong in Kyoto* and regrets from local and overseas friends who did not get a chance to see the exhibition. This, and Russel Wong's decision to donate these Kyoto photographs to the museum convinced us to extend the show. The Japanese woodblock prints have safely returned to Japan (light exposure concerns limit the time they can be on display), but we are fortunate to be able to expand our exploration of Kyoto with more colour and black and white photographs.

A major gift to ACM

Russel Wong has kindly pledged to make a gift to ACM of all the photographic prints – old and new – displayed in this exhibition. In addition to strengthening our small collection of contemporary artworks, this generous gift illustrates the cross-cultural connections within which Singapore is a part. Wong's

nationality as a Singaporean intersects with this work on Kyoto he produced outside of Singapore.

While most of us cannot travel to Japan right now, we warmly welcome you to come again to see Kyoto through the lens of Russel Wong.

Russel Wong

Russel Wong (born 1961) is an internationally renowned, Singaporean, fashion and portrait photographer with 25 years of experience working with Oscar-winning directors and Hollywood celebrities, including Richard Gere, Jackie Chan, Michelle Yeoh, Zhang Ziyi, and Isabella Rossellini. In addition to his portrait photography, his work includes still-life compositions, architecture, landscapes, and more.

2 **Kyoto**

Kyoto is Japan's third largest city, and one of its oldest. By 794, it was the capital of Japan. Like Nara, a previous capital, the city was laid out in a grid pattern modelled on the Chinese Tang dynasty capital Chang'an (today's Xi'an). Although Kyoto was the capital and served as home to the Japanese imperial family from 794 to 1869, the city was not always the focus of Japanese political power.

Emperors of Japan

From the 9th century onwards, the imperial family became more and more isolated, and from the 12th century, the country was ruled by military families called "shogunates". While Kyoto remained the imperial capital and the centre of national culture, the business of running state affairs was carried out by the shogunates. In 1603, the Tokugawa Shogunate was established, and they managed the country from Edo City until their defeat by forces loyal to the emperor.

The Meiji government was established in 1868 and the emperor and imperial family moved to Tokyo. In 1947, after World War II, a new constitution of Japan was enacted, and the role of the emperor became symbolic once again.

Kyoto survives and thrives

Just as imperial fortunes waxed and waned, fortunes of the city itself fluctuated dramatically. During the Ōnin War (1466–67), the Kyoto Gosho (imperial palace) and most of the city were destroyed. Much of today's Kyoto dates from the Edo period. Although political power resided in Edo, Kyoto flourished as a cultural, religious, and economic centre. Fortunately, Kyoto was spared the aerial bombing that razed other Japanese urban centres in the closing months of World War II. Today, there are more than 20 museums and over 30 universities and colleges scattered throughout the city.

3 Russel Wong and Kyoto

Japan, particularly Kyoto, has always drawn and inspired local and international photographers. Russel Wong's interest in photographing Kyoto and its geisha community began during a visit to Tokyo in 2005 to shoot publicity photographs for Watanabe Ken when he was starring in *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005). Kyoto came up during their conversation and this rekindled Wong's passion to dig deeper.

Despite its controversies, the film has contributed in recent years to public perceptions of and curiosity about Japanese geisha (called "geiko" in Kyoto). Wong feels that perhaps his photographs can give the geiko community – which hardly speaks and is seldom seen – a voice for an international audience.

Geiko community

The geiko community in Kyoto is a closed group and the traditional system of *ichigen-san okotowari*, “turning away first-timers” still rules in most teahouses today. It took Wong five years to gain access to communities in all five kagai (geisha districts, also known as *hanamachi*) in Kyoto.

Inspired by woodblock prints

In making these photographs, Wong was inspired by Edo-period woodblock prints. He was particularly drawn to the compositions, how the elements of the image work together, and by the silhouettes and portraits of the women depicted in them. He compares the actual streets and teahouses in Kyoto to those built to scale on a movie set. This familiarity and his experience working with celebrities enabled him to create a dramatic cinematic quality in these photographs.

4 *Geiko and maiko*

Geisha – called “geiko” in Kyoto – and *maiko* (geisha in training) in *kagai* (geisha districts, also known as *hanamachi*) within Kyoto are world-famous icons of Japanese culture.

Professional training of geiko and maiko takes place in schools for these artist-entertainers called *nyokōba*, which were established around 130 years ago. Basic training includes classical dance, playing traditional Japanese instruments such as shamisen, drum, and koto, as well as tea ceremony, singing, calligraphy, and flower arrangement.

Kyoto kagai 花街

There are five kagai in Kyoto: Gion Kobu, Miyagawacho, Pontocho, Kamishichiken, and Gion Higashi. Strictly regulated, exclusive teahouses, called “ochaya”, operate in these districts. They accept new clients only through introduction from a regular customer. They arrange regulars-only banquets, with dishes appropriate for the occasion, guest list,

and season, with entertainment from geiko and maiko they believe will meet the tastes of customers.

Seasonal activities and other rituals

The yearly calendar of each kagai revolves around seasonal changes, local history, and religious rituals and ceremonies. Some events express gratitude to teachers or honour historic figures. Kagai are intimately linked with local shrines and festivals. Gion Kobu, Miyagawacho, Pontocho, and Gion Higashi have a strong connection with Yasaka Shrine and the Gion Matsuri (held in July). Kamishichiken, said to be the oldest kagai, is affiliated with Kitano Tenmangu Shrine, which hosts both the Plum Festival (Feb) and Zuiki Festival (Oct). Geiko and maiko from each kagai join the annual Jidai Matsuri (22 Oct, one of Kyoto's most important festivals, along with Gion Matsuri) on a rotating basis.

5 Gokagai – the five kagai of Kyoto

Areas officially designated for geisha services

Miyagawachō

The Miyagawachō district was constructed in 1666. In 1751, it received official permission to do business as a kagai. It soon became the centre of performing arts in Kyoto. Minami-za, the primary kabuki theatre in Kyoto, is located in Miyagawachō. Some teahouses in the area are named after famous kabuki actors. Today, part of Miyagawachō is designated as a historical scenery preservation area.

Gion Kobu and Gion Higashi

In the early Edo period, many teashops opened to welcome visitors to Yasaka Shrine and Kiyomizu Temple. Gradually, the shops transformed into teahouses and waitresses became geiko. By the early 19th century, there were 700 teahouses and more than 3000 geiko and maiko.

When a huge samurai estate in the area was taken down in 1870, teahouses were built in its place, expanding the kagai area. In 1881, the area was separated into Gion Kobu and Gion Otsubu (today Gion Higashi). Part of the kagai is now designated as a traditional buildings preservation area, and another as a historical scenery preservation area.

Pontochō

A large-scale public project around the Kamo River was undertaken in 1670. Teashops and accommodations were built along a new street, welcoming tourists and boatman who transported goods along the Takasegawa Canal. The area gradually developed and received official permission to do business as a kagai in 1712.

Kamishichiken

When part of Kitano Shrine (today Kitano Tenmangu Shrine) burnt down in the mid-15th century, it was repaired, and seven teashops were built in the area. These seven shops were the origin of Kamishichiken. In 1587, Toyotomi Hideyoshi had a large tea party at the shrine, and the merchants and businessmen gave Hideyoshi a grand welcome. It is said that Hideyoshi returned the hospitality by granting them exclusive right to do business as teahouses.

Another origin story involves sacred maidens at the shrine. When these young girls grew older, they worked as waitresses in teashops. Thus the origin of geiko in Kamishichiken.

The area became popular with people visiting Kitano Tenmangu Shrine and with wealthy merchants in the Nishijin textile district.

Today it is designed as an important scenery maintenance area, and Kaburenjo Theatre as a historically important building.

6 Erikae – from maiko to geiko

The transition from maiko to geiko is called erikae, literally “turning of the collar”. This refers to the white collar worn by geiko underneath their kimono; maiko wear coloured ones. A maiko also changes her hairstyle from ofuku to sakko during the ceremony, and some blacken their teeth (traditionally a sign of a mature woman).

From natural hair to a wig

The maiko performs a dance called kuro-kami (“black hair”) to symbolise her transition. After the dance, she takes part in a special ceremony called danpatsu shiki, in which fellow maiko and geiko, along with important patrons, take turns clipping the wires that hold her elaborate hairstyle in place. Once her hair is free, she is no longer a maiko. She will wear a wig as a geiko.

Celebrating the transition

In general, a maiko works 3 or 4 years before her Erikae ceremony. Important patrons and relatives come to witness the ceremony. For the first three days after her Erikae, a new geiko wears a formal black kimono. On the fourth day, she may wear a coloured kimono.

7 Etiquette in the kaiga

With widespread fascination with geiko and maiko and the huge influx of international tourists to Kyoto, encounters with these artist-entertainers have become increasingly troublesome. International tourists have chased, stopped, swarmed, and even pulled on the kimono of geiko and maiko – usually just to snap a picture with them.

Curb your enthusiasm – don't stalk

Geiko and maiko are not allowed to stop for photos while working. When they commute between the teahouses, the clock is ticking.

Out of respect for paying customers, they cannot be late for banquets. It is extremely difficult to navigate the narrow streets of kagai while wearing a traditional outfit and trying to avoid tourists.

Please do not swarm around these women, invade their private space, or stalk them at night just to get a blurry photograph for your social media account.

Not a playground or theme park

Some guidebooks promote “geisha hunting”; that’s why some tourists want to chase them on the streets. Some visitors misguidedly treat Gion, the most well-known kagai in Kyoto, as a kind of historical theme park. But Gion and the other kagai are parts of the city – admittedly scenic – inhabited by ordinary Kyoto people who need to live and do business peacefully.

Respect privacy

The city of Kyoto recently enacted a ban on photography in the private alleys along Hanamikōji, the main street in Gion. Fines of up to ¥10,000 (\$125 SGD) are now given for photography without permit. If you do encounter geisha, it is respectful to first ask if it's okay to take a photograph. They're usually in a hurry to their next appointment, so don't be surprised if they politely refuse; and don't follow them.

8 Kyoto in colour

Take a deep breath and be transported through idyllic Kyoto landscapes. Journey with Russel Wong across four seasons to explore iconic places and lush gardens. The photographs in this projection are all different from the ones on display in the exhibition.

What feelings do these photographs evoke in you? After you finish looking at the exhibition, watch the projection again. What emotions do they now elicit?

9 Misedashi – official debut of a maiko

When women join the geisha profession, they are first called shikomi, which means “in training”. This stage lasts for about one year. They take lessons in dance and music, learn how to wear a kimono, and to speak in Kyoto dialect. Once she is deemed ready to enter the profession, a trainee will take an exam. If she passes, a date will be set for her official debut, known as Misedashi – literal translation, “open for business”.

One extra special day

28 February 2011 was an important day for the Tsurui Okiya. On that day, Satsuki made her official debut as a maiko, and Sayaka, who had her Erikae ceremony (transition from maiko to geiko) the day before, was introduced as a geiko. It was the first time in 38 years that an okiya in Gion Kobu celebrated both Misedashi and Erikae on the same day.

10 Career as maiko and geiko

In Japan, geiko and maiko are registered occupations allowed only in kagai areas. After graduation from junior high, a girl can debut as a maiko at the age of 15 or 16. When joining the profession, girls connect with an elder geiko “sister” (onesan), with whom they pledge sisterhood over a cup of sake. Elder sisters exercise great influence over maiko and new geiko when they debut on the kagai scene. A maiko is promoted to geiko when she is over the age of 20. After her term of service ends (typically 6–7 years, including time as maiko), she can quit whenever she chooses. Some geiko work for decades – look for photos of Geiko Katsukiyo in this exhibition.

Like a family

Candidates for maiko and geiko must join an okiya, an establishment to which a maiko or geiko is affiliated during her career in the industry. They establish a kind of parent-child relationship with the manager (okāsan). Elder

sisters take constant care of their younger sisters at ozashiki banquets (traditional Japanese dinners in a tatami room) and in the kagai community. These relationships form part of the hierarchy in the world of geiko and maiko.

Leaving the profession

There is no mandatory retirement age for geiko. But when they decided to stop working, they hand out hiki-iwai (greeting gift upon retirement) to those within the kagai to announce how they will continue relations with the community. Reasons for discontinuation are usually marriage or simply a desire to enter a new profession.