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Identity Formation in Adolescence: An Eriksonian Approach to Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*

Nibras Jawad Kadhim
Department of English, College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq

***Abstract*—The process of identity formation is a critical aspect of adolescent development, as outlined in Erik Erikson's influential psychosocial theory. This paper explores the application of Erikson's framework to the exploration of identity in Arthur Golden's acclaimed novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997). Erikson proposed that adolescents navigate a crucial stage of identity versus role confusion, where they must reconcile their sense of self with societal expectations and roles. The present study examines how the protagonist, Sayuri, navigates this journey, sifting through various choices and commitments to ultimately forge a cohesive identity. Sayuri embodies Erikson's ideas of identity exploration and crisis as she goes through a metamorphosis from a young child in a fishing village to a well-known geisha in Kyoto. The story depicts her battle with cultural norms, societal roles, and personal goals, echoing Erikson's theories about the complex negotiation of identity during adolescence. By examining the protagonist's experiences and choices, this paper emphasizes the relevance of Eriksonian theory in understanding identity development in literature, particularly in light of cultural and historical contexts. The paper concludes that Sayuri's identity formation is shaped by both her personal resiliency and the pre-World War II Japanese sociocultural context, demonstrating the universality of Erikson's developmental stages while also recognizing the impact of context on the adolescent experience.**

Index Terms*—adolescence, Arthur Golden, Erikson, identity formation, *Memoirs of a Geisha

I. Introduction

The adolescent period is a critical phase in human development, characterized by a quest for self-discovery and the negotiation of one's place within the broader social and cultural context. Lerner and Steinberg (2009) describe adolescence as a transitional stage in which psychosocial concerns shift from external expectations and directions to an internal framework grounded in one's experiences, strengths, limitations, and ambitions. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development provides a valuable framework for understanding this complex process, particularly through his concept of identity versus role confusion. Erikson asserts that adolescents struggle with the issues of identity and place in the world, which has a big influence on their sense of self and social roles in the future. This theoretical framework can provide significant insights into the psychological and emotional development of literary characters.

The primary developmental task of adolescence is the establishment of a coherent identity that serves as the foundation for a well-grounded adulthood (Abbasi, 2016). Erikson (1968) defined identity as "a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity" (p. 19). According to him, the process of identity formation does not culminate at a single stage of life; rather, it is "constantly lost and regained" and an evolving process which begins from "the baby's earliest exchange of smiles" (Erikson, 2008, p. 226). While this development is continuous, it becomes especially prominent during adolescence, a period marked by profound physical and psychological changes and increasing social demands, which bring issues of identity into sharper focus (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996). The process of forming an identity is characterized by Erikson (1968) as the "normative crisis" of adolescence, since it coincides with the stage in which physical growth, psychological maturation, and social obligations collectively prepare the individual to face this developmental challenge (pp. 23, 91).

Erikson emphasized that developing a strong sense of identity is essential for further development. However, not everyone successfully navigates this critical stage. Identity formation plays a central role in shaping personality and is closely linked to positive developmental outcomes (Marcia, 1993). It fosters a profound ideological commitment, helping individuals understand their role and position in the world (Hoare, 2002). It also cultivates a deep sense of well-being, feeling at home in one's own body, having direction in life, and experiencing significance in the eyes of those who matter (Erikson, 1968). However, Identity is not something society simply hands to a person, nor does it naturally emerge at a certain age. Instead, it must be consciously developed through consistent personal effort. Avoiding active engagement in shaping one's identity can lead to the danger of role confusion, which may result in alienation, a sense of isolation, and uncertainty about one's place in the world (Erikson, 1959).

Memoirs of a Geisha is a gripping story that touches on Eriksonian themes and captures the protagonist's challenges and victories in establishing her individuality within the boundaries of a traditional Japanese geisha society. The story, which is set in early 20th-century Japan, centers on Chiyo Sakamoto's transformation into the well-known geisha Sayuri.

This metamorphosis is more than just a change of profession; it is a profound journey in which Chiyo navigates her identity while contending with the demands and expectations of her historical and cultural contexts. By examining Chiyo's developmental journey through the Eriksonian stages, particularly focusing on her struggle with identity versus role confusion, this study will uncover how Golden's narrative illustrates the broader psychosocial dynamics at play during adolescence. The analysis will also consider how cultural and historical contexts influence the identity formation process, offering insights into the interplay between individual psychological development and external societal factors.

II. Erikson's Theory of Identity Formation

Erik Erikson, a prominent developmental psychologist, proposed the theory of "psychosocial development" that represents a cornerstone for understanding human growth across the lifespan (Erikson, 1968, p. 180). Departing from Freud's emphasis on psychosexual factors, Erikson underscored the crucial role of social interactions and cultural contexts in shaping an individual's personality and sense of self. Central to his theory is the concept of identity formation, a process that unfolds through a series of eight distinct stages. These include trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair. Every stage is marked by a specific "psychosocial crisis", a conflict between opposing forces that offers the potential for personal growth and development (Erikson, 1980, p. 133). Successful resolution of these crises leads to the acquisition of "virtue", or a psychological strength that contributes to overall well-being and the capacity to face future challenges (Erikson, 1968, p. 235).

While all stages are interconnected, the stage most central to identity formation is the fifth stage, identity versus role confusion, typically occurs during adolescence, a period Erikson described as involving a profound "identity crisis" (Erikson, 1968, p. 91). During this stage, individuals undergo significant physical, cognitive, social, and emotional changes that prompt them to ask fundamental questions such as "Who am I?" and "Where do I fit in?". Identity formation, as Erikson (1950) explained, involves two key processes: exploration, a "psychosocial moratorium" characterized by questioning and experimenting with various roles, and commitment to a coherent set of values, beliefs, and goals that align with one's emerging self (p. 236).

The process of exploration fosters self-examination and the search for personal meaning, ultimately leading to a stable and cohesive identity if successfully resolved (Erikson, 1968). This resolution cultivates "fidelity", a psychological strength marked by authenticity, purpose, and the ability to form meaningful, trust-based relationships (Erikson, 1968, p. 235). Conversely, failure to resolve the identity crisis results in role confusion, leaving individuals feeling insecure, fragmented, and unsure of their direction in life. This stage not only shapes personal identity but also lays the groundwork for later stages involving intimacy, generativity, and ego integrity.

It is widely acknowledged that personality development is generally seen as the outcome of both internal and external influences (Geulen, 1998). Erikson was a pioneer in demonstrating that an individual's social environment is deeply embedded in their psychological framework. He (1959) asserted that the individual cannot be fully understood without considering the social context in which they exist: "Individual and society are intricately woven, dynamically related in continual change" (p. 114). Therefore, Erikson highlights the importance of social interactions and cultural contexts in shaping one's identity, suggesting that the quest for identity is influenced by the broader social and cultural contexts. He argues that identity formation is influenced by a variety of factors, including personal experiences, social influences, and cultural norms. According to Erikson (1959), a sense of identity emerges only through meaningful interactions with others, a process he describes as "psychosocial reciprocity" (p. 52): "In adolescents, identity is never an individual achievement, but an outgrowth of mutual recognition… [it] grows by being acknowledged and appreciated by others" (Erikson, 1959, p. 48).

Adolescents are influenced by interactions with peers, family, and societal expectations that contribute to their identity formation. Erikson (1959) maintains that an adolescent's response to the question "Who am I?" is largely shaped by "social feedback", as individuals rely on how others perceive and assess them to define their identity (p. 52). During adolescence, individuals develop a self-concept, which is an understanding of who they are based on their experiences and feedback from others both positive and negative. A stable self-concept contributes to healthy identity formation. Furthermore, Exposure to role models and mentors helps adolescents navigate their identity development. Erikson suggested that guidance from trusted adults can facilitate the exploration of various roles and help in making informed commitments to one's beliefs:

> … the adolescent often goes through a period of a great need for peer group recognition and almost compulsive peer group involvement. Conforming to the expectations of peers helps adolescents find out how certain roles fit them. The peer group aid the individual in the search for a personal identity since they provide both a role model and very personal social feedback. Conformity to the expectations of the peer group reflects the learned skill of not making oneself an easy target of "catty remarks" or to avoid being "mocked out". (Erikson, 1959, p. 52)

Thus, the cultural and societal environment influences how adolescents perceive themselves and their roles. Erikson's theory emphasizes that identity formation is not only an individual process but also a social one, shaped by social relationships, cultural expectations and historical contexts. Social and cultural contexts support the formation of adolescents' identities by recognizing their psychological needs and providing opportunities for their expression.

III. A Geisha's Struggle for Identity: Examining Sayuri's Journey Through Eriksonian Lens

Memoirs of a Geisha follows the life of Sayuri who grows up navigating the complex and demanding world of the geisha tradition. From her early years, during which she was displaced and lost, to her training and eventual rise to stardom as a geisha, Sayuri's path is one of self-discovery and survival. Sayuri's adolescent experiences serve as an example of how challenging it can be to establish one's identity, particularly within the constraints of societal and cultural standards. Considering Erikson's identity vs. role confusion theory, the novel provides an engaging narrative for examining the psychological underpinnings of her identity formation.

The dramatic shift from Sayuri's existence in an impoverished fishing town to the strange and sometimes harsh atmosphere of Kyoto's Gion district, where she is taught to become a geisha, defines her early adolescence. Her identity crisis may have been triggered by this forced transition as it suddenly cuts her off from her cultural identity and family ties. According to Eriksonian theory, Sayuri is forced into a conflict between her new identity as a geisha-in-training and her previous identity as Chiyo, a fisherman's daughter. The loss of her family and the imposition of a new societal function that discourages independent expression and requires conformity exacerbate her identity crisis. She is stripped of her former identity and subjected to the authority of the okiya owners who impose the strict expectations and standards of the geisha tradition. This traumatic experience sets the stage for her struggle with role confusion as she is thrust into a world with predetermined roles and expectations.

Sayuri's life mirrors several of Erikson's developmental stages. Her early childhood, fraught with separation from her family, aligns with the stage of trust vs. mistrust, where she experiences a foundational crisis of trust that shapes her later interactions and sense of self. According to Erikson (1959), developing trust requires establishing confidence in others and the recognition of one's personal trustworthiness. Since infants are completely dependent on their caregivers, their ability to develop trust relies heavily on the care they receive. When caregivers are consistent, nurturing, and loving, children begin to build a sense of trust. Without this kind of dependable support, feelings of mistrust are likely to develop instead. Chiyo's early life is marked by both trust and betrayal. She shares a loving bond with her mother and finds solace in her older sister, Satsu. However, their sale to the okiya shatters this trust, leaving Chiyo with feelings of abandonment and insecurity. At the age of nine, Sayuri's father relinquishes custody of her to Mr. Tanaka, the owner of Japan coastal seafood company, in exchange for financial compensation to afford medical treatment for her ailing mother. Mr. Tanaka subsequently arranges for Sayuri to be sold to an okiya, a geisha house in Gion district in Kyoto province. The sense of security and stability that should have characterized this stage is severely disrupted, leading Sayuri to develop a cautious and distrustful attitude towards the world around her.

Arriving at the okiya marks the beginning of Chiyo's challenging and arduous journey towards establishing her identity. She faces considerable challenges in adjusting to the strict discipline and formalized routines of the okiya, which often leave her feeling isolated and burdened. The early stage of adaptation proves especially arduous. From speaking with the appropriate inflections to bowing elegantly, Chiyo must become familiar with the complex traditions and etiquette of the geisha society. She receives severe punishment for even the smallest mistakes, is given the dirtiest chores, and is continuously reminded of her lower status in the household. Through her severe training and the exploitation she endures, Chiyo's sense of autonomy is frequently undermined, while feelings of shame and doubt in her abilities are cultivated. Unable to make sense of her existence in the geisha house, Chiyo is at the bottom of the hierarchy in the okiya and the popular geisha bullies her all the time. Chiyo endures severe mistreatment at the hands of Mother and Granny, the strict and calculating owners of the Nitta okiya, as well as from Hatsumomo, the ruthless senior geisha residing there. Upon her arrival at the okiya, Chiyo's autonomy is effectively stripped away; she becomes confined to a life of servitude, and her existence dictated by the demands of others. The okiya functions as both her residence and a site of enforced labor. This reality is underscored by Auntie's remark: "It is an okiya... It's where geisha live. If you work very hard, you'll grow up to be a geisha yourself", highlighting the conditional nature of advancement within the geisha hierarchy and the labor required to attain it (Golden, 1997, p. 24). The okiya not only serves as an educational institution for aspiring geisha but also employs them in domestic roles prior to their formal artistic training. Once the geishas attain professional success, they become significant sources of income for the okiya. Mother's warning to Sayuri reflects the harsh reality of her new life in Kyoto. She sternly informs Sayuri that she must quickly learn to behave or face physical punishment, emphasizing that "Granny gives the beatings around here, so you'll be sorry". She lays out clear expectations: Sayuri must work hard, obey orders, avoid causing trouble, and never leave the okiya without permission. Only by following these rules might she have the chance to begin training as a geisha within a few months. Mother makes it clear that Sayuri was not brought to the okiya merely to be a maid, warning, "I'll throw you out if it comes to that" (Golden, 1997, p. 26). This dialogue underscores the strict discipline and limited agency imposed on Sayuri from the outset of her time in the geisha household.

For Chiyo, residing in the okiya is akin to enduring a living nightmare. Her existence is marked by profound hardship and persistent mistreatment at the hands of the okiya proprietors. However, each adversity she faces only deepens her determination to break free from this oppressive environment. Feeling uncomfortable, Chiyo's attempts at initiative, where she tries to make decisions, are often met with punishment. Her attempt to escape the okiya, by climbing on one of the okiya's roofs, leads to a debilitating injury, instilling a sense of guilt and highlighting the limitations placed upon her. In Gion if a girl escapes from her okiya, she is assumed to be a "bad investment" and the okiya will discontinue the school fees (Golden, 1997, p. 48). Therefore, her effort to be a geisha could never come true without training lessons.

This sentiment is reflected in Auntie's reprimand in which she tells Chiyo that her mistake has permanently closed the path to a geisha's life and that neither she nor anyone else can intervene to change the outcome (Golden, 1997). Later, Chiyo's fortune takes a turn when she meets Mameha, one of Kyoto's most renowned and respected geishas, whose guidance propels Chiyo forward on her path to becoming a full-fledged geisha.

Sayuri's journey is filled with challenges that reflect the complexities of adolescent identity formation. Erikson posits that during adolescence, individuals often experience a period of role confusion as they experiment with different identities and roles. As Sayuri undergoes her geisha training, she experiences intense role confusion, a core component of Erikson's fifth stage. The Gion district, with its strict hierarchical structure and emphasis on artifice and entertainment, becomes the primary environment shaping Sayuri's identity. She undergoes intense training in the arts, manners, and the nuanced worldly machinations of a geisha's realm. Although this process helps her become more refined and self-controlled, it also makes her repress her own emotions and needs, which causes her to feel fragmented. The tension between societal roles and personal identity is shown by her being torn between the okiya's expectations and her identity. The demands and limitations imposed on her by the geisha system further complicate Sayuri's task of juggling her private identity with her public persona as a geisha at this period. Her early opposition to the strict rules of the geisha culture, which require obedience but provide little freedom, and her wish to reunite with her family are reflections of her battle for independence and self-determination. This conflict serves as an example of Erikson's assertion that adolescence is a time of experimentation and discovery when adolescents must reconcile their own beliefs with external influences.

The reality of being a geisha is far more complicated than the romanticized portrayal of a dazzling and endearing profession. In order to fulfill the requirements of the job, being a geisha necessitates a significant amount of dedication, sacrifice, and a willingness to forgo personal preferences (Muhaimi et al., 2020). The loss of Sayuri's individuality and the pressure to fit in with the strict social and cultural expectations of the geisha profession are two of the main obstacles she must overcome. While undergoing training to become a geisha, she is forced to conceal her innermost thoughts and feelings in order to fulfill the needs and whims of her clients (Handriyani & Astuti, 2019). This is exemplified in Sayuri's observation that "a geisha's life is a solitary one. We hide our true selves beneath makeup and the kimono, and though we may be surrounded by admirers, at heart we are always alone" (Golden, 1997, p. 131). This sense of isolation and the suppression of Sayuri's authentic self are central to her internal struggles as she navigates the demanding and often dehumanizing aspects of geisha life. During the initiation ceremony marking her transition to an apprentice geisha, Sayuri becomes acutely aware that the persona she must now embody as a geisha diverges significantly from her former identity as Chiyo:

> When I heard her call me "Sayuri", I realized what was bothering me. It was as if the little girl named Chiyo, running barefoot from the pond to her tipsy house, no longer existed. I felt that this new girl, Sayuri, with her gleaming white face and her red lips, had destroyed her. (Golden, 1997, p. 108)

Chiyo's transition into Sayuri is a pivotal moment in *Memoirs of a Geisha*, marking the transformation from a young girl into a sophisticated geisha. This metamorphosis involves not just a change of name but an embrace of a new identity marked by grace, artistry, and social acumen within the intricate world of geisha culture. Buried under a mask where she adorns herself with traditional geisha makeup and dons a kimono, Sayuri becomes aware of her metamorphosis into her geisha persona. This transformation from Chiyo to Sayuri is epitomized in the moment when she carefully applies her makeup before the mirror, thereby fully assuming the identity of a geisha (Golden, 1997). These beautiful artifices conceal not only the geisha's actual appearances, but also her emotions and feelings, alienating her from her inner self. Sayuri herself acknowledges this disconnection, describing how she has long mastered a practiced expression, which she terms her "Noh smile", likening it to the fixed, unchanging features of a traditional Noh mask (Golden, 1997 p. 1). The willingness to change her appearance and conceal her true feelings is essential in a successful geisha's life. Examining how she transforms herself into a geisha in a mirror, her mind is detached from her being. Upon adopting the name Sayuri, she experiences a profound sense of disconnection from her former identity as Chiyo, feeling as though her true self has vanished and can no longer be recognized by others. This physical transformation symbolizes her rebirth and the shedding of her previous identity as Chiyo of Yoroido. Sayuri's coming-of-age experiences further develop her persona as a geisha. At this stage, Sayuri is not yet able to assert her true sense of self, instead relying on the external definitions imposed upon her. This external conflict mirrors the internal struggles Sayuri faces as she grapples with her own desires and the expectations placed upon her.

The geisha culture with its emphasis on artistry, performance and the art of seduction profoundly influences Sayuri's sense of identity. A geisha is traditionally expected to entertain guests by performing various classical Japanese arts, including dance, vocal music, and the playing of traditional musical instruments. This is where the term originates—gei meaning "art", and geisha thus meaning "person of the arts": "… the "gei" of "geisha" means "arts" so the word "geisha" really means "artisan" or "artist"" (Golden, 1997, p. 92). The training process undertaken by apprentice geisha to master their craft is both rigorous and, at times, physically punishing, with disciplinary practices that may involve bodily pain being commonly reported (Iwasaki, 2003). To meet the demands of her job, a geisha must even control her emotions to the point where some feelings are denied to her (Hamada, 2016). Sayuri is taught that "it is not for Geisha to want. It is not for a Geisha to feel. Geisha is an artist of the floating world. She dances, she sings, she entertains you…" (Golden, 1997, p. 135).

The cultural expectations of becoming a geisha impose a distinct identity onto Sayuri, one that is in stark contrast with her initial self-concept. The strict codes of behavior, appearance, and performance required of a geisha in Gion mirror the societal roles that adolescents must navigate according to Erikson's theory. Once a girl becomes a geisha, her life is not easy. In addition to carefully maintaining their intricate hairstyles and managing the acquisition of ornate yet heavy kimonos, highly regarded geishas were frequently invited to participate in numerous social engagements each day (Iwasaki, 2003). They possessed exceptional conversational skills, offering intellectually stimulating and witty dialogue that their clients might not encounter within the domestic sphere, thereby exemplifying "precisely those aspects of femininity that are absent from, or only incidental to, the role of wife" (Dalby, 2000, p. 177). According to Gallagher (2003), geisha performances were among the most popular forms of entertainment in early 19th-century Japan. This high demand led to the proliferation of okiya establishments dedicated to training young girls in the arts of geisha performance. The process of becoming a geisha was arduous, requiring rigorous physical and psychological discipline. As noted by Handriyani (2019), women who entered the geisha profession often faced significant restrictions on their personal freedom, including limited autonomy in making decisions about their own lives and rights. After becoming a geisha, Sayuri is compelled to work diligently to generate significant income for the okiya. Her daily responsibilities frequently involve entertaining male patrons in teahouses late into the night. This demanding schedule leaves her physically exhausted, often to the point where she struggles to rise from bed the next morning. Her physical and emotional fatigue is vividly conveyed in her reflection that, upon rising each morning from her futon, she felt as though her body carried the weight and sharpness of a bucket full of nails (Golden, 1997). This simile underscores the debilitating exhaustion she endures, illustrating the harsh realities behind the elegant façade of a geisha's life.

Sayuri's role confusion is exacerbated by her lack of control over her circumstances and her limited understanding of the geisha world. In addition, Sayuri's relationships within the geisha house further complicate her initial identity formation. As a beautiful young and talented geisha, Sayuri becomes the target of jealousy, competition and manipulation from her rivals, who seek to undermine her position and take advantage of her vulnerabilities. This threatens Sayuri's sense of self-worth and belonging and fosters feelings of inferiority and inadequacy (Handriyani & Astuti, 2019). This is evident in Sayuri's recollection of the rivalry between herself and the geisha Hatsumomo, who "did everything in her power to ruin me" and "would have done anything to keep me from becoming a success" (Golden, 1997, p. 75). Hatsumomo is renowned for her beauty and a popular geisha in Gion. Being self-centered, Hatsumomo feels threatened by Sayuri's presence and beauty and does not allow any room for sisterhood. She deliberately fabricates stories in the presence of male patrons to humiliate Sayuri and obstruct her advancement, fully aware that a tarnished reputation can irreparably damage one's prospects of becoming a successful geisha. Since a geisha's professional standing is intricately tied to the maintenance of an idealized image characterized by flawless beauty and refined conduct, any disruption to this carefully crafted persona poses a significant threat to her social and occupational viability (Svalina, 2018).

Sayuri's rivalry with the cunning Hatsumomo, who is both a mentor and a tormentor, highlights the competitive nature of the geisha world, pushing her to strive for recognition and validation. At this time, Sayuri must navigate the stage of industry vs. inferiority, where she strives to develop a sense of competence and mastery within the geisha tradition. The constant need to maintain her status and value within the geisha community add an additional layer of stress and anxiety to Sayuri's identity formation. However, these formative years laid the foundation for Sayuri's identity as a geisha, instilling in her a deep sense of pride and a determination to excel in her craft. Within the boundaries of the geisha society, Sayuri finds opportunities for exploration and experimentation despite its strict framework. Sayuri's perception of what it means to be a geisha is eventually shaped by this period of apprenticeship which enables her to try on different personas, experiment with her appearance, and develop her skills.

As Sayuri becomes older and more accustomed to living as a geisha, she starts to explore her own identity more actively. This period of exploration is a crucial component of Erikson's theory, where adolescents experiment with different roles and beliefs to discover their true selves. A crucial moment in Sayuri's identity development occurs when she meets Mameha, a prosperous and kind-hearted geisha, who serves as her mentor and helps her navigate the complexities of the industry. Her mentorship under the elegant Mameha provides guidance and a model of successful geishahood, albeit one that emphasizes conformity to tradition. Under Mameha's tutelage, Sayuri learns the art of being a good geisha which is not easy. She has to master dancing, music, story-telling, be witty and be able to seduce the right client. She learns how to tantalize men gracefully by exposing just the right of her inner wrist while pouring tea. By showing a glimpse of her forearm, she "can keep [a male customer] happy by letting him think he is permitted to see parts of your body no one else can see" (Golden, 1997, p. 109). Mameha teaches Sayuri how to laugh properly when a man says a joke, how to drink tea and how to bow while walking in order to get rid of her "peasant" behaviors. Explaining to Sayuri that "a geisha must be very careful about the image she presents to the world" (Golden, 1997, p. 91), Mameha highlights the agency geishas possess in shaping and managing their public personas. Through a gradual internalization of the profession's codes of conduct and aesthetics, Sayuri evolves from a rural peasant into a refined and cultured geisha. Under Mameha's mentorship, Sayuri learns the art of being a geisha, not just as a series of rituals and performances, but as a means of self-expression and survival. This, once again, aligns with Erikson's theory that guidance from mentors and role models helps adolescents shape their identity. Mameha wants Sayuri to become a remarkable, independent geisha: "I didn't say popular… I said successful. When I say successful, I mean a geisha who

has earned her own independence" (Golden, 1997, p. 95). This phase of training and guidance is essential for Chiyo, establishing the groundwork for her eventual transformation into Sayuri, the renowned geisha, and shaping her emerging sense of identity. It highlights the rigorous discipline involved, the significant role of mentorship, and the personal resilience necessary to achieve success.

Another significant event that plays an essential role in Sayuri's identity formation is mizuage, signifying her transition from an apprentice "maiko" to a fully-fledged geisha. This transition represents a significant turning point in Sayuri's professional identity and provides her a sense of legitimacy and validation within the geisha hierarchy. Sayuri is profoundly impacted by the Mizuage ritual, which entails selling a geisha's virginity to the highest bidder, on the social, emotional, and psychological levels. Sayuri experiences internal struggle as a result of the mizuage process; she feels dehumanized but also understands that it is a vital step to her career success. She transforms from a dependent apprentice to a full-fledged geisha with greater freedom and authority over her life. However, her actual self, her longings for independence, love, and freedom remains suppressed as she conforms to the social standards of being a geisha. This tension between her public persona and inner self becomes a defining feature of her identity as she continues to cope with the world of the geisha. Svalina (2018) argues that although geishas are traditionally expected to suppress their emotions, Sayuri experiences difficulty adhering to this expectation, as she aspires to a life beyond the constraints imposed by her role: "I thought we all wanted kindness. Perhaps what you mean is that you want something more than kindness. And that is something you're in no position to ask" (Golden, 1997, p. 194).

The geishas are ranked according to their "market price and physical beauty" (Younus, 2022, p. 45). Therefore, the mizuage process is deeply transactional, reinforcing the idea that Sayuri's body, and by extension her identity, is a commodity. She is sold to the highest bidder, who assumes responsibility for funding her training and career while securing an exclusive sexual arrangement. The price of Sayuri's mizuage breaks the history as the highest mizuage auction price. Therefore, she secures her status as a legitimate daughter of the okiya and the debt she owes to the Mother for her purchase from her parents has been erased. This experience shapes her perception of herself, instilling in her the belief that her value in society is tied to how men view and desire her. While this can be seen as a form of exploitation, it also teaches Sayuri a harsh lesson about the dynamics of survival and power in the world she inhabits. She learns how to manoeuvre this commodification for her own benefit, using her beauty and charm to acquire status and security.

Sayuri's successful mizuage sale is explicitly mentioned as a means by which Mother attempts to profit from Sayuri's adoption. However, this adoption marks as an important step in Sayuri's journey of her identity development. As an adopted daughter, Sayuri has more freedom and autonomy in her work. She no longer has to worry about repaying debts to the okiya, which is a constant burden for geishas who are not adopted. Meanwhile, adoption does not guarantee her better fate. Sayuri has to prioritize the needs and interests of the okiya over her personal desires. This includes her romantic life, as she must pursue relationships that will benefit the okiya financially rather than following her heart.

Sayuri's transformation into a geisha involves a complete submission to the hierarchical structure of the geisha community, where she must obey the demands of the okiya. Following the completion of the mizuage ceremony, a geisha may be afforded the opportunity to secure a danna, a patron who provides financial and social support to ensure her long-term stability and success. This means that Sayuri must relinquish control over her own life, including her choice of partners and the direction of her career, in order to fulfill the expectations placed upon her. In geisha tradition, marriage, emotions, and housekeeping are not a part of their lives. They are not brought up to be wives, but artisans whose only job is to entertain their guests (Khan & Saiel, 2023). Sayuri is advised that achieving success as a geisha requires maintaining mastery over men's emotions at all times (Golden, 1997). Geishas do not marry nor, like prostitutes, sell their bodies for casual encounters; as emphasized in the narrative, a geisha of a higher rank in Gion cannot be purchased for a single evening (Golden, 1997). She is traditionally expected to be devoted only to men of honorable position and wealth.

A pivotal moment in Sayuri's identity formation occurs through her relationship with the Chairman, a figure who represents both an idealized future and a link to her past. Sayuri's meeting with the Chairman when she was twelve imprinted in her mind until she has grown mature:

> In that brief encounter with the Chairman, I had changed from a lost girl facing a lifetime of emptiness to a girl with purpose in her life. Perhaps it seems odd that a casual meeting on the street could have brought about such change. (Golden, 1997, p. 72)

Sayuri's sense of purpose is closely tied to her emotional connection with the Chairman. Therefore, she promises herself to do anything; even though she "would suffer through any training, bear up under any hardship, for a chance to attract the notice of a man like the Chairman again" (Golden, 1997, p. 73). She determines to work hard to become a successful geisha so she can get reunited with the Chairman: "To become a geisha ... well, that was hardly a purpose in life. But to be a geisha ... I could see it now as a stepping-stone to something else" (Golden, 1997, p. 73). Sayuri's love for the Chairman is not merely romantic, but also a quest for a sense of belonging and validation within the tumultuous life of a geisha. According to Erikson, relationships play a significant role in identity development as they provide adolescents with feedback that helps shape their self-concept. Sayuri's admiration for the Chairman becomes a guiding force in her journey, motivating her to succeed as a geisha.

As Sayuri becomes an established geisha, she faces the challenge of forming intimate relationships while maintaining her public persona. Her complex relationships with men, particularly with the Chairman, demonstrate her struggle with intimacy. Sayuri longs for genuine connection but often feels isolated due to the superficial nature of her profession: "The more I became a person of importance, the more isolated I felt" (Golden, 1997, p. 138). This quote encapsulates her paradoxical existence; while she garners fame and attention, it does not fulfill her emotional needs. The conflict between her desire for intimacy and the isolation imposed by her roles underscores her ongoing search for identity and acceptance. Sayuri's personal and emotional desires often conflict with the demands of her profession. Throughout the novel, she struggles to reconcile her deep longing for love and personal fulfillment with the constraints of her role as a geisha. She yearns for a life of emotional and physical intimacy, yet the nature of her work requires her to maintain a distance from her clients and to prioritize their needs over her own. Teaching Sayuri the meaning of becoming a geisha, Mameha says: "We did not become Geisha so our lives would be satisfying. We became Geisha because we had no other choice" (Golden, 1997, p. 195).

Sayuri's internal conflict is, once again, evident in her longing for freedom and her affection for the Chairman. Her struggle to reconcile these conflicting aspects of her identity reflects Erikson's notion of an identity crisis, where adolescents face a fundamental conflict between who they are and who they want to be. Sayuri's feelings for the Chairman, a figure of power and unattainable affection, represent her yearning for genuine connection and love. However, her role as a geisha limits her agency in pursuing a romantic relationship freely. This reinforces the conflict between her personal desires and the expectations placed upon her, hindering her ability to fully integrate her romantic self into her overall identity. However, through perseverance, resilience, and the guidance of her mentor, Sayuri eventually achieves a sense of identity as a geisha. She masters the art of her profession, becoming renowned for her beauty, grace, and captivating presence. Her journey highlights that identity formation is not about conforming to a singular, static role. Instead, it's about integrating various aspects of oneself – personal desires, societal expectations, and individual talents – into a cohesive and authentic sense of self. While Sayuri embraces the geisha persona, she does so on her own terms, maintaining a sense of agency and individuality within the confines of her role.

Sayuri's eventual embrace of her geisha identity can be seen as a resolution of her identity crisis, where she integrates the cultural expectations of her role with her personal ambitions and emotional needs. However, this resolution comes with a price: in order to fit the geisha character, she must repress some parts of her identity.

In the novel, Sayuri's last phase of adolescence corresponds with Erikson's idea of identity formation, in which a person commits to a certain set of roles, values, and objectives. Even while she is still struggling with her own ambitions and the constraints of her career, Sayuri gradually accepts her identity as a geisha and the power and influence it grants her.

Sayuri's recognition of her geisha identity marks an important turning point in her growth. In her job, she finds stability and coherence as she realizes that her identity is shaped not just by her position as a geisha but also by her own ideals, fortitude, and ability to love and care for others. This resolution is in line with Erikson's theory that identity formation involves striking a balance that permits ongoing development rather than fully resolving internal conflicts.

Sayuri exhibits a constant process of adaptation and redefinition in spite of the external demands to fit in, which is consistent with Erikson's theory that identity formation is a continual process. Sayuri suggests that her identity is not set in stone but rather changes as a result of her experiences and shifting circumstances by reflecting on her history and self-concept even after becoming a successful geisha. Erikson's theory that adolescence is a foundation for lifetime identity development rather than a definitive period is consistent with this adaptable approach to identity creation.

IV. Conclusion

In *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Arthur Golden crafts a narrative that vividly mirrors Erik Erikson's theory of identity formation, particularly the adolescent stage of identity versus role confusion. Through Sayuri's transformation—from a powerless child to a self-possessed geisha—readers witness the nuanced interplay between individual agency and the constraints of societal expectations. Sayuri's journey illustrates how identity is not only discovered but also constructed through a series of trials, commitments, and evolving self-perceptions. Her struggle to define herself within the rigid framework of pre-war Japanese society underscores the universal nature of Erikson's theory, while also highlighting the profound influence of cultural and historical context on personal development. Ultimately, Sayuri's ability to reconcile internal desires with external pressures affirms Erikson's assertion that successful identity formation involves both personal growth and contextual adaptation. This analysis reaffirms the enduring relevance of Eriksonian psychology in literary studies and invites further exploration into how diverse cultural narratives can enrich one's understanding of developmental theory.

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Nibras Jawad Kadhim, born in Baghdad, Iraq, on March 3, received her Bachelor of Arts in English language from the University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq, in 1999. She earned her Master of Arts in English Literature from the University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq, in 2002.

She taught as a graduate teaching assistant at the University of Baghdad. She has held faculty positions at the College of Education. Currently, she is an Assistant professor of English literature at the University of Baghdad. Her work has appeared in scholarly journals such as International Journal of Arabic- English Studies. She is also the author of A Dystopian Future: Social Oppression and Religious Extremism in Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale. Her current research focuses on dystopian literature and postcolonial theory, while her earlier work examined gender and feminism in literature.

Assistant Prof. Kadhim is a member of the scientific committee. She regularly reviews manuscripts for peer-reviewed publications in her field. Email: nibrasjwad@yahoo.com ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9914-5522