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Having thus treated Osaka, Mizoguchi and his producer, Nagata, of the Dai-Ichi Motion Picture Company, decided to make films about two more cities, Kyoto and Kobe. The latter was never completed because the company failed, but the former was one of the best Japanese films ever made, the one which the critic Tadashi Iijima, among others, considers "the best prewar sound film." The title was *Sisters of the Gion*, the sisters being two geisha from the well-known Gion district of Kyoto. The younger is a *moga*—a derogatory portmanteau of the English "modern girl"—and thus is inclined to ignore the traditions of both her profession in particular and Japanese traditional society in general. The elder possesses all of the virtues of the legendary geisha. Despite the geisha code which authorizes a girl only one patron, the younger sister jumps from one man to another in search of ready cash. She also decides that her sister needs a new patron since the old one has lost all of his money, and so tells him that her sister is no longer available; and all the while she herself is going up the ladder of success from one man to that man's boss. Later, one of the younger's jealous expatrons pushes her from a moving automobile, but even when she is lying in the hospital, injured and hence unable to interfere with her sister's life, the elder, the traditional geisha, is too stupid, too encumbered by tradition, to attempt to

rejoin her old lover. Completely conditioned by her own code, she will always be afraid of going against custom. The younger sister, injured though she is, has every chance of recovery and there is a strong possibility of her taking up where she left off.

If the director's own sentiments occasionally and by default go to the elder sister, his ending leaves her condemned. The situation is such, however, that the spectator too must make a choice, because, for a Japanese at any rate, the problem suggested by the film is a very vital one and by implication goes far beyond the narrow world of the geisha. Aiding this effect of impartiality, which is the effect of realism itself, was Mizoguchi's striving for actuality and, in doing so, successfully evoking the very special atmosphere of this single tiny section of Japan. To project regional atmosphere is no easy task in a country where smallness and centralization conspire to make differences extremely subtle, yet never have the narrow Gion alleys and the backrooms of its teahouses appeared more inviting. To the Japanese this picture was more than merely slice-of-life. It went beyond documentation and projected the other-world atmosphere of the Gion itself.

