

JAPANESE GIRL AMONG REAL STARS OF MOVIES

Osiern Oaki, Tragedienne in Nippon, Schoolgirl, Dancing Girl and Motion Picture Actress in America, Describes Notable Career.



Tsuru Oaki

It is easy to classify her as the yellow peril, for there is just the faintest tint of saffron in the coloring of her skin and she upholds her allegiance to other picture favorites. Tragedienne in Nippon, schoolgirl, dancing girl and motion picture star in America, Tsuru Oaki is the subject of the third article that The Sunday Oregonian is printing on moving picture stars.

BY RAY W. FROHMAN.
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IN THESE days we find much in the public prints about "picture brides" and what they do—or don't.

Tsuru Oaki is not a picture bride—but she makes a wonderful picture, whether as a bride or not.

And what she does—or doesn't—is of very great interest the moment that one comes under the spell of her winsome personality in interviewing her.

For O Tsuru San is the "Madame Butterfly" of moving pictures—the only Japanese girl star on the silver screen in all America.

Comeliness is Typical.

Her comeliness is typical of the maid of the land of the rising sun. The rouse upon her eyelids and lips blends well with the natural tan of her complexion. Her mass of resplendent jet-black hair is done up in quaint fashion, with sweeping lines curiously suggestive of the prow of a model ship—the coiffure of the aristocratic girl in Japan.

Dull blues and greens and white blend pleasingly in the figures of her simple cotton kimono—the sort that Japanese wear to smoke.

A "shimada" (tiny headress) of coral and white, and a wide bright-blue "ohi" (sash) encircles her waist upon it, tied in a huge bow in the back, and with a touch of orange beneath it, lend brighter touches. Her feet are clad in a sort of thin white socks ("tabi"), reaching only to the instep and left with the strings of the "zori" (sandals).

She is like the pictures of dainty geisha girls we all have seen.

Her father is stern.

Her stern, gray-haired "father" looks as if he has just stepped out of an old Japanese print. He is wearing a divided skirt-like garment of smoke gray, with a silken black overgarment. But he is her father only on the screen.

On either hand are Jirikishas and groups of Nipponese men and women, the rikishaw runners wearing loose jackets and shirts of dark blue and full-length hose—the gardener's costume, the "happi," consisting of "hanten," "haragake" and "momohiki." Great white pancake-shaped hats, called "kasa," complete the bizarre medieval costumes.

Just Like Japan.

Tsuru was really "on location" in these outdoor scenes of her Japanese home and garden—some of which were taken at night—although she was still within the vast enclosure of the Universal studio-rancho. She was making a Japanese photoplay containing scenes in Nippon and Washington, D. C., in which she has the biggest emotional part she has ever played.

It was somewhat of a shock, amid this realistic scene of romantic Japan, to have young Pat O'Malley, maintaining unstable equilibrium in a rikshaw and puffing on a commonplace and strong pipe, call my attention to a fly on the end of her father's nose, which necessitated a "retake."

But it was really none of O'Malley's business if it took Tsuru's Japanese maid an hour to fix her hair that way; and I tried not to realize that the sitting, soft music wafted from the sidelines, to inspire Tsuru while "smoking," emanated from a painfully American piano-acordion.

Yet there were the Santa Monica foothills—no Fujiyama in sight.

From "Stage People."

"He wants to interview you," said "Mike" Boylen to Tsuru.

"Oh, I'm so fine to interview!" Tsuru replied with a pleasant, bashful little smile. "How do you do? What shall I tell you?"

"All my people were stage people in Japan—not my mother and father, but my uncle, aunt, sisters. I started to act when I was seven—I was born in Tokio—played child parts till I was nine in melodrama and historical plays, something like Shakepeare—all of course, in Japanese.

"Then I came to this country with my aunt and uncle and their Japanese repertoire company in 1903. They were the first company like that ever to come to the United States, and played in San Francisco, Chicago, New York and Boston; I only went with them as far as San Francisco. I went to school, in convents, in Pasadena, Chicago and Colorado Springs, finishing a high school course.

Asked Into Pictures.

"About six years ago, when I had just finished school, Fred Mace—he's dead now—wanted to produce some Japanese comedies in pictures. He couldn't find a leading woman. He had met me socially, and offered me

the position. I said I'd do the best I could."

"Mind you, Tsuru hadn't acted for 11 years; and then she had acted in Japanese in spoken drama (not comedy) in Japan, and only in child parts when she was 9 years old.

"Wasn't it entirely different in pictures?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied, adding with another dainty little smile: "There were many 'retakes!' It was an entirely new art to me. It was almost as new to me as if I had never acted.

"They were making split reels then. Mr. Mace was the star. I was at the new Majestic studio on Boyle Heights. He saw that the first one was all right, so he had me make another one.

Gets a New Play.

"A few months later, at the same studio, Lucius Henderson was directing an emotional drama, 'The Oath of O Tsuru San,' written by Bill Nye, the man who directed the filming of Ambassador Gerard's 'My Four Years in Germany.' It was one of the first two-reelers ever made—they thought they were taking a terrible chance making such a long picture.

"Mr. Henderson started me in that. It was the first time I had started. It was also the first drama I had been in in pictures.

"Then Thomas Ince signed me to star at Inceville for six months. Later I signed a contract there for a year more—making it about the end of 1914. Of course, I made many pictures there, but the most important one was a six-reeler, 'Wrath of the Gods.' I co-starred with Henry Woodruff in 'The Beckoning Flame,' an East Indian picture."

Enter at this juncture the only other Japanese screen star before the American public, the handsome and accomplished Sessue Hayakawa, well known formerly in support parts, but now and now as a star himself, principally, like Tsuru, in Japanese, Indian and East Indian dramas.

Sessue Hayakawa (pronounced Sess-you Hieh-sh-kah-wah, with the accent on the "Sess") and the "Jah" and Tsuru Aoki (pronounced Tso-roo Ah-oh-kee, with the accent on the "roo" and the "oh") don't mention it—were both at Inceville at the same time. They had known each other many years.

Both were Japanese, both were stars, and both were unpronounceable. Therefore, obviously, what could be simpler than changing her name to "Hayakawa," and thus cutting the public's difficulty in two? Nothing. It was done.

Next Tsuru went to the Laasy studio for a year, until about the beginning of 1916; not merely loving, honoring and obeying her Hayakawa, but "supporting" him as well—speaking in dramatic parlance, not financially. Among the many pictures she made was Hector Turnbull's "Allen Souls," in which Tsuru and Sessue co-starred.

But, somehow or other—though discerning souls interested in art and ability, as such, are exceptions—the public, particularly the younger, more sentimental, unmarried portion of the public, and married folks who are weary of their mates, likes its romance unmarred, as it were. It didn't seem too good to the powers that be to have Sessue and his spouse in the same pictures.

Gets Star Contract.

So obliging little Tsuru stayed out of pictures for about a year and a half—except for starring in one Sessue film, "The Curse of Iku."

Hayakawa, about the middle of 1917, started his own company at the Brunton studio with William Worthington as director—the "Hay" and the "Worth," producing the name "Haworth" for the company, and the company producing five-reelers.

Tsuru has been playing there off and on as leading lady for her hubby, until a couple of months ago, when she signed a contract to star in three Universal pictures.

Tsuru tells me, in case you'd like to know, that there are many Japanese picture companies making films in Japan for the Japanese, but despite the wealth of natural scenery in the island empire they are making all their pictures on the stage.

Also, Tsuru, all of whose roles have been emotional ones since the two comedies made during her first picture engagement, "would like to do light comedy—not 'slapstick'—if she can find a suitable play."

"How did it happen?" I asked her, "that only a couple of months after you started in pictures, Lucius Henderson started you in that emotional drama, 'The Oath of O Tsuru San'?"

She uttered a quiet little laugh at the question, and then replied: "Oh, Mr. and Mrs. Henderson were fond of me. They thought I'd do better in drama than in comedy. They'd already bought that Japanese drama, and there weren't very many Japanese in this work. I suppose I was lucky."

And then the quaint, charming little Japanese Bernhard fitted with her maid in a most commonplace American automobile and was waited hence to her dressing room.



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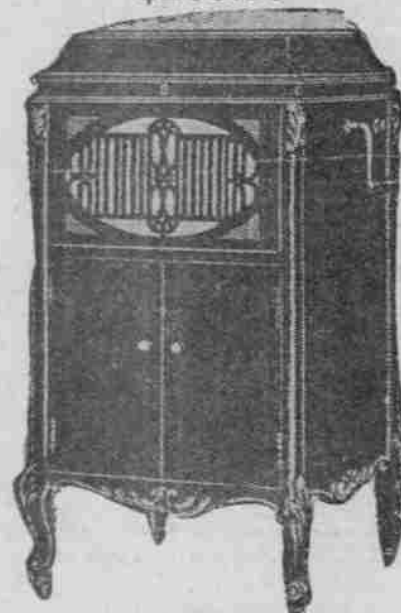
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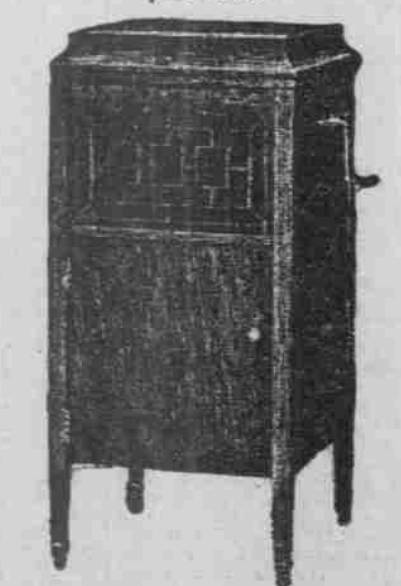
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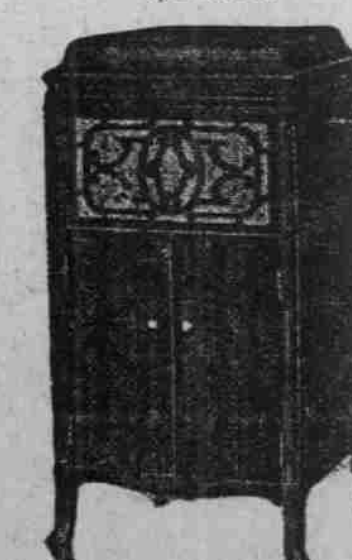
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