



Actress Oon Shu An (left) plays Jing Fei (above), the favourite concubine of chancellor Jia Sidao (played by Los Angeles-based Singapore actor Chin Han, above). PHOTOS: DESMOND FOO, PHIL BRAY FOR NETFLIX

# Oon's big break in Hollywood

Singapore actress Oon Shu An lands concubine role in \$120-million series Marco Polo, which is available on Netflix

**Boon Chan**  
Media Correspondent

**W**hen you watch the new Netflix series Marco Polo, you will see a Singapore face among the cast. Young Singapore actress Oon Shu An has received the biggest break of her career by landing the part of a concubine in the Asian period drama.

And she is not the only Singapore name in the series. Four other Singapore actors had speaking parts, including Tan Kheng Hua and Los Angeles-based Chin Han.

The series – all 10 episodes are available on Netflix, which provides on-demand streaming content, from tomorrow – is about the titular Venetian explorer (played by relative unknown Lorenzo Richelmy) and his adventures in Mongolian conqueror Kubla Khan's court in 13th-century China.

Oon, 28, plays Jing Fei, the favourite concubine of chancellor Jia Sidao (played by Chin) from the preceding Song dynasty.

Landing a part in the US\$90-million (S\$110-million) production is a big deal, Oon tells Life! in a recent interview.

"For Hollywood to basically come to our backdoor, we're very, very lucky. I know a lot of actors who have gone to Los Angeles and New York and just go knocking on doors, so for them to come here and be casting here is pretty exciting for the entire industry," she adds.

The alumnus of Lasalle College of the Arts has been active in the local theatre and television scene. Her credits include the one-woman play #UnicornMoment and the Channel 5 parody sketch series, Random Island. She will also play a defence attorney in the upcoming third season of Channel 5's Code Of Law.

Trailers for Marco Polo suggest there will be generous servings of nudity and violence. Asked where the show falls on a scale between the wholesome The Sound Of Music (1965) and the bloody and sexy epic fantasy Game Of Thrones, Oon responds with a hearty laugh: "I would say it's the Asian Game Of Thrones."

She points out, though, that there is no nudity for her character.

She says of disrobing for the camera: "Sometimes, I feel like I don't mind, but I don't know how my parents would feel about it. If it's well-written and you really get to see the character as a human being, that's something I would consider."

"But generally, I try to shy away from unnecessarily sexualised characters. Nudity is really something I would consider very carefully."

But what if the role of Jing Fei had called for it? Oon, who is dating a photographer, admits she would have thought twice about taking the role then, and adds: "It's forever, you know."

Most of her scenes were with Chin and they were quite a challenge as a lot of them were about her processing information and her emotions internally. She says: "For Code Of Law, you give me pages of script and I'm like, 'Yes!'. You just work with what the words do, whereas just existing is one of the hardest things to do."

The actress was also impressed by the scale of the production. There were 160 people just in the art department alone.

"It was really cool seeing everyone being so specialised in each field and going into minute details. There's a person whose job is to colour the costumes so it looks like it's been weathered," she recalls.

And having everything taken care of was a liberating experience as well. "You really just focus on the acting, which is really nice," she says.

She hopes that Marco Polo will help open doors for her. "The whole thing of 'Do you want to go to Hollywood?' has entered my mind and if there are opportunities, I would definitely think about exploring the options. Singapore is still home but I would love to work around the world."

✉ [bchan@sph.com.sg](mailto:bchan@sph.com.sg)

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