

## S'porean Harvard scholar & equity fund associate takes to Tokyo streets as Japan's 1st foreign oiran

*The most elegant performer there, if we do say so ourselves.*

By [Yeo Kaiqi](#) | ⌚ 22 hours

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Here's something cool that you might not have heard about that happened late last month.

While all of us were busy [getting mad about the presidential \(s\)election](#), Singaporean Rachel Leng was getting out there and making a name for us in a pretty interesting way.

[According to The Japan News](#), one of Japan's five national newspapers, the 27-year-old was selected to perform as one of five *oiran* of the annual [Shinagawa Shukuba Matsuri festival](#), an annual cultural event held in Tokyo, Japan.

Here she is, second from the left:





Photo via Rachel Leng's Facebook post

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You can see her walking elegantly down the street in super high wooden platform clogs here. In this video in particular, she demonstrates a distinctive style called “soto hachimonji”, in which the walker’s feet trace a sideways arc on the ground:

### **But first, what’s an *oiran*, and what’s this festival?**

An *oiran* is a Japanese prostitute who was very popular and highly regarded mostly for her beauty — not to be confused with the better-known term *geisha*, who is very skilled in song, dance, playing an instrument, and otherwise entertaining guests.

Leng appears in the “Oiran Dochu”, one of the main attractions of the Shinagawa Shukuba Matsuri, which celebrates the history of Shinagawa during the Edo period and its role in making Tokyo the city it is today, by re-creating the din and bustle of the Shinagawa ward back then.

The “Oiran Dochu” is a procession of kimono-clad ladies who perform as the traditional Japanese *oiran* courtesans. Prostitution is today banned in Japan, by the way, so there aren’t (supposed to be) anymore legitimate *oirans* left.

The festival also features other performances, such as a fire-walking exercise by monks, a fire-exercise by samurai warriors, and a street performance by a monkey.

And Leng was chosen out of 45 women to join the four locals by the festival’s executive committee in the hopes of attracting interest from foreigners ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.



We also know this is a pretty big deal since she was also featured on *Sankei News*, another national newspaper:



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This year's festival took place on September 23, and Leng instantly caught the attention of many festival visitors when she charmingly took to the streets in the procession:



Photo by David Lewis/Facebook.com



Photo via Rachel Leng's Facebook post



Photo via Rachel Leng's Facebook post

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An advertisement for Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE) ALSO Wi-Fi. The ad features the HPE logo and "Hewlett Packard Enterprise" text on the left, and the "ALSO" logo on the right. The main text reads "Simple à installer, facile à gérer" and "Wi-Fi pour petites entreprises". At the bottom, it says "HPE OfficeConnect" and "En Savoir Plus" next to a green arrow icon.

Here are a few more close-up shots with more details of Leng in her outfit:

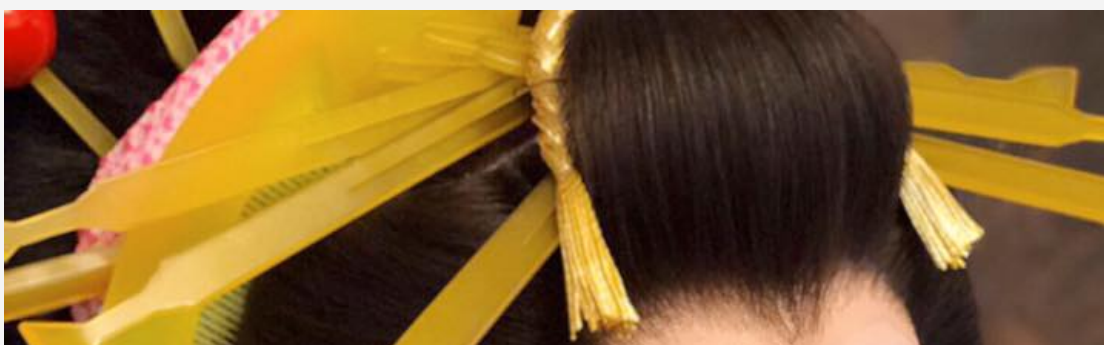




Photo via Rachel Leng's Facebook post







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Speaking to *The Japan News*, Leng said she put herself up for the *oiran* role as she “thought [she] could learn more about Japanese history and culture by participating in the festival as a cast member, not just as a visitor”.

“It is really eye-opening for me that Japanese do things like this with so much sophistication... It’s a great honour for me to take on a key role in a local festival. I think it’s a big step forward as Tokyo becomes more international.”

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## A brainy beauty







Photo via Rachel Leng's Facebook page

As attractive as she is, the former Miss Singapore 2013 title holder (she was named Miss Beauty with a Purpose) is more than an elegant face.

Leng happens to be a graduate alumna of Harvard University, where she did a Master's degree on scholarship in East Asian Studies. She did her Bachelor degree in public policy at Duke University.

At the moment, Leng is based in Tokyo, where she moved to in January to work as an associate at a private equity fund.

Nobbad.

Top image via [Rachel Leng's FB](#)

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## About Yeo Kaiqi



Kaiqi believes she's the reincarnation of ancient China's royalty. When she's not deluded, she behaves like a cat hoping to conquer the internet.



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