

Orizuru Osen (The Downfall of Osen) and *Tojin Okichi*

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(Film critic)



Kenji Mizoguchi directed *Orizuru Osen* (The Downfall of Osen) in 1935. The original film is a sound picture. A sound picture is a film with an extraordinary format with lines as subtitles like a silent film, but with recorded music and narration. Sound films were made when film production was shifted from silent to talkie films. The first successful talkie film, *Madamu to Nyobo* (The Neighbor's Wife and Mine) was produced in 1931. *Orizuru Osen* (The Downfall of Osen) was originally produced as a silent film, but producers assumed that a silent film would not bring much profit as most other films were produced as talkies, and changed it to a sound picture halfway through the shooting. In the version presented by *Talking Silents*, Midori Sawato's newly-recorded narration is combined with the original sound.

This is a very valuable and significant project as it re-produced the film that was neither silent nor talkie into a silent film with Benshi narration. Unfortunately, its original did not become very popular and was quietly forgotten by public. Although it was an ambitious work of the maestro Mizoguchi, it gave the bizarre impression of a sound picture shifted from a silent film because of business matters. I hope that the public will rediscover it in the version presented in *Talking Silents*.

The original story was written by Kyoka Izumi who also wrote *Taki no Shiraito* (The Water Magician). He uses unique and beautiful poetic lines throughout the story. These lines follow the rhythmic pattern of the seven-and-five syllable meter. It is quite fascinating when read silently or aloud as a poem. However, it sounds unnatural when pronounced as normal lines. Such lines are best for benshi narration, as it sounds like a poem read aloud. You can enjoy these unique narrations with benshi performance that is only possible for silent films.

Tojin Okichi is a 1930 film adaptation of the best-selling novel written by Yagisaburo Juichi. There is a myth that Kenji Mizoguchi was really into the film making and tried to cut down a telephone pole that was getting in the way of the cameras. From this period, it is said that the realism in Kenji Mizoguchi's films was carried to extremes. Yoko Umemura played the leading part in this film. She was the most important actress for Kenji Mizoguchi's early films.