

# Asian

# Representation Matters:

An intersectional study of the confluence of playwrighting, casting practices, and progressive productions as they relate to diversity and inclusion in theatre, film, and television.

Created for the students of the McLennan College Theatre Department

Kathleen Laundy, Professor of Costume Design

# Acknowledgements

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Molly Adams Barker, Freelance Writer; owner Grapheme Services, Austin TX.

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# Why do we need to know this?

American theatre, film, and television have a long and problematic history with systemic racism, misogyny, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and ableism:

Although BIPOC make up 70% of the world's population (and 67% of the world's non-Christians), white performers held 76% of the roles during the decade between 2006-2016 on Broadway. Of the 24% of the roles that went to minority actors (which includes all non-whites plus actors with disabilities) only 10.7% of those were non-traditionally cast. In other words, roles that could have been filled by a performer of any ethnic background, nearly always went to a white actor. White actors also earn higher wages than BIPOC actors.

Specifically, AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islanders) make up 5.6% of the US population, that's 22.6 million people, yet on TV only 35% of shows have any AAPI series regulars, and of those, 68% only have one, leading to tokenization.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we should know better and do better. We hope through education and deliberate action toward inclusivity in our productions as well as our classes, to increase the representation of these under-represented groups in both our student population and the plays we produce.

<https://howlround.com/how-liberal-arts-theatre-programs-are-failing-their-students-color>

<https://variety.com/2016/film/news/movie-tv-diversity-study-hollywood-straight-white-male-1201711586/>

[http://www.aapacnyc.org/uploads/1/1/9/4/11949532/aapac\\_2015-2016\\_10year\\_report.pdf](http://www.aapacnyc.org/uploads/1/1/9/4/11949532/aapac_2015-2016_10year_report.pdf)

<https://allarts.org/2019/03/study-finds-decrease-in-broadway-diversity-following-a-record-breaking-year/>



Asian Americans are from these countries:

- Australia--Aborigines
- Bangladesh
- Bhutan
- Burma
- Cambodia
- China
- India
- Indonesia
- Japan
- North Korea
- South Korea
- Laos
- Malaysia
- Mongolia
- Nepal
- New Zealand--Maoris
- The Pacific Islands
- Papa New Guinea
- The Philippines
- Singapore
- Sri Lanka
- Thailand
- Taiwan
- Vietnam



# Map of the Pacific Islands

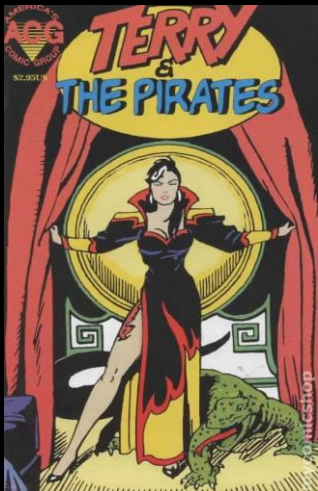
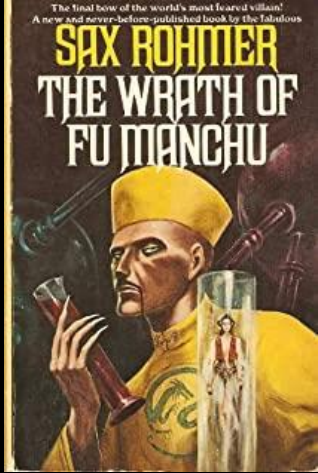


# Asian Tropes

<https://libguides.ithaca.edu/c.php?g=861718&p=6175738>

<https://asianamericanmediarepresentation.weebly.com/stereotypes-in-film.html>

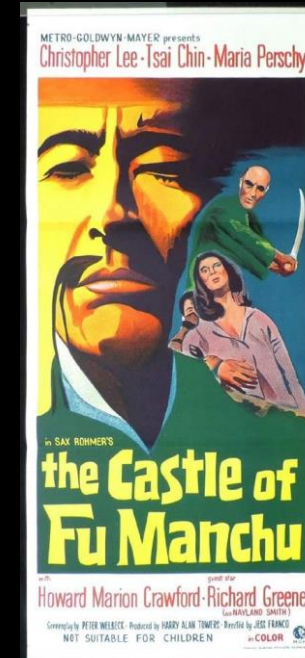
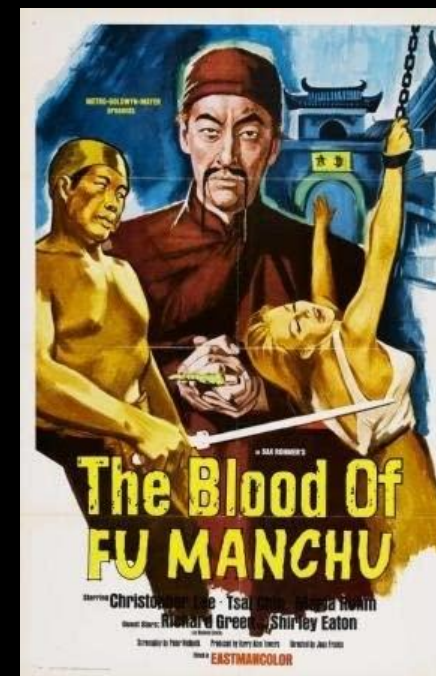
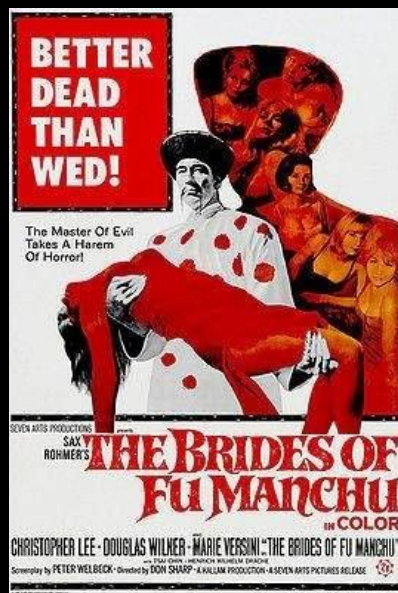
<https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/MagicalAsian>



- **Fu Manchu:** A series of 13 books by Sax Rohmer starting in 1913— millions of copies sold, adapted to radio, comics, TV and 50+ films. Fu Manchu was an evil genius criminal mastermind, cruel and cunning, over-sexed, and lusting after white women. Because of these books Chinese people were portrayed as a threat to Western culture—the *yellow peril*. He appeared in silent films beginning in 1923, and continuing to 1940. He disappeared from the screen for 25 years due to WWII and the Chinese being victims of the Japanese Genocide. He returned in 1965 due to the Communist Scare during the Cold War when Christopher Lee made 5 more movies about him. Ming the Merciless from *Flash Gordon* is a perfect example of this stereotype, as is Dr. Who from *King Kong Escapes*, Lo Pan from *Big Trouble in Little China*, Ra'za Ghul from *Batman Begin*, and The Jade Emperor from *Forbidden Kingdom*.
- **Dragon Lady:** Femme Fatale (beautiful but deadly) character from the comic book series called *Terry and the Pirates*, written by Milton Caniff, which ran from 1934-1973. Dragon Lady is characterized by her overt sexual and physical aggression, untrustworthiness, and mysteriousness. She has legs for miles, speaks cryptically using flowery metaphors, and might kill you with a blade. Her father is either Fu Manchu or an Opium king. Anna May Wong was famous for playing this character which was recycled later as Aura in *Flash Gordon*. The next gen of this trope is the female martial artist such as General Fang from *Around the World in 80 Days*, Miss East from *The Wild, Wild West*, O-Ren Ishi in *Kill Bill*, Knives at the end of *Scott Pilgrim*, White Haired Witch in *Forbidden Kingdom*, Lady Shiva from *Birds of Prey*, Katana in *Suicide Squad*, Myca in *The Crow*, Ching Shih in *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*, as well as Miss Scarlet in the original US version of *Clue The Board Game*. Later, more watered-down instances were Suzie Wong, Mdm. Piranha from *King Kong Escapes*. Ling Woo on *Ally McBeal*, The Ronettes during “Da-Doo” in *Little Shop of Horrors*, Cynthia from *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, and the Cool Asians from *Mean Girls*.

[https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=bridges\\_contemporary\\_connections](https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=bridges_contemporary_connections)









Big Trouble in Little China



King Kong Escapes



Flash



Batman Begins



Forbidden Kingdom





# Dragon Lady



Flash



Flash



Flash



Flash



Flash





*Around the World in 80 Days*



*Clue*



*Birds of Prey*



*The Crow*



*Scott Pilgrim*



*Kill Bill Vol. 2*



*Forbidden Kingdom*



*Suicide Squad*



*The Wild Wild West*



*Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*





Suzie Wong



Little Shop of Horrors



Flower Drum Song



King Kong Escapes



# Dragon Lady



Glee



Mean Girls



Priscilla Queen of the Desert



Ally McBeal



# More Asian Tropes



- **Charlie Chan:** Charlie Chan is a Honolulu police detective created by Earl Biggers in 1925 for his series of six books. Chan was based on real life detectives Chang Apana and Lee Fook, who Biggers had read about on a trip to Hawaii. Biggers felt that the Fu Manchu stereotype was a bad thing. "Sinister and wicked Chinese are old stuff, but an amiable Chinese on the side of law and order has never been used." Charlie is polite, apologetic, and assimilated. Although he speaks in broken English, his Number One Son speaks English perfectly. Both Charlie and Number One Son dress in western style clothing. Charlie is very intelligent, honest, and loyal to the US. Biggers' books were adapted into 48 films starring Swedish actor Warner Oland. This trope continues on as Kato in *Green Hornet*, Sulu in *Star Trek*, Sidney Wang in *Murder by Death*, Detective Sgt. Yemana in *Barney Miller*, Demetri Noh in *Flashforward*, Hiro in *Heroes*, and Beast Boy in *Titans*.



- **China Dolls:** This stereotype began with Puccini's Opera *Madame Butterfly*, in which a 15 year old Japanese girl marries an American GI, waits 3 years for him to come back, and then commits suicide when he shows up with his American wife to get his half-Japanese son to take back to the US. It's what *Miss Saigon* is based on. They can be nobles or peasants, they speak softly and gently and are pretty but not sexy. They're girlfriend material, basically Maryanne to the Dragon Lady's Ginger. Miyoshi Umeki played these roles her entire career. A modern example is Knives from *Scott Pilgrim*. She began as a China Doll until she realizes she's lost Scott, and then she morphs into a Dragon Lady. More examples are Kumiko from *Karate Kid*, Golden Sparrow from *Forbidden Kingdom*, Lily Onakuramar from *Pitch Perfect*, *Hidden Dragon*, and Pei Pei from *Shanghai Noon*.

<https://libguides.ithaca.edu/c.php?g=861718&p=6175738>

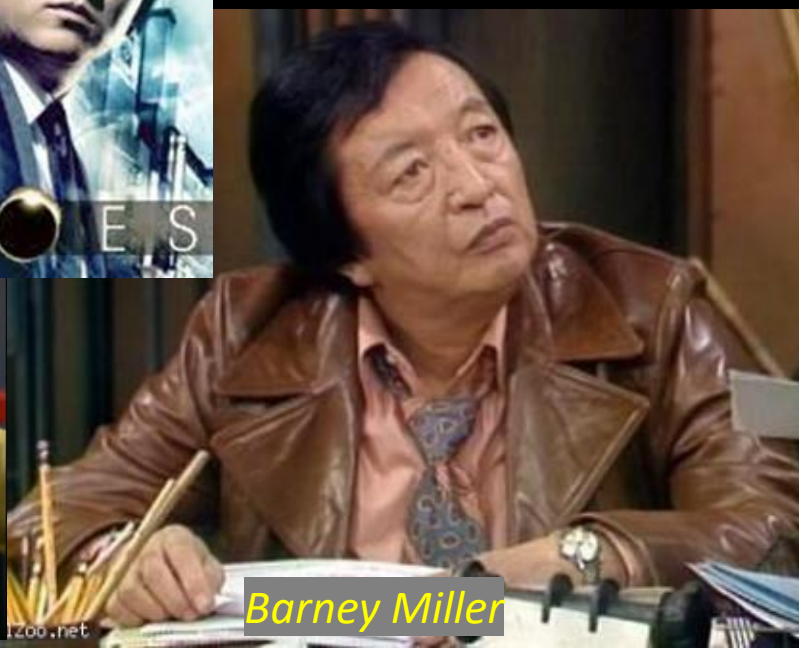
<https://asianamericanmediarepresentation.weebly.com/stereotypes-in-film.html>

<https://geishaofjapan.com/geisha-in-the-media/geisha-in-western-movies/>

[https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=bridges\\_contemporary\\_connections](https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=bridges_contemporary_connections)



# Charlie Chan







Flower Drum Song



Sayonara



The Courtship of Eddie's Father



Karate Kid 2

# China Doll



Shanghai Noon

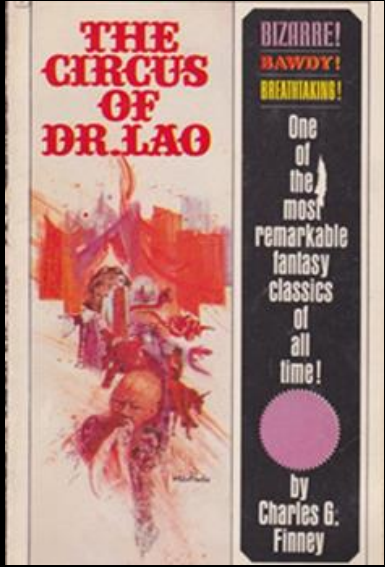


Forbidden Kingdom

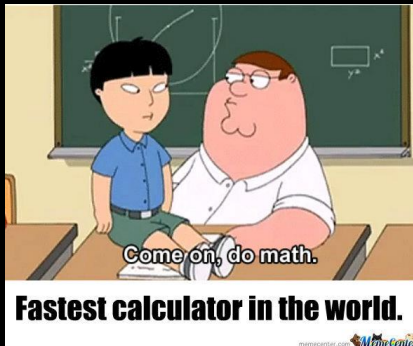




# Even More Asian Tropes



- **The Magical Asian:** 1934 book by Charles G. Finney *The Circus of Dr. Lao*. The Mystic/Guru/Sensei character is a wise Asian mentor to a usually white character. He exists to dispense lessons to white characters using the wisdom of his people. He will usually be a martial arts master, a practitioner of traditional Asian medicine, or a sage of some Eastern religion. Expect at least one scene of him meditating. He will often quote Koans attributed to Buddha, Confucius, or some other famous Asian sage. They are “inscrutable, mysterious” as Senor Chang says while stroking his imaginary beard on *Community*. Mostly, his character won’t even get a real name. Examples are Master Po from *Kung Fu*, Obi Wan and Yoda from *Star Wars*, Mr. Miyagi from *Karate Kid*, Pai Mei from *Kill Bill vol. 2*, the Old Oriental Man from *Gremlins*, Rama Gupta from *The Guru* and Guru Pitka from *The Love Guru*, the High Priest from *The Golden Child*, Master Shifu and Grandmaster Oogway from *Kung Fu Panda*, and The Ancient One from *Dr. Strange*.



- **Brainy/Nerds:** can be male or female; They are usually the smartest person in the room, excel in STEM fields, but are also socially awkward. *Takashi* from *Revenge of the Nerds*, and Long Duk Dong from *Sixteen Candles* are the prime examples. Later examples are Raj from *Big Bang Theory*, Data from *Goonies*, Ned in *Spider-Man Homecoming*, and the Nerdy Asians from *Mean Girls*. More recently females have also been stereotyped this way. Trini Kwan from *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, Angela from *Bones*, Barbara from *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, Dr. Chi Park from *House*, Sunshine Corazon from *Glee*, Ming Huang from *Awkward*.



*Kung Fu*



*Karate Kid*



*Doctor Strange*



*The 7 Faces of Dr. Lao*



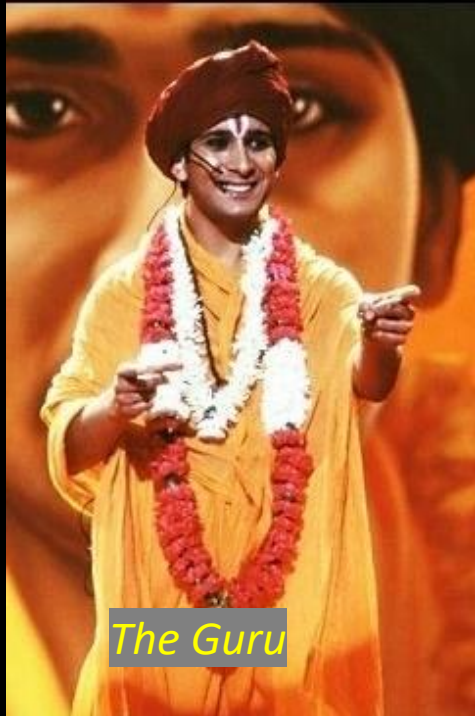
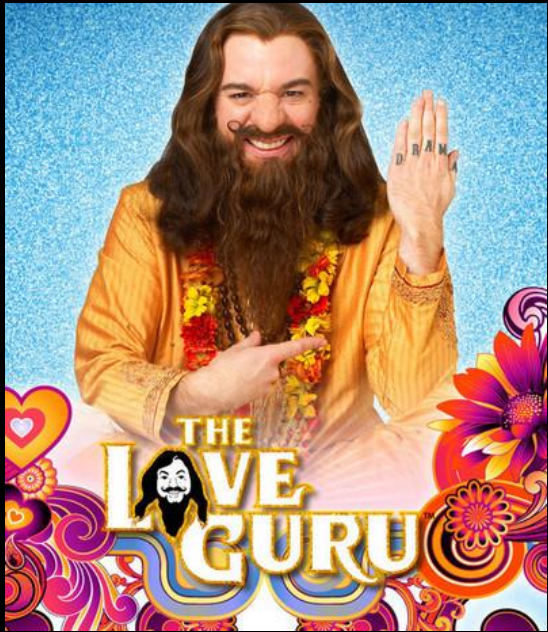
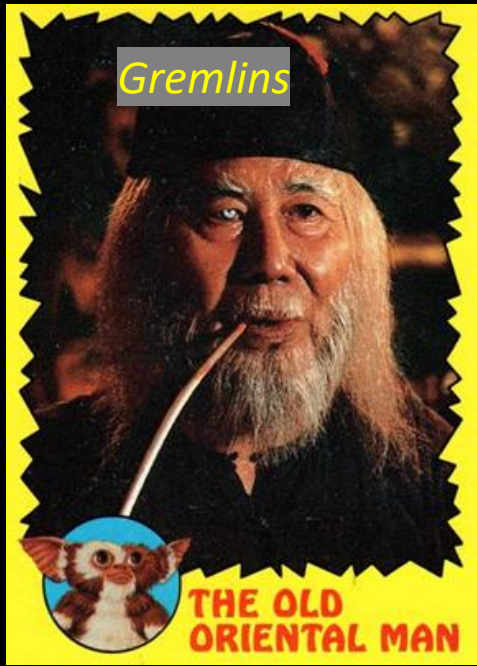
*The Empire Strikes Back*

Magical



*Star Wars*









BRIAN TOCHI  
AS TAKASHI

Revenge of the Nerds



Sixteen Candles

What's happenin', hot stuff?

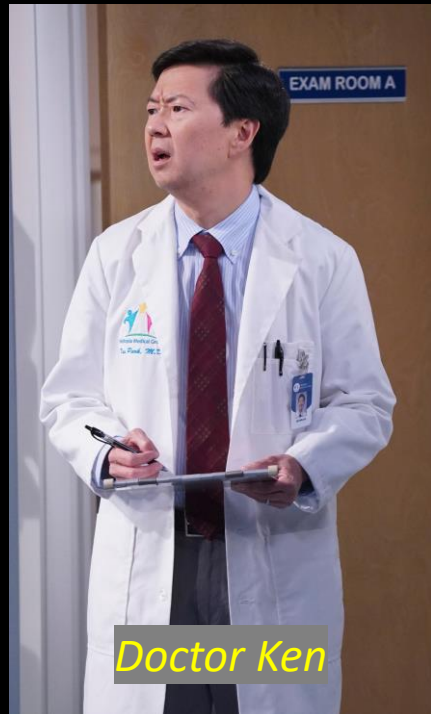


Goonies

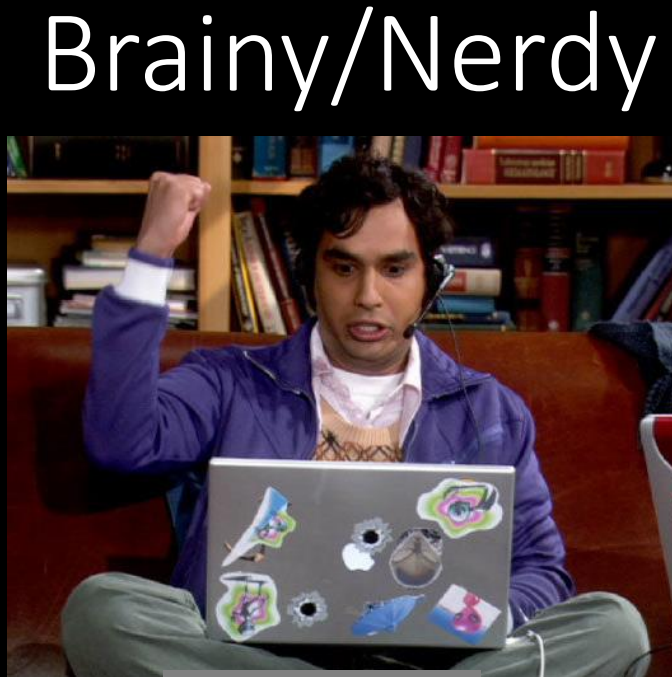


School of Rock

LAWRENCE ON LEAD SOLO  
KEYBOARD GO!



Doctor Ken



Big Bang Theory

Brainy/Nerdy



Supernatural

I'm Kevin Tran! I'm in advanced placement.  
Please don't kill me.



Mean Girls



Spider-man Homecoming





*Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*



*The Guru*



*House*



*Bones*



*Awkward*



*The Suite of Zack and Cody*



*Glee*

## Brainy/Nerdy

# What now?

Without bringing attention to the mistreatment of AAPI characters, it makes it difficult for writers to change how they write these characters. By learning about stereotypes, we grow to appreciate quality storytelling. We always have to ask ourselves certain questions: Are these stereotypes damaging? How should show-runners and writers improve their storytelling when it comes to AAPI characters? Can we like certain pieces of media while simultaneously recognizing their mistreatment of AAPI characters?



# Selar Sabu: the first Indian American star

Sabu was born in India in 1924, the son of the Elephant keeper to the Maharaja. Upon his father's death, Sabu took over the keeping of the Royal elephants when he was only 9 years old. A British film company found him while scouting locations for their upcoming film based on Kipling's book *The Elephant Boy*, and were so taken with him, they signed him to a contract, and took him and his older brother back to the UK to star in the film. While under contract, he made three more blockbuster films, starring in *The Drum*, *The Thief of Bagdad* and *The Jungle Book* as Mowgli, his most famous role.

While on tour in the US promoting *The Jungle Book*, Universal Pictures snapped him up and he made two more films. When he turned 20 he got his citizenship and then promptly enlisted in the US Army's Airforce and fought in WW II, earning medals of distinction as a combat tail gunner. After the war, he made 16 more films and was among the richest stars in Hollywood. Although he only ever played stereotypical roles, he met his future wife Marilyn Cooper on the set of *Songs of India*, a film where his character comes into conflict with the Maharaja for capturing animals for zoos. They married and had two children. He died unexpectedly at 39 of a heart attack.



<https://www.cinestaan.com/articles/2018/dec/2/17169>

<https://scroll.in/reel/802571/sabu-dastagir-the-actor-who-crossed-over-to-hollywood-on-the-back-of-an-elephant>

# *Mississippi Masala, 1991*

Directed by Mira Nair, screenplay by Sooni Taraporevala, starring Denzel Washington, Sarita Choudhury and Roshan Seth.

The story revolves around Mina's family, Indian immigrants from Uganda, who were forced to leave during Idi Amin's dictatorship and have moved in with family in Mississippi. Because of the racial trauma they experienced, Mina's father Jay, is resentful toward black people, however, Mina has assimilated into American culture and has a diverse group of friends. An interracial romance develops between Mina and Demetrius, played by Denzel Washington. Jay cannot handle the relationship and forbids Mina to see Demetrius, meanwhile Demetrius' family also treats Mina poorly, leaving the lovers no choice but to leave Mississippi altogether. It was filmed on location in both Mississippi and Uganda.

*Mississippi Masala* "is an extremely significant film. Too often, Hollywood has been content with certain generalized portraits of Asian characters in the rare times there are Asian characters, and for a film to devote so much of itself to Asian Americans is cause for celebration." wrote Charles Lee for *Yisei Magazine* at Harvard in 1992.

<https://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-xpm-1992-02-28-0000205232-story.html>

[https://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~yisei/issues/spring\\_92/ys92\\_9.html](https://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~yisei/issues/spring_92/ys92_9.html)





# Monsoon Wedding, 2001

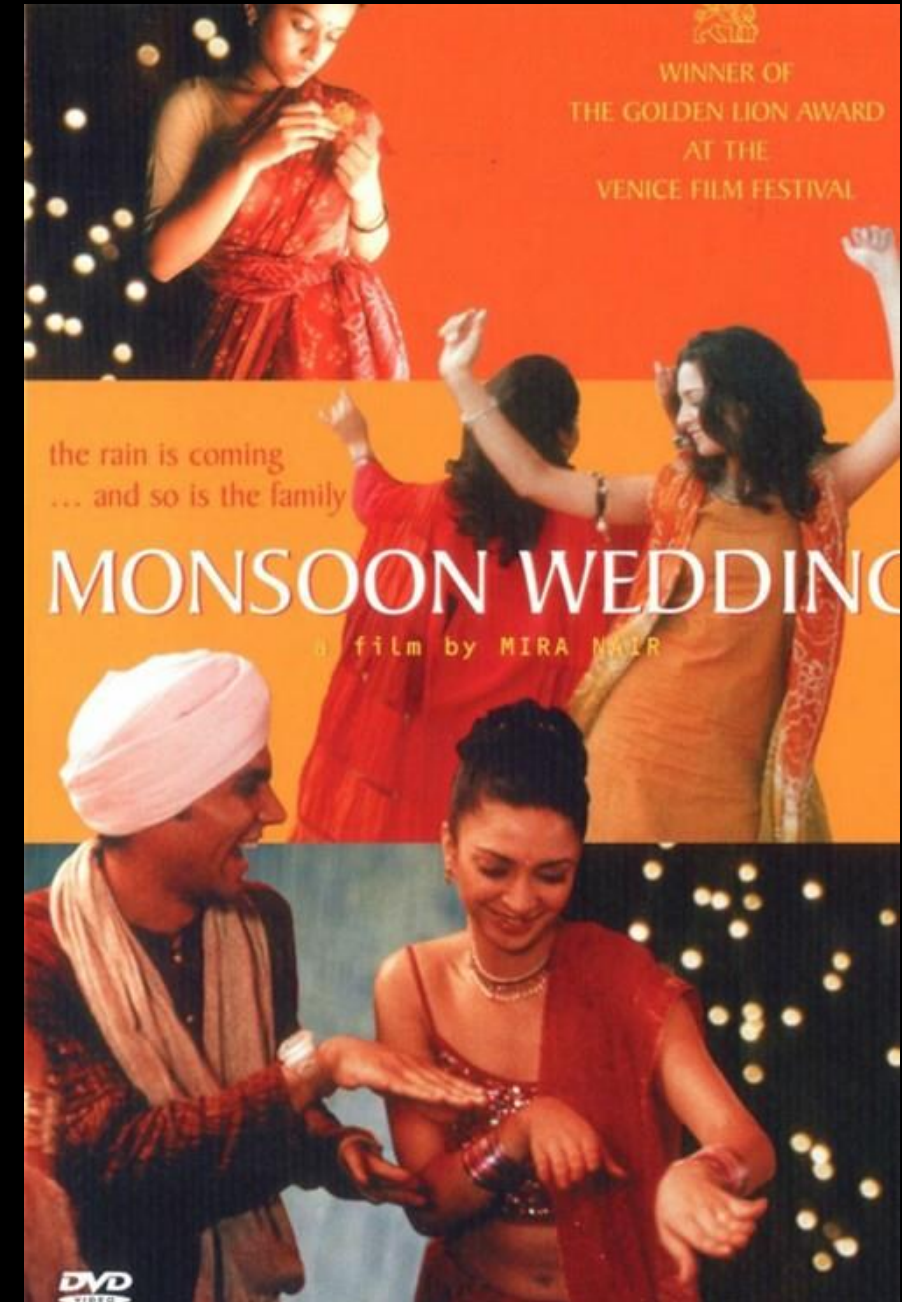
*Monsoon Wedding* is a 2001 Indian drama film directed by Mira Nair and written by Sabrina Dhawan. The film stars Naseeruddin Shah, Lillete Dubey, Shefali Shah and Vasundhara Das. The story depicts romantic entanglements during a traditional Punjabi Hindu wedding in Delhi. Lalit Verma (Naseeruddin Shah) and his wife Pimmi (Lillete Dubey) have arranged a marriage for their daughter Aditi (Vasundhara Das) to Hemant Rai (Parvin Dabas). Hemant is the son of a family friend who lives in Texas, and Aditi has only known him for a few weeks. As so often happens in Indian culture, such a wedding means that, for one of the few times in each generation, the extended family comes together from all corners of the globe, bringing its emotional baggage along.

It was nominated for both a Golden Globe and a BAFTA for Best Foreign Language film. A musical based on the film premiered on Broadway in May, 2017. Book by Sabrina Dhawan, Music by Vishal Bhardwaj, Lyrics by Susan Birkenhead, Directed by Mira Nair.

[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0265343/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0265343/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)

<http://thebrownneighbor.com/blog/monsoon-wedding-a-musical->

<https://www.atthetheatre.co.uk/new-musical-theatre-adaptation-of-the-hit-film-monsoon-wedding/>



# *Bend it like Beckham, 2002*

*Bend It Like Beckham* is a 2002 romantic comedy sports film produced, written and directed by Gurinder Chadha, and starring Parminder Nagra, Keira Knightley, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Anupam Kher, Juliet Stevenson, Shaznay Lewis and Archie Panjabi. It follows the 18-year-old daughter of British Indian Sikhs in London. She is infatuated with football but her parents have forbidden her to play because she is a girl. She joins a local women's team, which makes its way to the top of the league.

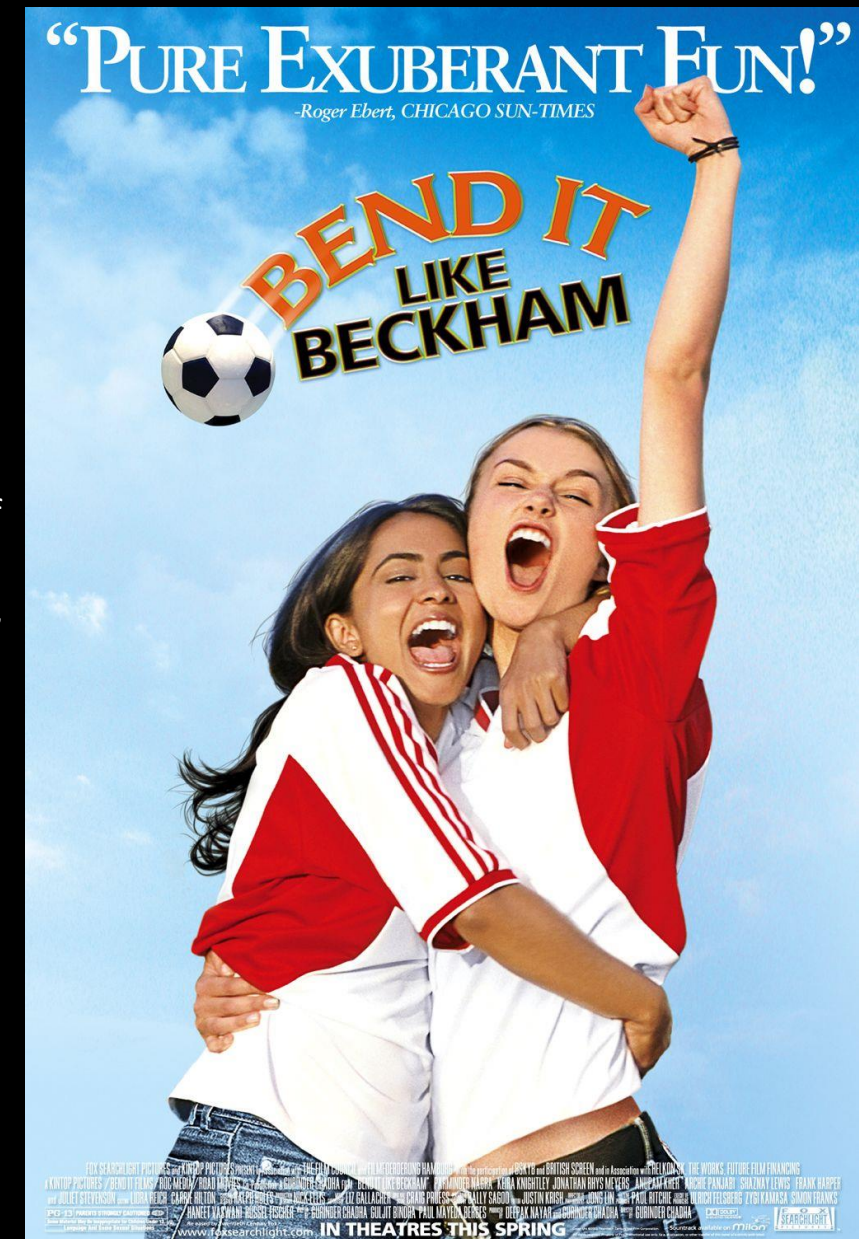
*The Times of India* noted the film's social context, saying, "[it] is really about the bending of rules, social paradigms and lives – all to finally curl that ball, bending it like Beckham, through the goalpost of ambition.... The creeping divide shows that Britain is changing, but hasn't quite changed yet. The stiff upper lip has travelled miles from the time Chadha's father was denied a pint at some pubs at Southall, but like dollops of coagulated spice in badly stirred curry, discrimination crops up to spoil the taste, every now and then, in multi-racial Britain."

*Planet Bollywood* gave the film a mark of 9 out of 10: the "screenplay not only explores the development of Jesse as a person, but also the changing values and culture of NRI teens: Jesse's urge to break the social norm of the Indian home-maker, her sister's (Archie Punjabi) sexually active relationship, and the gay Indian [Tony, played by Ameet Chana]."

*The Hindu* argued, "If ever there is a film that is positive, realistic and yet delightful, then it has to be Dream Production's latest venture directed by Gurinder Chadha.... Light-hearted, without taking away the considerable substance in terms of values, attitudes and the love for sport, the film just goes to prove that there are ways to be convincing and honest."

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0286499/>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20090302070309/http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/15586848.cms>





# *Bride and Prejudice*, 2004



From left to right:

Narata Shirodkar

Meghna Kothari

Indira Varma

Aishwarya Rai

Shivani Ghai

Based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, British Indian writer/director Gurinder Chadha of *Bend it like Beckham* fame, takes Austen's story and places it in modern day India. It's a love letter to Bollywood, Chadha said, "To reflect the modern day Indian diaspora and tell a truly multicultural story, Chadha set her film in three different countries—India, the U.K., and the United States."

The story still focuses on trying to marry off the family's daughters to respectable and wealthy men. The class consciousness of the original translates to race and cultural consciousness when Lalita (the Elizabeth Bennet character) meets Darcy (an American) at a wedding. *Bride & Prejudice* creates a pitch perfect depiction of casual American arrogance in Darcy's thoughtless cultural insensitivity. Chadha said "all my films are about racism and prejudice. They might be dressed up as comedy but everything I've ever done is always about making whoever's watching it think differently about the person on the screen... they're just about humanizing people who are different and showing you people in a different light and showing you people that you thought were different to you but actually were very similar to you. That's what drives my work." <https://www.avclub.com/bride-prejudice-weaves-an-impressive-cultural-critiqu-1832035352>

# *The Namesake*, 2006

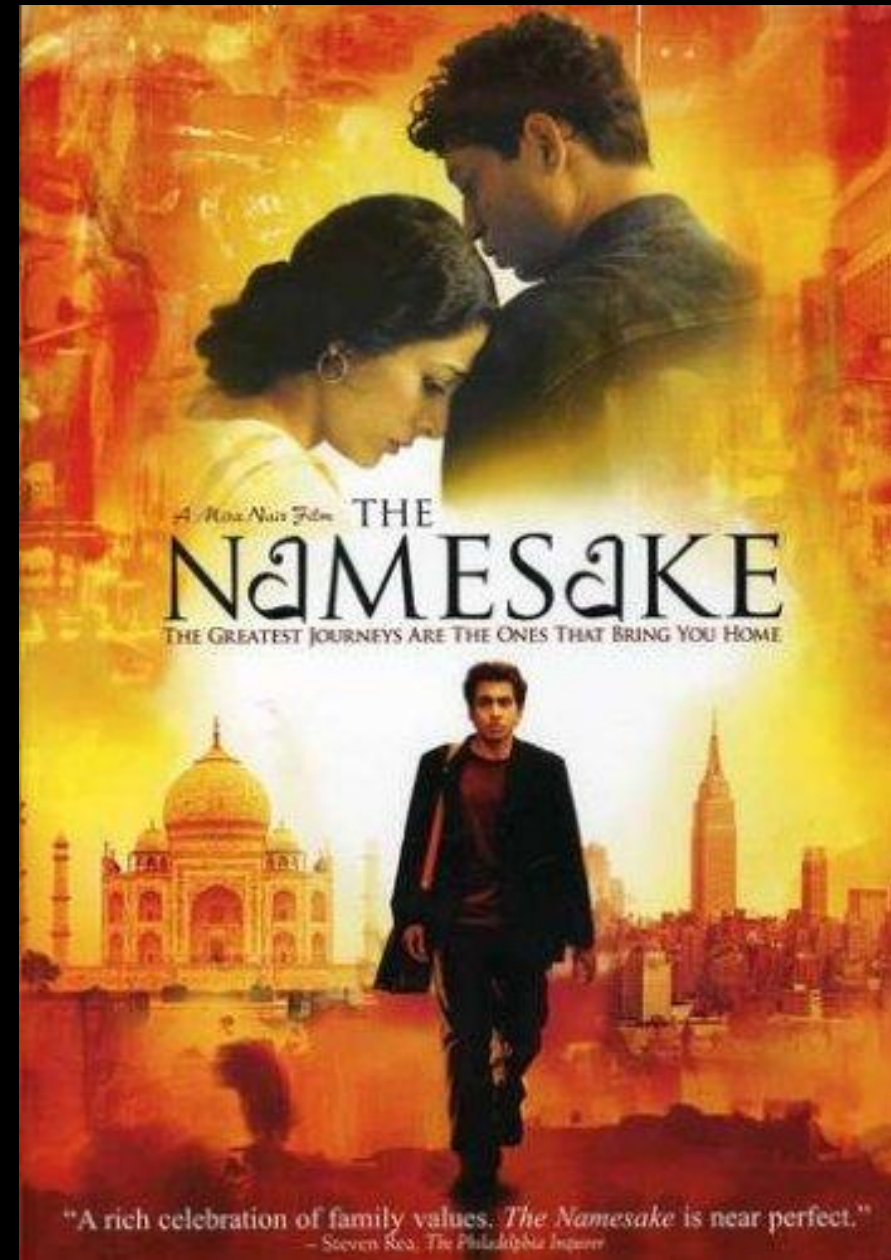
***The Namesake*** is a 2006 English-language drama film directed by Mira Nair and written by Sooni Taraporevala based on the novel *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri. It stars Tabu, Irrfan Khan, Kal Penn and Sahira Nair.

*The Namesake* depicts the struggles of Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli (Irrfan Khan and Tabu), first-generation immigrants from the East Indian state of West Bengal to the United States, and their American-born children Gogol (Kal Penn) and Sonia (Sahira Nair). The story begins as Ashoke and Ashima leave Calcutta and settle in New York City. Through a series of miscues, their son's nickname, Gogol (named after Russian author Nikolai Gogol), becomes his official birth name, an event which will shape many aspects of his life. The story chronicles Gogol's cross-cultural experiences and his exploration of his Indian heritage, as the story shifts between the United States and India.

"If *Monsoon Wedding* was a wild and rumbustious festival of India (read Punjabi culture), then *The Namesake* is a Haiku about Hindustan: minimalist, magical and intensely moving. Mira Nair takes Jhumpa Lahiri's novel and transforms it into visual poetics, using her colour palette to create a riveting kaleidoscope of contrasts... India is an idea that lives in the heart and the mind, rather than a land-locked territory; and India is a style of upbringing and attitude that transcends territory. Great performances, an iridescent canvas and a topical theme: *The Namesake* is Mira Nair's tribute to her janmabhoomi."

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0433416/>

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/english/movie-reviews/the-namesake/movie-review/1802655.cms>



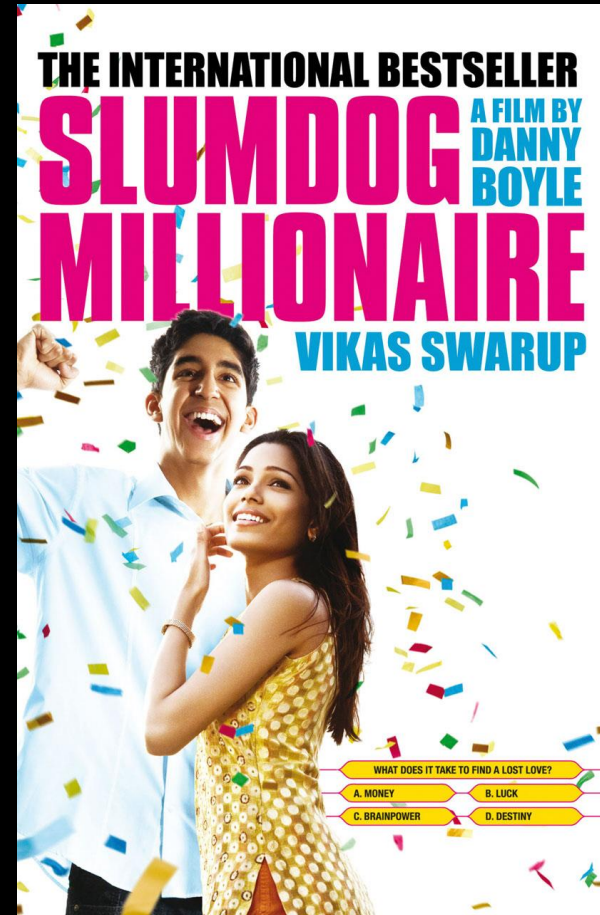


# *Slumdog Millionaire*, 2008

*Slumdog Millionaire* is a loose adaptation of the novel *Q & A* (2005) by Vikas Swarup, Indian author telling the story of 18-year-old Jamal Malik from the Juhu slums of Mumbai. Starring Dev Patel as Jamal, and filmed in India, the film was written by Simon Beaufoy and directed by Danny Boyle. As a contestant on the Indian version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* Jamal surprises everyone by being able to answer every question correctly. Accused of cheating, Jamal recounts his life story to the police, illustrating how he is able to answer each question correctly.

It was nominated for ten Academy Awards in 2009 and won eight—the most for any 2008 film—including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Adapted Screenplay. It won seven BAFTA Awards including Best Film, five Critics' Choice Awards and four Golden Globes, breaking all award show records. However, many Indian reviewers were critical of it, saying the plot was completely unbelievable, it didn't stick to the plot of the book, and it showed only the very worst parts of India.

Actor Amitabh Bachchan wrote "If *Slumdog Millionaire* projects India as Third World dirty underbelly developing nation and causes pain and disgust among nationalists and patriots, let it be known that a murky underbelly exists and thrives even in the most developed nations." Bachchan hosted the real *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* format show that provides the movie's principal structuring device. Writer Kalpana Sharma expected the film to be a rousing, consciousness-raising spectacle. He hoped the film "will shine a light" on the "millions of people who continue to live their lives without clean water, or sanitation, or electricity" in India.



[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1010048/?ref=nm\\_sr\\_srsrg\\_0](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1010048/?ref=nm_sr_srsrg_0)

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/what-does-india-think-about-slumdog-millionaire>

# *The Mindy Project, 2012-2017*



Ran for 6 seasons, Based on Mindy's mom. Mindy is an OB/Gyn balancing her personal and professional life. The show dealt with issues of racism and sex. The show was criticized for Mindy only dating white guys, and for there not being more actors of color on the show. Mindy said that , "I guess white women are expected to date white men but I'm supposed to stick to my own." There was an episode that aired during Trump's campaign where Mindy woke up as a white man only to discover how much easier her life was: being able to catch a cab, not putting up with microaggressions. In response to the criticism, Mindy dates an Indian man who calls her a coconut. She's upset and tells her brother who agrees with him, saying, "You think you're white, I think I'm black."

When Mindy announced that she wouldn't be addressing abortion on the show, she was criticized for that, even after she said that the show was a comedy and there's no way to make respectful jokes about abortion. In one episode an incident of sexual harassment was written off as funny, and there was an episode where "butt stuff" was the topic that viewers thought was taboo. Mindy defended this one by saying there are nine of us writers in the room and if we're scared by it, that means we should do it."

<https://screenrant.com/mindy-project-controversies-killed-show/>



# *Never Have I Ever, 2020*

Created by Mindy Kaling, *Never Have I Ever* is a coming of age story based on her real-life experiences growing up as an Indian American in Boston. The story is set in California and centers around Devi, a 15 year old sophomore who is grieving the loss of her father as she navigates school politics, friendships, and romance. It stars Maitreyi Ramakrishnan as Devi and Poorna Jagannathan as Devi's dermatologist mother, Sendhil Ramamurthy as Devi's father, Richa Moorjani as Kamala, Devi's cousin, and Japanese-American actor Darren Barnet as Devi's crush Paxton Yoshida. Black actress Lee Rodriguez and Asian actress Ramona Young play Devi's best friends. 96% Fresh on Rotten Tomatoes.

According to [UCLA's 2019 Hollywood Diversity Report](https://www.ucla.edu/news/2019/04/24/hollywood-diversity-report), Asians represented a mere 4.2% of broadcast scripted roles during the 2016-2017 season. The first teaser prompted much fanfare from brown girls across the globe, who applauded it as a long-overdue first: a multi-faceted Indian American girl as the main character in a coming-of-age series. A lot of people of color and the South Asian community [are] so used to being sidekicks, we're so used to being comedic relief," Maitreyi told *Variety*. The show has been applauded for its diversity and showing coming of age in all of its messy, glorious light." Devi's frustration as she tries to strike a balance between her two cultural identities is something viewers feel mirrors the first-generation immigrant experience.

<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/never-have-i-ever-season-2-renewed-netflix>

<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/never-have-i-ever-maitreyi-ramakrishnan-south-asian-names>

<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/what-south-asian-youth-saying-about-devi-from-never-have-i-ever>



# Indian Dance Companies in Texas

## Dallas

- Eyakkam Dance Company <http://eyakkamdance.org/>
- Kathak Rhythms <https://www.kathakrhythms.com/>
- Rhythm of Dallas School of Dance <http://rhythmofdallas.com/>
- Arathi School of Dance <http://www.arathidancedallas.com/>

## Austin

- Nritya Varsha Dance Academy <http://www.nrityavarsha.com/>
- Austin Dance India <https://www.austindanceindia.com/>
- Devi School of Dance <http://www.devischool.com/>

## Houston

- Rhythm India <http://www.rhythm-india.com/>
- Bollywood Shake <http://www.bollywoodshakehouston.com/>

# Anna May Wong: the first Chinese American Star

- Born as Wong Liu Tsong in LA to second gen Chinese-American parents in 1905. Her name means Willow Frost. Her family had been in the US since 1855.
- Got a part being an extra in *The Red Lantern*, 1919 and worked steadily for the next two years. She got her first starring role in 1922 *The Toll of the Sea* and got rave reviews. She was an international star at 19, when she appeared in the *Thief of Bagdad*.
- She was pissed off about the stereotypical roles she was offered by Hollywood—dragon lady, demure butterfly—as well as the pay inequality between her role as the star and the male lead Sessue Hayakawa. She was paid \$6000 and he was paid \$10,000. Wong criticized the negative stereotyping in *Daughter of the Dragon*, saying, "Why is it that the screen Chinese is always the villain? And so crude a villain – murderous, treacherous, a snake in the grass! We are not like that. How could we be, with a civilization that is so many times older than the West?"
- Due to America's anti-miscegenation rules, she was never cast as the romantic lead because she couldn't kiss a white actor. She left for Europe, worked steadily in Britain, and toured China and studied Chinese culture in the 1930's.
- During WW2 was an advocate for Chinese cause against Japan. Starred in *The Gallery of Madame Liu-Tsong*, 1951 first ever US TV series with an Asian lead, where she played a detective.
- Was supposed to play Madame Liang in *Flower Drum Song*, but died of a heart attack in 1961. She earned 60 credits over a 40 year career spanning silent film, talkies, TV, stage, and radio.

<http://chineseamerican.nyhistory.org/anna-may-wong-1905-1961/>  
<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/anna-may-wong>





# James Hong: Actor with the most Film/TV/Voice Acting credits

Born in 1929 in Minneapolis to Chinese immigrant parents. He studied civil engineering at USC while acting on the side. He served in the US Army and entertained soldiers during the Korean war. He began his acting career when he redubbed voices in Asian films like *Godzilla: King of Monsters!*. Over a 70 year career he has 600+ credits and is still going. Daniel Dae Kim is sponsoring a GoFundMe to raise money to get Hong a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

"Hong epitomizes the term 'working actor,' and that's not even taking into account all he's done to help further representation for actors of color," Kim wrote in the GoFundMe description. "Not only was he one of the few who worked steadily when there were even fewer roles than there are now, but he also served the Asian American community by co-creating the legendary [East West Players](#) theater company with fellow pioneers like Mako and Nobu McCarthy, just to name a few." He's been nominated for 3 Annie awards and won 1 for voicing Mr. Ping in the *Kung Fu Panda* movies. In 2007 the Las Vegas Film Critics Society gave him a Lifetime Achievement Award.



<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0393222/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Hong\\_filmography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Hong_filmography)

<https://ew.com/movies/daniel-dae-kim-fundraiser-james-hong-hollywood-walk-of-fame-star/?fbclid=IwAR1IzPvi4ZLI3M2AO8LjnVz7QcyUEP42GygXzea68WgjLgXzodVOakWIMo>

# Miyoshi Umeki: The First Asian Actress to Win an Oscar

Miyoshi Umeki was born May 8, 1929, in Hokkaido, Japan, where she performed for U.S. troops as a singer during the postwar occupation, singing in Japanese and English, according to *Variety*. By the time she moved to the U.S. in 1955, she was already famous in Japan as Nancy Umeki. She continued her recording career on Mercury records for some years after arriving in America.

Umeki won the Academy Award for best supporting actress in 1957 after playing opposite Red Buttons in *Sayonara*, the screen version of the James Michener novel about a U.S. soldier who falls in love amid the chaos at the end of World War II. Fated to be parted when he is ordered to return to the U.S., the pair commits suicide. She was the first Asian to win an Oscar and is still the first Asian woman to win one.

In addition to starring as Mei-Li in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Flower Drum Song*, Ms. Umeki also appeared in the film version, winning a Golden Globe nomination. Her involvement in the stage show landed her on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1958. On television, she became known for playing Mrs. Livingston in "The Courtship of Eddie's Father," the Bill Bixby comedy about a single parent. She won another Golden Globe nomination for her work there.

When *the Courtship of Eddie's Father* was cancelled, she left Hollywood to get married and start a family. She had one son. Her husband died in 1967, leaving her to raise their teenage boy alone. She scratched her name off the Oscar and threw it in the garbage, probably in a fit of grief, telling her son that she didn't need a trophy to remind her of what she'd accomplished. Later, she moved to Missouri to be near him and her grandchildren and lived there until she died at 78 from cancer.

<https://ew.com/oscars/2018/02/22/miyoshi-umeki-sayonara-oscars-profile/>







*Flower Drum Song* was another Rodgers and Hammerstein production, based on a novel by C.Y. Lee, a Chinese American. The theme was the conflict between immigrant parents and their American-born children. It was especially risky for R&H to do a whole show about Asian people as they were an ethnic group that had long been harshly caricatured and marginalized in the US especially after WWII. Huge efforts were made to get an all-Asian cast which included a national casting call. Six of eight of the leading roles were filled by Asian actors-- Miyoshi Umeki, Keye Luke, Pat Suzuki, Ed Kenney, Arabella Hong, and Jack Soo—as well as half of the ensemble. Anna May Wong was cast as Mdm. Leing, but due to her death, was replaced by Juanita Hall, a Black actor. *Flower Drum Song* was nominated for six Tony awards, winning one. <https://overtures.org.uk/?p=16704>

## *Flower Drum Song*, Broadway, 1958



# *FOB*, 1980 Public Theatre, NY

The ground-breaking first play by David Henry Hwang that established his career. He wrote the play as an undergraduate student at Stanford. Moving between myth and reality, *FOB* ("Fresh off the boat") explores assimilation, immigration, and the struggle of Asian American identity. Grace and Dale are cousins, living in the Los Angeles area and attending college. Dale, an "ABC" or "American Born Chinese," just wants to fit in to white American culture. Grace, who was born in Taiwan, feels less ambivalent about her Chinese heritage. The arrival of Steve, an exchange student and "fresh off the boat" newcomer from Hong Kong, forces them to confront conflicting feelings about America, China and themselves.

It won an Obie award. Revived Off-Broadway in 1990 at the Pan-Asian Rep Theatre. It was also produced in San Francisco by the Asian American Theatre Co. in 2005, as well as at Theatre Mu in Minneapolis in 2015.



Randy Reyes as Steve, Michael Sung-Ho as Dale, and Meghan Kreidler as Grace

# *The Joy Luck Club*, 1993

- Based on 1989 novel by Amy Tan. It was directed by Wayne Wang and stars Tsai Chin, Kieu Chinh, Lisa Lu, France Nuyen, Rosalind Chao, Lauren Tom, Tamlyn Tomita, and Ming-Na Wen. The story revolves around the relationships between four pairs of Chinese immigrant mothers and their Chinese American daughters. Through flashbacks, the film reveals the hidden pasts of the mothers and how that has influenced the lives of their daughters.



*from left:* Suyuan (Kieu Chinh), June (Ming-Na Wen), Waverly (Tamlyn Tomita), Lindo (Tsai Chin), Ying-Ying (France Nuyen), Lena (Lauren Tom), An-Mei (Lisa Lu), and Rose (Rosalind Chao)

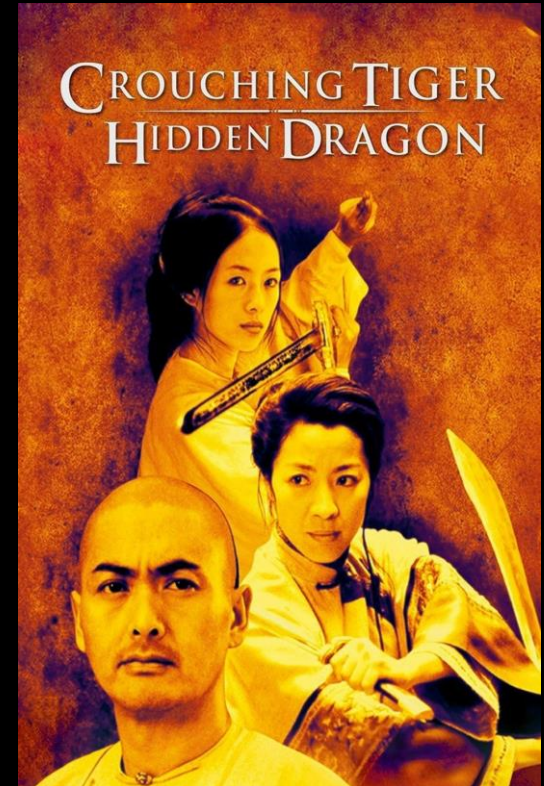


# *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, 2000*

Based on the 1930's Chinese book by Du Lu Wang and directed by Ang Lee. It tells the story of two separated lovers, played by Chow Yun-Fat and Michelle Yeoh, who put aside their feelings for each other until they have avenged the murder of Yun-Fat's master and recover his stolen sword. Tom Breihan wrote in his review for *The A.V. Club*, "*Crouching Tiger* is a movie about societal repression, about characters resolutely sacrificing their happiness, and sometimes their lives, to fulfill a set of societal expectations that they hold as sacred as anyone else."

Martial Arts movies rely heavily on a masterful fight choreographer, Yuen Wo-Ping of *The Matrix* fame, and in this movie, Wo-Ping brought "wire work" martial arts to American audiences for the first time. Roger Ebert, critic for the *Chicago Sun* wrote, "Lee and Wo-Ping give us a scene of startling daring and beauty, when two protagonists cling to the tops of tall, swaying trees and swing back and forth during a sword fight. Watching this scene, I assumed it was being done with some kind of computer trickery. I *knew* this because I *knew* the actors were not really 40 feet in the air holding onto those trees. I was wrong. Everything we see is real, Lee told me. Computers were used only to remove the safety wires that held the actors. "So those were stunt people up there?" I asked, trying to hold onto some reserve of skepticism. "Not for the most part," he said. "Maybe a little stunt work, but most of the time you can see their faces. That's really them in the trees." And on the rooftops, too, he told me."

Starring Chow Yun-Fat, Michelle Yeoh, Zhang Ziyi, and Cheng Pei Pei. It was nominated for ten Oscars including, Best Picture, Best Director, Best Adaptation, Best Costume Design, and won five Oscars for Best Cinematography, Best Score, Best Art Direction, and Best Foreign Language Film. *CTHD* remains the highest-grossing foreign language film in American. *Crouching Tiger* set the stage for a whole new era in action cinema, one where people from different countries and cultures worked together, often outside the Hollywood system, to make movies that resonated globally.



<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0190332/>   <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/crouching-tiger-hidden-dragon-2000>  
<https://film.avclub.com/america-had-never-seen-anything-like-crouching-tiger-h-1798261610>

# *Flower Drum Song, 2002*

With permission from author C.Y. Lee and the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization, Chinese American playwright, David Henry Hwang, significantly reworked the plot, while retaining character names and songs. His 2002 version —both an homage to the original and a modern re-thinking— won him his third Tony nomination.

The 2002 revival was produced with an all Asian cast starring Lea Salonga and ran for 600 performances on Broadway, and then gave rise to a national tour.



Sandra Allen, Randall Duk Kim, Alvin Ing, Hoon Lee, Lea Salonga



# *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, 2005-08

*Avatar* is an American animated television series created by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko, with Aaron Ehasz as head writer. *Avatar* is set in an Asiatic-like world in which some people can manipulate the classical elements with telekinetic variants of the Chinese martial arts known as "bending". One individual, the Avatar, is capable of bending all four elements and is responsible for maintaining harmony between the world's four nations. It is presented in a style that combines anime with American cartoons, and relies on the imagery of East Asian, South Asian, Inuit, and New World societies.

The series is centered around the journey of 12-year-old Aang, the current Avatar and last survivor of his nation, the Air Nomads, along with his friends Sokka, Katara, and later Toph, as they strive to end the Fire Nation's war against the other nations of the world. It also follows the story of Zuko—the exiled prince of the Fire Nation, seeking to restore his lost honor by capturing Aang, accompanied by his wise uncle Iroh—and later, that of his ambitious sister Azula.

*Avatar: The Last Airbender* was commercially successful and was acclaimed by audiences and critics, who praised its art direction, soundtrack, cultural references, humor, characters, and themes. These include concepts rarely touched on in youth entertainment, such as war, genocide, imperialism, colonialism, totalitarianism, and free choice. It won five Annie Awards, a Genesis Award, a Primetime Emmy Award, a Kids' Choice Award, and a Peabody Award. Several critics have referred to *Avatar* as one of the best (animated) television series of all time. The extended *Avatar* franchise includes an ongoing comics series, a prequel novel series, an animated sequel series and a live-action film, as well as an upcoming live-action remake of the show produced for Netflix. The complete series was released on Blu-ray in June 2018 in honor of the 10th anniversary of its finale, and was made available to stream on Netflix in the United States in May 2020, and on CBS All Access in June 2020.





# *Crazy Rich Asians*, 2018

Based on the novel by Kevin Kwan. Directed by Jon M. Chu. The film stars Constance Wu, Henry Golding, Gemma Chan, Lisa Lu, Awkwafina, Ken Jeong, and Michelle Yeoh. It follows a Chinese American professor who travels to meet her boyfriend's family and is surprised to discover they are among the richest in Singapore.

Justin Chang in a review for the *Los Angeles Times* found the film worthy of comparison to other notable films using an Asian ensemble cast including *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, and *The Joy Luck Club*. Chang found the supporting cast performance of Michelle Yeoh to be exceptional, stating "you can't help but hang on Eleanor's (Michelle Yeoh's) every word. In a crisp, authoritative, sometimes startlingly vulnerable performance that never lapses into dragon-lady stereotype, Yeoh brilliantly articulates the unique relationship between Asian parents and their children, the intricate chain of love, guilt, devotion and sacrifice that binds them for eternity".

Although the film has been lauded in the United States for featuring a predominantly Asian cast, it was criticized elsewhere for casting biracial and non-Chinese actors in ethnically Chinese roles. The film was also criticized for having characters speak British English and American English over Singaporean English. In addition, the film has received criticism for poorly representing the actual makeup of Singapore by virtually erasing non-Chinese citizens."

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-crazy-rich-asians-review-20180808-story.html>  
<https://www.economist.com/asia/2018/09/01/for-a-different-take-on-crazy-rich-asians-cross-the-pacific>





# *Soft Power, 2019*



Book by David Henry Hwang, Music by Jeanine Tesori. Explores America's place in the world told from China's point of view in which a theatre producer forges a bond with Hillary Clinton. It also examines the nature of democracy, cultural identity, cultural misappropriation and racism.

It was nominated for 11 Drama Desk awards. It was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.





## *Mulan, 2020*

The 1998 Disney animated film was based on the legend of Hua Mulan, a girl who takes her father's place and fights in the Chinese army disguised as a man. The film was cast with mostly Asian voice actors, including Ming-na Wen and Lea Salonga as Mulan. When the plans for the live action adaptation were announced an online petition titled "Tell Disney You Don't Want a White-Washed Mulan" collected 100,000 signatures. Ang Lee was originally approached to direct, but he declined, so Disney hired a woman, Niki Caro, instead. Liu Yifei stars as Mulan with Donnie Yen, Jason Scott Lee, Yoson An, Gong Li, and Jet Li. Due to the pandemic its release date got moved back to August 21.

# *The King and I* Broadway, 1951

The play is based on the book *Anna and the King of Siam*, a memoir of Anna Leonowens, the teacher of the Royal children of the Siamese court. (Siam is now Thailand) As mentioned earlier, Rodgers and Hammerstein were famous for their anti-racist musicals, and *The King and I* was no exception. It contains powerful themes of tolerance and understanding, to say nothing of its clear stance on gender equality. It is set in 1860's Siam, which is modern day Thailand. Yul Brynner, a Russian American actor, originated the role of King Mongkut and Latina Rita Moreno, originated the role of Tuptim. Because this role defined his career, he was incorrectly assumed to have Asian heritage. However, the "Little House of Uncle Thomas" featured two Asian dancers, Michiko and Yuriko, and Baayork Lee was the original Princess Ying.

It was wildly successful, winning five Tony awards, was adapted for film in 1956, which was nominated for nine Oscars and won five. *The King and I* was banned in Thailand and remains banned to this day for its inaccurate depiction of Mongkut. Although his interest in science and modernization was real, his actions regarding Tuptim's love affair were not. The real King Mongkut actually improved women's rights in Siam. He released a large number of royal concubines to find their own husbands, and he banned forced marriages and the selling of one's wife to pay off a debt.





# *The King and I*, 1996 Broadway Revival

After Yul Brynner, it became common practice to cast white actors in the Siamese roles and have them perform in “yellowface”. This practice goes beyond denying roles to Asian actors, but sustains a depiction that is caricatured and culturally insensitive. The problems of yellowface casting were initially confronted during the controversy over *Miss Saigon*, in 1989, which you will read about in an upcoming slide. Although *Miss Saigon*’s producers resolved this conflict, the yellowface casting of *King and I* persisted for another seven years.

The 1996 Revival was the first revival to feature all Asian actors as the lead characters of the Siamese court. It starring Filipino actor Lou Diamond Phillips as King Mongkut, and Joohee Choi as Tuptim. However, like *The Mikado*, productions in later years would be criticized for not going far enough. A critic for the BBC: “As the portrait of a white woman being both fascinated and repelled by a society depicted as both backward and barbarous I can't help but feel it's patronizingly out of step with modern sensibilities.”

<https://www.playbill.com/article/a-history-of-casting-king-and-i-cultural-evolution-and-community-action-com-346584#:~:text=Film%20star%20Lou%20Diamond%20Phillips,reviews%2C%20but%20Phillips%20did%20not.>



# *The King and I*, 2015 Broadway Revival

This version, directed by Bartlett Sher, featured Asian actors playing all 46 of the Siamese roles, 29 of which made their Broadway debuts. It starred Japanese actor Ken Watanabe as Mongkut. Sher said the play remains “resonant, powerful, and extremely well conceived. It’s views on gender equality and the conflict between modernity and tradition make it as timely and powerful as ever.” Sher said efforts have been made to avoid “decorative Orientalism” and to show the King of Siam as being realistically “besieged on all sides by colonial forces”.

Sher's revival restores “Western People Funny”, a song frequently excised from previous productions, in which the women of Mongkut's court deride Westerners for being "sentimental about the Oriental". Japanese actress Naoko Mori, who played Lady Thiang, said, “I was so pleased Bart put the number back in because it balances things out.” This production won four Tony awards.

From Playbill: “The success of *The King and I* depends on “increased resonance and verisimilitude that has come to modern productions through allowing Asian performers the chance to interpret a story and characters that are a part of their own cultural heritage. Together with Rodgers and Hammerstein's powerful themes of acceptance and equality, which continue to ring true today, this modern way of producing *The King and I* allows the piece to live on and continue being produced.”

<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-44709484>





# Miss Saigon, 1989-2001 London, UK

Based on Puccini's 1904 opera *Madame Butterfly*, French composers Schonberg and Boublil moved the action to Vietnam to tell the love story between an American GI, Chris, and a local girl, Kim. When it transferred to Broadway, it was hugely successful, was nominated for eleven Tony awards, ran for ten years, and did two national tours in spite of huge protests.

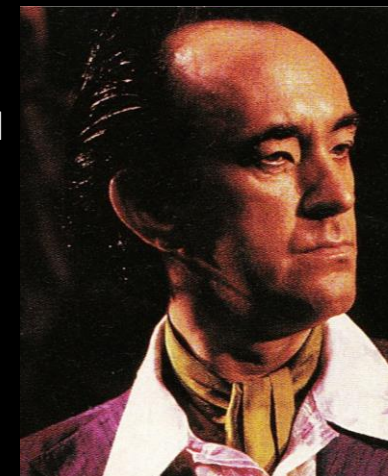
Actor's Equity protested because, with the exception of Lea Salonga, none of the cast were Asian. White actors Jonathan Pryce and Keith Burns appeared in "yellowface" including wearing prosthetic eyelids to create an epicanthic fold. The protest over the eyelids was so bad that the actors quit wearing them. Additionally, the "Vietnamese" dialogue was actually just nonsense words.

Activist Mia Nehg Moua, who attended a protest in 1994 when the tour came to St. Paul, said that Asians protested because they saw the story as "racist, sexist, and offensive to us as Asian Americans". Sarah Bellamy, founder of Penumbra Theatre in St. Paul said, "this work is not for us. It is by, for, and about white people, using people of color, tropical climes, pseudo-cultural costumes and props, violence, tragedy, and the commodification of people and cultures, to reinforce and re-inscribe a narrative about white supremacy and authority."

<https://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/case-study/miss-saigon-controversy>  
<https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/04/13/i-am-miss-saigon-and-i-hate-it/>  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20151003022619/http://www.tcgcircle.org/2013/10/establishing-cultural-norms-our-role-and-responsibility/>



Lea Salonga as Kim



Jonathan Pryce as The Engineer



Keith Burns as Thuy

# *Miss Saigon*, 2014 Revival

## London, UK

The writers, Schonberg and Boublil, reworked their production from a Vietnamese point of view. They made numerous changes throughout the score, including incorporating actual Vietnamese lyrics in the wedding song. From a directorial approach by Laurence Connor, the show now brings “an authentic focus to the human cost of the Vietnam War.” The revival originated in the West End and then transferred to Broadway in 2016 where it ran for two more years. The revival cast exclusively Asian actors to play the Vietnamese characters, starring Eva Noblezada as Kim.

“The show is not politically dumb. The theme of American responsibility to the Vietnamese, to the refugees who will do anything to reach America for a better life remains central to the show, and remains admirably unresolved and uncomfortable. That political bone, fully exposed under the Trump administration, is just as raw today as it was post-Vietnam.” However, Vietnamese critics still see the show as being white-centered and not reflective of themselves. Diep Tran writing for American Theatre said “Exactly what have we learned, really? That Vietnamese women are victims, Vietnamese men are villains, and Americans are well-meaning buffoons.”

<https://www.playbill.com/article/how-this-miss-saigon-honors-honors-the-vietnamese-perspective>  
<https://www.thedailybeast.com/sexism-race-and-the-mess-of-miss-saigon-on-broadway>



Eva Noblezada, Samuel Li Weintraub



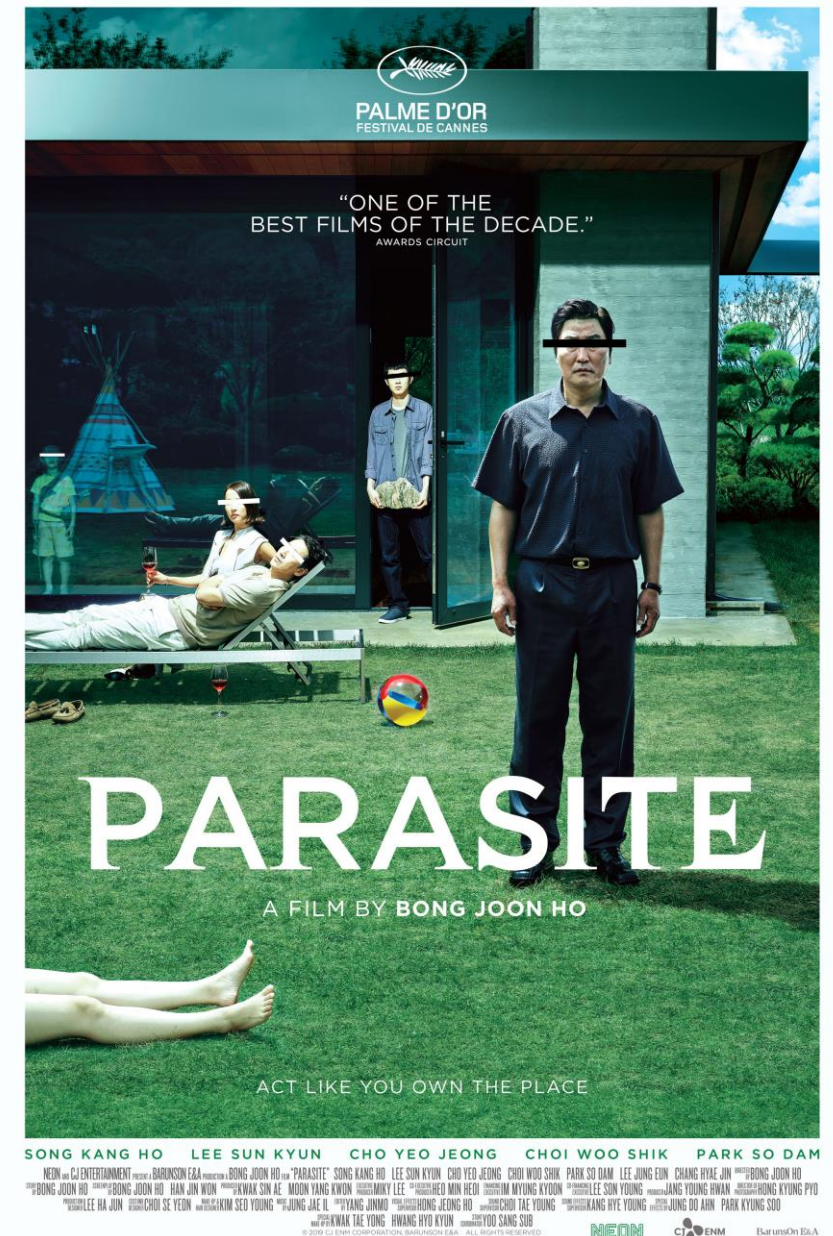
# *The Parasite*, 2019

South Korean thriller written and directed by Bong Joon Ho. Starring Kang-ho Song, Sun-kyun Lee, Yeojong Jo, and Woo-sik Choi. The story revolves around the Kim family who are poor and destitute, lying their way into the wealthy Park family's employ, by manipulating events to get their previous servants fired. Bad things happen.

Nominated for 6 Oscars, won four including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best International Film. It was the first ever foreign language film to win Best Picture. According to the Insider, "But with the celebrations of the win — widely heralded as a victory for Asian cinema as a whole — also came racist comments and criticism of a South Korean film winning big at the Oscars."

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6751668/>

<https://www.insider.com/parasite-oscar-wins-racist-criticism-coronavirus-2020-2>



# Sessue Hayakawa: the First Japanese American Star

Kintaro Hayakawa was the first Hollywood sex symbol, the highest-paid performer of his day, and the first Asian person ever to be nominated for an acting Academy Award.

Born in 1886 in Japan, his father was the provincial governor of Chiba and his mother was an aristocrat of the Samurai class. His family wanted him to be an officer in the Imperial Japanese Navy, but he ruptured his ear drum diving in the lagoon on a dare. His hearing kept him out of the navy and the stupidity of his behavior caused a rift between him and his family so much so that he was prepared to commit ritual suicide in the tradition of the Samurai. His pet dog's barking alerted his father to the emergency and his father saved his life.

After he recovered from his wounds, he moved to Chicago to become a banker. He graduated from the University of Chicago in 1912 and moved to Los Angeles where he became interested in the theatre scene in Little Tokyo. He changed his name to Sessue (snowy field) and began playing sexy villain roles. He reached such a rare level of success in 1918 whereby he could form and run his own production company, Haworth Pictures, so he could play the hero. He and his wife, Tsuru Aoki, starred in *The Dragon Painter* in 1919. He is best remembered for playing Col Saito in *The Bridge over the River Kwai*, which earned him an Oscar nomination. He had 107 credits over a 50 year career.

[https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0370564/bio?ref=nm\\_ov\\_bio\\_sm](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0370564/bio?ref=nm_ov_bio_sm)

<https://www.asiancinevision.org/sessue-hayakawa-americas-forgotten-sex-symbol/>

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/one-of-the-first-hollywood-heartthrobs-was-a-smoldering-japanese-actor-what-happened>





# *The Mikado*: A Case Study

## D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, 1885

Gilbert and Sullivan wrote *The Mikado* to be a lampoon of British culture and Victorian morals. They were working at a time of wide-ranging censorship of the theatre. Gilbert himself likened the challenge of being a late-19th-century dramatist to “doing a hornpipe in fetters”. *The Mikado*’s central plot device – that flirting is a crime punishable by death – is a dig at the theatrical censorship that would not allow any extramarital romance to be portrayed on the London stage. By using Shakespeare’s trick of setting the play in another country—with Shakespeare it was Italy and here it’s Japan—Gilbert and Sullivan were able to bitingly satirize England’s government, class system, and bourgeois attitudes of the middle class .

By the end of 1885, at least 150 companies were producing *The Mikado* in Europe and the US. It remains the most frequently performed G&S Operetta and has been translated into numerous languages. All of the roles were originally played by Caucasian actors. Some Japanese critics felt it disrespectful because of its racist stereotypes and criticism of Imperialism. After WWII it was staged in Japan with a half Caucasian, half Japanese company in 1946. A Japanese language version was done in Chichiu in 2001. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Mikado#Productions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mikado#Productions)



Richard Temple as the Mikado



Durward Lely as Nanki-Poo



George Grossmith as Ko-Ko.



Sybil Grey, Leanora Braham, Jessie Bond

# Variations on *The Mikado*

- ***Swing Mikado***, 1938: Federal Theatre Project. Starring Maurice Cooper and Frankey Brown. All black cast, set on a tropical island; with swing orchestrations. [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/The\\_Swing\\_Mikado](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/The_Swing_Mikado)
- ***Hot Mikado***, 1939: All black cast, starred Bill “Bojangles” Robinson and used jazz orchestrations. [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/The\\_Hot\\_Mikado\\_\(1939\\_production\)](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/The_Hot_Mikado_(1939_production))
- ***Black Mikado***, 1975: starring Nigerian Patricia Ebigwei as Yum Yum, set on a Caribbean island with all black cast, with rock, reggae, blues, and Calypso orchestrations. <http://gasdisc.oakapplepress.com/mikblack.htm>



Frankey Brown, Maurice Cooper



Bill Robinson, Bob Parrish, Frances Brock, Gwendolyn Reyde, Rosetta LeNoire



Patricia Ebigwei



# *The Mikado*, 1986

## English National Opera

Conceived, adapted, and directed by Jonathan Miller. Miller felt original production was a case of a costumed cover-up, "a fancy-dress party," Mr. Miller discussed the D'Oyly Carte tradition and compared its fanatical adherents to members of a religious cult. "To them," he offered, "the fan must be flicked open just the right way, like the elevation of the host at a communion service. They will be appalled - I have failed to perform the ritual as written." He thought others would visit the Coliseum with a very ENO "let's-see-what-he-can-do-with-it" attitude, while yet another segment would think it was too clever by half and say "Why change something that's worked well?"

The play was set in a 1930's English seaside hotel. The black and white color palette of the scenery and costumes were inspired by the Ascot race in *My Fair Lady*, while the direction and choreography was inspired by Groucho Marx films, evoking the glory of the Golden Age of Hollywood movie musicals. Eric Idle played Koko. As it turned out "People were deeply shocked at the way Miller ditched the fake Japonaiserie and made what has been regarded as a theatrical dinosaur fun and elegant. So effective has Miller's production been in changing our expectations of Gilbert and Sullivan, that it has transitioned from iconoclastic to classic, and now seems utterly conventional."

<https://www.nytimes.com/1986/10/12/arts/jonathan-miller-s-mikado-owes-a-lot-to-the-marx-brothers.html>



# Memoirs of a Geisha, 2005

Based on the book by Arthur Golden. The film tells the story of a young Japanese girl, Chiyo Sakamoto, who is sold by her impoverished family to a geisha house (*okiya*) in order to support them by training as and eventually becoming a geisha. The film stars Ziyi Zhang, Ken Watanabe, Gong Li, and Michelle Yeoh.

Controversy arose due to the casting of the film, with all three main female roles going to non-Japanese actresses. Both Chinese and Japanese critics expressed anger over the casting. The Chinese government canceled the film's release. Japanese critics took issue with the portrayal of geisha in the film, deeming it inaccurate and Westernized. Japanese cultural expert Peter MacIntosh, who had advised on the film, expressed concern that it had not been made specifically for a Japanese audience, and that anyone knowledgeable about Japanese culture who saw the film would be "appalled". Other Asians defended the casting, including the film's main Japanese star Ken Watanabe, who said that "talent is more important than nationality."

In defense of the film, Zhang said: A director is only interested in casting someone he believes is appropriate for a role...regardless of whether someone is Japanese or Chinese or Korean, we all would have had to learn what it is to be a geisha, because almost nobody today knows what that means—not even the Japanese actors on the film. To my mind, what this issue is all about, though, is the intense historical problems between China and Japan. The whole subject is a land mine. Maybe one of the reasons people made such a fuss about *Geisha* was that they were looking for a way to vent their anger.



<https://web.archive.org/web/20120829161435/http://www.helloziyi.us/Articles/interview-magazine-july2006.htm>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/oct/23/film.japan>

[https://web.archive.org/web/20081221002256/http://www.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2006/01/28/watanabe\\_defends\\_casting\\_in\\_geisha/](https://web.archive.org/web/20081221002256/http://www.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2006/01/28/watanabe_defends_casting_in_geisha/)



# *The Mikado Re-Imagined*, 2017

## New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players

After announcing that *Mikado* would be part of their 2015-16 season a public outcry was heard all over New York about its inherent racism. In response to an essay that appeared in the online magazine [Reappropriate](https://nygasp.org/mikado-program-note-public), the production was quickly cancelled as NYGASP held meetings with Asian-American members of the theatre world and convened an advisory panel to discuss a re-imagining of *The Mikado*. Not everyone agreed that it should be saved, and the process was at times contentious. In the 2014-15 theatre season, only 4% of Broadway and off-Broadway roles were filled by actors of Asian descent.

This all-new, critically acclaimed production of *The Mikado* that grew out of those meetings, is a diverse one with Asian American artists making up ten percent of the company, including the Assistant Director, costume and scenic designers. The production starkly contrasts with historical treatments of *The Mikado* in several ways, most importantly with no yellowface makeup and no racist stereotyped acting.

<https://nygasp.org/mikado-program-note-public>

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/an-asian-american-reimagining-of-gilbert-and-sullivan-the-mikado>



# *The Mikado*, 2019 English National Opera

English theatre critic Jim Pritchard: “In 1986 when Miller’s adaptation debuted the world was a different place, we still had Benny Hill chasing scantily clad girls and few would raise an eyebrow about white actors portraying Black, Latino or Asian characters on screen or in the theatre. In the 1980s ‘whitewashing’ meant, well, painting with whitewash and ‘colour blind’ casting was a long way off.... The problem is that G&S is treated too reverentially.” He includes the current ENO production in this assessment. “Ideally Gilbert’s text should mostly be jettisoned, and everything rewritten for a twenty-first century audience.”

<https://seenandheard-international.com/2019/11/jonathan-millers-the-mikado-returns-once-more-to-eno-but-is-showing-its-age/>



Sir John Tomlinson as The Mikado, Soraya Mafi as Yum-Yum, Elgan Llyr Thomas as Nanki-Poo, Yvonne Howard as Katisha, and Richard Suat as Koko.



# *Allegiance*, Broadway 2015

Inspired by the personal experience of George Takei, *Allegiance* is a musical that tells the story of the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII. It was the first Broadway musical to be crowd funded. It featured an all Asian cast and starred George Takei, Lea Salonga, Telly Leung, Michael K. Lee, Christopheren Nomura, and Greg Watanabe.

Praised for its concept, acting, and singing, the show was criticized for its book, music, and lyrics. Many reviewers felt that although it was an important subject for a play, illuminating a dark corner of American history, the character development was superficial, the score was derivative, and the songs didn't linger once the curtain came down. Mark Kennedy of the Associated Press implied the structure was schizophrenic: "There are long periods of unrelenting misery, with families ripped from their homes and subjected to brutality by vindictive white soldiers. Then there's a song about the joys of baseball. That gives way to scenes with dangerous choking dust storms, a dead baby, and jail beatings. Then there is a sock hop." It ran for only 111 performances. It was completely snubbed by the Tony Awards and wasn't nominated in any category. <http://allegiancemusical.com/>



# *Fresh Off the Boat, 2015-2020*



TV series ran for 6 seasons. Loosely based on the life of celebrity chef Eddie Huang and his 2013 autobiography. The story centers around a Taiwanese American family in Florida in the 1990's. Starring Randall Park, Constance Wu, Hudson Yang, Forrest Wheeler, Ian Chen, and Lucille Soong. It scored 94% fresh on Rotten Tomatoes: "This charming family sitcom is a milestone for Asian American representation."



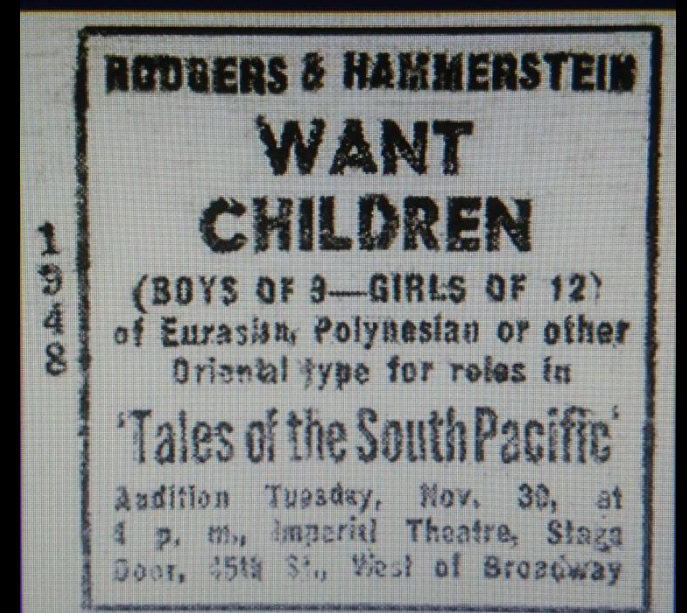
# *South Pacific*, 1949

## Broadway

Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote *South Pacific* as a musical based on Michener's book that would send a strong progressive message on racism during the time of Jim Crow, when mixed race marriages were illegal. The plot centers on an American nurse, Nellie, stationed on a South Pacific island during World War II, who falls in love with a middle-aged expatriate French plantation owner Emile, but struggles to accept his mixed-race children. A secondary romance, between a Princeton educated U.S. Marine, Lt. Cable, and a young Tonkinese woman, Liat, explores his fears of the social consequences should he marry her.

The issue of racial prejudice is candidly explored throughout the musical, most controversially in Emile and Lt. Cable's song, "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught": "You've got to be taught to be afraid of people who's eyes are oddly made and people who's skin is a different shade"

BIPOC actors were cast: Black actress, Juanita Hall, played Bloody Mary, and Filipino actors Barbara Luna and twin brothers Michael and Noel de Leon, played Emile's mixed-race children.



Barbara Luna as Ngana, Michael or Noel DeLeon as Jerome

# *South Pacific*, 1958

## Film Adaptation

Its racial theme provoked controversy, especially in the Southern U.S, for which its authors were unapologetic. When it toured to a racially segregated theatre in Delaware, R&H refused to open unless the theatre integrated, which it did. Congressmen from Georgia tried to ban it altogether. Controversy notwithstanding, it was an immediate blockbuster and won all ten Tony Awards it was nominated for.

When they made the film version in 1958, the Hays Code still forbade the depiction of miscegenation, but *South Pacific* earned its seal of approval because Cable is killed by the Japanese and Nellie is allowed to marry Emile because he is white.

Juanita Hall reprised her role as Bloody Mary. The original child actors were too old, so they were replaced with Candace Lee and Warren Hsieh. For the role of Liat, they replaced the original white actress, Betta St. John, with a fourth BIPOC actor, France Nuyen as Liat. It was her first ever role. It was filmed on location in Kauai.



Juanita Hall as Bloody Mary and Li Jun Li as Liat.



# Revival of *South Pacific*, 2008

Directed by Bartlett Sher, the play takes on new anti-war statement in the context of Bush's war in Iraq and doubles down on its anti-racist statement as Barak Obama, a bi-racial man born in Hawaii, was running for president. The company was 33% BIPOC actors. Bloody Mary was played by Hawaiian Loretta Ables Sayre, Liat was played by Chinese actress Li Jun Li. It won 7 of the 11 Tony Awards that it was nominated for.

The misogynistic aspect of the show reads as very dated now, with the song "Dames" being particularly offensive. Moreover, [Huffington Post review](#) was still critical of the play as having an Orientalist and Western-centric storyline in which stereotypical natives take on "exotic background roles" in relation to Americans. Furthermore, it characterized the relationship between Cable and Liat as underage prostitution, charging that she "speaks not a word in the whole musical, only smiles and takes the Yankee to bed."

<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2008/08/south-pacific-and-politics-today>



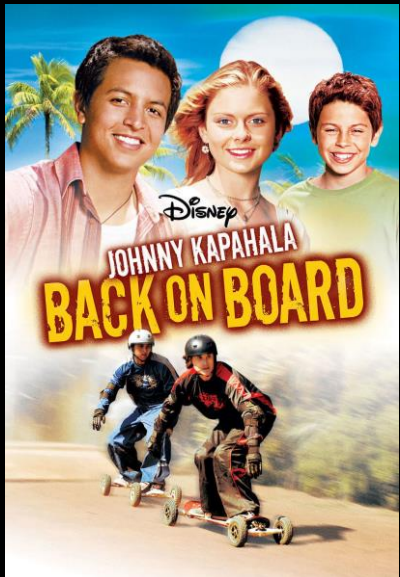
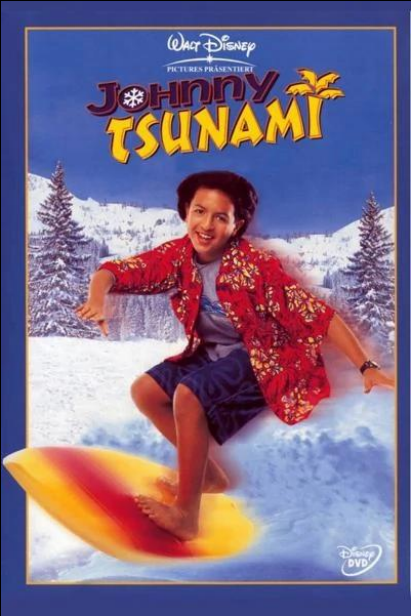
Li Jun Li as Liat, and Loretta Ables Sayre as Bloody Mary

# Johnnie Tsunami, 1999 Johnnie Kapahala, 2007

Disney channel original movie about a young surfer from Hawaii who moves with his family to Vermont, starring Brandon Baker as Johnnie Kapahala. Baker grew up competing in a Polynesian dance troupe with his family, as well as skiing, surfing, snowboarding, and playing hockey.

Baker's ancestry is Hawaiian and Filipino, casting directors deemed him "ethnically ambiguous" so he played Indian, Asian, Latino, and Native American roles. "Baker said, I think *Johnny Tsunami* was the first time I ever played a role that was of mixed descent, it was like, 'Okay, here's an actual identity that is somewhat akin to my own.'" He described the show as "surprisingly deep and non-pandering. It's just a family going through some shit, a kid growing up with a shitty father, and some racial and social issues. 'The longer I'm away from the acting, the more I'm glad I don't do it,' he says. 'But when people are like, 'I grew up with your movie, and I'm loving watching it with my kid now,' that's where it's just like, dude, that's super cool. If there's one role that has always felt aligned with who I am, it's *Johnny Tsunami*.'"

[https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/3kxxzb/what-happened-to-johnny-tsunami](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/3kxxzb/what-happened-to-johnny-tsunami)





# Moana, 2016

In 2012, Directors Ron Clements and John Musker went on research trips to Fiji, Samoa, and Tahiti to meet the people of the South Pacific Ocean and learn about their culture. The majority of the cast members are of Polynesian descent. Auli'i Cravalho voiced Moana, Dwayne the Rock Johnson voiced Maui, and Lin Manuel Miranda, wrote the score. It garnered two Oscar Nominations.



Lin Manuel Miranda , Auli'i Cravalho, and Dwayne Johnson



# Asian Theatre Companies

## California

- East West Players <https://eastwestplayers.org/>
- National Asian American Theatre Company <http://www.naatco.org/>
- Artists at Play <http://artistsatplayla.blogspot.com/>
- Chinese Pirate Productions <https://www.chinesepirateproductions.com/>
- Contemporary Asian Theatre Scene (CATS) <https://www.catsasiantheaterscene.org/>
- Grateful Crane Ensemble <https://www.gratefulcrane.com/>
- TeAda Productions <http://www.teada.org/>
- Bindlestiff Studio <https://www.bindlestiffstudio.org/>
- Crowded Fire <http://www.crowdedfire.org/>
- NAATAK <https://www.naatak.org/>
- EnActe Arts <https://www.enacte.org/>
- Ferocious Lotus <https://www.ferociouslotus.org/>
- Theatre of Yugen <http://www.theatreofyugen.org/>

## New York

- Asian American Performers Action Coalition <http://www.aapacnyc.org/>
- Ma-Yi Theatre Ensemble <http://ma-yitheatre.org/>
- Pan Asian Repertory Theatre <https://www.panasianrep.org/>
- Second Generation <http://www.2g.org/>
- National Asian American Theatre Company <http://www.naatco.org/>
- Four Seas Players <http://fourseasplayers.com/>
- Leviathan Lab <https://leviathanlab.org/>
- National Asian Artists Project <https://www.naaproject.org/>
- Yangtze Repertory Theatre <https://www.yzrep.org/>
- Rising Circle Theatre Collective <https://www.risingcircle.org/>





# Texas Asian Theatre Companies

## Austin

- Lucky Chaos Theatre and Productions <http://www.luckychaos.com/>

Lucky Chaos was founded in 2012 by Leng Wong, currently the Executive Director. Since 2012, we have produced over 60 productions with many theatrical productions playing to capacity crowds.



## Houston

- Shunya Theatre <https://shunyatheatre.org/>

Shunya, a Houston-based non-profit theatre troupe founded in 2003, is dedicated to providing a voice to the South Asian American experience through the visual and performing arts. Co-Artistic Director Sara Kumar.

# Asian Stage Actors

- Nico DeJesus: *Pretty Woman the Musical*
- Karla Garcia: as *Hamilton*
- Angelo Soriano: *Alladin*
- Julian De Guzman: *Newsies*
- Aaron Albono: Samuel Seabury in *Hamilton*
- Jin Ha: *M. Butterfly*
- Telly Leung: Ali in *Aladdin*
- Adam Jacobs: Ali in *Aladdin*
- Conrad Ricamora: Lun Tha in *The King and I*
- Jon Viktor Corpuz: Prince Chula in *The King and I*
- Lea Salonga: Kim in *Miss Saigon*
- Eva Noblezada: Eurydice in *Hadestown*
- Phillipa Soo: Eliza in *Hamilton*
- Kristen Faith Oei: *Soft Power*
- Ali Ewoldt: Christene in *Phantom of the Opera*
- Diana Huey: Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*
- Stephanie Hsu: Karen the Computer in *SpongeBob the Musical*
- Catherine Ricafort: *Alice by Heart*
- Karen Olivio: Vanessa in *In the Heights*



# Asian Tony Award Winners

- Willa Kim, Best Costume Design, *Sophisticated Ladies*, 1981.
- Ming Cho Lee, Best Scenic Design, *K2*, 1983.
- David Henry Hwang, Best Play, *M. Butterfly*, 1988.
- B. D. Wong, Best Featured Actor in a Play, *M. Butterfly*, 1988
- Willa Kim, Best Costume Design, *The Will Rogers Follies*, 1991.
- Lea Salonga, Best Actress in a Musical, *Miss Saigon*, 1991
- Robert Lopez , Best Original Score, *Avenue Q*, 2004
- Robert Lopez Best Original Score Written for the Theatre, *Book of Mormon*, 2011
- Robert Lopez Best Book of a Musical, *Book of Mormon*, 2011
- Yasuhiro Kawana, Producer, Best Musical, *Kinky Boots*, 2013.

# Asian Tony Award Winners

- Ming Cho Lee, Special Award for Lifetime Achievement, 2013
- Jhett Tolentino Producer, Best Play, *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, 2013
- Linda Cho, Best Costume Design of a Musical for *A Gentlemen's Guide to Love and Murder*, 2014.
- Jhett Tolentino, Producer, Best Musical, *A Gentlemen's Guide to Love and Murder*, 2014
- Jhett Tolentino Producer, Best Revival of a Play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, 2014
- Ruthie Ann Miles, Best Performance by an Actress in a Featured Role in a Musical, *The King and I*, 2015
- Mimi Lien, Best Scenic Design of a Musical, *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet Of 1812*, 2017
- Raymond Poliquit, Producer, Best Musical, *Dear Evan Hansen*, 2017
- Baayork Lee, Isabelle Stevenson Tony Award, 2017
- Kai Harada, Best Sound Design for a Musical, *The Band's Visit*, 2018.



# Asian Film/TV Actors

- Ian Alexander: *The OA*
- Karan Brar: *Wimpy Kid* movies
- Ross Butler: *Riverdale*
- Ian Chen: *Shazam!*
- Terry Chen: *Van Helsing*
- John Cho: *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*
- Henry Golding: *Crazy Rich Asians*
- Mark-Paul Gosselaar: *Pitch*
- Manny Jacinto: *The Good Place*
- Tim Jo: *Pitch*
- Ki Hong Lee: *Maze Runner, Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*
- Will Yun Lee: *Falling Water*
- Charles Melton: *Riverdale*
- Kunal Nayyar: *Big Bang Theory*
- Dev Patel: *Slumdog Millionaire*
- Kal Penn: *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*
- Harry Shum Jr.: *Glee*
- Vincent Rodriguez III: *Crazy Ex Girlfriend*
- Anthony Ruivivar: *Frequency*
- Hudson Yang: *Fresh Off the Boat*
- Forrest Wheeler: *New Girl*

# Asian Film/TV Actresses

- Keiko Agena: *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life*
- Aubrey Anderson-Emmons: *Modern Family*
- Awkwafina: *Jumanji 2: The Next Level*
- Chloe Bennet: *Agents of Shield*
- Sarayu Blue: *No Tomorrow*
- Arden Cho: *Teen Wolf*
- Priyanka Chopra: *Quantico*
- Kelsey Chow: *Teen Wolf*
- Jamie Chung: *CSI*
- Lana Condor: *X-Men Apocalypse*
- Auli'i Cravalho: *Moana*
- Sandrine Holt: *Macgyver*
- Vanessa Hudgens: *High School Musical*
- Sakina Jaffrey: *Timeless*
- Jameela Jamil: *The Good Place*
- Mindy Kaling: *The Office*
- Hayley Kiyoko: *CSI: Cyber*
- Claudia Kim: *Avengers Age of Ultron*
- Christine Ko: *The Great Indoors*
- Katrina Law: *Training Day*
- Greta Lee: *Chance*
- Shay Mitchell: *Pretty Little Liars*
- Lyrica Okano: *Marvel's Runaways*
- Kosha Patel: *Mary + Jane*
- Susan Park: *The Mick*
- Janel Parrish: *Pretty Little Liars*
- Freida Pinto: *Slumdog Millionaire*
- Zuleikiha Robinson: *Still Star-Crossed*
- Naomi Scott: *Aladdin*
- Reshma Shetty: *Pure Genius*
- Brenda Song: *Pure Genius*
- Nikki SooHoo: *Heathers*
- Hailee Steinfeld: *Pitch Perfect 2 and 3*
- Tamlyn Tonita: *Berlin Station*
- Jenna Ushkowitz: *Glee*
- Maggie Q: *Designated Survivor*
- Ming-Na Wen: *Mulan, Agents of Shield*
- Ali Wong: *American Housewife*

Did you notice there are twice as many women as men?



# Asian Oscar Winners

- Miyoshi Umedki: Best Supporting Actress, *Sayonara*, 1958.
- Ben Kingsley: Best Actor *Gandhi*, 1983.
- Haing S. Ngor: Best Supporting Actor *The Killing Fields*, 1984.
- Ang Lee: Best Foreign language Film, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, 2001
- Ang Lee: Best Director *Brokeback Mountain*, 2006
- Ang Lee: Best Director *Life of Pi*, 2013