



“STELLAR!” – *Variety*



From Arthur Dong, director of *Forbidden City, U.S.A.* & *Licensed to Kill*

HOLLYWOOD CHINESE



Featuring **TURHAN BEY JOAN CHEN**
JAMES HONG DAVID HENRY HWANG
NANCY KWAN ANG LEE
CHRISTOPHER LEE JUSTIN LIN
LISA LU LUISE RAINER
JAMES SHIGETA AMY TAN
WAYNE WANG B.D. WONG



Limited Theatrical Engagements

SAN FRANCISCO

Sundance Kabuki Cinemas
April 11-17, 2008

www.sundancecinemas.com/kabuki.html
415/929-4650

OAKLAND

Grand Lake Theater
April 11-17, 2008

www.renaissancerialto.com/current/grandlake.html
510/452-3556

LOS ANGELES

The Egyptian Theatre
May 15-22, 2008

www.americancinematheque.com
323/466-3456

PASADENA

Laemmle's One Colorado Theaters
May 16-22, 2008

www.laemmle.com
626/744-1224

HOLLYWOOD CHINESE FILM SERIES

American Cinematheque, Los Angeles
May 15-22, 2008

The American Cinematheque presents a special series in conjunction with the Egyptian Theatre's engagement of *Hollywood Chinese*. Curated by filmmaker Arthur Dong, the series includes motion pictures that highlight the Chinese in American feature films. Starting from the newly discovered and re-stored 1916 silent film, *The Curse of Quon Gwon*, to a cast and crew reunion of *The Joy Luck Club*, and special nights devoted to Nancy Kwan, Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu, this will be a first for Los Angeles. Special guests and speakers will accompany each program. For up to date information, please visit www.americancinematheque.com.

The Hollywood Chinese film series is co-sponsored by the Chinese American Museum, API Equality, Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment (CAPE), Diverse and Inclusive Visionary Artists (DIVA), Screen Actors Guild, Outfest, and Visual Communications (list complete as of printing date).

www.hollywoodchinese.com

Major funding for *Hollywood Chinese* provided by Center for Asian American Media, National Endowment for the Arts, Ford Foundation, California Council for the Humanities' California Stories Initiative, Media Arts Fellowship, Gee Family Foundation, Independent Television Service with funds from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting

© 2008 DeepFocus Productions, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
Design by Zand Gee. Nancy Kwan photo by Bert Stern, courtesy of Esquire Magazine.
Ang Lee photo by Kimberley French, courtesy of Focus Features.



ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF CHINESE HOLLYWOOD

By Sandy Mandelberger
Toronto International Film Festival Dailies Editor
www.FilmFestivals.com

In the delightfully entertaining and historically significant new documentary, *Hollywood Chinese*, documentarian Arthur Dong has filled in an essential gap in the history of Hollywood...charting the influence of Chinese and Chinese-American actors and technicians to the magic of the dream factory. The film is a quite ambitious history lesson that mixes both artistic contributions by well-known and unsung heroes and heroines, while attempting to understand the basis and origin of “Asian mystique” and how it has been portrayed in films. Racial stereotyping, Caucasian actors being given roles that should have been parceled out to true Asian thespians, and the cultural divide that has, up until recently, not fully accepted Asian immigrants as part of the American patchwork quilt are imaginatively and effectively drawn.

Dong traces the Chinese presence to the early silent days, when Asian actors (most unheralded) would round out an atmosphere of corruption and violence in some early melodramas. When a film role was more substantial, as that played by Richard Barthelmess in D.W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms*, it was always a Caucasian actor who was hired for the role. This practice, which seems absurd for modern audiences, but was the rule for the first five decades of Hollywood history, extended to such films as *The Good Earth* (the Austrian Luise Rainer as a Chinese peasant) and *Dragon Seed* (the New England Katherine Hepburn with slanted eyes). Even such classic Chinese characters (adapted from best-selling novels) as Charlie Chan, Mr. Moto and the notorious Fu Manchu (all of which were substantial film hits and generated a series of successful films), were played on screen by a series of European actors (Warner Oland, Sidney Toler, Peter Lorre, Boris Karloff and Christopher Lee respectively).

While a few authentic Asians were cast during Hollywood's golden era (for example, the Chinese-American actress Anna May Wong, a minor-key star of the 1930s, albeit always cast as either a dragon lady or a seductress), Japanese and Chinese actors were, in the eyes of the public and many a Hollywood producer, essentially interchangeable (a demeaning notion considering those two country's troubled history with one another). The casting decisions surrounding the MGM filmed adaptation of writer Pearl Buck's Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Good Earth*, revealed the system in all its infamy. Anna May Wong was desperate to be cast in the lead, but lost out to the Austrian Luise Rainer (who was a major star of the time and noted as an actress who could become almost any character). She was teamed with the equally dexterous Paul Muni (another chameleon who, despite his Yiddish theater roots, played all kinds of ethnicity on the screen). The film, described as the *Gone With the Wind* for the Chinese experience, was a watershed film in many ways, but its essential falseness cannot be hidden behind the expert makeup.

In fact, it was not until the late 1950s that a true Chinese-American superstar emerged. Nancy Kwan, a sexy, leggy actress/dancer who spoke in complete English sentences rather than pidgin monosyllables, made a strong impression as an amoral prostitute who finds love with William Holden in the big screen adaptation of the Broadway hit, *The World of Suzie Wong*. She followed up this highly successful and profitable film with the lead role in the film adaptation of Rodger and Hammerstein's musical sensation, *Flower Drum Song*, which featured an all-Asian cast (although a Japanese actress, the Oscar winner Miyoshi Umeki, who died this past weekend, was cast as a Chinese immigrant...but no one batted an eyelash). Kwan, who was present at the screening, emerged from this double hitter scrambling for quality roles, eventually having to repeat “dragon lady” stereotypes in a series of low budget exploitation pictures.

Thankfully, times have changed in the past two decades, with the emergence of such key directors as Ang Lee, Wayne Wang, John Woo, Joan Chen and a host of emerging indie talents. Films such as *The Joy Luck Club* have been able to be successful to a general public, while not compromising their essential “Asianness”. The more films made like this, the more authentic actors with substantial roles. But the success of the chop-socky action films starring such icons as Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li has not necessarily expanded the type of roles being offered to more colored Chinese actors such as B.D. Wong, James Hong and Joan Chen. With rare exceptions, Chinese-American actors are asked to play either “dragon ladies”, sexual submissives, action heroes or Zen master types. The struggle for a broader definition of what kinds of roles can be played by Asian actors continues.

Dong has done a masterful job of research into some very obscure film offerings from the past, none more so than a fascinating 1916 silent film, *The Curse of Quon Gwon*, made by a woman director Marion Wong, which was considered a “lost film” until it was uncovered a few years ago in a badly deteriorated nitrate print. These glimpses into the historical past, plus sharp interviews with a host of Chinese actors, directors and technicians, makes clear that the Chinese influence in Hollywood is a long one, and that it is high time that it be honored and acknowledged.

(Toronto, September 10, 2007 — Reprinted with permission.)