



Name in English: Anna May Wong

Name in Chinese: 黄柳霜

Name in Pinyin: Huáng Liǔshuāng

Gender: Female

Birth Year: 1905-1961

Birth Place: Los Angeles, California

Philanthropy: Auctioned her movie costumes, donating the money to Chinese aid; donated her salary from WWII-era films to United China Relief

Profession: Actress

Award(s): 1932, Honorary Doctorate from Peking University; 1960, received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame; the Anna May Wong Award of Excellence given out yearly at the Asian-American Arts Awards.

Contribution(s): The first Chinese American movie star, she broke further barriers by also becoming the first Asian American television star in *The Gallery of Madame Liu-Tsong*. She appeared in several anonymous roles starting in 1919, but her breakthrough came in January 1923 with the release of “*The Toll of the Sea*,” her first starring role that gained her American recognition and the chance of making better pictures. Her international breakthrough role soon followed in the 1924 film “*The Thief of Baghdad*,” opposite Douglas Fairbanks, then the most popular male star in America. She played a self-sacrificing “*Butterfly*,” a role that she would repeat throughout her career, alternating this with a conniving, deceitful “*Dragon Lady*” role. Her typecasting earned her a lot of criticism for fueling a white stereotype of all Chinese. Yet her career was cursed by anti-miscegenation laws (making interracial marriages and sexual relationships illegal) that kept her from ever playing the leading lady, as she was not allowed to kiss a Caucasian male lead.

Frustrated by the typecast roles she played in Hollywood, Wong left for Europe in the late 1920s, where she garnered acclaim for her films, stage acting and singing in Germany, France and Britain, even becoming fluent in German, French, and the King’s English in the process. Wong’s most lauded role with Marlene Dietrich, in “*Shanghai Express*” in 1935, came after her return to the United States.

However in 1935, MGM also refused her the leading role in “*The Good Earth*.” It instead went to the German actress Luise Rainer, who played the part in “*yellowface*.” The only role Wong was offered was that of Lotus, the only unsympathetic role in a film in which an otherwise all-white cast portrayed Chinese characters. After she was refused the part, Wong returned to England. To complete her contract with Paramount Pictures, Wong made several B-movies in the late 1930s, in which she portrayed non-stereotypical Chinese Americans; unfortunately the films were not well received. During World War II, she supported the Chinese struggle against Japan. Anna May Wong’s legacy is complicated. She helped perpetuate stereotypes about Chinese, but still humanized the “*exotic*” to white Hollywood.

External Links: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0938923/>