

elle crée
she creates



Anna May
Wong

About Anna May Wong (1905 – 1961)

First Chinese American Film Star

“The harder the work, the greater the satisfaction in accomplishing it.”

Anna May Wong is known as the first Chinese American Hollywood film star. Her career spanned the transition from silent film to “talkies” in the 1920s.

She was born to second generation Chinese Americans and grew up working at their family-owned laundromat in Los Angeles. She became enthralled with cinema at an early age and dreamed of becoming an actress. When she was only 17, she landed her first leading role in a major movie, *The Toll of the Sea*, which was based on the opera *Madame Butterfly*. The reviews of her performance were stellar, but unfortunately didn't result in other leading roles.

Hollywood continuously typecast her in very stereotypical supporting roles – either as an exotic temptress or as demure and subservient. Due to racist production rules at the time, she wasn't allowed to kiss a Caucasian man on screen which also prevented her from being cast in lead roles. She became frustrated with these limitations and moved to Europe for some time to seek out opportunities on stage and screen. The most disappointing setback to her career came in 1935, when MGM passed her over for a starring role in the screen adaptation of Pearl S. Buck's classic novel, *The Good Earth*, instead casting Caucasian actors in yellow face.

In 1951, Anna May made history by becoming the first Asian American to star in a lead role in an American television series - *The Gallery of Madame Liu-Tsong* – portraying a gallery-owning-sleuth. She died in 1961 at the age of 56 as she was planning a return to the big screen.

Not only is she remembered as a talented actress and fashion icon, she has also been recognized for the pivotal role she played in breaking down the racial barriers in Hollywood that she did battle with throughout her career.