The Asian Reporter

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Asian Heritage Month Special Issue

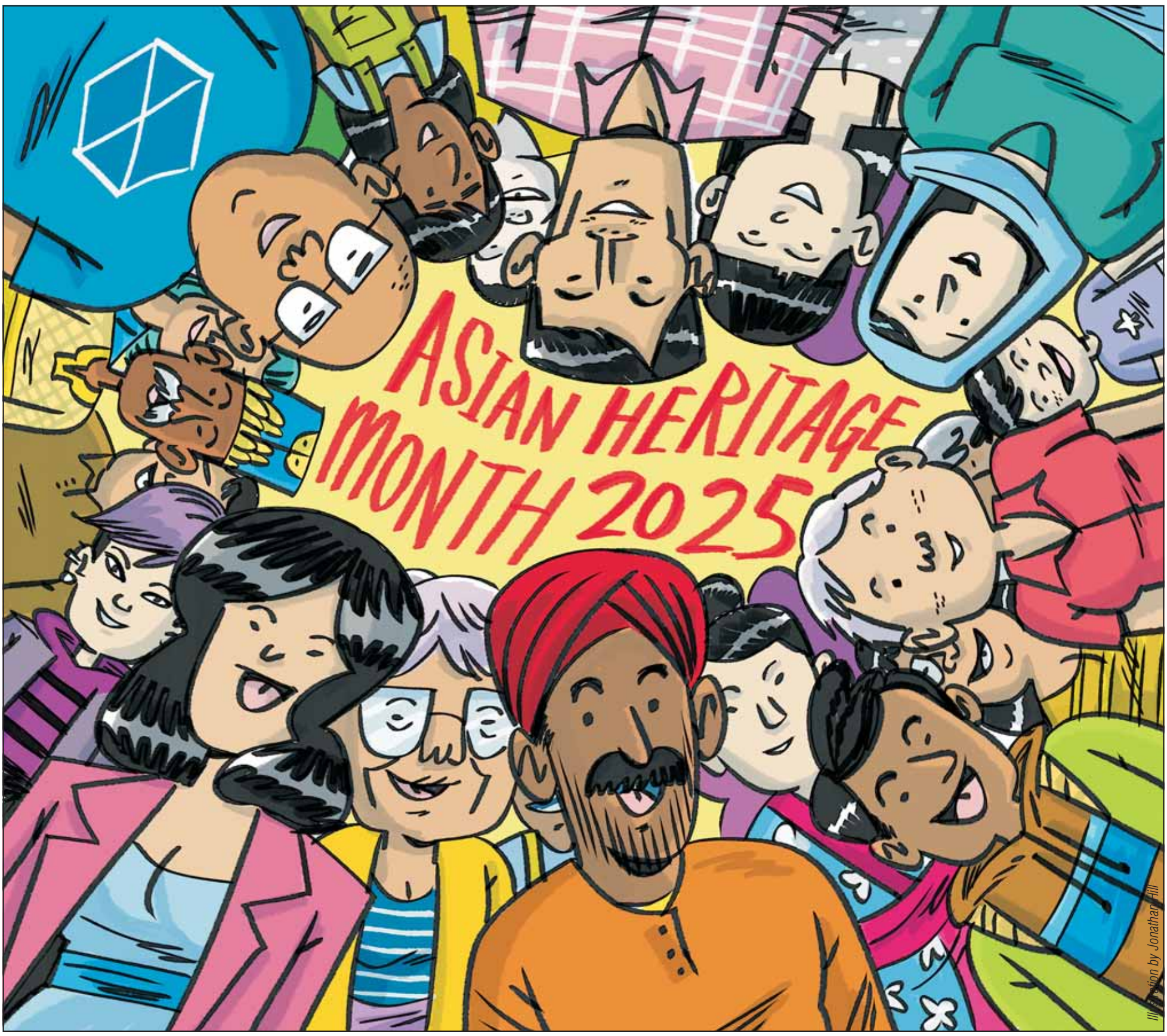

Illustration by Jonathan Hill

CULTURE & HISTORY. *During the month of May, we celebrate Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander heritage. The idea of celebrating the achievements and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the U.S. began in the mid-1970s. Many credit the observance's origin to Jeanie Jew, a co-founder of the Congressional Asian-Pacific staff Caucus. In 1977, the Chinese American shared a moving story with New York Republican representative Frank Horton about how her grandfather had helped build the transcontinental railroad in the 1800s and then was killed amid anti-Asian unrest. Jew believed Asians should appreciate their heritage and "Americans must know about the contributions and histories of the Asian-Pacific American experience," Horton said in 1992, according to congressional archives. This year's heritage month special section begins on page 8.*

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The Asian Reporter is published on the first Monday each month.

Celebrating Asian Heritage

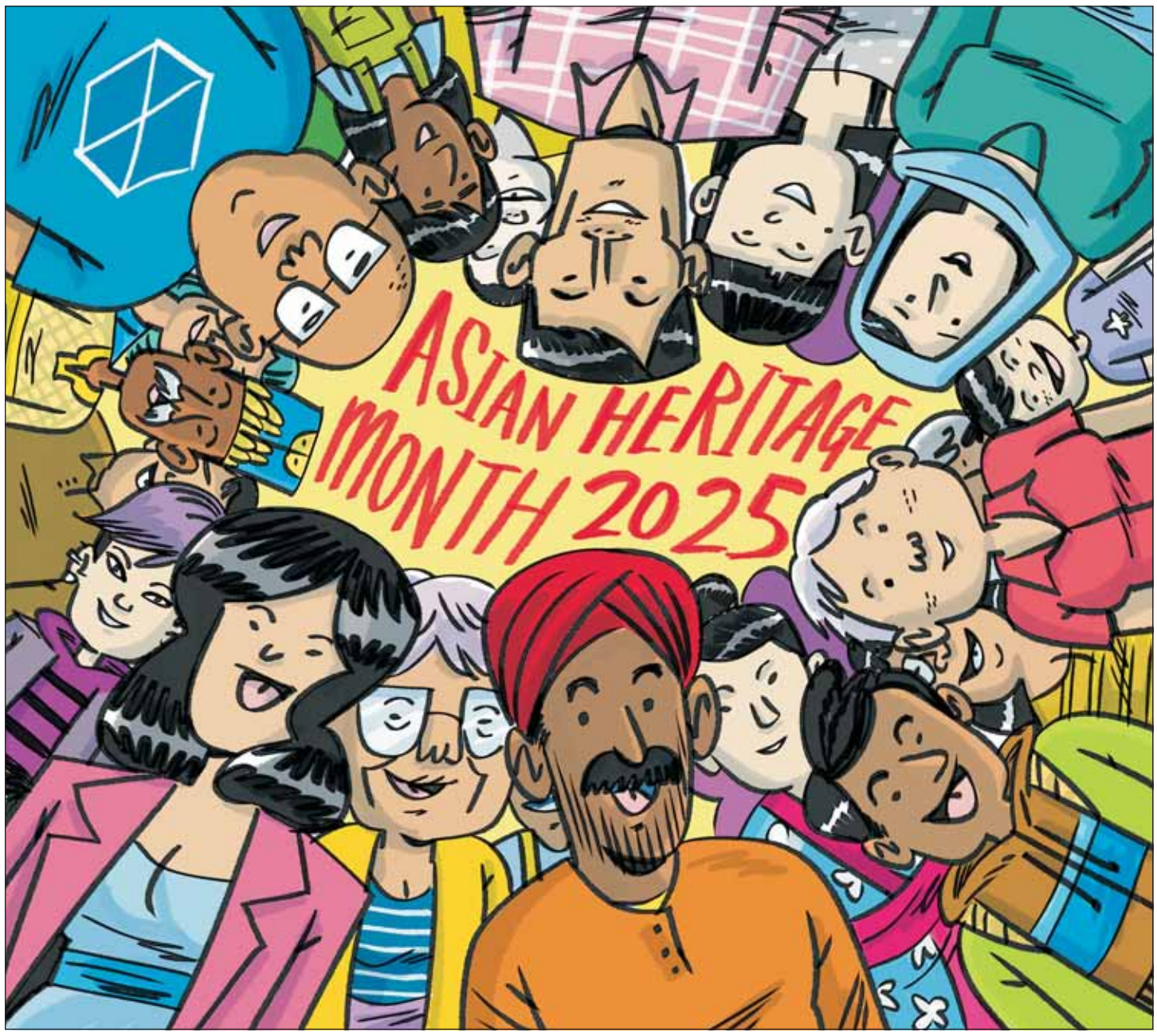
The Asian Reporter celebrates Asian Heritage Month with this special edition. In this issue, we mark heritage month looking at the beginning of the recognition of Asian heritage nearly 50 years ago. What started as just one week in May in the mid-1970s has evolved over the decades into a monthlong tribute of events in cities big and small. And the nature of the celebrations have evolved; it's no longer just about showcasing festive fare like food and fashion, but also addressing hard subjects such as grief and social justice.

The edition next highlights the Independent Lens premiere of a 60-minute documentary by filmmaker Michael Jacobs called *Who is Michael Jang?* The film tells the story behind 50-year-old photographs that had remained mostly hidden to the world. The once-obscure artist brought the images into the public eye by pasting reproductions of his vintage prints around San Francisco.

The section continues with *An Asian American A to Z: A Children's Guide to Our History*, a book about Asian people, movements, culture, historical information, and more written by Cathy Linh Che and Kyle Lucia Wu and featuring illustrations by Kavita Ramchandran.

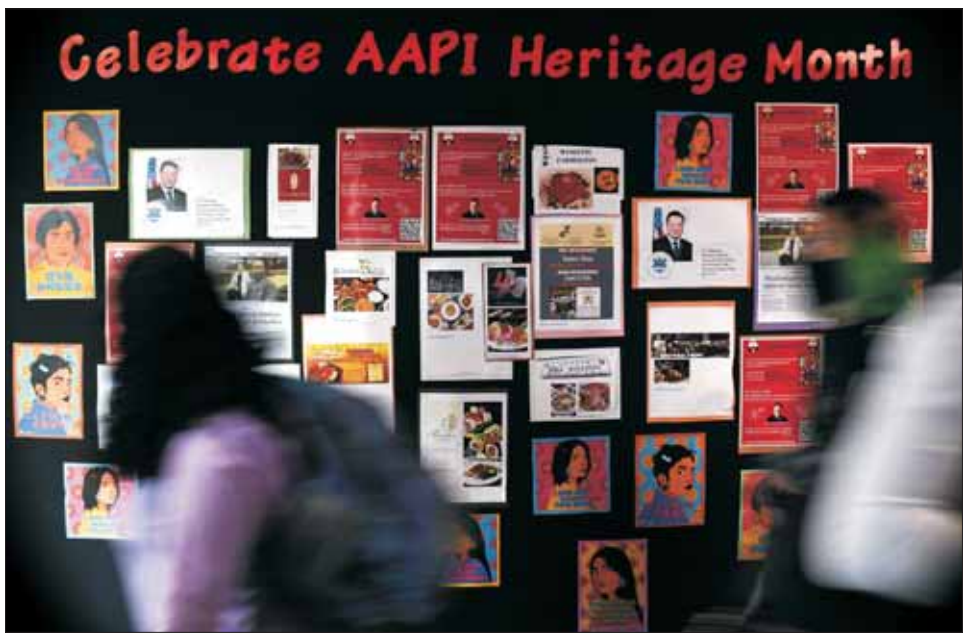
Also presented is *The World of Nancy Kwan*, a memoir by the pioneering Hollywood star about breaking barriers, celebrating achievements, overcoming disappointments, surviving tragedies, and, back in the day, calling an Asian actor getting to play an Asian role a victory because most roles were given to white actors.

Finally, our expanded events calendar provides a monthlong guide to Asian art, history, culture, and entertainment.



Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month has only grown in 5 decades

By Terry Tang
The Associated Press



CELEBRATING CULTURE & HISTORY. *Students walk past a display for Asian Heritage Month at Farmington High School in Farmington, Connecticut, in this May 10, 2021 file photo. What started as just one week in May has evolved over the decades into a monthlong tribute of events in cities big and small. (AP Photo/Jessica Hill, File)*

It has been almost 50 years since the U.S. government established that Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders and their accomplishments should be recognized annually across the nation.

What started as just one week in May has evolved over the decades into a monthlong tribute of events in cities big and small. The nature of celebrations also evolved. Asian American and Pacific Islander or Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month is not just about showcasing festive fare like food and fashion, but hard subjects like grief and social justice. The rise of anti-Asian hate during the pandemic only heightened that effort.

"I think the visibility and the level that the increased participation of organizations in Asian Pacific Heritage Month activities is also an indication of the increasing voice of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in civic life more generally," said Karen Umemoto, director of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center. "And also an indication of the spaces that we've come to collectively enter to be able to create those."

Heritage Month celebrations are not relegated just to ethnic enclaves or culturally-specific venues. Across the U.S., events are planned at public libraries, parks, and museums either highlighting a specific Asian culture or a myriad of them.

This year, the occasion is happening as President Donald Trump has curtailed diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in federal government. The president's anti-DEI executive orders appear to have prompted the removal of Defense Department website content honoring Japanese American service members (it was later restored). In February, during Black History Month, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy announced that his department would no longer participate in "identity-based observances."

The White House did, however, host a well-attended Black History Month celebration that Trump attended alongside golf legend Tiger Woods. The White House did not immediately respond to questions about plans for an AAPI Heritage Month celebration.

How did AAPI Heritage Month start?

Many credit the observance's origin to Jeanie Jew, a co-founder of the Congressional Asian-Pacific staff Caucus. In 1977, the Chinese American shared a moving story with New York Republican representative Frank Horton about how her grandfather had helped build the transcontinental railroad in the 1800s and then was killed amid anti-Asian unrest.

Jew believed Asians should appreciate their heritage and "Americans must know about the contributions and histories of the Asian-Pacific American experience," Horton said in 1992, according to congressional archives. At that time, Black History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month had already been instituted. Yet, Asian Americans were considered the fastest growing racial group.

Horton and California Democratic representative Norm Mineta proposed President Jimmy Carter issue a proclamation that the first week of May be "Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week." Hawai'i senators Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga, both Democrats, brought up a similar bill in the senate. Carter signed a joint resolution establishing the celebration in 1978.

Why is it in the month of May?

May was chosen because of two significant events. The first Japanese immigrants to the U.S. arrived on May 7, 1843. Then on May 19, 1869, the final spike for the transcontinental railroad track, in which Chinese laborers played a crucial role, was embedded.

Umemoto recalls hearing talk of Asian Pacific Heritage Week as a college student. But it wasn't something that was mainstream.

"I think it was more of a kind of cultural celebration in the early days," she said. "And so a lot of student groups, I remember as doing programming around the different histories, cultural traditions, and issues in the community."

In May 1990, President George H.W. Bush expanded the designation to the entire month. In 2009, President Barack Obama changed the name to Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. President Joe Biden's administration referred to it as Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.

In his first term, Trump issued proclamations in celebration of the month. "This month, we recognize the more than

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Who is Michael Jang? reveals a hidden body of photographs

Who is Michael Jang?
Monday, May 19
11:00pm to midnight
Oregon Public Broadcasting

VINTAGE PHOTOS. *Elusive and once-obscure artist Michael Jang (seen standing in the left photo) shows his art along the streets of San Francisco.* Who is Michael Jang? *— a new episode of Independent Lens — premieres on Monday, May 19. (Photos/Brent Willson)*

On Monday, May 19, Oregon Public Broadcasting is airing a new episode of Independent Lens called *Who is Michael Jang?* The 60-minute documentary by filmmaker Michael Jacobs introduces viewers to the story behind 50-year-old photographs that had remained mostly hidden to the world.

San Francisco-based artist Michael Jang sat on the trove of photographs for five decades. The images, taken when he was in his 20s, were underground snapshots that captured communities and subcultures. The pictures infiltrated and observed the area and its people, yet received little notice.

Jang spent his career working as a commercial photographer. In 2021, however, at the age of 70, he attempted to get his works — vintage prints taken on the streets of San Francisco during a pivotal time — seen more widely.

The elusive, once-obscure artist brought the photographs into the public eye by pasting reproductions of the vintage prints around San Francisco, including Chinatown where images of his Chinese American family took on a more subversive meaning, especially amid the rise in 2021 of anti-Asian hate and violence in the city.

The film captures Jang's exploits as his experimental street art morphs into a meta-exploration of his personal history and identity. In the process, *Who is Michael Jang?* bears witness to Jang becoming reacquainted with his younger self through the decades-old images resonating with vital, new meaning today.

"Michael Jang's art is clever and mischievous," said Independent Lens executive producer Lois Vossen. "In a time when the high-art photography world had no place for anything funny, Jang stayed true to himself and captured the quirky and often humorous aspects of everyday life. His visual storytelling is really funny and — like this documentary — both informative and entertaining."

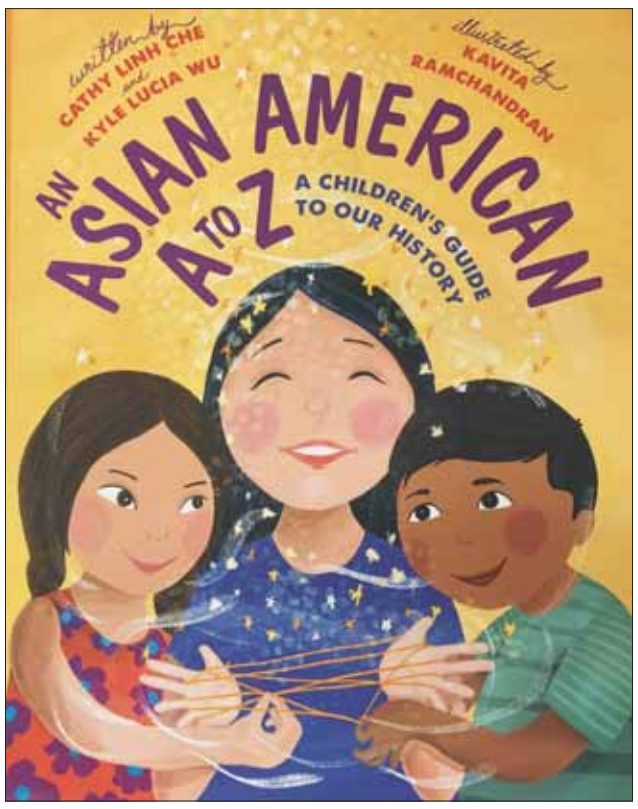
After decades in obscurity, the film shows how Jang uses graffiti tactics to share his previously unknown body of fine art photography with unsuspecting audiences.

Who is Michael Jang? premieres on Monday, May 19 at 11:00pm on Oregon Public Broadcasting. The film is also streaming on the PBS app. To learn more, visit <www.opb.org>.

An Asian American A to Z explores history, culture & more

An Asian American A to Z: A Children's Guide to Our History
By Cathy Linh Che & Kyle Lucia Wu
Illustrations by Kavita Ramchandran
Haymarket Books, 2023
Hardcover, 40 pages, $18.95

By Jody Lim
The Asian Reporter



An Asian American A to Z: A Children's Guide to Our History, written by Cathy Linh Che and Kyle Lucia Wu and featuring illustrations by Kavita Ramchandran, explores Asian American history. Its target audience is children, but it's a book that people of all ages could learn from. It's full of people, movements, culture, historical information, and more. It may also make you think. And act.

Starting on the first page with "A is for Asian American," *An Asian American A to Z* establishes the inclusivity of all Asian cultures: "… a name for us all, collective and true." Under B — beginning — readers are asked, "In 1776, the US was formed. Did you know Asians arrived years before?"

C — civil rights — follows with powerful words: "For equal treatment and protection from laws — many marched and struggled for the cause. Asian Americans everywhere owe much of our fight to the brave ones who first stood up for civil rights."

Under F — first — accompanied by colorful drawings of Bruno Mars, Sunisa Lee, and Padma Lakshmi, we read, "So many have been bold enough to walk a new line." The authors follow up with, "What new lines would you like to chart? You can walk a new path, one lit by your heart."

Under M — movies — with images of actress Anna May Wong, filmmaker Mira Nair, and comedian Hasan Minhai, we're asked, "Are there any parts that you want to play? Your name could be up there in lights one day."

The hard work of Asian Americans is mentioned as well. "R is for railroad," the Transcontinental Railroad, which was built by Chinese workers. "Without those men, we couldn't take those trains, but history books left out all their names! Next time you ride a train, think of what they've done. We reclaim history by remembering each one."

Inspiring and important messages are also found throughout the book: Under H — hotel — "Heroes don't give up if they don't win right away"; under I — intersectionality — we read about "honoring all parts of someone, respecting who they are, however they come."

Under J — Japanese American — the authors pose good questions accompanied by images of a World War II incarceration camp: "120,000 were placed in incarceration camps in a blink. Most were of US citizens, which makes you think: What does it mean to be a citizen here? Don't we all deserve to be free without fear?"

Annoying questions people are often asked are mentioned as well. To this the authors say: "Q is for questions, which you may be asked, about where you're from, or your parents, or past. But you don't have to answer! It's fine not to say! You belong, and you never need to explain."

I, of course, read *An Asian American A to Z* to my nephew, now a first-grader, who enjoyed all of the drawings and absorbed the information presented with each letter of the alphabet. He was unable to narrow down which was his favorite illustration (he liked all of them), but asked many questions. At the end of the book, we found a glossary that provided further information about the topics, concepts, and people we read about in the book.

Authors Cathy Linh Che and Kyle Lucia Wu have created an educational and inspirational book. Purchase your own copy or check out *An Asian American A to Z* from a library to learn more about Asian American history and possibly also be inspired to "walk a new line."

Heritage Month calendar

Organizations and others are holding events in celebration of Heritage Month. Some activities include:

A Tale of Portland's Historic Chinatowns"

Currently on view, 11am-3pm (Thu-Sun), Portland Chinatown Museum (127 NW Third Ave, Portland). View "Beyond the Gate: A Tale of Portland's Historic Chinatowns," a display of rare objects such as Chinese opera costumes, theatrical sets, bilingual text, audio-visual media, and more that tell a sprawling transnational story of contact and trade between China and the west, focusing on Portland's Old Chinatown (1850-1905) and New Chinatown (1905-1950). For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 224-0008 or visit <www.portlandchinatownmuseum.org>.

"Emerging Radiance"

Currently on view, 10am-6pm (Mon, Thu & Fri), 11am-8pm (Tue & Wed), 11am-6pm (Sat-Sun), Bellevue Library (1111 110th Ave NE, Bellevue, Wash.). View "Emerging Radiance," an augmented-reality, interactive artwork that honors the stories of Japanese American farmers who lived in Bellevue between 1920 and World War II. The installation is presented by the City of Bellevue in partnership with the King County Library System. For info, call (425) 450-1765 or visit <https://kcls.bibliocommons.com>.

"Oregon's Nikkei:
An American Story of Resilience"

Currently on view, 10am-4pm (Wed-Sat), 11am-4pm (Sun), Japanese American Museum of Oregon at the Naito Center (411 NW Flanders St, Portland). View "Oregon's Nikkei: An American Story of Resilience," an exhibit that highlights the discrimination, resilience, and identity of the Japanese American community in Oregon. The display begins in rural Oregon and the streets of Portland's Japantown where Japanese immigrants embraced American ideals. What they built was abruptly taken away during World War II when people of Japanese descent were imprisoned in American internment camps. From early immigration through current day, the exhibit explores the Japanese-American experience and includes the rebuilding of communities and the ongoing fight for justice. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 224-1458 or visit <www.jamo.org>.

UNIT SOUZOU. *Unit Souzou is presenting "Constant State of Otherness" on May 9 at the Walters Cultural Arts Center in Hillsboro, Oregon. The event features taiko, Japanese folk dance, song, and personal story. (Photo courtesy of Unit Souzou)*

"Boundless: Stories of Asian Art"

Currently on view, 10am-5pm (Wed-Sun), Seattle Art Museum (1300 First Ave, Seattle). View "Boundless: Stories of Asian Art," a display highlighting themes central to arts and societies of Asia, such as worship and celebration, visual arts and literature, and clothing and identity. The museum's south galleries feature art inspired by spiritual life and the north galleries show art inspired by material life. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (206) 654-3210 or visit <www.seattleartmuseum.org>.

"Be Water, My Friend:
The Teachings of Bruce Lee"

Currently on view, 10am-5pm (Wed-Sat), Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience (719 S King St, Seattle). View "Be Water, My Friend: The Teachings of Bruce Lee," an interactive exhibit that invites viewers to step into the mind, body, and spirit of Bruce Lee to see how his unquenchable pursuit of knowledge informed his philosophy and life. The display follows Bruce's path, beginning with his revelations on water, through the wealth of knowledge found in his 2,800-book personal library, to his philosophy of self-understanding and self-expression. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (206) 623-5124 or visit <www.wingluke.org>.

"What's Worth the Fight:
The History of the Slants"

Through May 11, 11am-3pm (Thu-Sun), Portland Chinatown Museum (127 NW Third Ave, Portland). View "What's Worth the Fight: The History of the Slants," the Portland Chinatown Museum's first music history exhibition. One of the first Asian American dance rock bands, The Slants are best known for their '80s-driven synth-pop (affectionately dubbed by fans as "Chinatown Dance Rock") and their landmark Supreme Court case over the rights to their name. The display explores the band's rich history and musical contributions, their Portland Chinatown roots, and the legacy of their continued activism and creative resilience. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 224-0008 or visit <www.portlandchinatownmuseum.org>.

"Celebrate Our Stories" at Lan Su

Through May 31, 10am-6:30pm (daily), Lan Su Chinese Garden (239 NW Everett St, Portland). Attend "Celebrate Our Stories" at Lan Su Chinese Garden during Asian Heritage Month. Festivities include Cultural Immersion Saturdays, which highlight different cultures, and Family Fun Sundays, featuring interactive games, crafts, and art for all ages. Another feature during the month is "Threading Together," an exhibit of traditional clothing and attire; the participating countries for 2025 are the Philippines, the Pacific Islands, Vietnam, China, India, Japan, Korea, and Cambodia. Other programming in May includes a Mother's Day special event on Sunday, May 11, as well as Comedy Nights held in partnership with Kickstand Comedy

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Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month has only grown in 5 decades

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20 million Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander descent who make irreplaceable contributions to our Nation's economy, security, and culture," read a proclamation the Trump White House issued in May 2020.

"Together, we will continue to live out the promise of our founding and build a better future for all Americans," Trump's proclamation said.

How has the Heritage
Month grown in significance?

Asian American and Pacific Islander advocacy groups have long used the month as a platform to bring resources to underserved communities and educate the public. But, the one-two punch of COVID-19 and assaults on Asian people in the U.S. really gave some a new appreciation for the Heritage Month's purpose.

Pre-pandemic, Amber Reed of Montclair, New Jersey, didn't really think about Asian Heritage Month. A Korean American adoptee who grew up one of few Asian children in rural Michigan, she said she didn't feel a strong connection to her Asian ancestry. That changed after the March 2021 Atlanta spa shootings that left eight dead, including six Asian women.

"Certainly it jolted me out of thinking that my family could be safe and that we could just sort of muddle through without sort of reckoning with some of the very vicious currents of racism in our culture," Reed said. "And I take no pride in having needed that moment to wake me up."

In response to the shootings, Reed and around 50 others started the nonprofit AAPI New Jersey — originally AAPI Montclair. They will be hosting a Lantern Festival for Justice and Unity for a fifth year. The Chinese custom of lighting lanterns honors victims of hate or injustice.

"I think one thing Asian cultures do so well is provide these rituals, including for collective grief," said Reed, who still finds it surreal that the group continues to grow.

What events mark the Heritage Month?

The variety of subjects and cultures feted during Heritage Month has flourished.

There are events happening this month that include more narrow topics, such as Asian Comedy Fest in New York City. And in Wisconsin, the state will celebrate May 14 as Hmong-Lao Veterans Day, which was signed into law in 2021. Thousands of Hmong-Lao soldiers fought alongside U.S. forces during the Vietnam War. Many Hmong and Lao families resettled in Wisconsin.

These Heritage Month celebrations are helping to erode the notion that the whole population is a monolith, Umemoto said.

"I think it's important for people to visibly see from a wide range of groups that fall under the category Asian American and Pacific Islanders. There are over 70 different ethnic and national groups and over 100 languages spoken within those communities," Umemoto said. "And they're very different."

Terry Tang is a Phoenix-based member of AP's Race and Ethnicity team.

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Nora Aunor, an actor among the Philippines' biggest stars, dies at 71

Continued from page 5

year, starring in the film *Mananambal* (*The Healer*) and appearing on the TV series "Lilet Matias, Attorney-at-Law."

Aunor was named a National Artist for Film and Broadcast Arts — the country's biggest honor for actors — in 2022. In 2014, then-President Benigno Aquino III had denied her the honor because of a previous drug arrest in the U.S., provoking broad outcry.

Aunor's lawyer said the 2005 arrest at the Los Angeles airport came because of a pipe found in a bag she did not pack, noting she was travelling with four assistants at the time. The charges were dropped in 2007 after she completed a diversion program, her lawyer said in 2014.

Aunor was married to actor Christopher de León from 1975 until 1996.

She is survived by their children Lotlet, Ian, Matet, Kiko, and Kenneth de León.

Star Wars fans wave lightsabers as an upcoming film gets announced in Japan

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was full of *Star Wars*-themed merchandise including t-shirts, toys, books, manga comics, AC chargers, cellphone covers, autographs, posters, and more.

The Lego booth featured a man wearing the ominous black mask and cloak of Darth Vader, made out of Legos. The deep-breathing villain also appeared as traditional Japanese lacquerware decorating earphones in a limited edition of 10, each selling for 990,000 yen ($7,000). Darth Vader t-shirts were more affordable at 8,000 yen ($56).

"It makes me so happy to think everyone here loves *Star Wars*," said Yoshiki Takahashi, 26, who was holding a remote-controlled R2-D2 miniature robot.

"I love the directing, the sound of the gun, and the lightsaber, but above all the story, with great fight scenes and, of course, human drama," he added.

Another Japanese man, who said he goes only by Hiro, was dressed as the *Star Wars* character Mandalorian, in a detailed costume he made himself, complete with a plastic sword and armor.

Also present were *Star Wars* fans from around the world, including a robed Raul Herrera, a computer science teacher from Chile, who was there with friends.

"All of them," said Herrera, when asked which *Star Wars* films he'd seen. "The sense of commitment of the characters, I really like it."

With offshoot stories spanning generations and literally the cosmos, *Star Wars* is one of the highest-grossing franchises of all time since its 1977 debut, starring Mark Hamill as Luke Skywalker.

It may be natural that *Star Wars* appeals to Japanese: Its story about a samurai-like hero who befriends various characters along his journey echoes the nation's fables, as well as legendary Akira Kurosawa films.

Heritage Month calendar

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on May 23 and 30. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 228-8131 or visit <www.lansugarden.org/celebrate-our-stories>.

"Earthen Elegance: The Ceramic Art of Bizen"

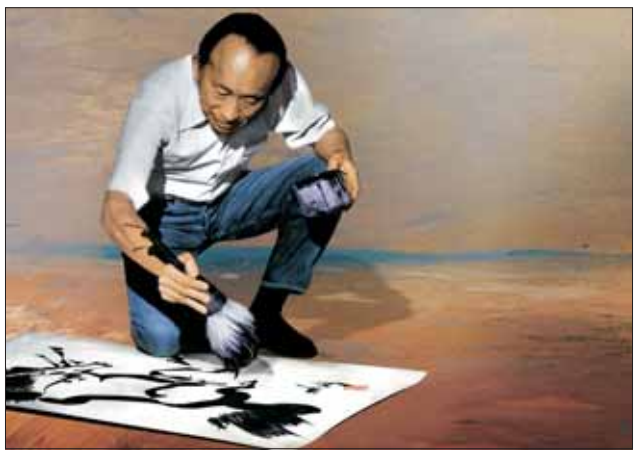
Through June 9, 10am-5:30pm (Wed-Mon), Portland Japanese Garden (611 SW Kingston Ave, Portland). View "Earthen Elegance: The Ceramic Art of Bizen," an exhibition that celebrates contemporary ceramic art and vessels that preserve a time-honored collaboration of earth, fire, and the artist's hand. Bizen is a ceramic center that has continued its unique form of pottery for more than 900 years. Notable for rustic, textured, and unglazed forms, the ceramics included in the display reveal the depths of the Bizen pottery tradition. The town of Bizen hosts nearly 300 active kilns with artists continuing to use local materials and an ancient wood-firing process. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 223-1321 or visit <www.japanesegarden.com>.

"Sadako and Paper Cranes: Through Our Eyes"

Through Sep 7, 10am-4pm (Wed-Sat), 11am-4pm (Sun), Japanese American Museum of Oregon (JAMO) at the Naito Center (411 NW Flanders St, Portland). View "Sadako and Paper Cranes: Through Our Eyes," an exhibit that examines the devastation of nuclear war through the eyes of the youth that experienced the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Sadako Sasaki was just 2 years old on August 6, 1945, when the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, where she lived with her family. Although she survived the blast and was not injured at the time, she began to develop the symptoms of leukemia 9 years later and eventually succumbed to her illness. While in the hospital, Sadako folded more than 1,000 origami paper cranes, a symbol of good luck. Sadako's classmates started a national movement to build the Children's Peace Monument as a tribute to her. The monument was dedicated in 1958 and sits at the center of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima, Japan. In addition to the exhibit panels, JAMO has invited local professional and student artists — Erin Shigaki, Lynn Yarne, Marie Johnston, Maya McDarragh, and six students from Grant High School — to create works in response to Sadako's story. The companion display brings together multiple generations of artists to contribute to ongoing discussions about peace and nuclear disarmament. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 224-1458 or visit <www.jamo.org>.

"Natural Patterns: Katazome Stencil Dyeing"

Through Sep 15, 10am-5:30pm (Wed-Mon), Portland Japanese Garden (611 SW Kingston Ave, Portland). View "Natural Patterns: Katazome Stencil Dyeing," an exhibit by Oregon artist Karen Illman Miller. Primarily used for elaborate patterns on kimono and yukata, katazome is a method of using exquisitely cut paper stencils and resist paste to dye fabrics. Today, katazome-created designs can be stand-alone art pieces, or are often found on noren curtains, futon covers, and furoshiki gift wraps. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 223-1321 or visit <www.japanesegarden.com>.



AMERICAN MASTERS. Tyrus Wong*, a show by American Masters that tells the story of the renowned painter, airs May 27 on Oregon Public Broadcasting. Until his death at the age of 106, Wong was America's oldest living Chinese American artist and one of the last remaining artists from the golden age of Disney animation. (Photo courtesy of Oregon Public Broadcasting)*

"Ai Weiwei: Water Lilies"

Through Mar 15, 10am-5pm (Wed-Sun), Seattle Asian Art Museum (1400 E Prospect St, in Volunteer Park, Seattle). View "Ai Weiwei: Water Lilies," a nearly 50-foot-long piece created with 650,000 LEGO blocks, which is being shown for the first time in the U.S. "Water Lilies," the artist's largest and most ambitious LEGO work to date, is a reinterpretation of Claude Monet's iconic triptych from the Museum of Modern Art in New York. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (206) 654-3100 or visit <www.seattleartmuseum.org>.

Asian Americans: "A Question of Loyalty"

May 8, 9pm & May 10, 9pm, Oregon Public Broadcasting World (OPB World). Watch "A Question of Loyalty," an episode of the five-part *Asian Americans* series. The show explores the impact of Asian Americans on the country's past, present, and future as an American-born generation straddles their country of birth and the homelands of their parents. Loyalties are tested during World War II when families are imprisoned in detention camps and brothers find themselves on opposite sides of the battle lines. To verify showtimes, call (503) 293-1982 or visit <www.opb.org>.

Voices of Change 2025

May 9, 5:30-8pm, Hoku Events (1125 SE Madison St, Portland). Attend Voices of Change, the annual fundraiser of the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon. The 2025 theme, "Building Bright Futures," reflects the organization's unwavering commitment to creating opportunities for all. The evening features performances by the Stella Luna Dance Group and Takohachi, speakers, and dinner crafted by local restaurants. For info, or to register (required), call (971) 340-4861 or visit <www.apano.org>.

Unit Souzou

May 9, 7:30-9-30pm, Walters Cultural Arts Center (527 E Main St, Hillsboro, Ore.). Join Unit Souzou as it presents "Constant State of Otherness." The event features taiko, Japanese folk dance, song, and personal story. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 615-3485 or visit <https://cityofhillsboro.ticketspice.com/unit-souzou>.

BonsaiFEST!

May 10-11, 10am-4pm, Pacific Bonsai Museum (2515 S 336th St, Federal Way, Wash.). Immerse yourself in the beauty and serenity of bonsai culture at the free, family-friendly BonsaiFEST! The gathering features hundreds of living works of art, four bonsai exhibitions, bonsai-making demonstrations, guided tours, games, food trucks, shopping, and more. Docent-led tours begin at noon and 1:00pm (no prior sign-up is required). In addition, live bonsai-making demonstrations are held between 10:00am and 4:00pm on both days. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (253) 353-7345 or visit <www.pacificbonsaimuseum.org>.

"Flavors of the Marianas"

May 11, 6pm (doors), 6:30pm (dinner), Fressen Artisan Bakery (7075 NE Glisan St, Portland). Attend "Flavors of the Marianas," a special pop-up dinner with live acoustic island music held in celebration of Asian Heritage Month and Mother's Day. The event, which features authentic Chamorro dishes by renowned chefs Peter Dueñas and Ed Sablån, also serves as a fundraising event for the Marianas Festival scheduled for August 22 through 24. For info, call (503) 317-8735, e-mail <marie.sablan@marianasfestival.com>, or visit <www.marianasfestival.com>. To purchase tickets, visit <bit.ly/MF25-FlavorsOfTheMarianas>.

And So It Begins

May 12, 11pm-midnight, Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB). Watch *And So It Begins*, an episode of Independent Lens that follows the turbulent 2022 presidential race in the Philippines, which was covered by independent journalist Maria Ressa. To verify showtime, call (503) 293-1982 or visit <www.opb.org>.

Asian Americans: "Good Americans"

May 15, 5pm & 9pm; May 17, 8pm; Oregon Public Broadcasting World (OPB World). Part of the five-part series *Asian Americans*, "Good Americans" addresses the Cold War years, when Asian Americans are simultaneously heralded as a model

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Nancy Kwan tells the behind-the-scenes story of playing a Hollywood stereotype

By Yuri Kageyama
The Associated Press

Demure, submissive, and erotic, Suzie Wong is that bigger-than-life stereotype that caricature Asian women grew up with in the U.S.

We may have also secretly hoped to play that geisha-like image to win our way out of our oppression. But over the years, some of us grew to resent it, fight it, and reject it, hoping to claim our true identity and dignity as a person.

In *The World of Nancy Kwan*, a memoir by the pioneering Hollywood star, we hear from the real-life woman who played Suzie Wong.

We learn an Asian actor getting to play an Asian role was a victory back in those days, as the roles were taken by white actors wearing strange slant-eyed makeup.

Kwan was born in Hong Kong in 1939. Her father was Chinese, an architect with a love for movies. Her mother was English, a model and actor, although she left when Kwan was young, and she was raised by a stepmother. It was hard because being Eurasian was an anomaly, she recalls.

"I've broken barriers, celebrated achievements, overcome disappointments, and survived tragedies, all part of my remarkable journey from Hong Kong to Hollywood and beyond. This is my story," she writes in the prologue.

Her book is speckled with the big names of that era — Pat Boone, Katharine Hepburn, Dick Van Dyke. Some passages read like a gossip column, such as her accounts of her friendship with Bruce Lee.

But she also depicts the racial barriers of that period.

All women, especially in Hollywood, were trying to be beautiful and desirable. In fact, being dubbed "the Asian Bardot," referring to Brigitte Bardot, was a genuine compliment.

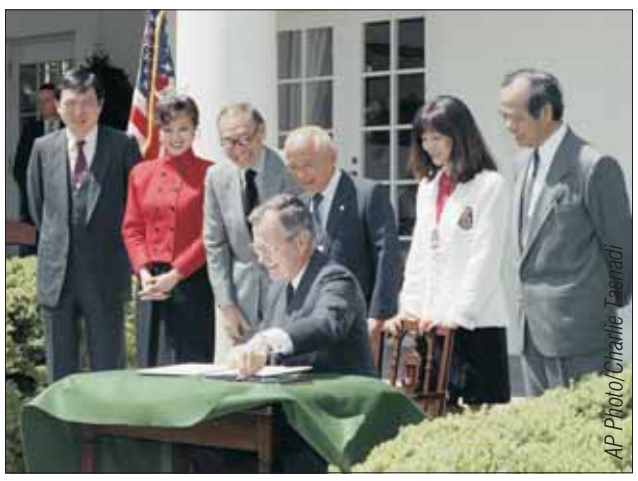
She talks about how Jack Soo, a Japanese American who portrays a nightclub owner in *Flower Drum Song,* was incarcerated with other Japanese Americans in internment camps during World War II.

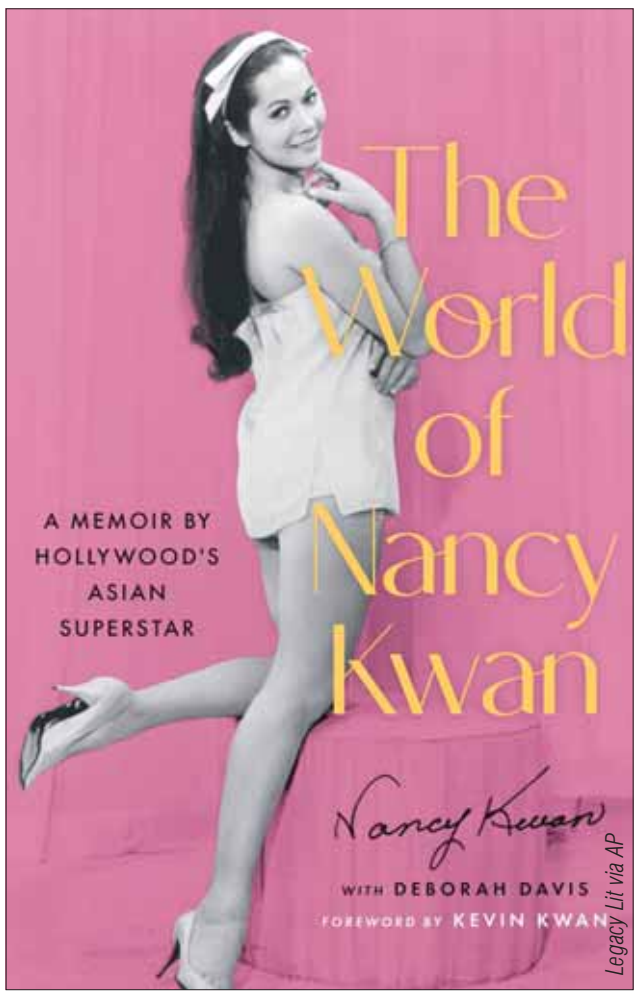
Kwan believes her story is about hard work and advancement despite racism, not succumbing to it.

After all, Asian actors' roles used to be limited to "Fu Manchu villains, hypersexualized Dragon Ladies, and comic buffoons" and "shopkeepers, maids, and houseboys," according to Kwan.

And so getting featured on the cover of *LIFE* magazine, wearing a body-hugging cheongsam, counted as a victory.


AP Photo, File


AP Photo/Charlie Tasnadi



Legacy Lit via AP

HONG KONG TO HOLLYWOOD. *Nancy Kwan, top left photo, poses on the set of the 1960 film* The World of Suzie Wong*, in which she plays the lead role, in this October 31, 1960 file photo. In* The World of Nancy Kwan*, right photo, a memoir by the pioneering Hollywood star, we hear from the real-life woman who played Suzie Wong. In the bottom left photo, President Bush prepares to sign a proclamation declaring May as Asian Pacific American Heritage Month during ceremonies on Monday, May 7, 1990, in Washington, D.C. Nancy Kwan, second from right, attended the event.*

Another big win is when Ross Hunter, a hot producer, rushes over to her at a Hollywood party and casts her in *Flower Drum Song*.

The musical film shattered stereotypes, she says, by focusing on fashionably dressed, wealthy Asians. Regardless of race, people cherish family, suffer heartbreak, laugh, sing, dance, and dream of happiness, she writes.

Kwan calls the work "joyous entertainment with the universal message that whatever our race, we're all alike."

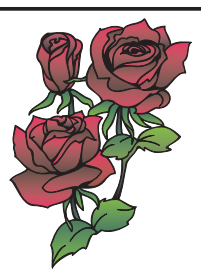
Even those who may find that message lacking in addressing the meaning of diversity and Asian American pride will acknowledge there is a lot to learn from Kwan's history.

She is simply trying to land roles, hopefully good ones that showcase her talent in works by respected directors.

Miyoshi Umeki, her friend and another prominent Asian actor of that period, did not like having to speak pidgin in her roles, but did it because that was her job as a professional.

That kind of pain is the legacy being explored in Kwan's life.

Being an Asian in America is what she calls "our shared humanity," in which "East can meet west and possibly make the world a little better."



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Heritage Month calendar

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minority and targeted as a perpetual foreigner. Bold ambition also emerges, as Asian Americans aspire for the first time to national political office and a coming culture-quake simmers beneath the surface. To verify showtimes, call (503) 293-1982 or visit <www.opb.org>.

Lone Fir Cemetery update

May 15, 5:30-7pm, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (317 NW Davis St, Portland). Metro is providing an update on the project to build a memorial at the historic Chinese section of Lone Fir Cemetery in southeast Portland at a free information session. Participants are also able to share ideas with an artist working on the project. For info, call (503) 797-1700 or visit <www.oregonmetro.gov/lonefirgarden>.

"Loimata, the Sweetest Tears"

May 15, 6pm & 10pm, Oregon Public Broadcasting World (OPB World). Watch "Loimata, the Sweetest Tears," an episode of Pacific Heartbeat that follows the Siope family as they return to their Samoan homeland to confront intergenerational trauma head on. To verify showtimes, call (503) 293-1982 or visit <www.opb.org>.

"South by South Korea"

May 15, 11pm, Oregon Public Broadcasting World (OPB World). Watch "South by South Korea," an episode of Reel South that shows how two films have bridged the American South and the Korean Peninsula. To verify showtime, call (503) 293-1982 or visit <www.opb.org>.

"A Glimpse of China"

May 17, 11am-5pm, Seattle Center, Armory Food & Event Hall (305 Harrison St, Seattle). Attend "A Glimpse of China: Seattle Chinese Culture & Arts Festival" presented by Seattle Center Festál and the Washington Chinese Arts & Culture Committee (WCACC). The event illuminates the colorful and ancient palette of Chinese culture with dance, painting, calligraphy, workshops, food vendors, and more. A few of the scheduled performers include the Jin Ting Dance School, the Chinese Dance Academy, the Chinese Wushu & Taichi Academy, the Seattle Cheongsam Association, and others. For info, call (206) 684-7200 or visit <www.seattlecenter.com>.

Dreams of Glory: The World of Women's Sumo

May 17, 6:30pm & 10:30pm, Oregon Public Broadcasting World (OPB World). Watch *Dreams of Glory: The World of Women's Sumo*, a 28-minute documentary that follows three female sumo wrestlers as they compete at the highest level at the Women's Sumo World Championships in Tokyo. The film tracks each athlete's individual journey, from strength and technique training to their final competitive fights. It also explores the untold stories behind the growing prominence of women in the traditionally male-dominated world of sumo. To verify showtimes, call (503) 293-1982 or visit <www.opb.org>.

Meet the Patels

May 17, 9pm, Oregon Public Broadcasting World (OPB World). Watch *Meet the Patels*, an episode of Independent Lens that follows a 30-year-old single man from a Hindu family who enters into the semi-arranged marriage system in America. To verify showtime, call (503) 293-1982 or visit <www.opb.org>.

Who is Michael Jang?

May 19, 11pm-midnight, Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB). Watch *Who is Michael Jang?*, an episode of Independent Lens that tells the story behind 50-year-old photographs that had remained mostly hidden to the world. Jang brought the images into the public eye by pasting reproductions of the vintage prints around San Francisco. To verify showtime, call (503) 293-1982 or visit <www.opb.org>. See related story on page 10.

ASIAN AMERICANS. *The storefront of a Chinatown meat and vegetable market is seen in San Francisco, California, in 1895.* Asian Americans*, the five-part series that traces the epic story of Asian Americans, is airing in May on Oregon Public Broadcasting World. (Photo courtesy of the University of Washington, Special Collections)*

Asian Americans: "Generation Rising"

May 22, 5pm & 9pm, Oregon Public Broadcasting World (OPB World). Watch "Generation Rising," the fourth episode of the five-part *Asian Americans* series. The show highlights a time of war and social tumult, when a young generation fighting for equality in the fields, on campuses, and in the culture, claim a new identity — Asian Americans. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, new immigrants and refugees expand the population and the definition of "Asian America." To verify showtimes, call (503) 293-1982 or visit <www.opb.org>.

"Celebrate 2025 — IRCO Gala"

May 22, 5:30pm (reception), 6:30-8:30pm (program), The Redd (831 SE Salmon St, Portland). Attend "Celebrate 2025 — IRCO Gala," an event highlighting the many decades of the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) empowering refugee and immigrant communities in Portland and beyond. The event features cultural performances, speakers, dinner, and a live auction. Contributions raised during the celebration directly benefit families and clients of IRCO. To reserve a space, call (503) 234-1541 or visit <www.irco.org>.

"I Am An American Live: Stories of Exclusion and Belonging"

May 24, 6:30pm (doors), 7-9:30pm, Patricia Reser Center for the Arts (12625 SW Crescent St, Beaverton, Ore.). Join The Immigrant Story for "I Am An American Live." The free event, titled "Stories of Exclusion and Belonging," features four storytellers from Vietnam, Nepal, Malaysia, and Afghanistan sharing their experiences of what it means to belong in America — even while at times being excluded — and what has inspired them to become agents of change. The evening also includes a vocal performance by Shivani Joshi. The event is part of programming by the Oregon Rises Above Hate coalition, with the aim of drawing attention to the historic xenophobia experienced by the AANHPI community in Oregon and across the U.S. For info, or to reserve tickets (highly suggested), call (971) 501-7722 or visit <www.thereser.org>.

Tyrus Wong

May 27, 9pm, Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB). Watch *Tyrus Wong*, a show by American Masters that tells the story of the renowned painter. Until his death at the age of 106, Wong was America's oldest living Chinese American artist and one of the last remaining artists from the golden age of Disney animation. The quiet beauty of his eastern-influenced paintings had a pioneering impact on American art and popular culture. To verify showtime, call (503) 293-1982 or visit <www.opb.org>.

Oregon Art Beat: "Creative Rhythm"

May 29, 8pm, Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB). Watch "Creative Rhythm," an episode of Oregon Art Beat highlighting Andy Akiho, a five-time Grammy nominee and Pulitzer Prize finalist known for innovative symphonies. Akiho's compositions are not just musical performances, they are immersive experiences that push the boundaries of classical music. To verify showtime, call (503) 293-1982 or visit <www.opb.org>.

Lizard Boy 2: The Most Perfect Summer Ever

May 31, 2pm, Maggie Mae's Bookshop (50 NW 1st St, Gresham, Ore.). Join Jonathan Hill as he presents *Lizard Boy 2: The Most Perfect Summer Ever*. Book two of the acclaimed graphic series explores intolerance through a relatable — and empowering — cast of middle-grade cryptids, immigrants, and outsiders. For info, call (503) 489-5471. To learn more, visit <www.oneofthejohns.com>.

Rising Against Asian Hate: One Day in March

May 31, 9pm, Oregon Public Broadcasting World (OPB World). In March 2021, a 21-year-old man murdered eight people, including six women of Asian descent, at three spas in Atlanta, Georgia — a horrific attack in a year of widespread anti-Asian violence. *Rising Against Asian Hate: One Day in March* pays tribute to the lives lost, examines the rise of anti-Asian racism, and documents a growing movement to fight back and stop the hate. The one-hour documentary takes a deep dive into this critical moment of racial reckoning while exploring the need for better hate crime legislation, demanding accountability from law enforcement, and chronicling a community as they break their silence to rise up against hate. Ultimately, the film asks the crucial question of what's next for Asian Americans — in the courts, in the voting booth, and in the streets. To verify showtime, call (503) 293-1982 or visit <www.opb.org>.

Pagdiriwang Philippine Festival

May 31-June 1, 11am-7pm (Sat), noon-6pm (Sun), Seattle Center, Armory Food & Event Hall (305 Harrison St, Seattle). Attend the Pagdiriwang Philippine Festival, a celebration of Filipino culture, history, and heritage presented by Seattle Center Festál. The free event observes Philippine independence from colonial rule and the strength of Filipino identity and imagination through art exhibits, performances, and more. For info, call (206) 684-7200, or visit <www.seattlecenter.com> or <www.festalpagdiriwang.com>.

"Music + Mingle"

June 5, 6-9pm, The Laurelhurst Club (3721 SE Ankeny St, Portland). Attend "Music + Mingle," a fundraising event for Portland Taiko featuring dinner, taiko performances, special guests, paddle raise, silent auction, mystery leis, and more. For info, call (503) 28TAIKO (288-2456), e-mail <info@portlandtaiko.org>, or visit <www.portlandtaiko.org>. To purchase tickets, visit <www.portlandtaiko.org/laurelhurst-club-2025>.

For timely information about upcoming events, visit <www.facebook.com/TheAsianReporter>.