



Hollywood: Her Story November 2022 ENewsletter Anna May Wong - 2022 Quarters

Five quarters memorializing women are being launched each year beginning in 2022 and continuing through 2025. The honorees for 2022 include Maya Angelou, Sally Ride, Wilma Mankiller, and Adeline Otero-Warren. The fifth quarter in the American Women Quarters™ program which began shipping in late October 2022 features Anna May Wong.



In issuing the Anna May Wong quarter, the Mint said, “With a career that spanned motion pictures, television, and theatre, Anna May Wong left a lasting legacy for Asian American women in the entertainment industry. She appeared in more than 60 movies, including silent films and one of the first made in Technicolor. She also appeared in productions on the London and New York stages.” Further, the Mint Director said, “The fifth coin in our American Women Quarters Program honors Anna May Wong, a courageous advocate who championed for increased representation and more multi-dimensional roles for Asian American actors. This quarter is designed to reflect the breadth and depth of accomplishments by Anna May Wong, who overcame challenges and obstacles she faced during her lifetime.”



Anna May Wong (Wong Liu Tsong) was born in Los Angeles in 1905. With the migration of the movie industry to California, Anna May was already obsessed with movies by age nine and was cast as an extra in the 1919 movie *The Red Lantern*. She worked steadily as an extra for the next two years until she dropped out of school to pursue a movie career full time. In 1931, she said in an interview with *Motion Picture Magazine*, “I was so young when I began that I knew I still had youth if I failed, so I determined to give myself 10 years to succeed as an actress.”

Her first screen credit was in the 1921 movie *Bits of Life*. Her performance was recognized with a cover photo on the British magazine *Picture Photo*. Her first leading role came in the first Technicolor movie *The Toll of the Sea* (1922) which was written by **Frances Marion**. Despite her extraordinary performance, she found the roles offered to her to be stereotypical due to her ethnicity.



Disappointed with the lack of roles she was offered, she went to Europe in 1928 and became an international star. Her last silent film was *Piccadilly* (1929), one of five British films in which she starred. Her first talkie was the 1930 movie *The Flame of Love*, which she recorded in English, French and German.

Wong was lured back to the U.S. in 1930 and appeared in films and on stage, but still had issues overcoming racial stereotypes. She became an activist advocating for Chinese American causes and better film roles. When her roles did not improve, she returned to Britain.

After the success of Pearl Buck’s novels, especially *The Good Earth*, Wong returned to the U.S. with the objective of being cast as O-lan, the lead female character in the film version of *The Good Earth*. But she was not cast in that role which went instead to a Caucasian actress – evidence of significant discrimination in the movie industry during the 1930s



After a year-long tour to China, Wong starred in *Daughter of Shanghai* (1937), a movie that was selected for preservation in the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress in 2006. The announcement of the movie's inclusion stated that it was "more truly Wong's personal vehicle than any of her other films." Wong said in *Hollywood Magazine*, "I like my part in this picture better than any I've had before ... because this picture gives Chinese a break—we have sympathetic parts for a change! To me, that means a great deal."

Wong continued to appear in films and television. In 1951, she starred in her own television show using her given name, *The Gallery of Madame Liu-Tsong*. This was the first television show in which an Asian American was the series lead. Her last appearance was on *The Barbara Stanwyck Show*, two

days before her death of a heart attack at age 56. She is the first Asian American to be depicted on U.S. currency.

Women in front of and behind the camera make the movies that we all welcome into our hearts and homes. Women across all the areas of moviemaking from actress to animator, editor to stuntwoman, costume designer to screenwriter, producer to director have contributed to the success of the movie industry since its founding in the 1890s. Help us celebrate these women who are written into movie history in *Hollywood: Her Story*.

Jill S. Tietjen and Barbara Bridges

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