

= Charlie Chan =

Charlie Chan is a fictional character created by Earl Derr Biggers . Biggers loosely based Chan on Honolulu , Hawaii detective Chang Apana , and conceived of the benevolent and heroic Chan as an alternative to Yellow Peril stereotypes and villains like Fu Manchu . Chan is a detective for the Honolulu police , though many stories feature Chan traveling the world as he investigates mysteries and solves crimes .

Chan first appeared in Biggers ' novels , then was featured in a number of media . Over four dozen films featuring Charlie Chan were made , beginning in 1926 . The character was first portrayed by East Asian actors , and the films met with little success . In 1931 , the Fox Film Corporation cast Swedish actor Warner Oland as Chan in *Charlie Chan Carries On* ; the film became popular , and Fox went on to produce fifteen more Chan films with Oland in the title role . After Oland 's death , American actor Sidney Toler was cast as Chan ; Toler made twenty @-@ two Chan films , first for Fox and then for Monogram Studios . After Toler 's death , six films were made , starring Roland Winters .

Readers and movie @-@ goers of white America greeted Chan warmly , seeing him as an attractive character who is portrayed as intelligent , heroic , benevolent and honorable in contrast to the racist depictions of evil or conniving Asians which dominated Hollywood and national media . However , in later decades critics took contending views , finding that Chan , despite his good qualities , reinforces condescending Asian stereotypes such as an alleged incapacity to speak idiomatic English and a tradition @-@ bound and subservient nature . Many found it objectionable that he was played on screen by Caucasian actors in yellowface .

Film adaptations in the 1990s have been poorly received . The character has been featured in several radio programs , two television shows , and comics .

= = Books = =

The character of Charlie Chan was created by Earl Derr Biggers . In 1919 , while visiting Hawaii , Biggers planned a detective novel to be called *The House Without a Key* . He did not begin to write that novel until four years later , however , when he was inspired to add a Chinese @-@ American police officer to the plot after reading in a newspaper of Chang Apana (???) and Lee Fook , two detectives on the Honolulu police force . Biggers , who disliked the Yellow Peril stereotypes he found when he came to California , explicitly conceived of the character as an alternative : " Sinister and wicked Chinese are old stuff , but an amiable Chinese on the side of law and order has never been used . "

It overwhelms me with sadness to admit it ? for he is of my own origin , my own race , as you know . But when I look into his eyes I discover that a gulf like the heaving Pacific lies between us . Why ? Because he , though among Caucasians many more years than I , still remains Chinese . As Chinese to @-@ day as in the first moon of his existence . While I ? I bear the brand ? the label ? Americanized I traveled with the current I was ambitious . I sought success . For what I have won , I paid the price . Am I an American ? No . Am I , then , a Chinese ? Not in the eyes of Ah Sing .

The " amiable Chinese " made his first appearance in *The House Without a Key* (1925) . The character was not central to the novel and was not mentioned by name on the dust jacket of the first edition . In the novel , Chan is described as walking with " the light dainty step of a woman " and as being " very fat indeed ? an undistinguished figure in his Western clothes . " According to critic Sandra Hawley , this description of Chan allows Biggers to portray the character as nonthreatening , the opposite of evil Chinese characters , such as Fu Manchu , while simultaneously emphasizing supposedly Chinese characteristics such as impassivity and stoicism .

Biggers wrote six novels in which Charlie Chan appears :

The House Without a Key (1925)

The Chinese Parrot (1926)

Behind That Curtain (1928)

The Black Camel (1929)
Charlie Chan Carries On (1930)
Keeper of the Keys (1932)

= = Film , radio , and television adaptations = =

= = = Films = = =

The first Charlie Chan film was The House Without a Key (1926) , a ten @-@ chapter serial produced by Pathé Studios , starring George Kuwa , a Japanese actor , as Chan . A year later Universal Pictures followed with The Chinese Parrot , starring Japanese actor , Kamiyama Sojin , in the starring role . In both productions , Charlie Chan 's role was minimized . Contemporary reviews were unfavorable ; in the words of one reviewer , speaking of The Chinese Parrot , Sojin plays " the Chink sleuth as a Lon Chaney cook @-@ waiter ? because Chaney can 't stoop that low . "

In 1929 , the Fox Film Corporation opted Charlie Chan properties and produced Behind That Curtain , starring Korean actor E.L. Park . Again , Chan 's role was minimal , with Chan appearing only in the last ten minutes of the film . Not until a white actor was cast in the title role in 1931 did a Chan film meet with success . In Charlie Chan Carries On Chan was played by Swedish actor Warner Oland , who had also played Fu Manchu in an earlier film . Oland , who claimed some Mongolian ancestry , played the character as more gentle and self @-@ effacing than he had been in the books , perhaps in " a deliberate attempt by the studio to downplay an uppity attitude in a Chinese detective . " Oland starred in sixteen Chan films for Fox , often with Keye Luke , who played Chan 's " Number One Son " , Lee Chan . Oland 's " warmth and gentle humor " helped make the character and films popular ; the Oland Chan films were among Fox 's most successful . By attracting " major audiences and box @-@ office grosses on a par with A 's " they " kept Fox afloat " during the Great Depression .

Oland died in 1938 , and the Chan film , Charlie Chan at the Ringside , was rewritten with additional footage as Mr. Moto 's Gamble , an entry in the Mr. Moto series , another contemporary series featuring an East Asian protagonist ; Luke appeared as Lee Chan , not only in already shot footage but also in scenes with Moto actor Peter Lorre . Fox hired another white actor , Sidney Toler , to play Charlie Chan , and produced eleven Chan films through 1942 . Toler 's Chan was less mild @-@ mannered than Oland 's , a " switch in attitude that added some of the vigor of the original books to the films . " He is frequently accompanied , and irritated , by his Number Two Son , Jimmy Chan , played by Sen Yung .

When Fox decided to produce no further Chan films , Sidney Toler purchased the film rights . Producers Philip N. Krasne and James S. Burkett of Monogram Pictures produced and released further Chan films , starring Toler . The budget for these films was reduced from Fox 's average of \$ 200 @,@ 000 to \$ 75 @,@ 000 . For the first time , Chan was portrayed on occasion as " openly contemptuous of suspects and superiors . " African @-@ American comedic actor Mantan Moreland played chauffeur Birmingham Brown in 13 films (1944 ? 1949) which led to criticism of the Monogram films in the forties and since ; some call his performances " brilliant comic turns " , while others describe Moreland 's roles as an offensive and embarrassing stereotype . Toler died in 1947 and was succeeded by Roland Winters for six films . Keye Luke , missing from the series after 1938 's Mr. Moto rework , returned as Charlie 's son in the last two entries .

= = = = Spanish @-@ language adaptations = = = =

Three Spanish @-@ language Charlie Chan films were made in the 1930s and 1950s . The first , Eran Trece (There Were Thirteen) (1931) , is a Spanish @-@ language version of Charlie Chan Carries On (1931) . The two films were made concurrently and followed the same production schedule , with each scene filmed twice the same day , once in English and then in Spanish . The film followed essentially the same script as the Anglophonic version , with minor additions such as

brief songs and skits and some changes to characters ' names (for example , the character Elmer Benbow was renamed Frank Benbow) . A Cuban production , La Serpiente Roja (The Red Snake) , followed in 1937 . In 1955 , Producciones Cub @-@ Mex produced a Mexican version of Charlie Chan called El Monstruo en la Sombra (Monster in the Shadow) , starring Orlando Rodriguez as " Chan Li Po " (Charlie Chan in the original script) . The film was inspired by La Serpiente Roja as well as the American Warner Oland films .

= = = Chinese @-@ language adaptations = = =

During the 1930s and 1940s , five Chan films were produced in Shanghai and Hong Kong . In these films , Chan owns his detective agency and is aided , not by a son , but by a daughter , Manna , played first by Gu Meijun (???) in the Shanghai productions and then by Bai Yan (??) in postwar Hong Kong .

Chinese audiences also saw the original American Charlie Chan films . They were by far the most popular American films in 1930s China and among Chinese expatriates ; " one of the reasons for this acceptance was this was the first time Chinese audiences saw a positive Chinese character in an American film , a departure from the sinister East Asian stereotypes in earlier movies like Thief of Baghdad and Welcome Danger , which incited riots that shut down the Shanghai theater showing it . " Oland 's visit to China was reported extensively in Chinese newspapers , and the actor was respectfully called " Mr. Chan " .

= = = Modern adaptations = = =

In Neil Simon 's Murder By Death , Peter Sellers plays a Chinese detective called Sidney Wang , a parody of Chan .

In 1980 , Jerry Sherlock began production on a comedy film to be called Charlie Chan and the Dragon Lady . A group calling itself C.A.N. (Coalition of Asians to Nix) was formed , protesting the fact that non @-@ Chinese actors , Peter Ustinov and Angie Dickinson , had been cast in the primary roles . Others protested that the film script contained a number of stereotypes ; Sherlock responded that the film was not a documentary . The film was released the following year as Charlie Chan and the Curse of the Dragon Queen and was an " abysmal failure . " An updated film version of the character was planned in the 1990s by Miramax . While this Charlie Chan was to be " hip , slim , cerebral , sexy and ... a martial @-@ arts master , " nonetheless the film did not come to fruition . Actress Lucy Liu is slated to star in and executive @-@ produce a new Charlie Chan film for Fox . The film has been in preproduction since 2000 ; as of 2009 it is slated to be produced .

= = = Radio = = =

On radio , Charlie Chan was heard in several different series on three networks (the NBC Blue Network , Mutual , and ABC) between 1932 and 1948 . Walter Connolly initially portrayed Chan on Esso Oil 's Five Star Theater , which serialized adaptations of Biggers novels . Ed Begley , Sr. had the title role in N.B.C. 's The Adventures of Charlie Chan (1944 ? 45) , followed by Santos Ortega (1947 ? 48) . Leon Janney and Rodney Jacobs were heard as Lee Chan , Number One Son , and Dorian St. George was the announcer . Radio Life magazine described Begley 's Chan as " a good radio match for Sidney Toler 's beloved film enactment . "

= = = Television adaptations = = =

In 1956 ? 57 , The New Adventures of Charlie Chan , starring J. Carrol Naish in the title role , were made independently for TV syndication in 39 episodes , by Television Programs of America . The series was filmed in England . In this series , Chan is based in London rather than the United States . Ratings were poor , and the series was canceled .

In the 1960s , Joey Forman played an obvious parody of Chan named " Harry Hoo " in two

episodes of Get Smart .

In the 1970s , Hanna @-@ Barbera produced an animated series called The Amazing Chan and the Chan Clan . Keye Luke , who had played Chan 's son in many Chan films of the 1930s and ' 40s , lent his voice to Charlie , employing a much @-@ expanded vocabulary . The series focused on Chan 's children , played initially by East Asian @-@ American child actors before being recast , due to concerns that younger viewers would not understand the accented voices . The title character bears some resemblance to the Warner Oland depiction of Charlie Chan . Leslie Kumamoto voiced Chan 's daughter Anne , before being replaced by Jodie Foster .

The Return of Charlie Chan , a television film starring Ross Martin as Chan , was made in 1971 but did not air until 1979 .

= = Comics and games = =

A Charlie Chan comic strip , drawn by Alfred Andriola , was distributed by the McNaught Syndicate beginning 24 October 1938 . Andriola was chosen by Biggers to draw the character . Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor , the strip was dropped in May 1942 .

Over decades , other Charlie Chan comic books have been published : Joe Simon and Jack Kirby created Prize Comics ' Charlie Chan (1948) which ran for five issues . It was followed by a Charlton Comics title (four issues , 1955) . DC Comics published The New Adventures of Charlie Chan , a 1958 tie @-@ in with the TV series ; the DC series lasted for six issues . Dell Comics did the title for two issues in 1965 . In the 1970s , Gold Key Comics published a short @-@ lived series of Chan comics based on the Hanna @-@ Barbera animated series .

In addition , a board game , The Great Charlie Chan Detective Mystery Game (1937) , and a Charlie Chan Card Game (1939) , have been released .

= = Modern interpretations and criticism = =

The character of Charlie Chan has been the subject of controversy . Some find the character to be a positive role model , while others argue that Chan is an offensive stereotype . Critic John Soister argues that Charlie Chan is both ; when Biggers created the character , he offered a unique alternative to stereotypical evil Chinamen , a man who was at the same time " sufficiently accommodating in personality ... unthreatening in demeanor ... and removed from his Asian homeland ... to quell any underlying xenophobia . "

Critic Michael Brodhead argues that " Biggers 's sympathetic treatment of the Charlie Chan novels convinces the reader that the author consciously and forthrightly spoke out for the Chinese ? a people to be not only accepted but admired . Biggers 's sympathetic treatment of the Chinese reflected and contributed to the greater acceptance of Chinese @-@ Americans in the first third of [the twentieth] century . " S. T. Karnick writes in the National Review that Chan is " a brilliant detective with understandably limited facility in the English language [whose] powers of observation , logic , and personal rectitude and humility made him an exemplary , entirely honorable character . " Ellery Queen called Biggers 's characterization of Charlie Chan " a service to humanity and to inter @-@ racial relations . " Dave Kehr of The New York Times said Chan " might have been a stereotype , but he was a stereotype on the side of the angels . " Luke agreed ; when asked if he thought that the character was demeaning to the race , he responded , " Demeaning to the race ? My God ! You 've got a Chinese hero ! " and " [W] e were making the best damn murder mysteries in Hollywood . "

Other critics , such as Yen Le Espiritu and Huang Guiyou , argue that Chan , while portrayed positively in some ways , is not on a par with white characters , but a " benevolent Other " who is " one @-@ dimensional . " The films ' use of white actors to portray East Asian characters indicates the character 's " absolute Oriental Otherness ; " the films were only successful as " the domain of white actors who impersonated heavily @-@ accented masters of murder mysteries as well as purveyors of cryptic proverbs . Chan 's character " embodies the stereotypes of Chinese Americans , particularly of males : smart , subservient , effeminate . " Chan is representative of a model

minority , the good stereotype that counters a bad stereotype : " Each stereotypical image is filled with contradictions : the bloodthirsty Indian is tempered with the image of the noble savage ; the bandido exists along with the loyal sidekick ; and Fu Manchu is offset by Charlie Chan . " However , Fu Manchu 's evil qualities are presented as inherently Chinese , while Charlie Chan 's good qualities are exceptional ; " Fu represents his race ; his counterpart stands away from the other Asian Hawaiians . "

Some argue that the character 's popularity is dependent on its contrast with stereotypes of the Yellow Peril or Japanese people in particular . American opinion of China and Chinese @-@ Americans grew more positive in the 1920s and 30s in contrast to the Japanese , who were increasingly viewed with suspicion . Sheng @-@ mei Ma argues that the character is a psychological over @-@ compensation to " rampant paranoia over the racial other . "

In June 2003 , the Fox Movie Channel cancelled a planned Charlie Chan Festival , soon after beginning restoration for cablecasting , after a special @-@ interest group protested . Fox reversed its decision two months later , and on 13 September 2003 , the first film in the festival was aired on Fox . The films , when broadcast on the Fox Movie Channel , were followed by round @-@ table discussions by prominent East Asians in the American entertainment industry , led by George Takei , most of whom were against the films . Collections such as Frank Chin 's Aiiieeee ! An Anthology of Asian @-@ American Writers and Jessica Hagedorn 's Charlie Chan is Dead are put forth as alternatives to the Charlie Chan stereotype and " [articulate] cultural anger and exclusion as their animating force . " Fox released the restored versions on D.V.D. in 2006 ; as of mid @-@ 2008 , Fox has released all of the extant Warner Oland titles and has begun issuing the Sidney Toler series . The first six Monogram productions , all starring Sidney Toler , were released by MGM in 2004 .

Some modern critics , particularly East Asian @-@ Americans , dismiss the Charlie Chan character as " bovine " and " asexual " , allowing " white America ? [to be] securely indifferent about us as men . " Charlie Chan 's good qualities are the product of what Frank Chin and Jeffery Chan call " racist love " , arguing that Chan is a model minority and " kissass " . Fletcher Chan , however , argues that the Chan of Biggers 's novels is not subservient to white characters , citing The Chinese Parrot as an example ; in this novel , Chan 's eyes blaze with anger at racist remarks and in the end , after exposing the murderer , Chan remarks " Perhaps listening to a ' Chinaman ' is no disgrace . " In the films , both Charlie Chan in London (1934) and Charlie Chan in Paris (1935) " contain scenes in which Chan coolly and wittily dispatches other characters ' racist remarks . " Yunte Huang manifests an ambivalent attitude , stating that in the USA , Chan " epitomizes the racist heritage and the creative genius of this nation ? s culture . " Huang also suggests that critics of Charlie Chan may have themselves , at times , " caricatured " Chan himself .

Chan 's character has also come under fire for " nuggets of fortune cookie Confucius " and the " counterfeit proverbs " which became so widespread in popular culture . The Biggers novels did not introduce the " Confucius say " proverbs , which were added in the films , but one novel features Chan remarking : " As all those who know me have learned to their distress , Chinese have proverbs to fit every possible situation . " Huang Yunte gives as examples " Tongue often hang man quicker than rope , " " Mind , like parachute , only function when open , " and " Man who flirt with dynamite sometime fly with angels . " He argues , however , that these " colorful aphorisms " display " amazing linguistic acrobatic skills . " Like the African American " signifying monkey , " Huang continues , Chan " imparts as much insult as wisdom . "

= = Filmography = =

Unless otherwise noted , information is taken from Charles P. Mitchell 's A Guide to Charlie Chan Films (1999) .