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A Historical Timeline of Whitewashing & Yellowface in Live-Action American Films

Yellowface is the practice when a non-Asian actor plays an Asian character. More specifically it is when a non-Asian actor applies prosthetics and makeup in order to portray an Asian person. This is a harmful and offensive practice because it relies on stereotypes and implies there is a correct way to look Asian.

Whitewashing in this context, refers to the practice in the American film industry which casts White actors in Asian-Inspired character roles. It is the entertainment industry's attempt at making ethnic characters more appealing to the majority, white moviegoers, by making non-white characters less ethnic and more "white." There are several reasons for this unethical casting practice. Institutional racism and producers who believe that famous white actors will attract a wider audience and therefore maximize the profits.

■ = yellowface ● = whitewashing

1919
Broken Blossoms
Lucy Burrows (White)
Chang Kwei (Chinese)

1931
Charlie Chan Carries On
Warner Oland (White)
Charlie Chan (Chinese)

1932
The Mask of Fu Manchu
Boris Karloff (White)
Fu Manchu (Chinese)

Jerry Karloff
Fu Manchu (Chinese)

1937
The Good Earth
Paul Muni (White)
Wang Lung (Chinese)

Luise Rainer
O-Lan (Chinese)

1944
Dragon Seed
Katharine Hepburn (White)
Jade (Chinese)

1956
The Conqueror
John Wayne (White)
Genghis Khan (Mongol)

The Teahouse of the August Moon
Marlon Brando (White)
Sakini (Okinawan)

A Majority of One
Alec Guinness (White)
Koichi Asano (Japanese)

1961
Breakfast at Tiffany's
Mickey Rooney (White)
I.Y Yunioshi (Japanese)

1962
Dr. No
Joseph Wiseman (White)
Dr. No (Chinese-German)

1968
The Party
Peter Sellers (White)
Hrundi Bakshi (Indian)

1984
A Passage to India
Peter Ustinov (White)
Professor Godbole (Indian)

1989
True Believer
James Woods (White)
Eddie Dodd (Korean)

Robert Downey Jr.
Roger Baron (Korean)

1997
Starship Troopers
Casper Van Dien (White)
Carmen Ejogo (Ghanian)

2005
Batman Begins
Christian Bale (White)
Ra's Al Ghul (Arabic)

2008
21
Jim Sturgess (White)
Ben Umeda (Chinese)

Speed Racer
Emile Hirsch (White)
Taro Mifune (Japanese)

2009
Dragon Ball Z
Justin Chatwin (White)
Goku (Japanese)

2010
The Social Network
Jesse Eisenberg (White)
Divya Narendra (Indian)

Extraordinary Measures
Harrison Ford (White)
Robert Stonehill (Taiwanese)

Avatar: The Last Airbender
Noah Ringer (White)
Aang (Asian)

Nicola Peltz
Katara (Asian)

Jackson Rathbone
Sokka (Asian)

2012
Argo
Ben Affleck (White)
Cora Lam (Japanese)

Cloud Atlas
Hugo Weaving (White)
Hae-Ko Yoon (Korean)

2013
Star Trek: Into Darkness
Benedict Cumberbatch (White)
Khan (Indian)

2014
Edge of Tomorrow
Tom Cruise (White)
William Cage (Japanese)

2015
Aloha
Bradley Cooper (White)
Allison Ng (Chinese-Hawaiian)

The Martian
Matt Damon (White)
Mindy Park (Korean)

2016
Doctor Strange
Tilda Swinton (White)
Tao Arnaiz Cruz (Thailand)

2017
Ghost in the Shell
Scarlett Johansson (White)
Major (Japanese)