

In Asian-led *Always Be My Maybe*, ethnicity is secondary

By Terry Tang
The Associated Press

The newly released Netflix movie *Always Be My Maybe*, is an Asian-American rom-com with a twist: ethnicity isn't central to the plot. It's just stand-up comedian and actress Ali Wong and "Fresh Off the Boat" actor Randall Park playing best friends and soulmates who happen to be Asian, which may be the most refreshing part of all. "It wasn't the type of thing where we sat down and said before we wrote it, 'OK, we got to represent and make sure we're making the perfect Asian-American movie,'" Park told The Associated Press. "It was more like, 'Let's make a really heartfelt and really funny romantic comedy, a movie that we'd really love to see.'"

In the flick, best friends Sasha (Wong) and Marcus (Park), who grew up next door to each other in San Francisco, lose touch after a night of passion. They are reunited 15 years later when Sasha, now a celebrity chef, temporarily moves back home to launch a new restaurant. Meanwhile, Marcus works for his father's air conditioning company while playing in a band. Despite both of them being in relationships and having opposite lifestyles, it's clear the more-than-friends feelings are still there.

Like *Crazy Rich Asians*, the film showcases an all-Asian ensemble and it's romantic and funny. But that's where the similarities end. Wong, Park, and Michael Golamco, who met doing theater at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the late '90s, co-wrote the screenplay that has more in common with *When Harry Met Sally* than *Crazy Rich Asians*. While the cast is Asian American,



there's no prominent east-meets-west culture clash storyline like in *Crazy Rich Asians*. Park, who plays a sweet-natured father of three on TV's "Fresh Off the Boat," has always wanted to play a romantic lead. "I never really got afforded the chance by the industry. So it was the type of thing 'Well, I guess I got to write it,'" said Park, who is Korean American. First-time movie director Nahnatchka Khan, who is also the creator of "Fresh Off the Boat," said it was thrilling to watch him embrace playing a romantic leading man. "He just pulls off the emotion," Khan said. "I think everybody has seen him be really funny in all of his TV and movie work. But to have him kind of carry this movie on his shoulders, you feel for him and you're rooting for him." Wong, who is Vietnamese and Chinese American, is courted by two other characters played by Keanu Reeves, who is part Chinese and Native Hawaiian, and Daniel Dae Kim, who is Korean American. To see men of Asian descent playing the

rivals is significant because those roles could have easily been cast with non-Asian-American actors. "What I find interesting about this particular film is that the three main romantic rivals ... they're all playing different types of Asian-American men," said Keith Chow, creator of online pop culture website The Nerds of Color. The characters are seen doing activities commonly associated with Asians, like eating dim sum or going to a Korean spa. But, there are also subtler nods to Asian culture, like people taking off their shoes when they enter homes. The filmmakers strived for authenticity, like using a working dim sum restaurant and its servers in a scene. "It just made the experience even better," Park said. Unlike previous mainstream rom-coms that take place in San Francisco, a lot of the bars and restaurant scenes have plenty of Asian extras in the background. That was something Khan was always conscious of. "On the monitors, I would always look at

ALWAYS BE MY MAYBE. This undated image shows Randall Park and Ali Wong in a scene from the movie *Always Be My Maybe*. The newly released Netflix movie is an Asian-American rom-com with a twist: ethnicity isn't central to the plot. (Photo courtesy of Netflix)

each frame and just make sure the crowd felt real, it felt authentic," Khan said. It was also integral to Park in scenes where Marcus performs with his band Hello Peril. After college, he performed in a largely Asian-American band like in the movie. "Because of that, Asian Americans came to our shows," Park said. "Just by nature, the community comes out to support and that's reflected in those scenes and in reality." Chow said he hopes the film will continue to normalize stories focused on Asians so that they are not seen as "niche." And so Asian Americans will not feel pressure that movies or TV shows have to be hits so that someone else's project can get made. "Give me the confidence of a mediocre white man," said Chow, cribbing a popular tweet from writer Sarah Hagi. He added: "That's the dream you don't have to make the greatest work of art of all time just to get on a network." Park, whose TV show has been renewed for a sixth season, thinks the window for opportunities for Asian-led stories has widened over the last few years. "While I've been in this business, there's always been a belief that there wasn't an audience for these types of stories or these types of stories weren't relatable to a wider audience. I think at this point we've proven that they are," Park said. "That's a big step. We still have a long way to go and hopefully we'll get there."

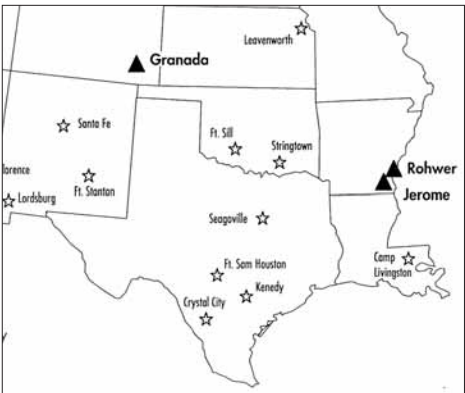
Terry Tang is a member of The AP's race and ethnicity team.

Oklahoma base set for migrant site was WWII internment camp

By Adam Kealoha Causey
The Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — A U.S. Army base in Oklahoma that the federal government says will temporarily house children crossing the border without their parents was used during World War II as a Japanese internment camp. Historical data from the National Park Service and private organizations show Fort Sill was among at least 14 Army and Department of Justice facilities nationwide where Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants were interred. The Army's War Relocation Authority held about 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans in "relocation centers" during the war with Japan. Tom Ikeda, executive director of Densho, an organization that documents the history of the United States' internment of Japanese people, referred to Fort Sill as "a place layered in trauma." He pointed to its use as a boarding school for Native American children and as a prisoner-of-war camp for Apache tribal members. "Sites like this need to be permanently closed, not recycled to inflict more harm," Ikeda said in a statement. "We need to stay vigilant and we need to be showing up at these places in protest. No one showed up for Japanese Americans during World War II, but we can and we must break that pattern now." The Obama administration also used Fort Sill to house unaccompanied migrant children during a migration surge in 2014. Ikeda's perspective echoed calls last year from state and federal leaders and locals who objected to the Trump administration looking into housing immigrant children near the site of a former internment camp in Rohwer, Arkansas. Those plans were scrapped. The Office of

Refugee Resettlement, overseen by the Department of Health and Human Services, said it plans to house up to 1,400 migrant children at Fort Sill, near Lawton, Oklahoma, about 90 miles southwest of Oklahoma City. An e-mailed request for comment from the department was not returned. In a letter dated June 12, Health and Human Services secretary Alex Azar and acting Homeland Security secretary Kevin McAleenan asked congress to appropriate \$4.5 billion in emergency funding requested to "address the immediate humanitarian crisis at our southern border." Record numbers of unaccompanied children have been arriving at the border, largely from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. In May, border agents apprehended 11,507 children travelling alone. The Office of Refugee Resettlement has come under fire for the death of two children who went through the agency's network of shelters and is facing lawsuits over the treatment of teens in its care. The office has said it must set up new facilities to accommodate new arrivals or risk running out of beds. Fort Sill spokesman Darrell Ames said the post's information indicates that following America's entry into World War II, the government directed the base to build internment camps for Japanese Americans, but nothing in the record reflects the camps were actually occupied by Japanese Americans. Instead, the camps were used by prisoners of war from Japan, Germany, and Italy. Officials at the Fort Sill National Historic Landmark & Museum said they have no information about the base's use as an internment or prisoner-of-war camp because that part of its history is not part of its mission statement.



Shawn Iwaoka, who works in collections at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, said confusion abounds because camps were referred to by different names, including "relocation centers" or "detention camps," and because the camp at Fort Sill was much smaller than camps such as Manzanar in California, which housed thousands of people. The museum's collection includes letters a man detained at Fort Sill wrote to his wife at another camp in California with a pre-preprinted label that said "internee of war." "The euphemisms were rampant to kind of soften what they really were. The museum's position is that they should be called concentration camps," Iwaoka said. "They were going into people's homes and forcing them to leave their property." It's unclear exactly when the camp at Fort Sill opened, but an encyclopedia Densho publishes shows it closed in June 1942, almost seven months after the Japanese bombed the American fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawai'i. That pushed the U.S. into war and led the government to open internment camps. Densho's records and the book *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites*, included on the National

CONFINEMENT & ETHNICITY. Fort Sill is seen in this partial map of confinement sites in the western U.S. associated with the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. (Image from the book, *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites*, National Park Service, 1999)

Park Service website, show from 359 to more than 700 people were interred at Fort Sill, including three German nationals. A guard shot a Japanese man to death while he was distraught and trying to escape. The Densho Encyclopedia says detainees lived in tents and that summer temperatures climbed to 100° Fahrenheit. Associated Press writers Tim Talley in Oklahoma City and Susan Montoya Bryan in Albuquerque, New Mexico, contributed to this report.

Three charged with plot to send stolen California plants to Asia

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Three South Korean citizens have been charged with trying to illegally export thousands of plants poached from remote Northern California state parks. Prosecutors say the three, who include a Vista nursery operator, pulled thousands of Dudleya plants worth more than \$600,000 from coastal park areas, intending to ship them to South Korea. The succulents are prized in Asia but take years to grow in nurseries. Authorities said that last year, they seized more than 3,700 plants that the defendants allegedly planned to ship through a commercial exporter in Compton. The three were charged with conspiracy and attempting to export plants taken in violation of state law. Each could face up to 10 years in federal prison if convicted. One person is in custody and two are fugitives.