

# Actor James Hong back in spotlight with Hollywood star push

By Terry Tang  
The Associated Press

James Hong is learning to do his first Zoom video chat at the spry age of 91. The actor, who has witnessed his industry continuously evolve with technology, is finding it “mind-boggling.”

“What is this Zoom thing anyway?” Hong said from his Los Angeles home, where he’s been hunkering down with his wife. “If I live another five years, what are we going to be doing? Talking through our fingernails?”

That sarcastic sense of humor is one of many reasons Hong has remained such an appealing presence on screen for nearly 70 years. With more than 600 acting and voice-over credits to his name, he’s sure to pop up any time of day in any country that airs American films and TV. His movie résumé includes *Flower Drum Song*, *Blade Runner*, and *Wayne’s World 2*. He’s appeared on a slew of hit TV shows since the 1950s — from “Friends” to “The Big Bang Theory” and both versions of “Hawaii Five-0.” He’s also got films yet to come out, including *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, where he plays father to Michelle Yeoh.

The longtime character actor is now in the spotlight after actor Daniel Dae Kim launched a campaign August 5 to get Hong a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. The nomination process isn’t until spring, but Kim wanted to secure the required \$50,000 price tag to create and install a star. While most celebrities have a studio or record label helping to cover costs, Hong does not.

Gearing up for a potentially difficult grassroots fundraiser, Kim and fellow actors Randall Park, Ming-Na Wen, and Ken Jeong promised a joint Zoom call for anyone who donated \$5,000 or more.

Turns out, it took all of three days for 1,700 people to donate \$55,000 to #StarforJamesHong.

“I thought maybe I should help him raise the money somehow,” Hong said. “But he said, ‘We’ve fulfilled it.’ Even my nephew and niece didn’t get a chance to put in any money.”

Hong didn’t know about the campaign beforehand and was more shocked by the donations than anyone. It was especially meaningful during an economy decimated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It’s hard to scrape up \$10, \$25, or \$50 let alone a thousand or five thousand,” Hong said. “I owe my public a lot and I don’t know exactly how to thank them.”

Kim and Hong met when they guest-starred in the same episode of “Charmed” in 2001. In his GoFundMe pitch, Kim said Hong “epitomizes the term ‘working actor,’ and that’s not even taking into account all he’s done to help further representation for actors of color.”

Arthur Dong, author of *Hollywood Chinese* and a longtime friend, said it’s no surprise these younger Asian-American actors revere him. Hong stuck to his ambition in an era when roles available to Asian actors were mostly tropes and stereotypes — a fact the actor acknowledges. What counted is that he worked to change things, Dong said.

“He’s not a victim. He works to conquer the problem and push for progress,” Dong said. “The fact that he survived it is incredible. I think that’s where the younger generations of actors find respect for him.”

Specifically, Hong and eight other Asian-American actors fed up with being offered “ cliché roles” formed their own acting troupe in 1964.

“I was doing all these little Chinese kids being rescued by the white guys ... and railroad workers. I was very frustrated,” he recalled. “When do I get to be James Hong with a main role?”

That acting group developed into Los Angeles-based East West Players, which is today arguably the most reputable Asian-American theater company in the



country.

Born in Minneapolis, Hong loved to entertain and would practice doing impressions in front of the mirror. His parents, however, wanted him to be a doctor or engineer. He studied civil engineering for three years at the University of Minnesota. He was then drafted to serve in the Korean War. When he returned in 1953, he decided to move with a friend to Hollywood.

The following year, he got a big break making an appearance on Groucho Marx’s quiz show, “You Bet Your Life,” because of his Groucho impression. Soon, small roles in films followed and he was sharing the screen with big names like Clark Gable and John Wayne, both of whom he looked up to at the time.

The Hollywood landscape Hong is working in today is vastly different for Asian Americans. Actors aren’t just saying no to cliché characters, but some, like Kim, have

**HOLLYWOOD STAR.** James Hong is seen at the world premiere of *Kung Fu Panda 3* at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles, in this January 16, 2016 file photo. Hong, a longtime character actor, is now in the spotlight after actor Daniel Dae Kim launched a campaign to get Hong a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. The nomination process isn’t until spring, but Kim wanted to secure the required \$50,000 price tag to create and install a star. While most celebrities have a studio or record label helping to cover costs, Hong does not. But it turns out it took all of three days for 1,700 people to donate a total of \$55,000 to #StarforJamesHong. (Photo by Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP/File)

formed their own production companies to tell the stories they want to tell, Hong said. There are also a lot of more Asian-American arts organizations amplifying the voices of talented actors, writers, and filmmakers.

“If I live another 10 years, it will be a whole different picture because all those talents are just starting to come forward,” Hong said.

If Hong were to join the Walk of Fame’s galaxy of nearly 2,700 stars, he’d be one of very few Asian-American actors. Last year, Lucy Liu became only the second Asian-American woman, after Anna May Wong, to receive a star. Hong can’t help but be a little cynical. A couple of people tried to nominate him before but he was rejected.

“It’s like that *Wayne’s World* movie I made: Am I worthy?”

Whether or not Kim’s campaign succeeds, the deluge of donations and fan support still feels like plenty of validation.

“They have told me that what I’m doing is worthwhile,” Hong said. “I knew that before anyway but now there’s hope, there’s a pat on the back.”

Tang reported from Phoenix and is a member of The Associated Press Race and Ethnicity team.

## Dual identities challenge America’s race labels

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People of Middle Eastern or North African descent have long struggled with what to pick. Advocates had unsuccessfully pushed for a separate category for the 2020 census, but the Census Bureau for now encourages people in those categories to identify as white. And even though Hispanic identity isn’t a race, Latinos often aren’t sure how to answer the race question and select “some other race” on census forms.

Aside from the way they outwardly present, how multiracial people are raised and conditioned by their families, their exposure to certain relatives, and the makeup of their community surroundings also are important factors in how they identify.

Former President Barack Obama,

whose father was Kenyan and mother was white, identifies as Black, while Meghan Markle, the Duchess of Sussex, whose father is white and mother is Black, has indicated a preference for being identified as biracial.

Then there’s pro golfer Tiger Woods, who coined the term “Cablinasian” because his mixed-race parents were of white, Black, Asian, and Native American ancestry. Woods’ unorthodox choice has offended some African Americans, who view it as a rejection of his Black identity.

For most of his childhood, Benjamin Beltran identified with his dad’s roots as a Filipino growing up in Saginaw, Michigan, with few other Asian Americans. At times, that made his white mother worry he was

forgetting her ancestry, which traces to Scotland and Ireland. Still, most people assume he is Latino.

The 26-year-old college administrator living in Washington, D.C., said he started shifting to identify as multiracial and biracial when he began hanging out with more Asian Americans in college, because he found his life experience was not quite syncing with his former preferred label.

“What I think is really cool is her identity is not simple,” Beltran said of Harris. “It’s complex and it’s nuanced and it’s reflective of more and more Americans in this day and age.”

AP journalists Noreen Nasir in Chicago and Michael Schneider in Orlando, Florida, contributed. Census 2020 forms are currently due on September 30, 2020. If your household has not yet replied, visit <www.my2020census.gov>.



## Short-term Programs Help Students Start New Careers

### Career Pathways with Additional Support

Mt. Hood Community College offers a variety of career pathways for students who want short-term education and job training, and may need additional academic and support services. These programs enable students to work on literacy – reading, writing, and math – and language skills, at the same time they are working on certificates or degrees. Programs vary in length from 6-12 months. Students who complete the programs are prepared to start a new career or continue their

education toward a 2-year degree. Programs with additional support services include:

- Accounting Assistant
- Child Development Associate: Preschool
- Early Childhood: Child Care Center Teacher
- Nursing Assistant

For more information visit: [mhcc.edu/Career-Pathways-Additional-Support](http://mhcc.edu/Career-Pathways-Additional-Support). Questions about one of the programs? Contact Kristen.Kulongoski@mhcc.edu or call 503-491-6948.



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### Wearing a face covering during warm weather

Wear a mask when indoors or in crowded outdoor spaces where physical distancing of 6 feet is not possible.

- If you wear a mask outdoors, try to wear a mask that is light in color, because dark colors may become hotter.
- Breathe through your nose, which will result in less heat and humidity within the mask.
- If you feel overheated, move away from others, remove the mask, and rest in a well-ventilated, shaded area.



Adapted from Trinity Health

For more information visit [healthoregon.org/coronavirus](http://healthoregon.org/coronavirus) or call 211

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