

Michelle Yeoh shows Asian immigrant women are *Everything*

By Terry Tang
The Associated Press

Michelle Yeoh was adamant about one script change before committing to *Everything Everywhere All At Once*.

The main character's name had to go. She was named Michelle as a love letter to her from the directors.

"I'm like 'No, no, no' because I believe this person, this character that you've written so rich, deserves a voice of her own. She is the voice of those mothers, aunts, grandmothers that you pass by in Chinatown or in the supermarket that you don't even give a second glance to. Then you just take her for granted," Yeoh told The Associated Press. "She's never had a voice."

At 59, Yeoh commands the lead of the genre-twisting flick by playing someone often invisible — the Asian immigrant wife and mother trying to be everything for everyone. "An independent film on steroids" as she puts it, *Everything Everywhere All At Once* recently went into wide theatrical release. It was ranked fourth for domestic box office in its first weekend, bringing in nearly \$6.2 million, according to figures compiled by Comscore.

Yeoh's performance is drawing raves at a time when Asians and Asian Americans of all age ranges continue to be the target of pandemic-fueled racism in Chinatowns, cities, and suburbs across the U.S. But reports have found Asian women have experienced these hate crimes at a higher rate.

After decades first as a star in Hong Kong cinema and then more mainstream hits like *Tomorrow Never Dies* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the Malaysia-born Yeoh has grown into a movie queen. She's had integral roles in what have been the first large U.S. studio movies in years with all-Asian casts — Marvel Studios' *Shang-Chi and The Legend of The Ten Rings* and *Crazy Rich Asians*.

"So much weight was on (*Crazy Rich Asians*) ... What if we weren't as successful as that? Did that mean that we don't deserve to be up there?" Yeoh said. "It exploded and the way it did made everyone realize, 'Hey, we've been neglecting this very major part of our society for so long.'"

As much as those films mean to her, she was a polished supporting player in them. "*Everything Everywhere All At Once* is a whole otherworldly experience where she gets to play "an aging Asian woman."

Written and directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert (known



PRAISEWORTHY PERFORMANCE. This image released by A24 shows Michelle Yeoh, left, and Jing Li in a scene from *Everything Everywhere All At Once*. At 59, Yeoh commands the lead of the genre-twisting flick by playing someone often invisible — the Asian immigrant wife and mother trying to be everything for everyone. (Allyson Riggs/A24 via AP)

as the Daniels), the story centers on a glammed down Yeoh as Evelyn Wang, a frazzled laundromat owner preparing for an IRS audit. Meanwhile, she is struggling with an unhappy husband (Ke Huy Quan), her critical father (James Hong), and an openly lesbian daughter (Stephanie Hsu). She is literally upended when another version of her husband pops up claiming to be from another universe. Evelyn ends up jumping through the multiverse and picking up skills possessed by her otherworldly counterparts.

The story is a wild laundry list of action, sci-fi, comedy, and family drama that includes people with hot dogs for fingers and a giant everything bagel. The first word that came to Yeoh's mind after reading the script was "insane."

"I was blown away that they had the courage to write the script and put [in] all these kinds of things. Because it wasn't just about the wackiness. The familial connections [were] so powerful," she said.

The movie puts the spotlight on the other actors as well. It marks a Hollywood homecoming for Quan. He charmed audiences as a child playing Short Round in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and Data in *The Goonies*. Funnily enough, *Crazy Rich Asians* is what made him want to return to the screen after more than 20 years. Yeoh is attached to the sequel and agreed it would be a great full-circle moment to find a role for Quan.

"We are so grateful that made him think because he never really left the film industry," Yeoh said.

Hong, 93, gets to chew plenty of scenery too. He made headlines in 2020 when famous friends successfully campaigned for him to get a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. He will receive the honor later this year.

"He's got a heart of gold. You know, he truly loves what he does," said Yeoh, who is reuniting with Hong on a new Disney+ series, "American Born Chinese." "He deserves it."

The film has hit a nerve with audiences but especially Asian Americans. Across social media, many describe crying during the film's last hour as the relationship between Evelyn and daughter Joy hits a make-or-break juncture. Some say they feel like they're watching their own immigrant mother become the hero of her story for the first time. Others say they've gained a better understanding about parents who typically don't wear their emotions on their sleeve.

"I think especially Asian parents, they tend to be more critical. But they show their love — they'll save you the best part of the meat, they'll make sure that you're well fed," Yeoh said. "That is their way of showing love and care."

For Asian-American women, the movie is a breath of fresh air. Hate incidents like last year's Atlanta spa shootings renewed conversations about the propensity to sexualize or dismiss Asian women. But in this movie, Yeoh gets to show a wide range — from comedic and martial arts chops to heart-wrenching angst. The actress promises she will never give up on proving women can be the leads in parts that are more than stereotypes.

"Why is it men can get to a certain age and keep pushing forward with all these kinds of things and women sort of like get left behind?" Yeoh said. "With the new sustainable development goals, one of the things up there is gender equality, equal opportunities. And that's all what we're asking for."

Terry Tang is a member of The Associated Press' Race and Ethnicity team.



PTFC FOR PEACE. Nearly 17,000 fans attended PTFC for Peace, a historic mixed-teams charity match held last month at Providence Park featuring members of the Portland Thorns and Portland Timbers. The 60-minute match resulted in a score of a 4-3 win for Team Yellow over Team Blue. Through the efforts of fans, partners, and the clubs, more than \$500,000 was raised for UNICEF relief efforts in Ukraine and bordering countries. Pictured is Thorns FC midfielder Hina Sugita, who participated in the match. (AR Photo/Denise Avery)

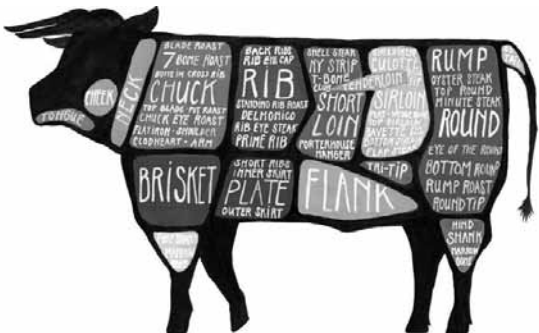
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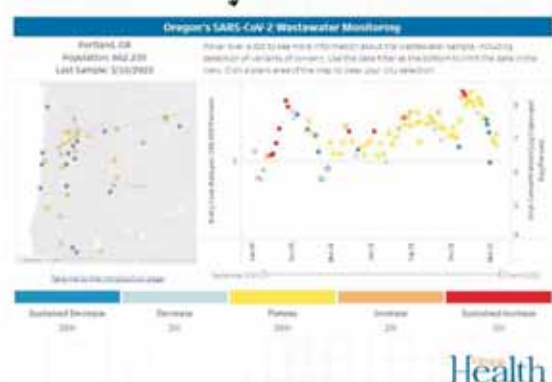
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Ansel Elgort takes on Japan mafia in HBO drama series

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"All those worlds are very interconnected in ways that are different from what you might assume, coming in from a western point of view. And so discovering the ways they are interconnected, as Jake figures it out on his own, is part of the pleasure of following the story," said executive producer Alan Poul.

The Emmy and Golden Globe-winning Poul began his career in Japan, and has a college degree in Japanese

literature. The multicultural cast of "Tokyo Vice" also includes Rinko Kikuchi and Rachel Keller.

Will there be any obligatory karaoke scenes to showcase the singing talent of Elgort and Watanabe? Viewers can only hope, although both lead actors praised each other's singing talent — Elgort in *West Side Story* and Watanabe in *The King and I* on Broadway.

"I was so blown away by Ken-san's singing," Elgort said in perfect Japanese.