

## Indies get manly at the 24th Asian film festival

[G. Allen Johnson, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

Wednesday, February 15, 2006

Quick -- name the last Hollywood film with an Asian American male as a romantic lead.

I'll wait.

While you're thinking, let's talk about independent films -- which haven't been much kinder to that demographic. But that is changing, because after nearly a half century of stagnation, the image of the Asian American man is being jump-started by filmmakers such as Eric Byler.

"Americanese," Byler's next film after his cult hit "Charlotte Sometimes," will open the 24th San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival at the Castro on March 16.

The festival, which runs through March 23 in San Francisco before moving to San Jose for the weekend, will close at the Palace of Fine Arts with first-time director Ham Tran's "Journey From the Fall," billed as the first major American film to dramatize the Vietnam War's traumatic aftermath from a Vietnamese perspective.

In between, the largest Asian film festival in the United States will screen more than 126 feature-length and short films from 21 countries at the Castro, Kabuki and the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley. Included are festival tributes to James Shigeta, who will be present for a screening of Samuel Fuller's 1959 noir "The Crimson Kimono," and memorial tributes to actor Pat Morita and "Picture Bride" director Kayo Hatta.

There are 13 world premieres (four features) and 10 U.S. premieres, but the focus is on Asian American movies. The jury competition has 12 entries, double the number of last year, reflecting what festival director Chi-hui Yang calls "a historic moment."

"What has come about is that the quantity and the quality of Asian American films has doubled in the past year," Yang said. "There aren't too many commercial opportunities there for them, yet they are still being made in enormous numbers."

The presence of Shigeta is an interesting complement. A rare example of Asian American machismo in film, Shigeta starred opposite Nancy Kwan in "Flower Drum Song" (1961) but remade the landscape as a leading man with interracial love interests. In "Kimono," Shigeta is a detective in a love triangle with beautiful blonde Victoria Shaw and partner Glenn Corbett; he wins.

Then there's "Bridge to the Sun" (1961), which will screen at the Castro. It's a story about an interracial relationship starring Shigeta and Carroll Baker.

"It's fascinating to look at 'Americanese' after having watched 'The Crimson Kimono,'" Yang said.

## Indies get manly at the 24th Asian film festival cont'd

Wednesday, February 15, 2006

"They almost seem to be commenting on each other."

Based on the breakthrough novel "American Knees" by Shawn Wong (who will sit on a panel at the festival with Byler), "Americanease" is about a Chinese American professor (Chris Tashima) who embarks on a relationship with a Vietnamese co-worker (Joan Chen) after a painful breakup. Identity and personal politics are in the forefront.

Other male tales in the festival include a rapper ("No Sleep Til Shanghai"), angst-ridden young people ("The Achievers"), Jason Scott Lee fighting in World War II ("Only the Brave"), a post-Sept. 11 Southeast Asian teen in Queens ("Punching at the Sun") and a documentary by San Francisco public defender Jeff Adachi that ties together the Asian American acting experience, "The Slanted Screen."

24th San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival: March 16-26. At the Castro, Kabuki and Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco; the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley; and the Camera 12 Cinemas in San Jose.

[asianamericanfilmfestival.org](http://asianamericanfilmfestival.org).

*E-mail G. Allen Johnson at*  
[ajohnson@sfchronicle.com](mailto:ajohnson@sfchronicle.com).

Page E - 2