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## In Hollywood, as in the NBA, Asian-Americans Are Still Rare

By *Tim Wu* | Posted Friday, Jan. 25, 2013, at 3:47 PM



NBA star Jeremy Lin  
Photo by Jared Wickerham/Getty Images

Asian-Americans were tagged years ago as the "new Jews" because of their disproportionate degree of academic success and their prominence in the medical profession. But one area of American life where Asian-Americans have not successfully followed in the footsteps of their Jewish peers is the film industry. As Neal Gabler memorably documented in *An Empire of their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*, Jewish immigrants largely created the American film industry, by starting studios like Universal, 20th Century Fox, and Paramount.

Whereas, not all that long ago, Hua Hsu described Wayne Wang's 1982 film *Chan Is Missing* as "still the pinnacle of Asian-American filmmaking." Attending Sundance this year I saw nothing likely to unseat it.

But there was, at least, *Linsanity*, a documentary that is itself about a sort of Asian-American exception. Sundance documentaries tend to range from serious (*Pandora's Promise*) to depressing (*The World According to Dick Cheney*) to seriously

depressing (*Salma*, a film about a Muslim woman whose parents locked her in the basement for 25 years). Evan Jackson Leong's heart-warming *Linsanity* is one of exactly two feel-good documentaries at Sundance this year. It's a winning mixture of sports drama and immigrant-made-good story.

Its strength lies largely in the fact that Leong, a sixth-generation Chinese-American, started tracking Jeremy Lin years before "*Linsanity*" was enshrined in the *Urban Dictionary*. That means the viewers are with Lin back when he was a nobody. We watch as he gets bumped back down to the NBA's Developmental League three times. That Lin actually became famous was an incredible stroke of good fortune for the filmmaker—"every filmmaker's

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dream," as Leong put it at the documentary's premiere.

The film is narrated by Daniel Dae Kim, most recognizable for his roles on *Lost* and *Hawaii Five-O*. Later at Sundance, Kim made much of the challenges faced by Asian actors and athletes at the launch of [the A3 Foundation](#), which is an effort by three former Facebook employees to put more money into Asian-American film. Both sports and film have been tough for Asian-Americans to break into. If Asian-Americans want to get serious about the movie business, it may be time to create studios with a real interest in supporting such work—to build, in other words, an empire of their own.

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Alice Zindagi Pua

I think this documentary paints a great picture of Jeremy Lin. No, he will probably never be a Michael Jordan on talent alone, and he's fallen from his meteoric and shocking rise. But that isn't the point. Lin has great marketing potential, a fantastic potential to brighten the future of young

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