

## Discussion Questions (continued)

8. In *Tiara*, many beauty pageant contestants were pressured by their mothers to join. If your mother was pressuring you to join, would you? If you had a daughter, would you let her join a beauty pageant?

9. Filmmaker Monica Mak notes that she has a “love and hate” relationship toward pageantry culture. How is this ambivalent attitude reflected in the film? Does the narrative structure convey this ambivalence?

### About the Filmmaker/Producer

Monica Mak is a Chinese-Canadian documentarian and media studies scholar. She has directed, co-directed and edited a number of educational short documentaries. These include *Our Photos, Our Videos, Our Stories: Addressing HIV/AIDS in the Community* (2007); *Women Educating for Peace* (2005), a post-9-11 film about primary school educators teaching peace to their students; and the award-winning *Unwanted Images: Gender-Based Violence in the New South Africa* (2001).

Monica holds a doctorate degree in Communications Studies from McGill University and has been a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa.

# Tiara

**A documentary film  
by Monica Mak**



**MOVING IMAGES  
DISTRIBUTION**

402 West Pender St, Ste 606  
Vancouver, BC V6B 1T6  
604.684.3014 • 800.684.3014  
[www.movingimages.ca](http://www.movingimages.ca)

**Secondary and Post-Secondary  
Discussion Guide**

## Director's Statement

As a teen growing up in Montreal in the 1990s, I was bombarded with images of Caucasian beauty. They epitomized female perfection—or what princesses should look like. My Chinese, Filipino, and South Asian girlfriends agree that they too experienced the effects of trying to look “Western.” But in Canada, if you are born looking Asian, where do you seek validation for the way you look? Or to live out your fantasy of looking like Cinderella for a day?

One answer dawned on me at the age of 16 when I was introduced to Asian-Canadian pageantry. It was 1992 and I saw a picture of my high school friend in a local Chinese newspaper. Decked out in a gown and sash, she was posing with other Chinese women. One wore a crown. Though my friend hadn't won the the Miss Chinese Montreal Pageant, the winner, Christy Chung, went on to win another Chinese beauty pageant and become a Hong Kong film star.

As years went by, I'd hear stories of other Chinese, Filipino and South Asian women joining beauty pageants organized by their various communities in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. All of this was happening in plain sight, oblivious to the rest of Canada, and largely below the public's radar.

Many people worry that beauty pageants are demeaning to women; yet, long before I came across my friend's photo in that community newspaper, Asian-Canadian beauty contests have been on the rise and continue to be popular. All this time, I have been intrigued with one question: What motivates Asian women to participate seeking to be crowned?

In the making of *Tiara*, I conducted extensive interviewees with contestants, organizers, critics, and even a “Missologist” (a self-declared beauty queen expert) to explore the allure of the tiara among women in the Asian-Canadian community.

*Monica Mak, Filmmaker/Producer*

## Tiara for Classroom Use

*Tiara* is an engaging educational tool for secondary and post-secondary studies. Its exploration of the cultural practice of beauty pageantry practiced by women of different Asian-Canadian communities makes it an excellent piece for broaching cultural diversity in the country. It also focuses on female body image, self-esteem, and beauty; these topics are all relevant to teenage girls and post-secondary female students—who may be for or against judging women on a stage.

## Discussion Questions

1. In *Tiara*, why do the featured Asian-Canadian women join beauty pageants? Can you think of other reasons not included in the film?
2. How are Asian-Canadian pageants different from or similar to mainstream pageants such as *Miss Teen USA* or *Miss USA*? How do mainstream pageants differ? Is it in their structure, the way they are covered and represented by the media, or both?
3. Filmmaker Monica Mak implies that Asian-Canadian women sometimes grow up with an inferiority complex. What does she mean by this? How does this complex relate to the film?
4. What are “ideal” notions of beauty in Western society?
5. Why are some people opposed to beauty pageants? What are your thoughts on beauty pageants?
6. Which interview subject do you find interesting? Why?
7. Would you ever consider joining a beauty pageant? Explain why or why not. Alternately, explain why you would encourage or discourage your sister or female friend from joining one.