

## ABSTRACT

### Stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans in the U.S. Media: Appearance, Disappearance, and Assimilation

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This thesis commits to highlighting major stereotypes concerning Asians and Asian Americans found in the U.S. media, the “Yellow Peril,” the perpetual foreigner, the model minority, and problematic representations of gender and sexuality.

In the U.S. media, Asians and Asian Americans are greatly underrepresented. Acting roles that are granted to them in television series, films, and shows usually consist of stereotyped characters. It is unacceptable to socialize such stereotypes, for the media play a significant role of education and social networking which help people understand themselves and their relation with others.

Within the limited pages of the thesis, I devote to exploring such labels as the “Yellow Peril,” perpetual foreigner, the model minority, the emasculated Asian male and the hyper-sexualized Asian female in the U.S. media. In doing so I hope to promote awareness of such typecasts by white dominant culture and society to ethnic minorities in the U.S.

Stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans in the U.S. Media:  
Appearance, Disappearance, and Assimilation

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of American Studies

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## DEDICATION

To my parents



## CHAPTER ONE

### Stereotypes of East Asians in the Western World

#### *Introduction*

Like other ethnic stereotypes, stereotypes of Asians (especially East Asians) are often apparent in the U.S. media. Usually, the U.S. media has a dominant Western perception of Asians and Asian culture when portraying East Asians rather than realistic depiction of East Asians and their culture. Representation and stereotyped portrayals could be seen almost everywhere when depicting Asians and Asian Americans in the U.S. media. Unfortunately, these stereotypes have been mainly negative concerning Asians and Asian Americans in the U.S. on various aspects, ranging from daily life, creative expressions, and public sphere to news media, official legislation, and governmental policies. Although underrepresented and stereotyped interpretations are not determinative and of authority, their social power is still influential and controlling.

Asian Americans total around five percent of the entire U.S. population, and are the third largest ethnic minority group after the Black and the Hispanic in the United States. The governmental census in 2009 indicates that about 14.9 million people report themselves as having Asian heritage.<sup>1</sup> In the thesis, by Asians and Asian Americans, I mean East Asians and East Asian Americans, such as Chinese, Japanese,

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<sup>1</sup> [Asian American Population Estimates](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/IPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-qr_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201&-qr_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201PR&-qr_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201T&-qr_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201TPR&-ds_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_-reg=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201:031;ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201PR:031;ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201T:031;ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201TPR:031&-lang=en&-redoLog=false&-format=) by United States Census Bureau, [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/IPTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=01000US&-qr\\_name=ACS\\_2007\\_1YR\\_G00\\_S0201&-qr\\_name=ACS\\_2007\\_1YR\\_G00\\_S0201PR&-qr\\_name=ACS\\_2007\\_1YR\\_G00\\_S0201T&-qr\\_name=ACS\\_2007\\_1YR\\_G00\\_S0201TPR&-ds\\_name=ACS\\_2007\\_1YR\\_G00\\_-reg=ACS\\_2007\\_1YR\\_G00\\_S0201:031;ACS\\_2007\\_1YR\\_G00\\_S0201PR:031;ACS\\_2007\\_1YR\\_G00\\_S0201T:031;ACS\\_2007\\_1YR\\_G00\\_S0201TPR:031&-lang=en&-redoLog=false&-format=](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/IPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-qr_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201&-qr_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201PR&-qr_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201T&-qr_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201TPR&-ds_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_-reg=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201:031;ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201PR:031;ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201T:031;ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0201TPR:031&-lang=en&-redoLog=false&-format=)

and Korean. The other sub-ethics, such as South Asian and West Asian, also have their own representations and stereotypes in the U.S. media, but they are not included in the discussion of the thesis because of the limited content of the paper.

According to Chan, the historiography of Asian and Asian American falls into four main periods. The first period is from 1870s to the 1920s, which witnessed the debates over Chinese and Japanese immigration. The side of “Yellow Peril” viewholder battled strong defense of the Chinese and Japanese immigrants. The 1920s to the 1960s studies were dominated by social scientists. The studies focused on assimilation, social organization, and the World War II internment camps. In the 1960s and the early 1980s, the assimilationism faded away from the mainstream study, and classical Marxism and internal colonialism were the leading theories concerning Asian American. After 1990, there has been much research by professional historians.<sup>2</sup>

The Asian people came to the United States to work as laborers. The Chinese arrived in the U.S. in large numbers on the West Coast in the 1850s and 1860s to work in mines and railroads. In Central Pacific Railroad, the first Chinese was hired in 1865 with payment of around \$28 per month, they were assigned very dangerous work, for example, blasting and laying ties over the terrain. They lived in shabby dwellings and cooked themselves. The hard work and malnutrition made them look thin and sickly in appearance. In Central Pacific Railroad, thousands of Chinese workers were hired. But after the railroad was finished, they were hounded out of the railroad towns, with many winding up in Chinatowns, segregated parts of large cities. The Japanese arrived in large numbers in the period of 1890 to 1907 to the West Coast and Hawaii. From the very beginning they entered this country, they not only

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<sup>2</sup> Suchen Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Twayne Publishers, 1991).

suffered from physical torment, but also experienced hostility and discrimination—especially from Irish Americans who were also recent immigrants—as undesirable and inassimilable strangers. They were denounced for having brought diseases, economic competition, and vice (gambling, prostitution and opium) to the communities that they settled in.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, White farmers in the west coast also held a strong hostility and hatred for the Asians and Asian Americans because of the economic competition that the Asian and Asian American brought to them. Many Asians made the unwanted swamp land arable, and became competitive and successful at the local produce market, which set a threat to the economic interests of local white farmers. In 1905, the Asian Exclusion League (AEL) was formed which was aimed to drive all Asians and Asian Americans out of the US, and prohibit further immigration of Asian to the United States.

The Yellow Peril discourse appeared not only in the political sphere, but in journalism rhetoric. According to California Governor Henry Gage, the Japanese labor was described as a “menace” to the unskilled American workers. And the AEL claimed that “the preservation of the Caucasian race upon American soil necessitates the adoption of all possible measures to prevent or minimize the immigration of Asiatic to America.”<sup>4</sup> As stated in the *New York Times*, a leading newspaper in the United States, “We have four million of the degraded negroes (sic) in the south...and if there were to be a flood tide of Chinese population— a population befouled with social vices, with no knowledge or appreciation of free institution or constitutional liberty, heathenish souls and heathenish propensities, we should be prepared to bid

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> R. Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little Brown, 1989), 201.

farewell to republicanism.”<sup>5</sup> The early experience had a far-reaching and long-standing influence on the knowledge and impression of the society to Asians and Asian Americans.

In the U.S. media, Asians and Asian culture are underrepresented and stereotyped. In the films, TV programs, roles that were granted to Asian Americans usually have stereotyped characters. Since the media is often the reflection of societal norms and beliefs, underrepresentation and stereotypes of Asian American only serve to perpetuate already existing biased knowledge of the ethnic group. The historical underrepresentation and stereotyped portrayals of Asians and Asian Americans in the last century have residual effects that continue to today, and will extend to the future. Although the U.S. media has made great progress after the protest movement of 1960s and 1970s, and Asian Americans themselves have attempted to re-counter their image in the media, there is still a lot of work to be done. Until there is a great change in the structure of media production, the phenomenon may continue to the future.

### *Orientalism, Mysticism and Exoticism*

Underrepresentation (or symbolic representation) and stereotyped portrayals of Asian and Asian American have a rather long history in the West, which were shaped by the attitude of imperialism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to Edward Said, orientalism refers to the manner in which the Westerners interprets Asians and Asian culture with their own knowledge, experience and encounters with the Orient and the culture.<sup>6</sup> As claimed by Said in his influential and controversial book *Orientalism*, the term “the Orient” was donated special meaning in the West as a place

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>6</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Pantheon Books, 1978), 1-2.

of exoticism, romance, and mysteries, and it has a contrast (usually negative) with Western culture.<sup>7</sup> Said used the term orientalism to describe the traditional Western outsider views of the East.

Under the concept of orientalism, the Asians and Asian Americans are regarded as the “othering”, their habits, customs and cultures as “exotic”, and their characters as “mystified”, which all set a steep contrast with the “self”— the West and its Anglo-European heritage. By associating the “Other” with exoticism, romance, and mysteries (which are abnormal characteristics in the context of our society), representations and stereotypes are established in mindset of individuals and groups within a society. However, Said suggests that Orientalism was not created by the Asian people, and that Orientalism could not describe the Asian people exactly. Thus, Orientalism is a concept created by the Europeans to describe what they “believe” about the East, which is a European externalization, and reflection of their fictionalized view of the world. Orientalism helped explain the position of the East and the West in explaining the Asian and its culture from the perspective of the West and western culture. Thus, “A line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant.”<sup>8</sup>

Said’s concept of Orientalism not only helps us understand the theoretical reasons of the representations and stereotyped portrayals of Asians and Asian Americans, but also sheds light on understanding the relationship between the West and the East. As Rizvi and Lingard write,

Orientalism is best understood as a system of representations, a discourse framed by political forces through which the West sought to understand and control its colonized populations. It is a discourse that both assumes and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 57.

promotes a fundamental difference between the Western “us” and Oriental “them.” It is a manner of regularized interpreting, writing about and accounting for the Orient, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases politically marshaled to self-justify imperial conquests and exploitation. In this sense, the Orient is an imagined place that is articulated through as an entire system of thought and scholarship.<sup>9</sup>

The concept is also reflected in the U.S media that representations and stereotyped portrayals are vastly applied when depicting Asian and Asian Americans.

### *The Media and Identity*

An important way to understand the representations and stereotyped portrayals of Asians and Asian Americans in the U.S. media is to dig out the underlying reasons of the biased construction and identity of the minority in the U.S. society.

According to Woodward, “identities are forged through the making of difference.”<sup>10</sup> The difference is vital to make meaning, which further is central to form identities. People used to organize their knowledge and recognition based upon observed difference. These systems work on the basis of binary opposition, such as sacred and profane, raw and cooked, or more simply good and bad (even though the real world is not so simple.)

Meanings get out from the binary opposition of sacred and profane, raw and cooked, or good and bad. It is not because that humans understand the certain meaning and knowledge of “sacred”, but that we understand that “profane” is “not-sacred.” To explain it another way, it is the difference of “sacred” and “profane” that we know the meanings of the two words. Of course, some binaries are more opposite than others, and are more direct or obvious to the construction of identity. For

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<sup>9</sup> Fazal Rizvi and Bob Lingard, Edward Said and the cultural politics of education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 27(3) (2006), 296.

<sup>10</sup> K. Woodward, *Concepts of Identity and Difference* in Woodward, K (ed.), *Identity and Difference* (London, England: Sage, 1997), 29.

example, the concept of “Self” and “Other” in *Orientalism* creates self-identification and other-identification directly, while, the binary opposition of us and them creates a less direct relation that we are what they are not.<sup>11</sup>

However, humans easily fall into the suspicion of oversimplifying the subtle and not-so-subtle differences within the broad range of the poles. The direct result is that individuals or groups’ binary preference may be or amplified or essentialized. In the context of a country or a culture, ethics variation and culture complexities are simplified and distilled into a few representations and characteristics of a culture and people.<sup>12</sup> The problem is that the simplified and distilled representations and characteristics of individuals and groups can hardly in the same (or even the similar) way as what they actually are because of the fact that binaries are never neutral. Implication of “Power” is inevitable at the poles of the binary. For example, in the binary terms of “us” and “them,” the position of “us” has more power than that of “them.” In the Western or Anglo-European world, “white” is in a position of power over “non-white” (the situation is perhaps reversed in other civilizations.)

The construction of difference and identity is everywhere, both socially and symbolically. The media image construction deemed to be symbolic and representative throughout the society.<sup>13</sup> The images in the media are mostly stereotyped that depict “Other” as inferior in the aspects of morality, intellect, and characteristics. It not only applies in the image construction of Asians, Asian Americans, and the Asian culture, but almost works on all “Other”, for example, African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans.

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<sup>11</sup> Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*.

<sup>12</sup> J. Gabriel, *Dreaming of a White...* in S. Cottle (ed.), *Ethnic Minorities and the Media: Changing Cultural Boundaries* (London, England: Open University Press, 2000), 67-82.

<sup>13</sup> Stuard Hall, *Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies* in L. Grossberg, & P. Treichler (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 1.

Throughout the U.S. history, the binary of “Self” and “Other” could be seen in kinds of expressions, fictions, films, and TVs, stereotypes of African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans helped enforce the power and the ways that of the white and their established institutions.

As to the media studies, one critical approach is to study the ways how the images of media are related to the centre of power and how the centre of power is expressed through the images of media.<sup>14</sup> According to Gandy, one key issue of image readings of media studies is to critique “representations that distort, ignore or displace important aspects of the lives of subordinate groups.”<sup>15</sup> Also, the cultural politics and the usage of research to raise people’s attention to the minority groups is a primary focus of the study.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 277-94.

<sup>15</sup> O. Gandy, *Communication and Race: A structural Perspective* (London, England: Arnold, 1998), 11.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Stereotypes of Exclusion or Hostility

#### *Introduction*

Today some people may say that Dr. Martin Luther King's "dream" that children from different racial groups hold each other's hands in friendship has been fulfilled, racism has become memory, race no longer matters as before, and we enter in a post-racist period. However, research focusing on race and media studies suggests that it is not the case as advocated by some academic researches of "race neutrality" or "post-racism."

For Asian Americans, perhaps the most long-standing and entrenched stereotype is that of the "Yellow Peril," which has a history of more than one century ever since the entry of Asian people into the United States as workers in mines and railroads. Yellow Peril (or Yellow Terror) was a color metaphor for Asians or Asian Americans which originated in the late nineteenth century with the immigration of the Chinese laborers in large number to the West, especially to the United States as laborers. Later, this term was linked to the immigration of the Japanese in large numbers in the mid-twentieth century. Asian Americans were regarded to be a great potential threat to take over, invade, or even Asianize the society and culture of the US. Usually, the Yellow Peril discourse emphasizes the powerful, threatening, and extensive of Asians and Asian Americans, while depicting whites as vulnerable, threatened, and in danger.

In the US, the stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans as Yellow Peril have experienced several periods with different ways of representations: from the

mid-nineteenth century as racial and social pollutants, from the 1860s and 1870s as drug-users and sexual deviants, from the 1870s and 1880s as coolies (labors who undertake very heavy work and are paid very humble salary,) and from the 1880s as a great threat to white people, especially white women.

Although the term “Yellow Peril” was proposed in the twentieth century, it does not fade away into the history. The Yellow Peril persisted through the twentieth century and continues today. Although the situation of recent years is much better than the previous century, especially the earlier part, it still exists, and probably will develop in the future as expected. Undeniably, the Yellow Peril discourse in the media and in the large society tends to be more symbolic and underground.

Another typical stereotype is “Model Minority,” which originated in the 1960s during the civil rights movement. In appearance, the model minority is a positive word that is used as a stereotype (and almost the only positive one), which shapes a strong contrast to other racial stereotypes such as immoral, unethical, lazy, and violent tendencies. The positive traits include hardworking, politically inactive, studious, intelligent, productive, and inoffensive.

The “Yellow Peril,” as a discourse, is deeply entrenched in American society and culture, and the US mainstream media has been continuously representing the Asian and Asian American as Yellow Peril. On the one hand, the discourse may influence people’s recognition and understanding of the Asian and Asian American. On the other hand, people’s biased knowledge may perpetuate the Yellow Peril discourse in the U.S. media.

There is no one-to-one correlation between what the media construct and what the people think. So, personal experience of the media discourse is necessary, as well as research in cartoons, news articles, TV programs, and films.

In Sut Jhally's Stuart Hall video, *Representation and the Media*, Hall defines a concept, *representation*. Hall states that concepts and memories of experiences that are special to individuals help dictate how dominant ideas of the world come into being. He states:

Now it could be the case that the conceptual map which I carry around my head is totally different from yours, in which case you and I would interpret or make sense of the world in totally different ways. We would be incapable of sharing our thoughts or expressing ideas about the world to each other. In fact, each of us probably does understand and interpret the world in a unique and individual way.<sup>1</sup>

Most media producers form their ideas from their subjective knowledge and experiences about Asians and Asian Americans. As a result, representations, such as Yellow Peril, may come into being, and then be defined in the broader society about Asians and Asian Americans.

Language, images, signs, body language, and communication, to list a few, as indicated by Hall, are externalizations of the meanings and conceptual maps. If a word, a sign, or a body gesture is delivered, and people get it, then the externalizations become communication. Unlike the ideas and images in the minds, the externalizations are sharable and may invoke thinking, discussion, and consideration. People, vulnerable or invulnerable, may compare their cognition and experience with the externalizations by others, and the ways that the others understand them. Certain externalizations, for example, the broadcast media and public speech, are widespread and may gradually become part of the public cognition and understanding.

In this chapter, a selective history of Yellow Peril is traced in the media discourse, its persistence and its expression forms. In the first part of the chapter, I

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage 1997), 13-64.

will examine the origins and effects of Yellow Peril in the United States before paying special attention to the characters in the films and relations of media representations and historical events in the twentieth century. Then, I will have a brief examine from anti-Japanese discourse in the 1980s and anti-Chinese discourse in the 1990s to representations of Asian American gangsters in the films. In the next part, the stereotype of the perpetual foreigner will be discussed within the content of TV programs and news articles, which implies that Asian Americans come from a land far away from the United States, and they are a group of people unassimilable because of the significant difference between their language, culture, custom and the white Anglo heritage.

### *“Yellow Peril”*

Although the fears of Yellow Peril began to spread broadly from the late nineteenth century, the concept may date back to an earlier time. According to Gary Okihiro, the concept of Yellow Peril may be traced back to the fifth century (BCE), in the ways that the Greeks thought about the Persians.<sup>2</sup> As suggested in the book, the concept of “Yellow Peril” could originate from the medieval era when the Europeans were afraid of Genghis Khan and the Mongolian invasion of the European land.<sup>3</sup> As he writes in his book, “Yellow Peril combines racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the original Yellow Peril discourse was combined with hatred and fears of strangers and their culture.

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<sup>2</sup> Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asian in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 119.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 119. Okihiro suggests that the Mongols were thought of as a “swarm” that set a great threat to take over Europe.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Gradually, the depictions and imagery of the East in the West preceded the later representation and stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans in the U.S. media and other expressions.



Figure 1: “The Yellow Terror in all his Glory,” editorial cartoon, 1899

In the late nineteenth century, and at the height of Yellow Peril discourse, “nonwhite people are by nature physically and intellectually inferior, morally suspect, heathen, licentious, disease-ridden, feral, violent, uncivilized, infantile, and in need of

the guidance of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants.”<sup>5</sup> Concerning the portrayals of Asian Americans, J. Frederick MacDonald summarized the Yellow Peril representation of Chinese and Chinese Americans during the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As suggested by MacDonald, the United States has a long history of fearing of Chinese, including the images of Chinese smoking opium, wearing “strange” dress, and keeping their hair in queues. According to MacDonald, the Chinese were portrayed as wearing pigtails, carrying strong dialects, and appearing to be “stupid because American heroes cannot understand their speech.”<sup>6</sup> Under the depiction of cartoons in the high profile magazines, such as *Puck* (this is an English magazine), *Harpers’ Weekly*, and *The Wasp*, the Chinese Americans were heathens, opium and gambling addictive and a potential threat to the white women, sexually and physically. These representations and stereotyped portrayals are also reflected in other visual materials in the United States.

In the media, the depiction of Asians and Asian Americans was not simultaneous and developed in a vacuum but concurrent with the major history events and policies concerning Yellow Peril. For example, the Yellow Peril discourse played a significant role in the legislation of restricting Chinese immigration. According to Eugene Franklin Wong, during the era of restricting the Chinese and the height of the Yellow Peril discourse, the Chinese and Chinese Americans were depicted as people “non-Western in dress, language, religion, customs, and eating habits,” who were mysterious, immoral, and inassimilable.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the “Yellow Peril”: Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of Californian Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>6</sup> J. Frederick MacDonald, “The ‘Foreigner’ in Juvenile Series Fiction, 1900-1945,” in Jack Nachbar, Deborah Weiser and John L. Wright, eds., *The Popular Culture Reader* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1978), 151-67.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene Franklin Wong, *On Visual Media Racism: Asians in the American Motion*

As Wong writes, many were sexually attractive and active Chinese women had an “exotic strain of venereal disease” which threatened the Americans mentally and physically.<sup>8</sup> The Chinese men were addictive to “opium smoking” and “gambling” which were infectious. Also, they were psychologically cowardly and physically inactive.<sup>9</sup>

The US government enacted legislation to restrict Chinese immigration to the United States. For example, the Angell Treaty of 1880 stated that China should limit the emigration of Chinese workers. Also, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was “the first federal law to bar immigration to the United States on the basis of race and class.” Furthermore, the legislation in 1884, 1888, 1892, 1893, 1898, 1901, 1902, and 1904 limited the migration of Chinese.<sup>10</sup> The Yellow Peril discourse and debates after 1882 fueled these exclusion acts aiming at the Chinese migration. Until the late 1960s, the large-scale migration Chinese began to come to the United States legally. During the period between 1882 and the late 1960s, many pictures similar to figure 1 (“The Yellow Terror in all his Glory”) appeared in the U.S. media.

Since the late nineteenth century, the Yellow Peril discourse had been expressed in newspapers, magazines, and other publications. The representation and stereotyped images emerged in early films of the twentieth century, even in the silent film era, for example, *The Chinese Rubbernecks* (1903), *The Heathen Chinese and the Sunday School Teachers* (1904), *The Cheat* (1915), and *Broken Blossoms* (1919).

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*Pictures* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), vi-vii.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., viii-ix.

<sup>10</sup> Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong, Marlon K. Hom, eds., *Coming Man: 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Perceptions of the Chinese* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 19-20.

Among the films, *The Cheat* (1915) and *Broken Blossoms* (1919) constructed the problematic and abnormal Asian-white sexual relationships, suggesting that Asians and Asian Americans were a threat to white women. Taking accounting of the historical background of that time, *Broken Blossom* is a perfect case to illustrate this point, especially when examining it in relation to figure 1, “The Yellow Terror in all his Glory.” There is a main difference between the cartoon and the film. The cartoon depicts Asian men as a violent sexual threat to white women. In the cartoon, the yellow man holds a smoking gun, wears a “strange” robe, wields his long, curvy queue, and carries a distorted facial expression that represents a vital threat to the white woman; while in the silent film *Broken Blossoms*, the Yellow Man has a romantic desire for a white girl, Lucy Burrows (whom he calls “White Blossom.”)



Figure 2: Lucy (Lillian Gish) and Cheng (Richard Barthelmess) in Yellow Man’s room above his store in *Broken Blossoms* (1919)



Cheng Huan (casted by Richard Barthelmess) left China with “dreams to spread the gentle message of Buddha to the Anglo-Saxon lands.” His dreams were broken when encountering the realities of London. Lucy, a white girl, was unwanted and mal-treated by her father, “Battling.” One evening, after being beaten by her father, she escapes from her home and finds a sanctuary in the Yellow Man’s home above his store, which is an exotic and decorated place. The Yellow Man takes care of Lucy until her recovery, and the two unwanted form a bond with each other. When Lucy’s father hears the news that his daughter lives in a Yellow Man’s room, he goes to the store angrily and destroys the shrine in Yellow Man’s room. Battling drags Lucy back home and punishes her severely after a drunken rage. To escape Battling’s beating, she locks herself in a closet, sad and desperate. Lucy dies in her bed lonely, when her father is drinking in another room. Yellow Man goes back to his home and finds Lucy missing. Carrying a gun, he directly goes to Battling’s home to rescue Lucy finds her lifeless body. Battling tries to escape, but the two meet in the room. They look at each other with hatred until Battling carries an axe to attack Chang. Chang shoots Battling repeatedly with his handgun killing him, and then carries Lucy’s body back to his bed and plunges a knife into his chest.

Peter Feng suggests that it is a misreading that the Asian man is depicted favorably in the film.<sup>11</sup> Even though Battling, a white man, is portrayed as mean, cold-blooded, aggressive, and a horrible character in the lower class of society, in which pugilism, alcoholism, family abuse are problematically constructed, for example, Battling often beats his daughter, and forces the girl to cook for the family, Yellow Man is never a hero. In many aspects, the two men share similarities: they

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Feng, ed., *Screening Asian Americans* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 4-5.

both live in the lower class of society; while Battling drinks alcohol, Yellow Man uses opium; Battling is killed, and Yellow Man commits suicide.

The yellow man in the film differentiates from the Asian man in the cartoon (Figure 1) in many ways. Yellow Man in *Broken Blossoms* is kind and “good,” and yellow man in the cartoon is horrible and aggressive with gun and opium. Yellow Man, Chang, does not threaten the white girl Lucy violently and sexually as indicated in the cartoon. Lastly, the film depicts Yellow Man as feminine, while the yellow man in the cartoon is constructed to be aggressively masculine. In the film, Yellow Man often uses his hands to stroke the face and retreats from kissing Lucy to consummate their relationship, not only because that the film intends to indicate the purity of their relationship but also because the society is against miscegenation.

Despite of the differences, the image of Yellow Man in *Broken Blossoms* does not deviate from the cartoon distinctly. Yellow Man uses a gun, and he smokes opium as the yellow man in the cartoon. Also, the white women both in the film and in the cartoon die in the end in relation with yellow man, direct or indirect. There is a difference, however, as to who is the aggressor.

The film shares some similarities and shapes a strong contrast with the editorial cartoon in constructing the images of yellow man; what’s more, the film exceeds the cartoon in important ways. The Yellow Man is depicted by a white man (Richard Barthelmess) through yellowface make-up which makes the white man totally different from whites, physically and psychologically which distinguishes the Yellow Man from the white, and marks him as the other. Then, even though Yellow Man has Buddhist beliefs of abstinence and non-violence, the film depicts him as being not very serious through his addiction to opium, his sexual desire for a white girl (despite the purity of their relationship as indicated by the film), and his shooting

at Battling. Furthermore, the film portrays him as primitive and uncivilized through his gesture and dressing. “His eyes almost nearly shut and his body pictured in a stooped position, his head as if in a perpetual bow.”<sup>12</sup> The Yellow Man’s images of the other, asexuality, and primitiveness reflects the westerners’ stereotyped concept of the Asians and Asian Americans, which is perceived to be a threat to the masculinity of the West.

As Gina Marchetti suggests, the film does well in constructing Yellow Man who has eastern philosophy and religious sympathy, and constructing Battling as brutal, aggressive, and unsympathetic.<sup>13</sup> Battling’s fate is expected, but Yellow Man does not escape the punishment of the law, despite the fact that he is not intended to have access to Lucy. The Yellow Man has no way out in the film, and his identity and existence is irreconcilable in the society of white-domination. Thus, his destiny is doomed. Even if he does not commit suicide, the law will punish him. The film indicates the facts that Yellow Man, who represents Asian and Asian Americans, could hardly be accepted in western society, and miscegenation of the Asian and the white cannot be tolerated. The death of Yellow Man, who trespasses the moral and sexual boundary, is assumed, even if he is sympathetic and kind.

#### *Archetypes of Yellow Peril*

Previously, we have a detailed analysis of Yellow Peril representation in the film *Broken Blossoms*. In this part, I will talk about one of the most typical and interesting figures of Yellow Peril— Fu Manchu. The recent events concerning Asian and Asian American spies show that anti-Asian sentiment still exists, even though it

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<sup>12</sup> Kent A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham, *Asian Americans and the Media* (UK: Polity Press, 2009), 33.

<sup>13</sup> Marchetti, *Romance and the “Yellow Peril”*, 34-45.

has been more than eighty years since Dr. Fu Manchu was introduced in the 1923 English film *The Mystery of Dr. Fu Manchu*, a British silent film serial starring Harry Agar Lyons. Subsequently, Lyons again played the role in *The Further Mysteries of Dr. Fu Manchu*. In 1940, another film *The Drums of Fu Manchu* was produced. Then, a series of films were released to construct the character of Fu Manchu, for example, *The Adventures of Dr. Fu Manchu* (1956), *The Face of Fu Manchu* (1965), *The Brides of Fu Manchu* (1966), *The Vengeance of Fu Manchu* (1967), *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (1968), *The Castle of Fu Manchu* (1969), and *The Fiendish Plot of Dr. Fu Manchu* (1980).

The character first appeared in the US film *The Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu* in 1929. As suggested by Wong, Rohmer knew little about Chinese people and Asian culture, and most of his knowledge about the group was from the seldom and fantastic view of Chinatown.

With his limited contact with real Chinese and his generous imaginal conception of Chinatown, Rohmer, the man who created the single outstanding personification of anti-Sinicism, confessed his ignorance of the Chinese people, stating: 'I made my name on Fu Manchu because I know nothing about the Chinese.'<sup>14</sup>

Fu Manchu generally has been regarded to be the Yellow Peril archetype in the West. Although Dr. Fu Manchu was not the first Yellow Peril stereotype, or even a Victorian character, he has become the typical representation of the Yellow Peril, and his version has been repeatedly modeled many more times, consciously or unconsciously, than his Yellow Peril predecessors.

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<sup>14</sup> Eugene Franklin Wong, *On Visual Media Racism: Asians in the American Motion Pictures* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 97-8.

Dr. Fu Manchu is a sinister, evil, aggressive, and unbelievable, representation of Yellow Peril, whose image continued to the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>15</sup> The villainous character has continued to appear in films, TV series, and other media representations to maintain the discourse of the Yellow Peril.

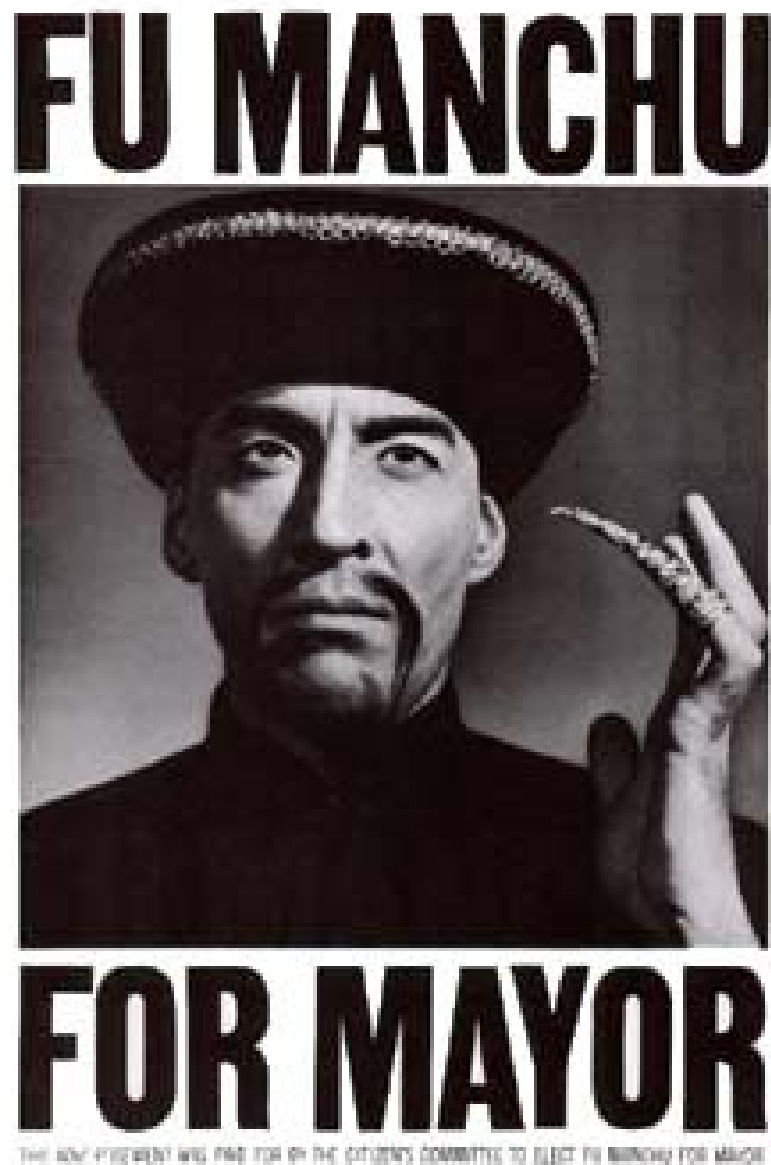


Figure 3: The film poster of The Face of Fu Manchu in 1965

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 101-02.

As Jachinson Chan suggests, Dr. Fu Manchu is constructed to meet Western desire for the manifest destiny of the East; therefore, Dr. Fu Manchu is portrayed to be aggressive, hyper virile, and evil.<sup>16</sup> As the representation, Fu Manchu “perpetuates the myth that the Chinese, and by extension, Asians, are trying to take over the Western world.”<sup>17</sup> As Chan states,

At the end of each novel, the yellow peril is contained in spite of the exaggerated threat posed by the scheming Chinese man. White male supremacy, as an ideological construct, is reestablished as Asian men are ritualistically vilified in order to maintain a sense of superiority among White men.<sup>18</sup>

Fu Manchu also displays the ambivalence that was discussed earlier. He is a fascinating character, as well as a devil. As Chan states, “Dr. Fu Manchu is a Chinese Satan who, on the surface, is cat-like, calm and implacable but will strike you at any moment for no apparent reason.”<sup>19</sup> One important point is that Fu Manchu’s characteristics carry both the East and the West. Then Chan adds, “The image of Dr. Fu Manchu encompasses both Eastern and Western characteristics (the brows, face, and cat-green eyes), reducing the character to a brilliant mutant. The ideological implication here is the perpetuation or confirmation of the cultural incommensurability between East and West.”<sup>20</sup>

Among Dr. Fu Manchu’s characteristics, an important one is his sexual lust for and ultimate domination over the White woman. Besides this point, his scientific hybrid experiments, and his “fascination with miscegenation and genetic hybridity”

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<sup>16</sup> Jachinson Chan, *Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee* (New York: Routledge. 2001), 16.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

contributed greatly to the depiction of his character to be dangerous and frightening. What is more, he is portrayed to be de-sexualized, and be “an asexual rapist who uses force to capture his woman in order to breed superior offspring.”<sup>21</sup> Although Dr. Fu Manchu is not the first of the Yellow Peril characters, he is undoubtedly the most influential one, so much so that the stereotype came to be named after him.

The concept of the Yellow Peril also applied to the Japanese to Japanese Americans. Darrell Hamamoto maintains that much of the media representations of Asian and Asian Americans are directly related to foreign policy. As he writes, “in the postwar era, television has been of inestimable help in making U.S. foreign policy understandable and acceptable to the American public by producing programs with high propaganda content.”<sup>22</sup>

Following the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, an image of bat appeared in the US media to represent the Yellow Peril of the Japanese and Japanese Americans. Although there had been widespread anti-Japanese sentiment and movements since the nineteenth century in the United States, the Yellow Peril discourse in the US media reached its highest point after the Pearl Harbor bombing. The Japanese were depicted to be rat-like and cold-blooded animals in caricatures with devil, villainous, and inscrutable characteristics. The images of Japanese and Japanese Americans of the post- Pearl Harbor bombing had much similarity with the images of Chinese and Chinese Americans during the exclusion era albeit with some added features.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>22</sup> Darrell Y. Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 100.

During the World War II and postwar era, Hollywood propaganda portrayed the Japanese and Japanese Americans as “fanatical near-savages, sneaky, dirty fighters.”<sup>23</sup> As Wong writes,

The otherwise inhuman characteristics of early Asians in America were integrated into the Asian enemy, the competitor, the unfair and degrading threat to white labor, the culturally peculiar aliens whose low standard of living paralleled their own low value on human life, and the secretive Japanese farmer who was under his coveralls a barbaric samurai ready at a moment’s notice to spearhead an invasion of white, Christian America.<sup>24</sup>

Through the reading of images depicted by Hollywood, Wong continues to note, “Hollywood was able to manipulate the image of Japanese so as to create in the process intense and highly racist attitudes among non-Asian Americans for the Japanese, and ultimately for all Asians.”<sup>25</sup>

As expected, the film *Wake Island* (1942) was released by Hollywood to emphasize the depiction of the villainous, devious of Japanese in the Pearl Harbor bombing. The film received significant recognition and was Academy Award-winning and box-office hit. Then, the film *The Purple Heart* (1944) of similar theme appeared to be a part of the propaganda of Yellow Peril stereotypes of the Japanese and Japanese Americans.

At the end of the World War II, the fear switched from the Axis countries of Germany, Japan, and Italy to the threat of communism. As one of the leading communism group, the Chinese and Chinese Americans once again came back to the mainstream media, and were depicted with Yellow Peril stereotype. As Wong states,

The United States Government and the American motion picture industry, contrariwise, had not only succeeded in firmly establishing anti-Asianism in the public mind, but had also in the process set a backlog of anti-Asiatic

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<sup>23</sup> Wong, *On Visual Media Racism*, 156.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.



imagery that would prove movable from one Asian Group to another as international conditions changed.<sup>26</sup>

Although the World War II ended, the Yellow Peril representations of Asian and Asian Americans continued.



Figure 4: Arthur Szyk's (Japanese Air Force Pilot) image after Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor appeared in *Collier's* on December 12, 1941.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 168.

### *Perpetual Foreigner*

The stereotype of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners is based on the misunderstanding that Asian Americans come from a faraway place called the Far East with totally different languages, cultures, and ideologies. Thus these people could hardly understand the mainstream American culture. This is a particular misconception when applied to the Asian Americans who were born, raised, and educated in the United States and yet who are still regarded to be foreigners who cannot speak fluent English and do not necessarily understand American culture. For example, Asian Americans of all ethnicities are often asked such questions as “Where are you from?” “Which country were you born in?” or are told that “You speak such good English!”

Despite the fact that the United States is a nation of immigrants and descendants of immigrants with people from all of the continents, Asian Americans are still regarded as strangers from “other place” and foreigners in the land without equal social, economic, and political status as granted to the white Anglo Americans. What is more, the stereotyped misunderstanding even leads to the unfavorable or extreme problems, such as hate crimes aimed at Asians and Asian Americans in case of the nation involving in economic problems. A good example is the Irish hostility and exclusion of the Chinese during the early twentieth century. Historically, Asians and Asian Americans have been perceived to be “perpetual” foreigners who can hardly be assimilated into the mainstream white society regardless if they are citizens of the United States, or how long they stay in this country. A similar opinion has been proposed by emeritus professor of Asian American Studies Ling-chi Wang, who is at the University of California, Berkeley. As Wang suggests, the mainstream media discourse about Asian and Asian American communities in US society has always

been “miserable,” and “in [the] mainstream media’s and policymakers’ eyes, Asian Americans don’t exist. They are not on their radar... and it’s the same for politics.”<sup>27</sup>

Asian Americans total 5 percent of the U.S. population which is the third largest minority ethnic group after African Americans and the Hispanic. However, according to the report, the Asian Americans only make up 2.6 percent of primetime TV regulars. The reasons are various, among which a significant one is that few Asian roles or Asian characters appear on the shows in such big cities as New York, Los Angeles with much higher percent of Asian American populations.

Ming-Na is an actress who plays an FBI agent on the Fox television series show “Vanished.” Referring to Orange County, California, where the program “The O.C.” is based, she said in an interview, “I don’t know what Orange County that show is representing. But there is not one single Asian in that show. And I am sorry, that is just wrong. It would be like having a show take place in China and not having one Asian represented.”<sup>28</sup> Orange County, California, traditionally has been one of the richest and most conservative counties and been dominated by the white residents. According to Census 2000, the percent of white population decreases, and around 875,000 residents in Orange County are Latino, making up a little lower than one third of the total population.<sup>29</sup> Also, the Orange County attracts people from Filipino, Vietnam, Japan, India, and China. The Asian Americans are the richest and most

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<sup>27</sup> Ngoc Nguyen, *Loss of AsianWeek Increases Hole in Asian-American Coverage*, 2009, *News.ncmonline.com*. Jan 5, 2009, [http://news.ncmonline.com/news/view\\_article.html?article\\_id=f775e75df8b5562c54d292ff4d](http://news.ncmonline.com/news/view_article.html?article_id=f775e75df8b5562c54d292ff4d)

<sup>28</sup> Admin, *Hollywood's Racial Catch-22 s*. *Abcnews.go.com*. <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=2495573&page=3>

<sup>29</sup> Mike Boehm, *Cultivating Home-Grown Latino Theater*, *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 12, 2001, <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/sep/12/entertainment/ca-44804>

affluent segment, and their education level is much higher than the average white population. Unfortunately, this was not reflected in the series.

In light of the historical representation of the Yellow Peril and perpetual foreigner discourse, anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese sentiment continues, rose in the Vincent Chin case and fear of Japanese economic power during 1980s and 90s, and arrived its pitch after 9/11 actions.

General John DeWitt, in charge of defending the western states during the Second World War, said, “A Jap’s a Jap ... The Japanese race is an enemy race ... It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen, he is still a Japanese... we must worry about the Japanese all the time until he is wiped off the map.”<sup>30</sup>

Despite the fact that Japanese Americans were native-born citizens without crimes, many were sent to live in prison camps, and lost everything they had during the World War II. Even the Supreme Court thought their race mattered more than their citizenship. Even though the Japanese Americans had set their feet in America longer than most Italian, Polish and Jewish Americans, they were still be thought to be less citizens rather than perpetual foreigners.

In 1982, the gas prices rose, and the less expensive and energy-efficient Japanese cars became popular in the United States. Vincent Chin, a 27-year-old Chinese American engineer, was beaten to death in Detroit by two white men, Ronald Ebens and his stepson Michael Nitz. Nitz had been recently laid off, and blamed Japan for stealing their job opportunities. The film *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (1987) suggests that the reason of this strategy was racial tensions and the media’s representation of the tensions. However Chin was not Japanese, also not Chinese, he was American! The killers were fined \$ 3,000 and gained three years’ probation

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<sup>30</sup> The Nelson Rockefeller Report to the President by the Commission on CIA Activities within the United States, 130-59 (Manor 1975).

without in prison. Helen Zia, one of the main journalists investigating the case, writes that Chin's friends "overheard Ebens say 'Chink,' 'Nip,' and 'fucker.' One of the dancers heard Ebens shout at Vincent Chin, 'It's because of motherfuckers like you that we're out of work.'"<sup>31</sup> The perpetual foreigner of Japanese discourse rose to a pitch throughout the 1980s and heightened in 1991, fifty years after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. At that year, the Major League Baseball franchise of Seattle Mariners was put up for sale. A national fear rose for the prospective and eventual buyer of the franchise, which consisted of four white and one Japanese American. The Japanese American's father-in-law, Hiroshi Yamauchi, was the owner of Nintendo. So, the U.S. media around the country stated the pending purchase of the team is like another "Pearl Harbor," and takeover of the nation. Many people feared that this purchase may lead to the mixing of Japanese money with American money, and further would spoil the interests of the United States, or what Ono calls *economic miscegenation*.<sup>32</sup> The Japanese American, even though being a citizen the same as the four white investors, was still regarded to be "foreigner," and a potential threat to the safety and interests of the United States.

As to Chinese Americans, there was a case about the California State Treasurer and fourth generation Californian, Matt Fong. When he was running for the U.S. Senate in 1998, he was asked a question by a news reporter—which country he would support if there was a war between China and the U.S. In the 1998 Olympics, MSNBC wrote the headlines of "American beats Kwan" when Tara Lipinski won the Olympic Gold Medal over the U.S. figure skater Michelle Kwan, who is actually a

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<sup>31</sup> Helen Zia, "Detroit Blues: 'Because of You Motherfuckers,'" in *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000), 59.

<sup>32</sup> Kent A Ono, "'American's' Apple Pie: Baseball, Japan-Bashing, and the Sexual Threat of Economic Miscegenation," in Aaron Baker and Todd Boyd. eds., *Out of Bounds: Sports, Media, and the politics of Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 81-101.

Chinese American. The 60-year-old Chinese American scientist, Wen Ho Lee, was accused of working as a spy for China. He was a U.S. citizen, and worked at the Los Alamos Nuclear Lab. On his trip with thirteen other colleagues to China, he was charged as a spy with fifty-nine counts of security breaches, while, the other thirteen were all free of the charge. The *New York Times* published a series of leaks from the U.S. Justice Department on the front pages. Lee was in solitary confinement for nine months, in the end, but one of all the fifty-nine charges were overturned due to lack of evidence.

There are two ideas that underlie the concept of “perpetual stereotypes.” First, the United States belongs to the whites; second, there is not much difference between race and culture. The outside, reflected by the race, is thought to represent the inside, one’s culture, custom, or world view. As a result, no matter how long Asians and Asian Americans live in the United States and how they have been assimilated to the white culture, they are still the “foreigner,” and regarded to be “outsider” of the U.S. mainstream society. In the United States, when mentioning the word “stereotype,” people easily relate it to Asians and Asian Americans.

### *Conclusion*

In recent years, the media has repeatedly proposed the term “post-racialism” since Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama’s success to become the president. His black color and race are claimed to be a “non-issue,” and his success has been used to support the post-racial stance in US society. What exactly does the term “post-racialism” mean? To be more specific, is race really as unimportant as stated by the media?

By stating that the United States has entered a “post-racism” era, it highlights the idea that race is no longer important or significant in the society. However, this

chapter concludes that the Yellow Peril discourse does not end in today's society, and it persists in contemporary media. Hall's theories of "representation" and "externalization" help us understand how the Yellow Peril discourse develops along with the main historical events, and play a role in the conceptual map of Asians and Asian Americans.<sup>33</sup> The discourse of Asians and Asian Americans as a threat to the United States and the white dominant society continues and persists with the development of major historical events and changing foreign relations. The reasons for the discourse are various, among which we can see historically entrenched fear of aliens originated from centuries ago and unequal distribution of media power with the dominant white controlling the media. In the dominant US media, Asians and Asian Americans have no means to represent themselves, and they are depicted by the "media power controllers" without much knowledge and information. Some questions are necessary to be proposed and discussed in the thesis: why would the non-Asians and Asian Americans represent Asians and Asian Americans? Why would the non-Asians and Asian Americans depict Asians and Asian Americans in stereotyped ways? In addition, what efforts are necessary to improve stereotyped image and representation of Asians and Asian Americans by the white society?

To help answer these three questions, Hall's conception and understanding of the representation will be very inspiring. Historically, so few Asians and Asian Americans worked in the mainstream white media to lead the representation and externalization of the images of themselves and other Asians and Asian Americans. The externalization of images was produced almost exclusively by the non-Asian and Asian Americans without much knowledge and information about Asians, Asian Americans, and their culture. As a result, the Yellow Peril discourse discussed in this

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<sup>33</sup> Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*.

chapter is not the reflection from the perspective of “the yellow” themselves, but is constructed by the “non-yellow,” which reflects their attitude and beliefs. To improve the unfavorable situation, Asians and Asian Americans need to have more control in the mainstream media institution and take part in the depiction of images in the media production.

To examine the Yellow Peril discourse in the media, I use an Asian American studies approach. That is, to draw attention about the history, social, economic, and legal conditions of Asians and Asian Americans, to trace the social and political environment in which the Yellow Peril discourse emerges, and to imply the possible solutions to alleviate the representation and underrepresentation of Yellow Peril in the media.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Model Minority Stereotype

#### *Introduction*

In the 1960s, when the protests bloomed for civil rights, equal education and job opportunities, and social justice, the U.S. mainstream media began to characterize Asian Americans as a model minority. In reaction to the protest of disparities between the majority and minority groups in the U.S. society, the conservatives set Asian Americans as a model example to claim that the “American dream” shows no different whether you are a person color or white. A message is delivered clearly, “If Asian Americans can succeed in America, why not blacks, Hispanic, and Native Americans?” The term “Model Minority” was first coined by sociologist William Peterson in 1966 in an article “Success Story: Japanese-American Style” published in the *New York Times Magazine*.<sup>1</sup> He suggests that although Asian Americans, as an ethnic minority, are marginalized, they have achieved much more success in the United States than other minority groups. In the article, he stated that the Japanese cultures, emphasizing good work ethnics and family values, contributed greatly in making them to be model minority and preventing from becoming “problematic minority.” And later in December 1966, a similar article was published in *U.S. News and World Report* about Chinese Americans—“Success Story of One Minority in the U.S.”<sup>2</sup> To the 1980s, the mainstream popular mass media widely told the success stories of Asian Americans, and almost all major newspapers and magazines printed articles on this theme. The

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<sup>1</sup> January 9, 1966, 20-21, 33, 36, 38, 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Success Story of One Minority Group in the U.S.*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Dec. 26, 1966, at 73, reprinted in *ROOTS: AN ASIAN AMERICAN READER* 6, 6 (Amy Tachiki et al. eds., 1971).

news media focused on the aspects that Asian Americans performed well and had high test scores at school; they had financial success with high-skilled jobs; and were less likely to commit crimes.

In the essay “Asian Americans as the Model Minority: An Analysis of the Popular Press Image in the 1960s and 1980s”, Keith Osajima traced the origin of the concept “model minority” that appeared in the earlier U.S. mass media, and rethought the media discourse about Asian Americans. In various ways, Asian Americans have done very well socially and economically—they, on the average, get good education, find high-paid jobs, and make a better living in the U.S. society. So many have the image that Asian Americans are the “model minority”—they are patient, intelligent, and hard-working who set a good example for other minorities to follow. Also, Osajima is the first to debunk the “model minority myth” by suggesting that the model minority image separated the Asian Americans from African Americans and other minority groups, and made Asian Americans to be racially different from other ethnics. The Asian Americans were constructed to be highly financially-independent that they did not need social assistance, federal attention, or government support. Some scholars concern that the model minority stereotype may divide the Asian Americans from other minority groups, and even sows resent sentiment which may dissipate the Asian American minority.

Recently, Deborah Woo has made additional discoveries about the model minority stereotype, and proved that the stereotyped image of Asian Americans continued to the today’s media discourse. He asserted that Asian Americans are highly educated, have high skill works, experience low divorce rate, suffer less mental illness, and are less likely to commit crimes.<sup>3</sup> Woo focuses on the myth of Horatio Alger who

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<sup>3</sup> Deborah Woo, “Inventing and Reinventing ‘Model Minority,’” in *Glass Ceilings and Asian*

is an example that Asian Americans overcome obstacles to get success. He writes, “Underlying it all is a theme of hard work and determination reminiscent of stories told by Horatio Alger (1832-1899), a Harvard-educated ordained minister with celebrated stories about penniless who pulled themselves up by their own ‘bootstraps.’”<sup>4</sup> In the articles, he stated that the mass media shared so much space to print and broadcast stories about Asian American entrepreneurial success, for example, story of billionaire Jeong Kim who walks through the way from rags to riches, David Tsang and Chong-Moon Lee who work very hard, and get success in high tech industry.

If Osajima and Woo’s description help us understand some important aspects about the “model minority” stereotype in the mass media discourse, Yuko Kawai’s article emphasizes on one variant aspect of model minority— another expression of Yellow Peril. This variant indicates that Asians and Asian Americans’ success at school and work pose a threat to the white society.

In this chapter, I will trace representations of model minority stereotype (or model minority myth) in the U.S. mainstream media, historically and more recently. First, I will begin with the discussion of the “good man” archetype Charlie Chan in the film, an early image of model minority stereotype and also precursor of model minority representation, and move to the examination of Asian Americans working as journalists and in the medical science field. Then, I will discuss the ways how the model minority myth is understood as Yellow Peril discourse. To be more specific, Asian American’s academic achievement at school is thought to be a threat for students of other races in university admission, as well as in the already competitive

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*Americans: the New Face of Workplace Barriers* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000), 23-41.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 24.

job market which constructs an image of competitive minority race. The model minority discourse consists of ambivalent meanings. From one aspect, it seems to compliment the achievements of the Asians and Asian Americans, as a racial minority in the U.S. society, for their educational, economically, and social success. Yet, from another aspect, the bright and competitive image of Asian Americans are constructed that poses a threat to the white and the white dominant society.

### *Model Minority Representations*

In 2005, the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (2005), after a content analysis, pointed out the “Model Minority” in the media. The analysis was conducted on the primetime television programs that indicated characters of Asian Americans reinforced the stereotype of model minority myth. Within the content analysis, all roles of Asians and Asian Americans have the characteristics of intelligence, hard-work ethic.<sup>5</sup> Even though the stereotype may indicate the positive aspects of Asian American as a racial minority, the consistent stereotypes are unfair and problematic for it represents the Asian and Asian American communities as a whole. In a similar way, Charles Taylor and Barbara Stern conducted a study with content analysis of over 1300 primetime TV advertisements. The authors examined such specific aspects of the TV advertisements as product categories, settings, and relations of characters. Their result shows that there is an obvious tendency that Asians and Asian Americans are portrayed to be success businessmen images, maintain the “model minority” stereotype.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (2005), *Asian pacific Americans in prime time: Lights camera and little action*, 1-13.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Taylor and Barbara Stern, Asian-Americans: Television advertising and the “model minority” stereotype in *Journal of Advertising*, 26(2), 1997, 47-61.

While Osajima traced the origin of the model minority that the concept was proposed in the 1960s in the mainstream mass media with the print of two articles about Japanese and Chinese Americans, Jachinson Chan suggests that Charlie Chan<sup>7</sup> emerged much earlier before the model minority discourse in the U.S. mainstream media.

Charlie Chan was constructed to be a successful example of immigrant assimilation. Unlike the early aggressive, exotic, and brutal images of Asian Americans published in editorial cartoons or in the films, Charlie Chan cherishes his families, gets along well with others, and does not challenge the “hegemonic hetero-masculine order.”<sup>8</sup> Chan is the father of ten children—an “emasculated breeder.” According to Chan, “Chan’s asexuality is consistently juxtaposed against the sexual exploits of the protagonist. It can be argued that Chan’s subordinate role is an essential element in his popularity: he is an intelligent, culturally different, ornament that adds color to a monocultural society.”<sup>9</sup> His English does not improve over time, which makes him to be different from the white and inassimilable character. Charlie Chan’s existence served to be a necessary portion of the “monocultural” white dominant society. His obedient, hardworking, intelligent, dependable, and sexual characters never pose a threat to the white and the white dominant society. In general, Charlie Chan is a precursor of model minority.

Charlie Chan is the precursor and early example of model minority stereotype. Although Charlie Chan was just a fictionalized character that first appeared in Bigger’s novels, he was featured repeatedly in the U.S. media, with more than 50 films

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<sup>7</sup> The first Charlie Chan film emerged in the 1920s. And the Charlie Chan films include the following: *The House without a Key* (1926), *Behind that Curtain* (1927), *The Chinese Parrot* (1928), and *Charlie Chan Carries On* (1931).

<sup>8</sup> Chan, *Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee*, 53.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

featuring Charlie Chan since 1926, and became the archetype of the “good man.”

And recently, two kinds of model minority representations emerged in the U.S. mass media: one is the depiction of Asians and Asian Americans as journalists after the success news journalist Connie Chung; and the other is Asians and Asian Americans working as medical professionals in films or TV series.



Figure 1: Television journalist Connie Chung speaks about her move from ABC News to CNN at a news conference, January 23, 2002 in New York City.

Connie Chung is a successful news anchor, and is a representation of the model minority for women. After her success, the U.S. news organizations consult her image as an important standard when hiring Asian American women to work as news anchors

or newscasters. And her image has become a “criteria” that the following news casting women are expected to live up to. A good example is Emerald Yeh in the film *Slaying the Dragon* (1988), who is a former anchor in KRON-TV. In an interview in CNN, she was told that “You look different. You’ve cut your hair.” The CNN wanted her to follow the style of Connie Chung. Emil Guillermo, an editorialist for the SFGate and columnist for Asianweek.com, writes, “So now there’s a Connie Stereotype in every city, in every market. Wherever there’s a TV newscast, you’ll find one.”<sup>10</sup> The stereotype of Connie Chung greatly limits the development of Asian and Asian American women journalists in the U.S. media.

Another important model minority stereotype of the Asians and Asian Americans is that they are more likely to work in the medical field which is regarded to be a highly professional area. According to a study about the prime-time television representations of Asian Americans delivered in 2004, “Of the eight APIA characters with known occupations, five hold advanced degrees, often in the medical science.” Compare to the earlier diverse characters, such as Fu Manchu, Charlie Chan, Madame Butterfly, and the Dragon Lady, today’s media inclines to portray Asian Americans as medical professionals, ranging from Dr. Sanjay Gupta, the famous medical correspondent for CNN, Ravi Kapoor, a famed forensic entomologist on the television *Crossing Jordan*, surgeon Neela Rasgotra (Parminder Nagra) in ER, Cristina Yang (Sandra Oh) in *Grey’s Anatomy*, George Huang (B.D. Wong), forensic psychiatrist in *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, Ken Jeong as Dr Kuni in *Knocked Up* (2007), to Mohinder Suresh (Sendhil Ramamurthy), a geneticist in *Heroes*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Emil Guillermo, C-100 Loses by Honoring Chung, News. Asianweek.com, April 1, 2005, <http://www.asianweek.com/2005/04/01/c-100-loses-by-honoring-chung/>

<sup>11</sup> Ono and Pham, *Asian Americans and the Media*.

In *ER*, one sub-story of the episode “House of Cards” is about two medical students, Deb Chen (Ming-Na Wen) and John Carter (Noah Wyle), with Carter being the primary character around whom the story is narrated. Michael J. Porter suggests in his essay that “John serves as a thematic foil to another medical student, Deb Chen.” They have different attitudes towards their professions, with Carter caring about the patient, and Chen “seems more concerned with the science of medicine.”<sup>12</sup> The episode provides us information to understand the different characters between Carter and Chen. When Chen finds that Carter has finished more procedures than herself, she becomes to envy Carter, and worries that she will be left behind Carter. Without being allowed, she bribes the nurse to leave the room, and performs a procedure on a patient. Chen’s action makes the patient in dangerous situation, and other doctors help to remedy her mistake. Later, she tells Carter that she wants to quit, and says, “I didn’t care about the patient, I just wanted the procedure.” And “I like the science of it. But the patients, the sickness, sometimes it almost scares me.”<sup>13</sup>

In *ER*, Chen is constructed to be a stereotyped image of model minority with highly professional work. Chen cares more about the science than the patient; she is rich, professional, competitive, but also cold, and selfish. It is implied that Chen’s characterizations predestine that she is not capable of becoming a “qualified” doctor who should put the patients’ interests and safety to the first place. In the episode, the white Carter is depicted to be an ideal doctor, but Chen is not, even though she is bright and interested in the medical science.

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<sup>12</sup> Michael J. Porter, “The Structure of Television Narratives,” in Leah R. Vande Berg, Lawrence A. Wenner, and Bruce E. Gronbeck, eds, *Critical Approaches to Television* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 147-8.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.





Figure 2 Cristina Yang (Sandra Oh) in *Grey's Anatomy*

In the television *Grey's Anatomy*, Dr Cristina Yang (Sandra Oh) is described to be competitive, ambitious, and unsympathetic. She is interested in the purely logic and practical thinking rather than emotional interaction with others. As an M.D, graduating first in her class from Stanford University, there is no doubt that she is a representation of “model minority.”

She is presented in similar ways as Deb Chen in *ER*. In *ER*, after Deb Chen gave birth to an African American and Chinese American baby, she decided to give up the baby, because she is afraid that her parents will not allow. In *Grey's Anatomy*, Cristina becomes pregnant by African American Dr Preston Burke, a medical colleague and her superior. Without telling him, Cristina schedules an abortion. Facing the problem of mixed race baby, Deb and Cristina make a similar decision. In another similar way, both Deb and Cristina are treated to be medical “robots.” Deb endeavors to make procedures even at the expense of the patient’s safety; Cristina is

the most proficient intern in cardiothoracic surgery, but her characteristic of lacking emotional interaction makes her to be almost ignored by one of the new doctors.

Although medicine science is a highly professional to work on, and is esteemed by the society, the meaning has experienced subtle change when it applies to Asian American model minority discourse. According to Yuko Kawai, the prevalent Asian American “doctor representation” may enforce the discourse of Yellow Peril. When representing Asian American as doctors, the media has provoked a potential worry that the Asian Americans are “stealing” over another set of jobs after the earlier discourse that Asian Americans posed a competitive threat for the unskilled white in the job market. This stereotyped representation, in one aspect, limits the Asians and Asian Americans to play other casts in the films and televisions. And in the other aspect, it restricts people’s cognition of Asians and Asian Americans as real human being living with diversity.

### *The Threatening Model Minority*

Student: “Asians are threatening our economic future. . . We can see it right here in our own school. Who are getting into the best colleges, in disproportionate numbers? Asian kids! It’s not fair.”

Teacher: “Uh . . . That certainly was an unusual essay . . . Unfortunately, it’s racist.”

Student: “Um . . . are you sure? My parents helped me.”

—Garry Trudeau, *Doonesbury*, March 17, 1988, cited in Wu<sup>14</sup>

As depicted by cartoonist Garry Trudeau, the Asian Americans grasp much of the public attention about their performance at schools. Some scholars suggest that the

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<sup>14</sup> F. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America beyond Black and White* (Basic Books, New York, 2002), 39.

understanding of Asian Americans as model minority is insidious and pervasive, especially in the field of education. The model minority myth is alluring. In one aspect, the good academic performance of Asian Americans at schools makes up one of the Asian Americans' success stories that are admired and appraised by the other ethnic groups. In the other aspect, the group's success produces a sense of pressure and fear for other groups, especially in schools, where the Asian American students will change the grading curve, and raise the average test scores.

Yuko Kawai suggests that the model minority myth is an ambivalent discourse, which is interlocked with the obvious racist presentation of Asians and Asian Americans, Yellow Peril. She states that the model minority stereotype is pervasive today both nationally and internationally. The model minority is depicted to be well-educated, submissive, economically affluent, and competitive in job market. But they also pose a threat to the west and to the United States specifically.

The film *Rising Sun* (1993) was produced "in the background of Japan's economic threat to the United States and 'Japan-bashing' in the 1980s."<sup>15</sup> In a party of a Japanese corporation in the United States, an escort is found dead after a sexual encounter. Web Smith and John Connor are sent to investigate the case, with Smith thinking that it is a sexual encounter and murder case, but Connor claiming that there is a deep reason behind the evidence. They endeavor to make tough investigation, and Connor gets a disc with the footage from the murder, which turns out to be altered by the murderer. The change is made by Eddie Sakamura, the son of a wealthy Japanese businessman (who is Connor's longtime friend.) After the disc is recovered to the original footage, the facts show up. After having a rough sex with a politician, the scout was just unconscious. And an employee again strangled her after the powerful

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<sup>15</sup> Kawai, 111.

politician left. When the murderer is identified, he tries to run away, but is taken care of by Eddie's Yakuza friends who bury him alive. The film seems to be one with Yellow Peril theme, but it also contains model minority myth. As Kawai suggests, "The Asian man in the film is a 'good' guy in the sense that he is willing to assimilate to the White rules of the game (i.e., dressing exactly like the White cowboys do and attacking them in a 'cowboy style') but is a 'bad' guy who disrupts what the White cowboys attempt to achieve (i.e., taking away their woman)."<sup>16</sup> In addition, the Japanese figures, whether the representations of Yellow Peril or model minority, shape a contrast with the Americans. For example, the film depicts "Japan's affluence and America's poverty."<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the representation is problematic. When the film emphasizes the Japanese's "good," it also "exaggerates the (country's) foreignness."<sup>18</sup> It is surely an advantage for White America to have African American against Asian Americans to protect its interests."<sup>19</sup>

Below, I will discuss two news articles with the model minority Yellow Peril discourse. In November 19, 2005, *Wall Street Journal* prints an article about two high schools in Silicon Valley,<sup>20</sup> where the white students are transferring away because of the increase of the Asian students. As the story suggests that, historically, the white moved from the inner city to the suburbs because the inner city was "overrun" by minority groups, especially African Americans. While, recently, the white are making

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>20</sup> Suedin Hwang, "The New White Flight: In Silicon Valley, Two High Schools with Outstanding Academic Reputations are Losing White Students as Asian Students Move in. Why?" *Wall Street Journal*, November 19, 2005.

another move from the academically top high schools to other places because of the influx of the highly competitive and academic superior Asian students.

According to the story, the white parents take their children out of the two Silicon Valley schools and sent them to private schools or whiter public schools because the white parents think the two high schools have too many Asian students. Some white parents think that the environment in the two schools is too competitive for the students to socialize with their peers and the other cultures. Also, the article suggests that the phenomenon of white parents taking their children out of the two high schools because of the influx of Asian students is not specific in the Silicon Valley; it also exists in other highly competitive high schools in the United States, at “Wootton High School in Rockville, Md., known flippantly to some locals as ‘Won Ton,’ roughly 35 percent of students are of Asian descent.” And “Some parents and students say these various forces are creating an unhealthy cultural isolation in the schools.”<sup>21</sup>

While the article on the *Wall Street Journal* focus on the Asian students in high school, another article “Little Asia on the Hill” by Timothy Egan was published in the *New York Times* newspaper in January, 2007, asking “Is this the new face of higher education?”<sup>22</sup> The article focuses on how “Asian” UC Berkeley is, and emphasizes that UC Berkeley is beset by large numbers of Asians and Asian Americans. The article states:

This fall and last, the number of Asian freshman at Berkeley has been at a record high, about 46 percent. The overall undergraduate population is 41 percent Asian. On this golden campus, where a creek runs through a redwood grove, there are residence halls with Asian themes; good dim sum is never more than a five-minute walk away; heaping, spicy bowls of pho are served

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Timothy Egan, “Little Asia on the Hill,” *New York Times*, January 7, 2007.

up in the Bear's lair cafeteria; and numerous social clubs are linked by common ancestry to countries far across the Pacific.<sup>23</sup>

The article questions the “diversity” of UC Berkeley, and indicates that the overabundance of Asians and Asian Americans make the university less diverse. Then Egan comments on the public universities in California, “But it is the new face of the state’s vaunted public university system. Asians makes up the largest single ethnic group, 37 percent, at its nine undergraduate campuses.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Egan suggests that because of the large numbers of Asian and Asian American population, “Berkeley is freighted with the baggage of stereotypes—that it is boring socially, full of science nerds, a hard place to make friends.”

The Asian American students are depicted to be boring, asocial, care only about science which renders Berkeley to be a hard place to socialize people and find fun after study. Besides their images to be asocial, Asian and Asian American students speak less in the class, and are not interested in classroom participation, which make the classes inactive and boring, tend to revere authority, spend so much time on book reading and academic research. Egan also suggests that the “highly credentialized Asian applicants” are been accepted over “students of color with less stellar test scores and grades.”<sup>25</sup> The article sets Asian and Asian American students against other ethnic groups, even including the white, without carefully examining reasons that render minority groups lack access to the higher education.

This article functions that through suggesting the surprising large numbers of Asian and Asian American student at Berkeley and the UC system, and more broadly at such elite universities of Stanford, Harvard, Princeton, MIT, Amherst, Johns

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid..

<sup>24</sup> Ibid..

<sup>25</sup> Ibid..

Hopkins, Dartmouth, Carnegie Mellon, the California Institute of Technology, Cornell, the University of Texas at Austin, the universities are gradually dominated by the Asian and Asian American students. However, this article does not mention the fact that historically, the white have dominated the higher education in the top California public universities, until recently the situation changed to be the dominance of Asian and Asian American students. The whole article does not see the contribution made by the presence of Asian and Asian American students and scholars in Berkeley but refer them as a threat to Berkeley, to the United States education system, and further the white students, and the whole nation.

The article asserts that the Asian and Asian American students' presence on Berkeley campus have increased the studious atmosphere and academic competition and that the large enrollments have limited the access of other ethnic groups to the higher education, which imply that the model minority Yellow Peril persists and continues in the U.S. mainstream media.

### *Conclusion*

Through the discussion of the above paragraphs, we can find that racism is not away, and the U.S. society does not enter into the "post-racism" era. Even though the Yellow Peril discourse tends to be more concealed with the mask of "model minority myth" than the earlier time of twentieth century of apparent "yellow peril" cartoon, there is no any significant progression in the mainstream media.

As is discussed in this chapter, the representation of model minority is not the simple facts that Asians and Asian Americans are intelligent and hardworking, that they are submissive, and do not make trouble, or that they, in general, are affluent. Rather, the representations are complex and problematic, which seem to applause the achievements of Asians and Asian Americas, but function the Yellow Peril discourse.

In this chapter, we begin with the archetype “good man” Charlie Chen, the precursor to the model minority, to the 1960s, when William Petersen coined the concept of “Model Minority” in his article “Success Story: Japanese-American Style” published in *New York Times Magazine*, from the representation of Asian Americans working as journalists and in the medical science field after the success of Connie Chung as a news anchor and American Horatio Alger myth to the successful Asian American students with good academic performance at schools. However, without exception, the Asian and Asian American figures, more or less, have been depicted to be uncaring, asocial, silent and dependant.

As Kawai suggests, the model minority representation tends to be ambivalent and doubled with Yellow Peril discourse which is reflected in the film *Rising Sun*, and in the education institutions in the United States. Asians and Asian Americans are represented in problematic and limited ways that distinguish them from other minority groups in the United States. Under the mask of Horatio Alger, the model minority myth continues to exist in threatening ways in the mainstream media



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Stereotypes of Gender and Sexuality

#### *Introduction*

Before beginning the study of problematic representations of Asian and Asian American male and female, one may ask the question that why the U.S. dominant media portrayals the representations of Asian American male differently from that of Asian American female. Just as Laura Kang suggests, Asian and Asian American men and women have been imagined historically to be different in the Western mainstream culture, with Asian American women being “aesthetically pleasing, sexually willing speechless,” “dark” and “primitive,”<sup>1</sup> and Asian American men being “predatory figures... as ugly or loathsome,”<sup>2</sup> as “tyrannical and lecherous, cruel in their treatment of their women while lusting after Euro-American woman.”<sup>3</sup> Asian American men were an “enemy rival,” who was “inferior in both physique and ethnics.”<sup>4</sup> Asian and Asian American women were portrayed to be passive, while Asian and Asian American men to be villainous.

In this chapter, I will try to show the reasons and the ways that mainstream media represent the Asian and Asian American men and women differently, and the changing stereotyped representation, Bruce Lee. However, it is not enough to explain the reason that the media derogatorily produce the representations of the both if just

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Kang, “The Desiring of Asian Female Bodies: Interracial Romance and Cinematic Subjection,” in Peter Feng ed., *Screening Asian Americans* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press), 74.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*,

juxtaposing the representations of Asian and Asian American men with that of their counterparts. In order to make it clear, the *intersectional* approach (which has been an important approach in women and gender studies) is introduced to explain the race, gender, and sexuality concerned with the representations of Asian and Asian American in the U.S. media.

As to be first task, the phenomenon that Asian and Asian American men have been represented in a different way with Asian and Asian American women is related to the history of colonialism—its logic has significant influence in the ways that the Western mainstream media represents the people of color. The popular depictions of sexual alluring and pleasing Asian and Asian American women and villainous and asexual Asian and Asian American men imply that (1) it is free for the men (i.e., white men) rather than Asian men to have a romantic relationship with Asian women; (2) Asian and Asian American men, usually depicted to be undesirable and asexual, appear to be inferior competitor to the white men. The desirability of Asian women and undesirability of Asian men doomed the elimination of the later.

According to Rana Kabbani, not only are the Asian and Asian American women available for the other men, they are also well-grounded to escape from the male patriarchy of Asian and Asian American men, who are depicted to be undesirable, barbaric and uncivilized in the western mainstream culture.<sup>5</sup> This construction parallels the narratives of Native Americans of the colonial period. As to the stereotypes of Native Americans, Rana Kabbani writes,

The forging of racial stereotypes and the confirmation of the notions of savagery were vital to the colonist world view. In colonial America, for instance, there was a systematic attempt to portray the Indian as an abductor

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<sup>5</sup> Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 27.

of women, a killer of children, and a collector of scalps, as an apology for white brutality against him.<sup>6</sup>

Just like the discourse that the Native American women should be saved from the salvage Native American men, the Asian and Asian American women should also escape from the barbaric, deceptive Asian and Asian American men.

To understand the different representations of Asian and Asian American male and female, it is important to examine the media works to differentiate the men and women, as well as the logic of colonialism which inclines to construct the colonized men and women differently. In this chapter, I will discuss the ways that the media represents Asian and Asian American men and women, and the way how the media produce stereotypes. Also, I will give some historical and contemporary examples and use the intersectional analysis approach to study the representations of Asian and Asian American male and female in the media. In general, I will apply the intersectional approach to re-read the race and gender representations in the mainstream U.S. media, and explore how contemporary gendered representations are through the examination of the historical gendered model in the media.

Gender, race, and sexuality are three important factors in the media representation research, which help define the power positions of different races, genders, or the both. In this system, some are usually portrayed to be in the position of power and dominance, while others in the position of powerlessness, submissive, or even subservient.

The subordinate ones are requisite for the others with power and dominance.<sup>7</sup>

In the media, the difference is highlighted to distinguish the people in power with that

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>7</sup> It is from a classic article by Laura Mulvey (1975), which recognized that media narratives, and especially film romances, represented women and men in ways that both demonstrated and reified notions of power between the sexes.

of not. As Ruth Frankenberg suggests, “whiteness is a product of negative difference; people come to know who they are by what they are not.” Thus, Frankenberg continues, “the only way white people can understand themselves as white is by contrasting their experiences with those of people of color.”<sup>8</sup> As to the theme of Asian and Asian American representations, the white identity becomes meaningful when contrasted with that of the Asian. “White is therefore a default racial identity, an identity that does not come from the inside so much as being defined by what is not observed to be constitutive of the other.”<sup>9</sup> I suggest further that, the gender, like the whiteness, is also the product of negative difference, the gender becomes to be meaningful when contrasted with that of not.

Throughout the history of U.S. media, the stereotypes of Asian and Asian American men and women exist. The repeated representations, or “controlling images”<sup>10</sup> suggested by Patricia Hill Collins and Darrell Hamamoto, provide us hints to study the contemporary representations of Asian and Asian American men and women in the media.

### *Female: “China Doll” and the Dragon Lady*

To understand the seemingly contrasting representations of “China Doll” and the Dragon Lady, it is necessary to introduce the concept of *ambivalent dialectic*, under which the women in the media are granted to two contrasting portraits. The two contrasting images seem to be opposite, but they work together to outline the problematic representations of women. This concept applies to all women in the

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<sup>8</sup> Ono and Pham, *Asian Americans and the Media*, 65.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>10</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, “Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images,” chapter 4 in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Conscious, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 67-90.

media, the women of white, the black, the Hispanic, as well as those of the Asian and Asian American. For white women, the dialectic system is the virgin and the whore. This means that the women must be chaste or long-lasting sexually available to men, which construct women's sexuality under the normative control or possession of men.

For black women, it is the "mammy" and the "Jezebel". In a very similar way, the two representations in the media suggest women's availability to serve men, and the two just solidify each other in the gender world with men in power and dominant position and women in powerless and submissive position. The virgin and the "mammy" are the alternative to the whore and the "Jezebel", and both of the two dialects represented in the media suggest that the women get their meaning through their relation with men.

As to Asian and Asian American women, the media stereotypes, just like the virgin and the whore of the white women, are the "China Doll" and the Dragon Lady. The Asian women have been supposed to be sexually active, feminine, and eagering to serve men even at their sacrifice. These characters are termed as the "China Doll," which appears in many movies, historically and contemporarily. The Lotus Blossom and Madame Butterfly depict women as sexual attractive, alluring, submissive, obedient, and self-sacrificial. The Asian and Asian American women have been depicted to be sexual objects of men (especially of the white men), in the position of powerless, and need rescue. The typical difference of the Lotus Blossom and Madame Butterfly is that the later one is so self-sacrificial that she is even willing to sacrifice her life to save a child, or her men. Another example is *Return to Paradise* (1998), which sets itself in Malaysia where three white American men spend their time laying on the beach, using cheap cocaine, flirting with local girls, and sleeping with them. The film deliveries the message that the Asian women are willing, or even

take it a pride, to serve men sexually because of their whiteness and wealth, even though the facts that the Asian girls are not acted by Asian and Asian American female, and that it lasts only several minutes at the beginning part of the film.

The other side is the Dragon Lady, who is constructed to be deceitful, domineering, mysterious, and sinister.<sup>11</sup> As Kent A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham suggest, “She is untrustworthy, deceitful, conniving, and plotting, and she may use sex or sexuality to get what she wants, including the objects of her sexual desire.” Also, “She is a dark force, whose sexuality may be masculinized, whose heterosexuality may be cast as either incomplete, unusual in some way, or simply unattractive.”<sup>12</sup> However, both the Dragon Lady and the Lotus Blossom representations make women’s sexuality available with the Dragon Lady threatening and the Lotus Blossom passive and unthreatening.

Not all the roles in the films fell into the ambivalent dialectic of the “China Doll” and the Dragon lady, even though it is a useful one to understand the media representation. It is undeniable that an actor is more or less casted in the stereotyped roles. Just as Peter Feng and Cynthia Liu suggest, every person has different understanding and interpretations even towards stereotyped roles, depending on social, political, economical, and historical background.<sup>13</sup>

In the era following World War II, the films and television programs constructed Asian and Asian American women as submissive, obedient, and

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<sup>11</sup> Shirley Jennifer Lim, *A Feeling of Belonging: Asian American Women's Popular Culture, 1930-1960 (series: American History and Culture)* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Ono and Pham, *Asian Americans and the Media*, 66.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Feng, “Recuperating Suzie Wong: A Fan’s Nancy Kwan-dary,” in Darrell Hamamoto and Sandra Liu, eds., *Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 40-56.

obsequious, who were willing to serve men and please men even at their sacrifice.<sup>14</sup> The Asian and Asian American women have been constructed to care nothing about their own desires and interests, for example, in the film *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), Nancy Kwan played the character of Suzie Wong, who was constructed as willing to do anything for her white male suitor.

In the film *Sayonara* (1957), we see the images of the Lotus Blossom and the Madame Butterfly. *Sayonara* was set in the 1952 Japan, and in the film, a story that an American air force pilot falls in love with a Japanese girl, a stage performer for Takarazuka, is narrated. Lloyd “Ace” Gruver is a major and the son of a U.S. Army general, and he meets a Japanese entertainer through his enlisted crew chief, Airmen Kelly, and falls in love with the girl. Kelly is going to marry a Japanese woman, Katsumi, even though that the miscegenation is not allowed on the both sides, and the marriage is not recognized by the U.S. military. Gruver is ever strong against Kelly and Katsumi’s marriage, and even uses a racial slur to describe Kelly’s fiancée. Finally, he apologizes to Kelly, and decides to be Kelly’s best man at their wedding. Kelly and Katsumi challenge the anti-miscegenation to involve in the interracial romance with each other. Katsumi says that her dream is to be a woman, a lover, and a mother. However, the strategy falls in them: the military then orders him back to the United States. Realizing the fact that he is unable to take his wife, who is in pregnancy, Kelly and Katsumi commit suicide, dying in each other’s arms.

The central story of the film is Lloyd and Hana-Ogi’s romance relation, the Kelly and Katsumi’s story informs the Lloyd’s. Prior their death, Katsumi appears in the film as a subordination of Kelly, more like an object than a subject. After

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<sup>14</sup> Renee Tajima (1989) provides two examples of this kind representation, *Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956) and *The Incredible Hulk*. In *Teahouse of the August Moon*, actor Machiko Kyo is introduced as a geisha and is giggling. And in *The Incredible Hulk*, Irene Sun is introduced as a “mail-order bride” and is depicted as an object and submissive.

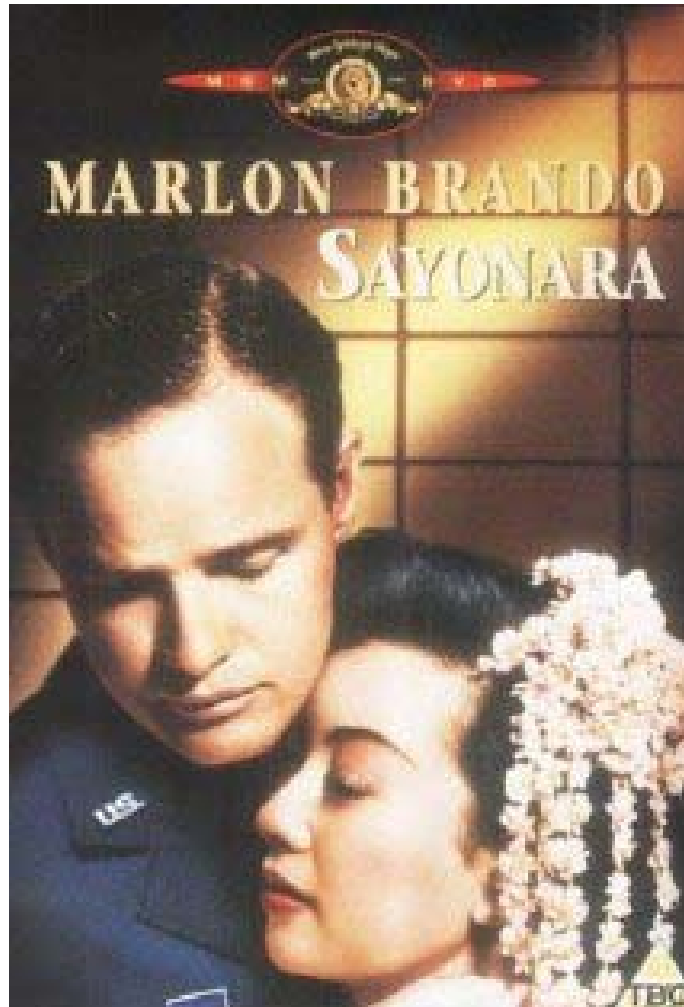


Figure 1: *Sayonara*, a story in which an American Air Force pilot falls in love with a Japanese girl, a stage performer for Takarazuka

Kelly and Katsumi get married, when Red Buttons asks Lloyd to kiss to congratulate, he really kisses her lips. And Katsumi prepares food for both Kelly and Lloyd. In one scene in *Slaying the Dragon* (1988), Katsumi makes a bath for Kelly, and during the bath, she says to Lloyd, “This is the life, ain’t it, Ace?”

Despite the racial discrimination and the anti-miscegenation are strong challenged in the contemporary mainstream society, they do overridingly exist in the media of the last century— the depiction of Asian and Asian American women as submissive, obsequious, and self-sacrificial for the white U.S. military personnel.



In contrast with the “China Doll” representations in the *Lotus Blossom* and *Madame Butterfly*, the *Dragon Lady*, typecast by Anna May Wong in the films, represents another stereotype of Asian and Asian American women. In many films, Anna May Wong was typecast the roles that consist the characters of *Dragon Lady* stereotype.



Figure 2: Anna May Wong in the film *Daughter of the Dragon*

In the film *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931), Anna May Wong plays the role of the daughter of Fu Manchu who is the archetypal character of Yellow Peril. Also, in the film *Thief of Bagdad* (1924), she plays a role who is an accomplice to the Mongol villain. In her most famous role in *Shanghai Express* (1932), she plays a role seeing in shadow throughout the film, and perhaps the most unforgettable part of the film is

that she stabs a Chinese villain who raped her in his back. At the end of the film, the white is saved from the villain, and her duplicitous nature enables her to take the action. Another example is *Shanghai Lily* (Marlene Dietrich). She also makes compromise sexually, but she does not kill the villain when he attempts to rape her.



Figure 3: Lucy Liu

The roles, consistent to the Dragon Lady, continue in the films even to today, decades after Anna May Wong created the stereotype. Lucy Liu's image in such films as *Payback* (1991), *Ally McBeal* (1997), and *Kill Bill* (2003) make the Dragon Lady vividly in the contemporary films. In *Payback*, Lucy Liu plays the role of Pearl,

a dominatrix and hit woman. When confronting by Porter, Pearl is in bed with Val (cased by Gregg Henry). Pearl uses her dominatrix to touch and grope Val. When Porter tries to use pistol, Pearl stops him, and abuses and beats Val. In *Kill Bill*, Lucy Liu plays O-ren Ishii, who kills the person that murdered her father. She is on the top of the murderer before having sex.

The Dragon Lady not only appears in the films, it also emerges on the television. Lucy Liu plays the role Ling Woo on the television show *Ally McBeal*. Ling Woo is a lawyer who is “sexual viper”<sup>15</sup> as described by Rachel Dubrofsky. Sometimes, she seems to be litigious to a fault. Ling Woo uses sex both as a tool and an object. As Dubrofsky writes, “(Ling Woo) constantly maintains that she has no interest in sex except as a tool to hold onto a man. In fact, it is hard to figure out why Ling would want a man because she treats all men with utter contempt... she will go to great lengths to reify her sexual currency as a woman.”<sup>16</sup>

Ling Woo is constructed to be a woman with mystical, unusual, and inventive sexual abilities and desires. She is sexually dangerous because of her desire for revenge. Such images are also in other contemporary Hollywood films, for example, *Year of the Dragon* (1985), *Come to See the Paradise* (1990), and *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991). Although there are differences among these films, they has one theme—interracial sexual relationship between a white man and an Asian female. And each of the film just confirms the primacy of the white male over both Asian and Asian American men and women.

The “China Doll” and the Dragon Lady stereotypes have been historically entrenched in the U.S. mainstream media, and even continue to today’s construction

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<sup>15</sup> Rachel Dubrofsky, “Ally McBeal as Post Feminist Icon: The Aestheticizing and Fetishizing of the Independent Working Woman,” *Communication Review*, 5, 274.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

of Asian and Asian American women. The characteristics of Asian and Asian American women as sexual available, submissive, and self-sacrificial render them as easy sexual objects. Also, the suitors in the films are usually the white U.S. military personnel, which indicate the relationship of the Asian nations and the U.S. , as well as their power relation. As Renee Tajima states, “Asian women in American cinema are interchangeable in appearance and name, and are joined together by the common language of non-language-that is, uninterpretable chattering, pidgin English, giggling, or silence.”<sup>17</sup> When women are depicted to be submissive, substitutable, and willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others, they are meaningful only when related to the ones in the power position.

#### *Male: Emasculation and Asexuality*

Historically, the Chinese had the image of emasculation because of their physical appearance of the early laborers in the early 1900s and the fact that they did what the Westerners thought to be women’s work. The early Chinese laborers usually had a long queue, and wore long gowns that in the west only women appeared like this. Also, the influx of Chinese laborers posed a great potential threat to the white workforce, so laws were enacted to protect the Chinese laborers from many traditional “male” work industries, and they could only do work that were thought to be women’s work, for example, laundry, cooking, and childcare.<sup>18</sup>

In the Hollywood films, some Asian men have been stereotyped to be super geeks or asexual martial artists who have no any interest in love and women. Just like the stereotyped representations of women, the Asian and Asian American men are

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<sup>17</sup> Tajima, *Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956), 309.

<sup>18</sup> Sheridan Prasso, *The Asian Mystique: dragon ladies, geisha girls, and our fantasies of the exotic orient* (Public Affairs, 2005).

also constructed in very limited ways in the U.S mainstream media. In the chapter two, we have discussed the representation of the Asian and Asian American men as the “Yellow Peril,” they are depicted to be undesirable, barbaric, uncivilized, and predatory of white women. However, in the ambivalent dialectic, they are also constructed to be emasculated, asexual and nerdy as delivery boys, or computer geeks without any physical attractiveness.

One of the many examples that depict Asian and Asian American men as asexual is Long Duk Dong, played by Gedde Watanabe, in the film *Sixteen Candles* (1984). Long Duk Dong is a foreign exchange student, speaking the English with strong Asian accent. He lives with Samantha, and her family. At a time when Samantha brings Dong to attend her school dance, Dong meets a tallish, large-breasted jock, Marlene, nicknamed “Lumberjack” (Debra Pollack). In one scene of the film, when Lumberjack is riding a stationary bike, Dong sits on her lap. Then, when Dong is riding a bike, Lumberjack begins to lift barbells. Through the two scenes, the stereotyped representation of Dong is reflected. It seems that Dong and Lumberjack’s genders are switched: Dong is feminized, who rides on Lumberjack’s lap, and does exercises that are typical for women; Lumberjack is masculine, who is taller and stronger than Dong. This representation is intended to bring comic effects to the audience: feminizing the Asian man, Dong, and making the aberration of the role of Dong’s girl. The stereotyped representation of Asian and Asian American men as asexual, emasculate, and nerdy also appears in many other films, for example, clumsy yet nerdy and crafty Data in the film *The Goonies* (1985), Mr. Yunioshi in the film *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961).



Figure 4: Long Duk Dong and “Lumberjack” in the film *Sixteen Candles*

The representations of Asian and Asian American men as asexual, emasculate, and nerdy have appeared throughout the films in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and continues to today’s films. In the television show *Beauty and the Geek*, many of the geeks are Asian American men who are interested in the white beauty. In general, the dominant west culture is intended to construct Asian and Asian American men to be in the position of powerlessness, and asexuality, even inferior to all other men, either the white men, or the African American men, the Hispanic men.

In the film *Showdown in Little Tokyo* (1991), an Asian man forces himself upon a white woman, and kills her when threatening the Asian woman love interest. As is predicted by the stereotyped ideology, the white man kills the Asian villain, and wins the Asian woman. Thomas Nakayama suggests the importance of studying race, gender, and sexuality at the same time rather than considering them as separate elements in his article *Show/Down Time: "Race," Gender, Sexuality, and Popular Culture*.<sup>19</sup> He also suggests the representation of Asian and Asian American men as asexuality and emasculation in the films serves as a foil to the masculinity of the white men. So, in the film, Detective Kenner (Dolph Lundgren) and Johnny Murata (Brandon Lee) together fight to rescue Minako Okeya, who is kidnapped and in need of help. After reviewing the representations of the two men, Nakayama states that Murata's representation serves as a foil of Kenner's: Murata is depicted to be inferior to Kenner, whose masculinity is reaffirmed. As Kenner's friend, Murata is depicted to be less masculine and feminized sidekick, which shapes a strong contrast to the powerful and potent Kenner.

In another film, *Deuce Bigalow: Male Gigolo* (1999), the asexuality and emasculation of Asian and Asian American men function to be a joke of the audience. The sexual and racial inferiority of the Asian American man, Lil Kim, is indicated throughout the movie, which produces a "humor" and fun for non-Asian and non-Asian American audience, and a hurt and insult for the Asian and Asian American ones.

The contrast of the masculinity of white men and emasculation of Asian and Asian American men continues to exist in the U.S. mainstream media. The activist,

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Nakayama, "Show/Down Time: "Race," Gender, Sexuality, and Popular Culture," in *Critical Studies of Mass Communication*, 1994, 11, 162-79.

writer, and scholar Frank Chin<sup>20</sup> have made effort to reclaim the masculine for Asian American men. He argues against the dominant media's depiction of Asian and Asian American men as asexual, emasculate, inferior, and the like, and in favor of the authentic Asian masculinity rather than the "fake" one, represented in the works of Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan. In a similar way, Cynthia Liu writes,

[I]n arguing that the racism of early Hollywood filmmakers maligns images of Asian American men even as the same racism 'benignly' co-opts, sexualizes, and domesticates Asian American women's images, the implicit critical project becomes one of propping up hetero-normative, Asian-masculine desirability.<sup>21</sup>

Jachinson Chan suggests that Chin is "problematic precisely because he does not challenge mainstream myths of manhood" myth.<sup>22</sup>

In April of 2004, the magazine *Details* published an article "Gay or Asian?" with a picture of an Asian American man, which is protested by many Asian American organizations and individuals. Under the pressure of Asian American Watch, the editor-in-chief of *Details* Daniel Peres published a letter to apologize, and the letter reads:

Over the past three weeks, I have received an unprecedented number of letters regarding the "Gay or Asian?" piece, which ran in the April issue of *Details*. It has been made abundantly clear to me that this story, which is part of an ongoing series challenging male cultural stereotypes, was insensitive, hurtful, and in poor taste—an obvious point that I regret not recognizing prior to publication.

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<sup>20</sup> Frank Chin, "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake," in Jeffery Paul Chan et al., eds, *The Big Aiiieeee!: An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese-American Literature* (New York: Meridian, 1991), 1-92.

<sup>21</sup> Cynthia Liu, "When Dragon Ladies Die, Do They Come Back as Butterflies? Re-imagining Anna May Wong," in Darrell Hamamoto and Sandra Liu, eds., *Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 26.

<sup>22</sup> Chan, *Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee*, 13.



There's a line that should never be crossed in any satirical humor, and *Details* crossed it. I, on behalf of the magazine, deeply regret this misstep, and apologize to those who were offended.

Sincerely,  
Daniel Peres<sup>23</sup>

A problem is suggested through the trouble that Asian and Asian American men's sexuality matters in their feeling of inclusion, citizenship, and belongings. The dominant society regularly regards homosexuality as deviant, and within the context, the Asian American gay men would be thought to be unusually deviant. To see it as a whole, the article put the gay sexuality and Asian and Asian American men sexuality into question more broadly.

#### *Conclusion: Legend of Bruce Lee*

Despite the long-lasting gendered representations of Asian and Asian American women and men, more recent media depiction of Asian men is seemingly to be in variance with the traditional stereotypes that we have discussed earlier of this chapter. In this chapter of conclusion, Bruce Lee will be introduced as an example of re-representation of Asian and Asian American masculinity in the U.S. mainstream media. The image of Bruce Lee has challenged the traditional representation of Asian men as emasculate and physically-weak, and becomes its own kind of controlling image.

Bruce Lee was a powerful martial artist and *sifu* (master), and later became a world famous movie star. He, part of pop cultural lore, has been followed by millions of fan even in this day around the world. A statue has been erected in Mostar, Bosnia to memorize him for his contribution to smooth political tensions, for he is believed to bear the spirit of strength, peace, and heroism.

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<sup>23</sup> As of September 7, 2007, the quotation was accessible online at <http://asianmediawatch.net/details/>.



Figure 5: Bruce Lee

Lee was born at one Chinese hospital in San Francisco on November 27, 1940, and made his first film *Golden Gate Girl* in 1941 at the age of three month. He graduated from the University of Washington, Seattle, where he ever worked as a martial arts instructor of Wing Chun kung fu. Chuck Norris, Roman Polanski, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, just to list a few, were Lee's students, when he was a *sifu*. Before gaining fame in the picture, he played several movies and television series, including television series *The Green Hornet* (1966). Then he left the United States to Hongkong to develop the career in the pictures, where he became famous. The two films *First of Fury* (1971) and *The Chinese Connection* (1972) are among the many that gained him of the prominence. As Chan suggests, Hollywood producers changed their attitude after the blockbusters were released, and offered Lee "million-dollar movie contracts and guest appearances on talk shows such as *The Tonight Show*

starring Johnny Carson.”<sup>24</sup> Lee and Raymond Chow established Concord Productions, and produced his final two films, *Return of the Dragon* (1972) and *Enter the Dragon* (1973). Bruce Lee passed away at his thirty-two in 1973.

As Chan suggests, Bruce Lee offered “a disengagement of his masculine identity from the patriarchal society he inhabits in his films by exuding an ambisexual identity.”<sup>25</sup> At first glance, people may think that the image of Bruce Lee was constructed to be masculine and powerful. But his profession would suggest that he is “a hero who dominates his opponent by using excessive violence.” Also, Chan suggests that Lee’s characters “are not typically patriarchal or misogynistic (; they) do not oppress the female characters nor do they exhibit an exaggerated James Bond-like heterosexism.”<sup>26</sup> For Chan, Bruce Lee’s masculinity is ambiguous.

However the scholars think about Bruce Lee, he is revised representation of Asian and Asian American men, and his image allows for sensuality and sexuality. As the powerful representations of Asian and Asian American women and men have existed historically, and continue to today’s U.S. mainstream media, we also see positive scholarship on this issue. As Asian American studies suggests that the stereotyped representations should not only be criticized, but also be challenged. What’s more, the media ways, for example internet, should be utilized to critique, and furthermore, to provide revised and subject images of Asian and Asian Americans.

To summarize, this chapter begins with suggesting the interlinked representations of Asian and Asian American women and men. The scholarships on colonialism have argued the interrelation of the different depictions of Asian and Asian American genders and the construction of colonial power positions. Then, we

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<sup>24</sup> Chan, *Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

discuss different ways that the media constructs the representations of female and male: “China Doll” and the Dragon Lady of Asian and Asian American women, and emasculation and asexuality of Asian and Asian American men. Finally, we take Bruce Lee as an example to discuss the ways and possibilities that the powerful stereotypes could be challenged and revised in the media. Thus, people can have new ways to understand the gendered representations of Asian and Asian American, which have a significantly effect on the minor group.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

The previous chapters have examined the four stereotyped representations, or “controlling images,” of Asians and Asian Americans in the U.S. mainstream media of various forms of expressions since the twentieth century, the Yellow Peril, perpetual foreigners, model minority representation, and stereotypes of gender and sexuality that have appeared in the media repeatedly.

While the thesis is not a comprehensive analysis of all media representations of Asians and Asian Americans, it provides some typical representations of Asians and Asian Americans that appear repeatedly in the mainstream media. In the thesis, I attempted to draw attention to such dimensions of media as films, television series, videos, newspaper articles, and internet, and tried to provide theoretical aspects for the readers to understand the media representations better. Also, the thesis places the representations in historical, cultural, and political context to give the readers a big picture of when and how the certain representations appeared and developed as they did.

Historically, Yellow Peril discourse, anti-miscegenation law, restrictions of citizenship, and stereotypes appeared in the U.S. mainstream media and had significantly affected Asians and Asian Americans themselves and their living and development in the “new land.” Thus, critical reflections on the media representations are necessary, but vigilant effort is also needed to analyze, critique, and publicly comment on the media events continually as they occur. As I am writing the thesis which includes many media representations, other instances of

representations of Asians and Asian Americans or anti-Asian and anti-Asian American discourse emerged in the media. For example, on March 13, 2011, *mangoh69* posted a video titled “Asians in the Library- UCLA Student’s Racist Rant” on YouTube in which a white American girl frankly expresses the anti-Asian discourse. Also, in January, 2011, Amy Chua published the book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, introducing how she and her Jewish husband raised their two girls, Sophia and Lulu. “Tiger Mother” Amy Chua’s tough and obsessive parenting style has been labeled as “eastern,” “Asian” or “Chinese” which is ethnical and exclusive. Her “ethnical” parenting received massive critique because of the negative effects of extreme strictness with children. The phenomenon reminds us of the necessity of continuous analysis and critique of Asian and Asian American media representations.

As is shown throughout the thesis, the dominant media has been depicting Asians and Asian Americans as the “orientalized Other” since their mass entry into the United States, and the representations even continue today. If the audiences understood the dominant media representations, they would realize the media views Asians and Asian Americans as Yellow Peril, perpetual foreigner, model minority, exotic women, and asexual men which, if applicable, pose a threat to the United States as analyzed in the previous chapters.

All these stereotyped media representations may produce a mass psychological effect both on the Asians and Asian Americans and on non-Asian and non-Asian American. As indicated in the previous chapters, the media representations are sparse and problematic which draw the public attention toward particular controlling images and the media chooses to be selective blind to the real Asian and Asian American and their culture.

To the situation, there are explicit critiques and protests of offensive media representations of Asian and Asian Americans. As Ono and Sloop suggest, it is significant to analyze and critique offensive and resistant representations that circulate widely within commercial, public, and cultural spheres.<sup>1</sup> For example, the protest of the Broadway Premiere of *Miss Saigon* in 1991 is still regarded as a landmark of Asian American protest against the representation. The producer asked a Caucasian British actor to play the role of a Vietnamese pimp in the New York production. Asian Americans protested the portrayal of Asians by a white actor.

Also, independent Asian and Asian American media could function to dilute the “powerful” stereotyped media representation by filling in real and diverse images of Asian and Asian American characters. The term “independent” does not simply mean having independent funding. The word refers to artistic work free from corporate capital and dominant media influence and allows freedom and agency. Ang Lee is a good example. He may be thought to be independent because of his identity as an Asian American, and his early films, such as *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), which was independently funded.

The media poses an incredible influence on the audience’s understanding toward the world, especially one with which they are not quite familiar. While the individual effects are hard to estimate, it is undeniable that they have widespread and expansive effects on the change of the media. Through scholar research, social activism, and challenging representations of Asians and Asian Americans, the stereotyped representations of Asians and Asian Americans in the U.S. mainstream media may possibly experience change.

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<sup>1</sup> Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, “The Critique of Vernacular Discourse,” in *Communication Monographs*, 62, 1995, 19-46,.

It is just with the hope of possible change and my identity as an Asian woman that I make the media research for the Asians and Asian Americans and write my graduate thesis on the topic. The change is not inevitable, not assured, even not expected in a short time, but it is still worth the time and effort on this task,



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