
The film *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1956) was nominated for eight academy awards. Among those nominated was Jennifer Jones, a well known Caucasian actress who played Dr. Han Suyin, a Chinese doctor. In 2005, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, adapted from the novel, caused a stir when three of the main Japanese character roles were filled by three very famous Chinese actresses who received no Oscar nominations for their performances. Although the use of Asian actresses over the white Jennifer Jones demonstrates progress in terms of representation, the use of Chinese actresses in Japanese roles represents the lack of understanding of unique racial identities. This unfortunate and even careless choice illustrates larger issues in the creation of the Asian image such as Asian women often seen as overtly sexual or painfully submissive, waiting for the strong white male to whisk them away and show them the world. Asian men are often strong martial artists or weak, hairless, nerdy shop owners. The literature on Asian American film suggests that movies often reinforce and perpetuate these negative stereotypes.

Film is a medium for social transmission, transferring information from reality to screen and back into the world. Hollywood produces movies that imitate publicly held views. Margaret Russell (1991) describes the media having the “dominant gaze.” She defines this as the “tendency of mainstream culture to replicate, through narrative and imagery, racial inequalities and biases which exist throughout society” (p. 268). Film shows Asian Americans as the public views them, thereby replicating the current biases, and thus perpetuating the vicious cycle that both creates and reinforces stereotypes of Asians.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Film Studies

Film can act as an important educational tool as well. If students are taught to re-learn how to view films then this medium can be a teaching tool rather than just passive entertainment. Like literature, movies include lessons that students can use to solve problems in their own lives (von Morzé 2008). Imagery in film can provide new, extra-disciplinary ways of thinking and is an important field of study because of its relevance in, and application to, the social and cultural world (McCarthy 2009). Kenneth Burke's (1967) theory of *equipment for living* believes that we use content we learn from literature in our everyday lives. Stephen Dine Young (2000) takes Burke's (1967) theory of and applies it to film. The biggest struggle for Young (2000) in his theory is being able to reach children who may have a harder time distinguishing between film and reality, taking what they see on the screen as real life situations and using many of the same actions and words in their own lives. In fact often times the impressions left on any viewer go unnoticed, regardless of age, unfortunately complicating our awareness of race in film - especially for the passive viewer.

The passive viewer is particularly susceptible to racial undertones in film especially with the way the racial images have been integrated. Ann Everett (1994) breaks these down into three categories: "Segregated, partially integrated, and fully integrated narrative structure" (p. 280). Segregated, for Everett, is where the racist undertones are almost transparent to the passive viewer, the comments or racist images on screen so subtle that they are hard to notice, and often are missed in the first viewing. Although this may seem like an overly sensitive and critical way to critique film, it is important when considering Young's take on "equipments for living." Everett would even argue the directors and writers of these films themselves are unaware of the

racism they reproduce. Her next approach, partially integrated, is when there is a multicultural cast interacting as people of different cultures and backgrounds. Race is not always the plot of these films, but it is obvious that its role is important. Lastly there is full integration, generally found in movies where the narrative is based around issues of race. While viewers may passively accept these images, in each of Everett's categories, all the films actually promote racially biased images even if they do not understand their consequences or intend to do so.

History of Asian Americans

Min Zhou (2004) asks the question "Are Asian Americans becoming 'white?'" and argues the racial stereotypes tightly associated with the Asian race makes the answer to this question "no". She raises the fact that European immigrants over the country's history have gained the status of "becoming" white and what it then means to be white within America. She uses the term white as a status symbol instead of a mere skin complexion, "'white' is an arbitrary label having more to do with privilege than biology" (p. 234). Asian stereotypes started out very similarly to those of African Americans: dirty and lazy. However, during World War II, the stereotypes evolved into cunning and sly. Around the time of the Civil Rights Movement, the term "model minority" appeared (Zhou 2004). Zhou (2004) believes this was a scheme to pit people of marginal status against each other. In the 1960s, Asian Americans were doing well for themselves financially and therefore became the example of the "American Dream," a racial minority pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. As argued some of the current stereotypes of Asians are positive: smart and driven. Nonetheless, Zhou (2004) asserts that these characteristics do not make Asian Americans white due to the common belief that Asian Americans are seen as the "forever foreigners." Even third and fourth generation Asian Americans are still thought to have been newly immigrated, have English as their second language and are expected to speak

with an accent. The fact that Asians have been in the United States since the last 1800s goes unnoticed. Asians may be the model minority but that still makes them a minority and therefore far from being granted this “white” status.

Asian men today are usually perceived by the public as asexual, effeminate and inferior in masculinity compared to the white male. When interviewed, Asian American men told Rosalind Chou (2009) about the belittling of their masculinity in film, contributing to the way they are seen in everyday life: as inferior men. These men informed Chou of a website serving as a platform for angry Asian men to vent their frustration believing, “‘God’ or ‘nature’ has punished Asian American men by giving them smaller penises, shorter statures and hairless bodies” (p. 18). The men believe the creators of the site “use these physical ‘disadvantages’ to explain why Asian American men are unable to court and satisfy women” (p.18), using society’s artificial masculine values against them. Chou’s (2009) respondents did not share their opinions on the website subject material but did admit to visiting the site. Even with the more positive stereotypes of being smart and hard working, Asian men are still not portrayed as masculine. Many Asian American parents emphasize the importance of an education. According to one of Chou’s (2009) respondents, academics and intellect were so heavily pushed that there was little room in his tight schedule for athletics. He felt as though this played into the nerdy, non-athletic Asian boy stereotype.

In Amy Sueyoshi’s (2004) short essay, “History of Asian American Sexuality” she describes the history of Asian men and women during their first waves of immigration in the late 1800s. Asian men came to the United States for work, often hired to build and maintain the railroads. These men could only afford to migrate alone, usually leaving spouses and families back home. To cure their loneliness, it was common for them to look to prostitutes and at times,

to each other. Sueyoshi (2004) describes that the majority of Asian men “found companionship in the very homosocial communities of Chinatown” (p.1). The question of whether these all male communities were sexual is still debated but, Sueyoshi (2004) saw them mainly as a way for these Asian male workers to create meaningful bonds and friendships.

Eventually Chinese women also came to the United States, some sold by their families into the lucrative business of American prostitution. Chinese women also took part in the nightclub scene, where they were often seen as exotic because of their foreign origin. These women were described as “China Dolls” who were “used as sex objects to lure the Euro-American male audience” (Dong 1998:139). The exotic mystique attached to the image of an Asian woman acted as a lure to satisfy American men’s curiosity. This stereotype persisted until World War II when this curiosity was satisfied for men after many soldiers spent time in different parts of Asia and returned home with Asian brides. White men no longer want to see the women they loved as grotesquely sexualized and instead saw the Asian female in domestic roles. This domestic role was more consistent with the strict patriarchy of Asian culture and sexually submissive and devoted to their husbands. Nonetheless, perceptions of Asian American female sexuality still were at the heart of the conversations.

Sexuality in the literature on Asian Americans commonly has Asian men and women on opposite sides of the sexual spectrum. Asian men are described in an emasculated way and Asian women are seen as exotically hyper sexual. Karen Pyke (2003) discusses the effects of this divide. She interviewed Asian American women about Asian American men, finding that the women could not see themselves with an Asian male spouse. Pyke (2003) found Asian women often see Asian men as abusive and controlling noting they link these characteristics to Asian tradition. However Asian women do not think of themselves as the traditional submissive

and accommodating Asian wife and claim instead to be outspoken and independent. They assume Asian men could not handle their defiance of the traditional roles. The women believe Asian men need to assimilate to American culture and instead, look to white men as a more ideal spouse. Pyke (2003) does not offer any indication of the source of these women's ideas, whether media or their home lives, but made it clear that Asian American women found white men more suitable partners than their Asian counterparts.

Janna Kim (2009) speaks to Asian women's sexual socialization by analyzing the home-life of Asian American girls. She asks how Asian American families talked to their young girls about sex, finding that the majority of these girls do not have what she referred to as "the big talk." Instead they hear that sex is something dirty and meant for a husband and wife only, and that it was not to be talked about lightly in their households. Not feeling comfortable with talking to their parents about sexuality, sex or relationships, the girls feel as though they need to turn to something or someone else for this information and advice (Kim 2009).

Asians in Film

Film has the ability to fill the role of the "big talk." Thus, the roles portrayed in film can be particularly significant in the identities of Asian Americans. Celine Shimizu and Helen Lee (2004) explain how people of color commonly and unknowingly do not represent themselves to others as individuals but represent their whole race. These roles are often limited, and Shimizu and Lee (2004) specifically mention three, that are applied to Asian women in particular, the "Dragon lady, the prostitute with a heart of gold, and the dominatrix" (p. 1387). For the Asian women playing these roles they end up representing Asian women as a whole. So a character such as Lucy Liu's, Ling Woo, on *Ally Mcbeal* (1997) who is hypersexual, open about her sex life and very public with her physical affection can have more effect on a young Asian American

girl than her white counterpart. Liu's presence empowered some Asian women, while others were appalled at yet another overtly sexual Asian character. This character acts as a controlling image for Asian woman. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) uses the term "controlling images" in reference to popular images of African American women, "as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas helps justify U.S. Black women's oppression" (Collins 2000:69). She theorizes that these images are used by the elite as an "instrument of power." Inserting popular belief on a racial group in media further perpetuates this image, this image is now controlled by the media. The controlling images for Asians in film are significant because of the ramifications they have for the perception of Asian male masculinity.

Chou believes even the occupations Asian men have in film are perceived as less masculine, such as the owners of laundromats and restaurants, instead of CEOs or American heroes, contributing further to their emasculation. That being said, for Chou (2009) the fact that Asian male characters held jobs in their film roles was important. Minorities, especially African Americans, are often shown as lazy and unemployed, but when Asian men were not kung fu fighters or ninjas, they often held domestic jobs. We cannot mention Asians in film without mentioning Bruce Lee, whose movies were part of a large wave of Asian films to come to the United States (Ahn 2009). Due to Lee's success, kung fu and other martial arts films became a popular genre and big box office hits. The men Chou (2009) spoke with never mentioned how karate and kung fu's ties to Asian culture plays into how they are perceived through film. No other form of fighting was mentioned for Asian male actors in the readings. If there are movies that include Asian male martial artists, then are there other types of action roles for Asian males? Or are martial arts the only fighting they are allowed? The only roles Asian men stereotypically fill

in movies are asexual and emasculating, unless they are martial artists, and even then, Asian men do not show any connection or positive social responses to those depictions.

Perceptions of race in the United States have progressed substantially from 1960 to today and so has Hollywood's reflections of these cultural changes. How have the Asian characters from the early *Love is a Many Splendored Thing* (1956) Dr. Sue Han to the more recent characters of *Memoirs of a Geisha* evolved, if at all, during their different appearances across these decades? I plan to note the roles Asians play in American movies. Everett's (1994) three examples will serve as tools when observing the roles Asian American fill in these films. I will focus on the most common roles played by Asians in American cinema. Will I find the asexual male shop keeper, the kung fu fighter and emasculated lonely geek as the male roles? Will I see the "dragon lady, the prostitute with a heart of gold, and the dominatrix" (Simizu and Lee 2004:1387). Is the idea of the forever foreigner displayed in film? I will seek to discover how these questions are answered in American film, and whether the questions and analyses change from 1960 to present day.

Lucy Liu is a beautiful and talented actress who plays sexy, smart, strong female characters, roles, whether seen as positive or negative, that exist in Hollywood. Has this role evolved over the years and how, if at all, has it changed since Ling Woo's appearance in 1998? I want to know how Asians have been commonly perceived in American culture, and how this has changed throughout the years. A great way to study this is through film. How do the roles played in Hollywood reflect perceived roles for Asians and their place in society, and how have these roles changed over time?

METHODS

To start the process of discovering and analyzing the roles Asian fill in American cinema I needed a way of finding a group of movies to conduct this research. I started by examining the cast lists for Asian actors in Oscar nominated films for best picture. Through this research, a list compiled by Michael Kang (2011), a Korean American film producer, was uncovered. “Asian American Film 101” (2011) was comprised of 101 films from the early 1900s to 2011 which Kang (2011) felt were significant to Asian Americans for different reasons. Next to each film’s title was a brief caption for why he felt it belonged on his list. Some movies he saw as accurate and positive portrayals, others negative stereotypes, a number had Asian themes, some Asian directors and a few were remakes of Asian films. There were many different portrayals of Asian characters across the films and even some within the same movies.

After the 101 movies were cross listed by Oscar nominations across all categories and filtered to focus only on Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and any other unspecified person of Asian descent, excluding Indians, the list included nineteen films. The decision to focus on these particular ethnic groups was based on the logic of Gina Marchetti (1993) who wrote in, *Romance and the Yellow Peril*, “Hollywood has favored narratives dealing with Japan, China, and Vietnam” (1993:1). Film also has a unique relationship with Indians through Bollywood and other Indie films. Narrowing this search would focus the data on specific groups to recognize these “favored narratives” it which Merchetti eludes.

From this list, seventeen of these nineteen were accessible for this research. Recording Asian characters and themes I identified roles and commonalities between Asian characters in these films. It was insightful to compare notes with a colleague who viewed and coded a few of the films as well allowing for more perspectives on the films. A few of the codes were similar to the text from the literature review and others were in complete opposition. I used codes from the

literature and created new codes when the literature was inadequate. Noting and describing all the Asian characters in the films, I was able to see patterns in the reoccurring Asian roles. There were a few movies with family at the core of the plot and each member had a specific role in the family unit. From the literature it looked as though there were few roles for Asian men, however through watching the films, there were a number of lead male roles. After the seventeen movies were watched and coded there, were eight codes examined (see Appendix).

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The literature presented that Asian actors were given very limited roles: the emasculated Asian men and hypersexual Asian women. However, after watching the first film, *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), I found the Asian characters to be different from those discussed in previous research, creating an important contrast from the findings in the literature. The lead character was a strong Asian male, seen as masculine and sexual, far from that which the literature had eluded. Once having watched the seventeen movies derived from Michael Kang's (2011) list, there were major and reoccurring roles and the theme of a constant battle happening between the old and the new. In these specific movies, this contrast was represented by the older, traditional Asian culture and values and the new, more modern, often Westernized portrayal of an Asian generation. The movies on Kang's (2011) list were American, therefore showing Western perceptions and interpretations of Asians and Asian culture in and outside of the United States.

These characters are shown during their time of metamorphosis from their cultures' expectations of them to the movies' representation of their own individualities. These individualities were the Western idea of what freedom and individuality *should* look like because the traditions of old were too restrictive for their modern happiness and expression. This struggle can be explained as liminality where the characters in these films are "on-a-threshold," a

“transition from one sociocultural state and status to another” (Turner 1979:466). According to Ronald Takaki (1993), a professor of Asian American studies at University of California Berkley, the Asian immigrant population was different because “The other groups came here as immigrants: for them, America represented liminality - a new world where they could pursue extravagant urges and do things they had thought beyond their capabilities” (Takaki 1993:55). He further explains Asian immigrants felt as though they were “No longer fastened as fiercely to their old countries, they felt a stirring to become new people in a society still being defined and formed” (Takaki 1993:55). Asians wanted to experience the American Dream by straying from their countries strong roots and becoming American, but they still found themselves being placed outside of the “American” box. Asian American is a broad term used for describing every Asian from all different Asian ethnic backgrounds across every generation (Zhou 2004). Asian Americans are somewhere in between Asian and American, “on-the-threshold” between these two nationalities, Asian Americanness is this liminality. This struggle between the past and present is most easily seen within the family structure in these films.

The Asian Family

There were three films that centered around the Asian family: *Flower Drum Song* (1961), *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), and *Mulan* (1998). There was one common theme throughout these movies: the parents wanted to practice traditional arranged marriages while their children wanted to have their own sexual identities and choose life partners for themselves. This is a central theme in the movie *Flower Drum Song* (1961); the father of Wang Ta wants to find his son a bride while Wang Ta considers himself American and he believes in “American” values and wants to find a wife for himself because that is the American way. Similarly *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) shows Wai-Tung’s mother asking him when he will find himself a wife and if he

does not find himself someone to marry and produce grandchildren she will arrange a marriage for him. Wai- Tung is gay, with a live in boyfriend but knows that his lifestyle is not one his family would approve or accept.

Mulan (1998) is set in China hundreds of years ago. Mulan is a young girl trying to bring honor to her family through becoming a suitable wife. But she is a free spirit and does not do things in the traditional Chinese way. When the matchmaker tells her she will never marry her family is very disappointed. During this time, a woman's place was in the home but Mulan's strong will and "modern" attitude leaves her believing there is something more.

This family unit dynamic was very important because of the generational struggle between the old and the new, the past and the present. The Asian family aspect showed this clash of tradition and modernism portrayed in American film. The ways in which American films showed the breaking of Asian tradition for Western values has been a pattern throughout the films across five decades. Each film showed this liminal state for Asian Americans between traditional and Western ideals of modern American life. In these portrayals the elder's tradition looked out of date, highlighting the new ideals and values as the correct way for happiness.

Lead Male Character

The lead male role was noteworthy because of its divergence from the literature on Asian male masculinity. There were many films that portrayed Asian males as stereotypically (but not hyper) masculine and lusted after by Asian women. These male characters, with the exception of Li from *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (2000), were all part of a younger generation, breaking away from the traditional patriarchy of their Asian cultures as shown by the lead male character, Wang Ta in *Flower Drum Song* (1961). Wang Ta's father is trying to find him a traditional Chinese wife but Wang Ta, however, has plans to marry a woman the "American way," finding

someone who makes him happy and who he truly loves. The type of woman his father, the older generation, wants for Wang Ta is one with traditional values and customs of China who can bear children. Similarly in *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) Wai-Tung is in a relationship with his long time white boyfriend Simon. Shang from *Mulan* (1998) is the leader of a group of men that he must turn into soldiers to fight the Huns. He is powerful and brave and the men look up to him for guidance. Although Shang is initially tied strongly to his traditional Chinese views, he is swayed after meeting and falling for the strong female warrior Mulan, who is supposedly not fit for marriage. Master Li Mu Bai in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (2000) does not show a liminal state as an Asian lead male character. He is closely tied to his tradition and attempts to spread his beliefs to the younger generation that is shown as lost. In this film, unlike the others, the modern lifestyle of the young is not shown as the correct way of life.

The movies with Asian male leads had primarily Asian casts, an example of Everett's (1994) full integration; the plots of these films are all based on the Asianess of the characters. Asian American films using real Asian actors was a step forward in representing real Asian identities but also shows the limits of roles for Asian men. These male leads were only allowed lead roles when white roles were not present. In other words Asian men as main characters were only seen in "Asian American" films. *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) is an interesting example of these limited roles. Although the film's plot does focus on an Asian family, the lead male is a gay Asian American man in a relationship with a white American man. This Asian male is in a unique liminal state because his Asian Americaness includes his homosexuality. This intersectionality complicates not only his Asianess but his Americaness too. Besides *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) the other lead Asian characters are all parts of solely Asian casts, showing where the line is drawn for Asians and Asian American actors.

There was one Asian lead male that transcended liminality and even stood alone as the only Asian character throughout the film. *Up* (2009) is a Pixar animated film featuring a young Asian boy as the co-lead role. Russell's race is never a focal point of the film, let alone mentioned in the story. The intention behind Russell's Asianess by Pixar is unknown, but for the purposes of this research he is a pivotal character for Asian male leads. He is the only Asian lead role without a complicated racial identity attached to his character.

The identity of the lead male role is uncertain in these films. This refers to Zhou's (2004) idea of the "forever foreigner," Asian Americans always seen as newly immigrated, unassimilated foreigners. Takaki (1993) speaks on this perception that have been tied to Asian Americans even after over a 150 years of immigration, one being "unassimilability." These strong male leads are examples of both these ideas because American film creates roles Asian American men can play but only within the confines of this Asian American content.

The male jobs

While the lead characters are complicated in terms of their unassimilability, the jobs they held suggest further development of these characters. In Chou's (2009) research she found the occupations Asian male characters held in films were domestic and emasculating. However, the jobs that the leading Asian men in the films above held varied and were outside the professions Chou (2009) listed. There was one Asian grocer, which was a position she found to be more domestic. Conversely the portrayal of this occupation was different than Chou's (2009) domestic view of it because it showed an Asian man and his family newly in the United States from Korea opening and running a successful business in a very poor community in New York (*Do the Right Thing* 1989). There was a variety of jobs Asian male characters held: the lead male character in *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) was a property manager, *Indiana Jones and the*

Temple of Doom (1984) and *Black Rain* (1989) both had strong mob ties, there was a police detective also in *Black Rain* (1989), Fargo's (1996) Mike Yanigita was an engineer, and Sulu was a technician for the Starship Enterprise in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979). These jobs were much more empowering than Chou made Asian male occupations in film out to be. These professions also allowed for the viewers to see Asian men outside the stereotyped Asian grocer or laundromat owner. This array of occupations showed the adaptability of Asians within the United States during their transitional states. In these films they were placed in a profession outside ones they were perceived to stereotypically hold. This created a more versatile Asian character even for the more minor roles.

The Sexualized Female.

The sexual Asian female character was abundant in the literature and shown as a controlling image of Asian American women since entering the country, which was apparently in these films as well. This controlling image is one that American cinema has perpetuated. In the traditional Asian culture, as depicted in these films, physical affection and sexuality is often repressed. Arranged marriage is an example, parents arranging for their children's future based on status and fertility, some of the films showing the women being inspected and measured for their child bearing hips. In the United States, the *idea* of marriage is filled with love and compatibility, whether or not it is that simple. In the films, the traditional Asian female is shown being taught how to dress, sip tea and carry herself, as shown in the beginning of *Mulan* (1996). During the film there is a scene where the soldiers sing about how they wish they had "A Girl Worth Fighting For." Through this song they list all the aspects of a woman that make them worth fighting for: pale, impressed by strength and an impressive cook. When the question,

“how ‘bout a girl who’s got a brain who always speaks her mind?” the men all reply “Nah!” (*Mulan* 1996). Asian women should be pretty and domestic but never smart or outspoken.

Wei Wei in the *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) was at a crossroads of her own in the film, an illegal Chinese mainland immigrant living in New York. During the film there is a conversation between her and her mother-in-law where they discuss the new modern life of a woman, the qualities sung about in *Mulan* (1996) to living an independent and happy life. The mother says she is envious of Wei Wei and women now because they are well-educated and independent but that she hopes they still have some of their same traditional values regarding marriage and a family. Wei Wei does not see these values as the most important to her but does struggle with letting go of this dream completely. She is shown as a beautiful and sexual, single Asian woman throughout the movie and the mother’s envy is that comes from an older more traditional perspective on young, specifically Asian American, modern females.

Linda Low from *Flower Drum Song* (1961) is a young beautiful “LLD” (long legged dancer, a term used to describe her in the film) who loves nice cars, clothes and sings about how she enjoys being a girl. She is far from the girl the traditional Chinese single father wants for his son to marry. She is a dancer at the Chinese restaurant and club who entertains the guests with her seductive routines and half naked shows. The woman the father in the film, Wang Chi, does want for his son to marry is a girl from China who still dresses in Chinese robes and sings songs of filial piety. These two women represent two different American perceptions of Asian cultures, Chinese culture and Chinese American culture.

This Asian female sexuality in the movies was always evolving; the women in *Flower Drum Song* (1961) were in opposition, one Chinese, one Chinese American, but dealing with Asianess at the core of the issues. *Mulan* wanted brains and a husband, these characters always

on the edge of being old-fashion and traditional or independent and modern. The film *Sideways* (2004) is where this Asian sexual female finally transcends this limbo. Stephanie is placed in a role where she is not battling her Asian roots and heritage (something which was never even mentioned) and expressing herself sexuality. This character was different from the other sexual Asian women because she was the only Asian character in the film and as a supporting character her Asianess was not part of the film's plot. This character shows no struggle with her values and beliefs and does not show this same liminality being able to represent herself as a modern Asian American woman whose sexuality is not shown in opposition to her Asian roots.

Full Metal Jacket (1979), a movie regarding the Vietnam War, portrays a Vietnamese woman as a prostitute looking for American soldier clients. The woman has long straight black hair, short skirt and low cut, a cleavage revealing top. To grab attention she says "Me love you long time" "Me sucky sucky" and "Me love you too much" (*Full Metal Jacket* 1979). This movie was coded for its sexualization of Asian women but held a different purpose than that of the women in other films. The prostitute character was in a liminal space of her own during a war, life was between stages for her, selling her body was her way of surviving. Her role was still significant because of the portrayal of her Asianess in a Western context.

Kung Fu Panda 2 (2011) is a difficult example to discuss on the same terms as the other films because the Asian characters are portrayed very differently. Firstly it is an animated film made for children's entertainment. Secondly, all of the characters are animals, and thirdly the movie is set in China from where all the animals come. However Viper, the snake, was different from the others. Her character was just as strong and dedicated as the rest of the characters but was more feminine than the other fighting animals; she wore flowers and had more slant to her eyes. This snake was played by the very famous Asian American actress Lucy Liu. Often

animated characters are drawn to have similar physical markers of the voices that play them for Lucy Liu this may be her eyes. However, the tiger's voice in the film is played by Angelina Jolie, known for her full lips which are not displayed on her character. Viper was coded as a sexual Asian female because of her slinky and hyper feminine distinctiveness common to those of Asian women in other films.

Margaret Hillenbrand (2008) mentions similar female roles to the findings in the literature review when talking about the Asian roles through satiric films, "Geisha girls, dragons ladies, China dolls, Miss Saigon. Madame Butterfly, and single Asian females seeking their white knights..." (Hillenbrand 2008:50). This "white knight" idea however was not seen in any of the films from Kang's (2011) list, but many of these films have race at the heart of the relationships. Angie Beeman's (2007) focuses on emotional segregation this is shown through the way interracial relationships between blacks and whites are depicted in film. Beeman spotlights that these relationships are often times shown differently because of "emotional segregation" which is the, "Inability of 'white' to see African Americans as emotional equal- as human beings capable of experiencing intimacy and expressing human feelings" (p. 690), stating a scene with an interracial couple together would be different than that of a white couple. Stephanie and Jack in *Sideways* (2004) were the only interracial male/female couple in the films and they were very sexually active, the courting time was short, and their scene sexually graphic. Because Stephanie's racial identity was never recognized, the relationship between her character and Jack's was beyond this emotional segregation.

Wise Elder

The wise elder was a voice of reason and aged intellect, played by an older character. This elder represented the traditions and lessons of old Asian culture and often shared their

wisdom with youth who needed this guidance. Auntie Laing in *Flower Drum Song* (1961) was raised with all of the traditions and teachings of China but was graduating from citizenship school in the United States. Understanding both worlds, her character bridged the gap between old Chinese tradition and new American values, sternly talking to the younger generations to respect their elders.

Mr. Miyagi is famously known for his short meaningful lessons and sayings in *The Karate Kid* (1984). Mr. Miyagi became Daniel's mentor, teacher and best friend when he struggled in his new surroundings. Through karate, Mr. Miyagi uses his wisdom and life experiences from Japan to teach Daniel great life lessons of persistence and compassion for others. Mr. Miyagi is a perfect example of a wise Asian master, sharing his wisdom in Confucian like phrases with a lost youth in need of guidance. Similar to that of Auntie Laing, Mr. Miyagi does not try to stray from his Asian roots and in fact uses them to guide others.

Using the teachings of old, Shifu, the Kung Fu master teaches Po about Zen and inner-peace in *Kung Fu Panda 2* (2011). As the wise elder, he informs Po that every Kung Fu Master must find inner-peace to complete training. This was a teaching he learned from his Kung Fu Master and now is sage advice he is passing down to Po to guide him to acceptance and peace.

Both lead characters in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (2000) are trained Zen warriors who use their skills only for good. When they find themselves face to face with Jen Yu who is using their same technique and training for evil, their instinct is to save her from this lifestyle. By offering her training and a way to channel her power and aggression into something positive, they encourage her to use her skills in the traditional way they were meant to be used, not for the wicked that she has been taught.

This wise elder character in *Black Rain* (1989), Sugai, is the head of the Japanese mob who produces counterfeit American money. During a talk with the main character Sugai, discuss Sato, the main antagonist who ruthlessly murders throughout the film. Sugai points the blame at the United States for creating people like Sato, “I was 10 when the B-29 came. My family lived underground for three days. When we came up the city was gone. Then the heat brought rain. Black rain. You made the rain black, and shoved your values down our throats. We forgot who we were. You created Sato and thousands like him. I'm paying you back” (Black Rain 1989). Sugai, a Hiroshima survivor, helps put evil into perspective for the main character and encourages him to look back into history to fight and understand his enemy in an anti-Western critique.

These wise elders are all very closely connected with their Asian roots. Some still within their own countries, others American immigrants, but all care about honor and respect and hold their Asian values close. These characters represent the force holding traditional Asian values together and passing them along to the future generations as a solution to many of their problems. In all of these examples, the wise elder is a good character showing that value of tradition. There is a fine line that these movies tow showing lessons from the past as important and meaningful additions to one’s life which can help them create a vehicle in moving forward without holding them back.

Asian Mob Character

In both *Indiana Jones: the Temple of Doom* (1984) and *Black Rain* (1989), the lead roles are white men but the villains are part of the Asian mob. This Asian male character was important because of the decade in which the movies were released.

The fact that both of these films were released in the 1980s seemed significant but what was it that made this Asian mob character show up in these two films in this particular decade? The New York Times published an article in 1990 on the census report of a seventy percent increase of Asians in American in the 1980s (Barringer 1990). Takaki (1993) also mentions an article in that same year stating, almost as a warning, that soon the white Americans would be the minority because of the growth of other races in the United States. Henry William (1990) wrote “The deeper significance of Americans becoming a majority nonwhite society is what it means to the nation’s psyche, to individuals’ sense of themselves and their nation - their idea of what it is to be American” (Qtd. in Takaki 1993:50). Stating this notion of being the majority was important to white Americans sense of themselves. What would happen to *their* America if they were no longer the majority? These two articles were important for the perception of Asians as the enemy, this “Asian invasion.” Asians were different though, they were not just numbers they were obtains jobs and in some cases out shining that of their white American counterparts relating to the difference for their immigration Takaki (1993) mentioned above. In an article a few years later, Zhou (2004) lays out statistics of the type of success Asian Americans have had, “Their median household income in 1999 was more than \$55,000 – the highest of all racial groups, including white - and their poverty rate was under 11 percent, the lowest of all racial groups. Moreover, 44 percent of all Asian Americans over 25 years of age had at last a bachelor’s degree, 18 percentage points more than any other racial group” (p. 236). This sense of threat of loss of superiority may not have been unwarranted.

Asian Americans were seen as smart and hard working which were positive, especially when compared to that of the stereotypes of their minority counterparts. However, Asian is still not white and although they may be seen as the model minority they are still a minority and with

that status still came racially driven stereotypes. Even these positive stereotypes can be seen negatively. Asian Americans are seen as smart which can be threatening to white Americans in the workforce and schools. Takaki (1993) states that Asians are seen as “nerds” and told there are “‘too many’ of them on campus” (p. 55). These were the roles still being “defined and formed” for Asian Americans even after leaving their countries and traditions behind.

Both *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) and *Black Rain* (1989) which had Asian villains were made in the 1980s during this seventy percent increase in Asian Americans. Although these two antagonists are smart and use that for evil, the white main male lead role is always smarter, stronger and more clever than the Asians who are shown as less of a threat. The Asian antagonists in these films were significant because of their Asianess and what Asian was representing to the United States at the time a threat.

Minor Characters

In review of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), *Fargo* (1996) and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005) the Asians presence was important in the films when considering the idea of liminality. The characters, played by Asian actors, could have been played by any actor or actress of any race and made no difference to the plot. From the yellow face days of Mickey Rooney in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), these minor Asian characters represent the presence of real Asian Americans in Hollywood and the normalization of seeing Asians and holding the jobs alongside their white onscreen counterparts.

Star Trek: The Motion Picture (1979), created after the popular television series, showed Sulu as a minor role who has very few lines or screen time. Other than portraying a very technically savvy and respectful Starship Enterprise crew member, the character of the Asian Sulu made very little difference to the plot of the film. It is important to note his role in the

television program may have been more substantial but in this movie adaptation his role was very limited. Similarly Mike Yanagita, in *Fargo* (1996) happens to be Asian but this racial identity does not affect the plot of the film. This was also seen in *Face/Off* (1997). Wanda was a fellow FBI agent. She never saw much screen time and her Asian appearance was never a focal point to her character.

Cho Chang's race in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005) also has no bearing on her role in the film. In the novel, Chang plays a much more important and prominent character which was minimized on the screen adaptation. Harry is very attracted to Cho and has a slight flirtation with her throughout the film. The most popular boy in the school is also interested in Cho and she is perceived as his girlfriend throughout the movie. I would not categorize her as hypersexualized because she was shown as just an attractive and popular high school girl.

These roles illustrated not all Asian characters had to go through this transition because these characters' jobs and lives were preexisting to the films' storylines. There was no Asian conflict between old and new ideals and standards. The smaller characters were able to skip the liminal period trying to find their Americaness while not discarding their roots. These liminal states were only seen in films with large fully integrated Asian casts, these minor characters were not important to the plot of the films therefore their Asianess or Asian Americaness did not contribute to the stories either.

The Accent

Zhou's (2004) idea of the "forever foreigner" is important and is also mentioned by Ron Takaki (1993) at the beginning of his essay "A Different Mirror." He tells a story of his encounter with a man believing Takaki is a foreigner, even though his family has been in the United States since 1880, just because of his Asian appearance. In the films, there were many

cases of this forever foreigner despite perfect English and families' long term United States ancestry merely because of Asian appearance. In movies like *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Flower Drum Song* (1961) and *The Karate Kid* (1984), the accents seemed appropriate seeing as they were all representing first generation Asian Americans. In the movies *Sideways* (2004), *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979) and *Up* (2009), it was significant that none of the Asian roles had accents nor was there a reference to the characters' Asianess. Zhou (2004) states people assume that every Asian American has English as a second language and these three films did not say what generation these characters were but one would assume not first because neither character spoke with an accent. The film that did represent this forever foreigner was *Fargo* (1996) in Mike Yanigita who could be seen as a character in transition. It is never said what generation Asian America Mike was, although he did live with his parents, but he had a very thick Asian Minnesotan accent, no broken English but a strong enough accent that would allude to him not always having lived in the United States.

This liminal space that was found throughout these films was represented less after the 2000s. These focuses on accents show the change from *Flower Drum Song* (1961) to *Up* (2009). The liminality at the heart of *Flower Drum Song* (1961) to *Up* (2009) which featured an Asian American boy as the main character without ever mentioning his Asianess the film it was clear the subject matter was evolving. The accent identifies Asian characters as foreigners; the lack of an Asian accent changes the perception of the characters' life in the United States.

CONCLUSION

The characters and roles found in these films depict Western perceptions of Asianess. The identities of these characters are fraught with tensions between cultures. Many of the films showed this complication of being both respectful to one's roots and true to one's self. Others,

through characters like the wise elders, viewed holding on to valuable traditions and cultural lessons as an important addition to young life. These contrasting ideas were sometimes found within the same films creating a nuance of not reverting fully to the behaviors of old but using lessons of the past in order to progress to ones' future. The films where this idea was the most evident were the movies with fully integrated Asian casts. The only Asian roles that were able to transcend this liminal state were the minor characters and the animated film *Up* (2009), one of the more recent films from the list. This pattern shows the limits of the Asian roles, either the characters Asianess dominates the story or the characters have little importance to the film. Throughout this paper, Asian is used as a pan-ethnic identifier because of the phrasing of the literature. I self identify as half Japanese and half Norwegian and as Asian American. Although I am fourth generation on both sides, I am still often asked where my origins lie, confusing people with my multiracial identity. I have never struggled connecting with or separating myself from my Asianess, but because of the "other" box I am categorized as Asian American. These films position Asian characters in this same box, accepted as hardworking and smart and a step towards American but with a hyphen – Asian American.

For future research, it would be interesting to recognize the differences between the characters in these films meant to be Asian from Asia and the Asian American characters. There were films that were set in Asian countries while others were located in the United States. How are these Western portrayals different from one another? Kang's (2011) pre-existing list was specifically made to show significant portrayals of Asians in cinema; the seventeen movies used in this research were only the ones that had Oscar nominations. The Academy members who vote for these nominations tend to gravitate to the more progressive films of the year; this way of creating a more manageable list could have led to problematic data. With more time studying all

of the films or even extending it to the films which grossed a certain amount may have shown different information. With more films, breaking down the pan-ethnic language into individual ethnic identities would be easier because the data would comprise of more examples. These possibilities for future research could still be done using Kang's (2011) list and would be an interesting addition to these few selections.

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APPENDIX

Movie Title	Year	Family	Lead Male	Sexual Female	Wise Master	Mobster Antagonist	Minor Roles	Accents	Noted but Uncoded	Totals
Flower Drum Song	1961	X	X	X	X			X		5
Star Trek: The Motion Picture	1979						X			1
Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom	1984					X		X	X	3
The Karate Kid	1984				X			X		2
Full Metal Jacket	1987			X				X	X	3
The Last Emperor	1987								X	1
Black Rain	1989				X	X		X	X	4
Do the Right Thing	1989	X						X		2
The Wedding Banquet	1993	X	X	X				X		4
Fargo	1996						X	X		2
Face/Off	1997						X			1
Mulan	1998	X	X							2
Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon	2000		X	X	X					3
Sideways	2004			X						1
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	2005						X			1
Up	2009		X							1
Kung Fu Panda 2	2011			X	X			X		3
Totals		4	5	6	5	2	4	9	4	

*Codes from the literature