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Orientals in Hollywood: Asian American representation in early U.S. cinema

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION

Thesis

ORIENTALS IN HOLLYWOOD:

ASIAN AMERICAN REPRESENTATION IN EARLY U.S. CINEMA

by

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ABSTRACT

Modern Asian American activists are shining a spotlight on the lack of diversity in media, and the root of this inequality traces back to the origins of cinema. Since Asians first immigrated to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, the U.S. government and its citizens have repeatedly demeaned, misrepresented, and excluded Asian Americans from most facets of society, including the opportunity to appear on screen. This project explores how early cinema shaped negative perceptions of Asian immigrants, primarily by subscribing to popular stereotypes including the *pollutant, coolie, deviant,* and *yellow peril*, the first four of Robert G. Lee's "Six Faces of the Oriental." By analyzing a series of Hollywood films from the years 1894–1934, and providing the historical context surrounding Asian Americans' slow and contested assimilation, this project maps the evolution of these four threatening identities and how they influenced exclusionary laws targeted towards Asian immigrants. It also explores yellowface, the branch of racial cosmetology wherein non-Asian (primarily white) actors are "made up" to appear of Asian heritage, and how this practice promoted the literal exclusion of Asians from the film industry. This project ultimately concludes that while modern cinema offers less bigoted representations, the invisibility of Asian Americans persists through the practice of whitewashing, the successor to yellowface.

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Introduction: Yellowface and Stock Stereotypes

Yellowface is a transformation, typically through the use of prosthetics and cosmetics, wherein a non-Asian actor (normally Caucasian) appears of Asian descent. More symbolically, yellowface is the manipulation and defining of the Asian race by non-Asian bodies. Its roots in the United States trace back to theatrical productions of the mid-18th century, and despite wide-scale criticism, the practice continues to this day in mainstream Hollywood productions (e.g. *Cloud Atlas*, 2012). With such pervasive usage in cinema, particularly in the decades leading up to the Civil Rights era, yellowface played a noteworthy role in America's understanding and perception of Asian immigrants. Through the use of yellowface, Hollywood routinely excluded Asian actors from participating in the influential practice of mythmaking. Perhaps more importantly, the practice also precluded an understanding of Asians as "Americans," because it engendered the "othering" and stereotyping of Eastern cultures. The purpose of this project is to examine early Hollywood's representation of Asians on screen, and how practices such as yellowface, among others, erased the identity of Asian Americans from the film industry and society at large.

Hollywood has a long history of discriminatory Asian representation, dating back to Edison's shorts in the late 19th century. For the purposes of this project, I focus on Hollywood films that premiered before the enforcement of the Production Code (1894–1934). This time period is particularly important because its films are foundational case studies of Asian representation on screen, ones that influenced future representations, the public's perception of Asian Americans, and subsequent legislature aimed towards this

population. Through a close analysis of several films that employed yellowface, as well as a consideration of the historical contexts surrounding the productions of such films, I will attempt to uncover the lasting effect of the early film industry on the Asian American population. I suggest that Hollywood failed Asian Americans in two ways: 1) it grossly misrepresented the Asian race, ultimately participating in the "othering" of Asian immigrants; and 2) it supported the exclusion of Asian Americans from both the film industry and American society. This, in turn, set the groundwork for the continued state of Asian American exclusion from the current film industry.

Influence of Blackface

It would be remiss to discuss repercussions of yellowface on Asian American populations without first exploring the cultural predecessor, blackface, which has a far more public relationship with American culture and a far greater presence in academic research. Blackface, the practice of using cosmetics to give someone the appearance of an African American, played a vital role in shaping the American identity. As Rogin notes, blackface "moved settlers and ethnics into the melting pot by keeping racial groups out" (Rogin 12). Rogin notes the important distinction between ethnicity and race, and argues that it is along these lines that Americans designated assimilable populations. The U.S. government welcomed ethnically "different" populations, such as people of Jewish and/or European descent, because they entered the country under the banner of whiteness (12). Racially different populations (such as African, Asian, and Native Americans) lacked the necessary qualifications for Americanization.

Blackface gained recognition through the popular minstrelsy circuit, particularly

vaudeville. Many performers that employed blackface identified with ethnic groups that were in the process of assimilating to the American melting pot. In this way, many European immigrants promoted the othering of non-white populations in an attempt to lay claim on their own rights to Americanization. Al Jolson, of Jewish heritage, is perhaps the most famous of blackface performers, even incorporating it in Hollywood's first "talkie," *The Jazz Singer* (1927).

In one way, Hollywood's use of blackface is notably less encompassing than its use of yellowface. As will be discussed in great length throughout the course of this project, yellowface enabled the hiring of non-Asian actors in Asian roles. Such films, therefore, rely on a degree of authenticity, asking viewers to accept actors in yellowface as the stand-in for Asian performers. In many instances, early Hollywood films used blackface in the context of performances. Actors such as Al Jolson and Fred Astaire appeared on screen in blackface, but for specific performance scenes within the film. Viewers therefore recognized the performances as performances, and the actors did not assume a black identity. This is a unique context for blackface that is not incorporated in the yellowface tradition. In such scenes, the aesthetics of blackface further illustrate the subterfuge of the cosmetics. Often, markers (such as a white band around the mouth) are intended to call attention to the face that the actor is, in fact, white. Hollywood's use of yellowface, on the other hand, skewed towards realism. With that said, there are also striking examples, such as *Birth of a Nation*, wherein white actors donned blackface to portray black men and women as demeaning stereotypes. In fact, the overall purpose of both practices remains the same: to exoticize non-white populations. And as early

cinematic representations of Asians prove, this exoticization excluded Asians from an American identity for over a century.

Misrepresentation of Asian Americans: Yellowface

The earliest recorded example of yellowface on American soil was a 1767 theatrical production, *An Orphan of China,* written by Irish playwright Arthur Murphy and based on a popular play by Voltaire. The play premiered at a time when the average U.S. citizen had little to no understanding of the Asian race. For many in the audience, the first glimpse of Asian culture was filtered through the guise of yellowface. Consequently, America's first perception of Asia was founded in fiction; the idea of the "Far East" as exotic predated the arrival of Asian immigrants. This categorization of Asians as "other" and fundamentally un-American soon became truth, one that instigated a century of racist practices.

The clearest example of how yellowface misrepresents Asian Americans is its physical distortion of Asian features. As Robert G. Lee notes:

> Yellowface marks the Asian body as unmistakably Oriental; it sharply defines the Oriental in a racial opposition to whiteness. Yellowface exaggerates "racial" features that have been designated "Oriental," such as "slanted" eyes, overbite, and mustard-yellow skin color. Only the radicalized Oriental is yellow; Asians are not. Asia is not a biological fact but a geographic designation. Asians come in the broadest range of skin color and hue. (Lee 2)

In Jenny Egan's 1992 textbook *Imaging the Role: Makeup as a Stage in Characterization*, Egan lays out a series of "ethnic distinctions" from which she bases her

various makeup tutorials. By her classification, an "oriental" person has five distinct features: (1) straight black hair, sparse facial hair, (2) epicanthic flap, (3) round, flat face, (4) button nose with a low bridge, and (5) short "rosebud" mouth (Egan 159). Egan presents a detailed taxonomy of oriental features, but the primary criticism is that she reduces dozens of cultures into one unified ethnic classification. Still, Egan's tutorial is far more thorough than those of her contemporaries; most "oriental" cosmetic tutorials focus on the eyes alone - specifically in creating the epicanthic flap.

The epicanthic flap is the skin fold above the eyelid that covers the inside corner of the eye (Fig. 1.1). It is the most distinguishable feature of the Asian face, and consequently, it is also the most replicated feature. Textbooks such as Richard Corson's renowned *Stage Makeup* (1992) or Lee Bagyan's *Makeup for Theatre, Film, & Television* (1982) give detailed instructions on how to replicate the epicanthic flap, also known as the "oriental eyelid," which typically include affixing a piece of latex to the actor's eyebrow. In altering the eyes alone while ignoring the other facial features, the final result is a grotesque caricature of an Asian face.

In the history of cinema, there have been many preferences when it comes to the application of yellowface. Frank Capra, for instance, sought authenticity in his representations of members from the "Far East." In his autobiography *The Name Above the Title*, Capra chronicles the challenges he faced when filming *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933). Like his contemporaries, Capra chose to forego the hiring of an Asian actor to play his Chinese lead, although he claims to have undergone an exhaustive search. As he notes, "I looked for a tall, overpowering, real Chinese. But there were no

tall Chinese in casting directories, or even in laundries" (Capra 141). Instead he opted for Swedish actor Nils Asther, whose "impassive face promised the serenity and mystery of a centuries-old culture," but Capra faced the dilemma of transforming Asther into an Asian warlord (141). Capra disliked modern practices of yellowface, which he found to be cartoonish and ugly, so he researched ways to authenticate an "oriental" look. For Capra, this involved simulating the epicanthic flap, trimming his eyelashes to one-third their natural length, and introducing a stiff, eccentric walk. Of his creation, Capra remarked, "of a certain he was not Caucasian," which satisfied his needs. Capra's search for authenticity only extended to "not looking Caucasian" (141).

One of the most widely discussed examples of cinematic yellowface is Luise Rainer's portrayal of the Chinese peasant farmer O-Lan in *The Good Earth* (1937). This portrayal is famous for a few different reasons. First, Rainer received wide acclaim from her contemporaries for mastering the role, ultimately receiving the Academy Award for Best Actress for this performance. Second, Rainer infamously beat out Asian American actress Anna May Wong for the part, despite Wong's popularity and obvious claim to the role owing to her Chinese heritage. Much of this decision was related to the Hollywood Production Code's anti-miscegenation clause, which prohibited interracial romance on screen. This clause will be discussed in greater detail later in this introduction because it played a significant role in limiting Asian American representation in Hollywood.

When contrasting Wong's facial features to those of Rainer as O-Lan, one can clearly see the unnatural distortion of yellowface. Rainer's face has a replication of the epicanthic fold, high, arched eyebrows, and a darkened skin color, but her German

heritage is still obvious in her long face and high cheekbones. Like many contemporary examples of yellowface, Rainer's transformation focuses predominantly on her eyes, which seem discordant with her natural facial features. Without her slicked hair and costuming, Rainer would easily pass for European. This attempt at yellowface is further weakened by the direct comparison to Anna May Wong who provides a textbook example of Jenny Egan's "oriental" features - straight dark hair, round and flat face, button nose, etc. In summary, Wong is Chinese, and no amount of cosmetics could have replicated her natural features. In yellowface Rainer does not look Chinese, and yet with this gross misrepresentation, she received the most prestigious acting award in the country. Rainer was awarded for portraying an "oriental," a race invented by American popular culture.

Orientalism

There is a gross misrepresentation in using "oriental" as a catchall for the incredible range of cultures and countries that comprise Asia. Yet, all of the aforementioned cosmetic texts refer to yellowface as the "oriental" application. Robert G. Lee stated "Race is a mode of placing cultural meaning on the body" (Lee 2). This statement is particularly relevant for yellowface. The non-Asian players who wear yellowface are not portraying Asian people; they are portraying Orientals, the perceived people of the "Far East." The Orient is an amalgamation of cultures filtered through a white lens. In this way, yellowface is a powerful example of Edward Said's theory of Orientalism.

Orientalism is a way of "coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the

Orient's special place in European Western experience" (Said 1). According to Said, the term carries multiple meanings: an academic understanding relating to the scholarly study of the Orient; an imaginative understanding relating the Orient (East) in opposition to the Occident (West); and finally a corporate understanding of Orientalism as a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 3). Ultimately, Orientalism is an ongoing discourse of Western society's "othering" of Eastern cultures, viewing the East as something requiring study, fundamentally different from the West and in need of domination. Said specifically focused on Britain's and France's relationship to the Middle East, but he made the interesting observation that Americans associate the Orient with the Far East, specifically China and Japan (1). This has undoubtedly been proven true by U.S. media portrayals of "Orientals."

Said accuses the media of a modern proliferation of Orientalism. He states, "There has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media's resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds" (Said 26). Yellowface is one such "mold," an ethnocentric portrayal of Asian races. It is a reflection of the prejudice towards Asia that had been building in the United States for over a century. Orientalism is one explanation for the gross misrepresentation inherent in yellowface. Americans do not see Asian countries as individual, unique nationalities, but instead as one Orient, which is peculiar and inferior because of its differences. This project highlights several films that are guilty of this misrepresentation, and Orientalism is a discourse attached to each example.

The Six Faces of the Oriental

Hollywood introduced an additional layer of misrepresentation beyond the reductive facial features of yellowface. In early films, Asian characters fit the mold of a distinct set of stereotypical characters. These characters reflect the historical racism surrounding Asian immigration to the United States.

In his book *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (1999), Robert G. Lee introduces "Six Faces of the Oriental" which portray the "Oriental as an alien body and a threat to the American national family" — the pollutant, the coolie, the deviant, the yellow peril, the model minority, and the gook (Lee 8). These six stereotypes subsume other well-known Asian cinematic character tropes, such as the Dragon Lady or Fu Manchu. *Orientals* was well received by scholars in the fields of American and Cultural Studies for its thorough study of Asian American culture, a small albeit burgeoning topic. In the book, Lee explores how popular culture reflected each of these representations, and while he incorporates many examples, he largely bypasses cinema. I find this an interesting choice considering the far-reaching influence of film in the early twentieth century, a foundational time for national identity. My project more thoroughly vets these proposed stereotypes within early cinema. Each of these stereotypes sprung from a specific historical context in which economic shifts produced social fears and called for a reassertion of American dominance. In other words, these stereotypes are a result of surges of Orientalism over the last 150 years.

The portrayal of Asian as *pollutant* arose in the mid-19th century when Asian immigrants began immigrating to California. U.S. settlers saw this new group as a

disruption to Westward Expansion and a pollution on the true American Dream. Lee explains, "The Chinese constituted an alien presence and a threat of pollution which earlier fantasies of exotic but distant Asia could not contain" (Lee 11). The reality of Asian bodies on American soil posed a danger to a truly free nation.

The portrayal of Asian as *coolie* arose toward the end of the 19th century when the U.S. working class began to form. Chinese immigrants were given menial labor with low wages, and consequently such unskilled jobs were deemed "coolie labor." Despite the fact that Chinese immigrants were racially segregated in the workforce and were given no opportunity for skilled work, they were soon vilified for undercutting the wages of the working class.

The portrayal of Asian as *deviant* refers to the idea of Asians as prohibited sexual desires. As Lee notes, towards the end of the 19th century, Asian men were being excluded from even basic labor, and instead found positions as domestic servants in households. Simultaneously, hundreds of Asian women were being shipped to California to serve as prostitutes (Lee 9). Both opportunities presented the possibility of interracial romance, at a time when Victorian norms of heterosexuality were being established in America. The threat of "racial pollution" abounding from interracial coupling offered a provocative danger to the white, middle class (10). The Asian as deviant is a very popular trope in Hollywood representation, and often an instigator for the use of yellowface. This will be discussed at length in later chapters.

The portrayal of Asian as *yellow peril* is another popular stereotype in Hollywood cinema, best represented through the infamous Fu Manchu series. At the start of the 20th

century, newly acquired land in Asia brought threats of future invasions of its people, and consequently an expanded pollution of American culture. Lee notes that at the turn of the century, "Asiatic immigration...was said to pose the greatest threat to Western civilization and the white Race" (Lee 10). If it has not already been made clear, American-ness was, and arguably remains, inextricably linked with whiteness.

The portrayals of Asians as the *model minority* and the *gook* are important stereotypes born later in the 20th century. The model minority rooted from the 1950s effort to produce a successful example of American assimilation, while the gook rooted from 1970s fear of the Asian American as an invisible enemy, likely a result of the Vietnam War. This specific project will not examine these stereotypes since they were invented post-Production Code, but they are both important entries into the historical understanding of Asian Americans.

In the coming chapters, I will attempt to provide more thorough descriptions and examples of how Hollywood cinema reinforced misrepresentations of Asian Americans as pollutant, coolie, deviant, and yellow peril. These stereotypes are unique in the ways in which they set the Asian community in opposition to Americans. At a time when American ideology was crafted, these stereotypes demarked Asian immigrants as foreigner, other, and un-American.

Exclusion from Hollywood

Having settled ways in which Hollywood grossly misrepresented Asian races — through the exaggeration of physical attributes and the stereotyping of them as threats to U.S. society — it is time to discuss ways in which the practice excluded Asian Americans

from society. I would like to first highlight how Asian Americans were excluded specifically from Hollywood, and later from American society at large.

As seen from previous examples including *The Good Earth* and *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*, Asian Americans were frequently overlooked for lead acting roles. The reasoning for hiring white actors in yellowface over authentic Asian American actors is muddled and manifold. In Capra's explanation, his use of yellowface was not preferred but instead a necessity since the existence of skilled Asian talent was limited. Let's unpack this sentiment, since it was a popular notion in Hollywood. Skilled Asian American actors existed in early Hollywood; Anna May Wong and Sessue Hayakawa are examples of this. History, however, shows that both of these stars were often relegated to supporting roles. A more likely explanation for the promotion of yellowface is job security for white actors, as well as the notion that white actors were more naturally gifted. The idea of the natural dominance of white performance over Asian performance is, of course, a product of Orientalism. Related, there is the possibility that white actors in yellowface simply played the stereotype better. Hollywood did not desire authentic representations of Asians, but rather the perceived culture of Orientals. Despite his celebrity, Hayakawa's more human performances did not meet the requisite exoticism of Orientalism.

There is also a practical reason for the increased use of yellowface, specifically during the introduction of sound in cinema. According to film historian Thomas Doherty, the heightened realism of the sound era made Asian actors appear more full-bodied, and consequently more threatening (Doherty 268). In other words, the sexual deviant proved

more realistic with a voice. Additionally, a white actor in yellowface looked even more garish and unrealistic when compared with an Asian player. Consequently, rather than hiring more Asian actors, the studio simply fired them to give preference to white actors in yellowface. A good example of this is the film *The Son-Daughter* (1933). Ana May Wong was originally hired to play the lead, but she was eventually replaced with white actress Helen Hayes. The hiring of Hayes facilitated an overhaul of the casting, and most Asian actors were fired. Even the extras were replaced "in order to avoid comparisons between the principals in make-up and Orientals" (268). This policy of avoiding comparisons between Asian actors and non-Asian actors in yellowface was primarily confined to dramas. In comedies, studios did not mind the garish comparison because it heightened the humor, and consequently, Asian players were often hired for bit parts or sidekicks.

The Motion Picture Production Code, specifically its anti-miscegenation clause, necessitated an increase in yellowface. The Production Code was not a legally binding document, but something of a gentleman's agreement among all of the major studio heads. It was crafted as a response to building pressure from various outside organizations that called for heightened censorship in Hollywood productions. This censorship movement responded to the increasing levels of violence and sex in films of the 1920s, as well as several highly publicized scandals involving Hollywood stars. The Production Code was a set of moral guidelines for Hollywood film, and although it was created in 1930, it was not strictly enforced until 1934. The moral guidelines imposed by the Code included the reduction of violence, sex, drinking, and similar vices, on screen.

For the purposes of Asian American exclusion on screen, I would like to pay particular attention to the anti-miscegenation clause in the Production Code, which banned "Miscegenation (sex relationships between the white and black races)." Although the clause specifies white and black races, this description was often translated as a ban of relationships between white and non-white races. While this clause obviously limited the writing of interracial romances into scripts, it also prohibited the hiring of interracial romantic leads, regardless of the race presented on screen. *The Good Earth* is an excellent example of this issue.

In *The Good Earth*, as previously discussed, Anna May Wong lost the coveted role of O-Lan to Luise Rainer, and much of this is explained by the anti-miscegenation clause. Caucasian actor Paul Muni played the husband, so despite the fact that he portrays an Asian character, the Production Code banned the hiring of an Asian actress to play his love interest. When pressed why he did not hire Wong, Producer Irving Thalberg allegedly replied "I'm in the business of creating illusions, (Vieira 323)" which is yet another meager explanation for the acceptance of yellowface. Interestingly, the studio did ask Wong to play the role of the deceptive concubine Lotus, but she felt the insult and reportedly refused by stating, "If you let me play O-Lan, I'll be very glad. But you're asking me—with Chinese blood—to do the only unsympathetic role in the picture, featuring an all-American cast portraying Chinese characters" (Sakamoto). Of course, the Production Code, and the anti-miscegenation clause in particular, reflected the larger social attitudes of the time. Since Asians were excluded from participating in much of American society, this naturally extended to cinema.

Exclusion from U.S. Society

The legal exclusion of Asian Americans from U.S. society began almost immediately after the first major wave of Asian immigration in America in the mid-19th century. The Chinese were initially needed for hard labor, but when that need diminished, white acceptance plummeted. Due to their differences, Asians were seen as inferior, in accordance with the most basic tenets of Orientalism. Furthermore, they were continually blamed for wage deflation due to their willingness to accept low-paying jobs.

Only a few decades after the arrival of Chinese immigrants, the U.S. government responded to racist pressure by implementing the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This federal legislation placed a ban on Chinese immigration for 10 years, and was the first significant restriction on immigration in U.S. history. The Act was renewed several times and restricted Chinese immigration until its repeal in 1942. The Act initially limited the ban to "both skilled and unskilled laborers and Chinese employed in mining" (Chinese Exclusion Act). Over the course of its history, however, the Act tightened the immigration laws, eventually broadening to other Asian populations as well. Perhaps most significantly, the Exclusion Act banned any path to citizenship for people of Chinese origin, instead labeling them as permanent aliens. People of Asian descent were not granted the right to naturalized citizenship until the year 1952. The importance of this legislation in the discussion of yellowface cannot be understated. The Chinese Exclusion Act legally labeled Asian people as foreigners, as "alien." While European immigrants received similar denigration at the hands of U.S. citizens, U.S. laws at least opened the door for their naturalization. For Asians, "alien" was a legal classification rather than a

popular one. This exoticism only promoted the cinematic misrepresentation as discussed earlier in this chapter. The Act also laid the foundation for additional discriminatory legislation.

While there was never a federal anti-miscegenation law, many of the individual states implemented these laws, with several of them dating back to the 17th century. Although the bulk of the laws prohibited relations between "blacks" and "whites," there were several states that specified a ban on interracial relationships with Asian Americans. In 1910, seven states implemented anti-miscegenation regulations involving Asian Americans. By 1950, the height of Jim Crow era discriminatory legislation, that number had doubled to 15 states (Karthikeyan 3). In this climate, it is no wonder that the Motion Picture Production Code mirrored this legislation in its own morality guidelines. It took until 1967 for anti-miscegenation laws to be deemed unconstitutional.

Perhaps it is vital to briefly touch upon ideology in film, and the medium's power to influence social perception. Historically, the popularity of film has cut across economic, racial, and national boundaries. It has been celebrated for its entertainment value, but what of its ability to shape society? Certainly, the powerful influence of film was acknowledged by the Motion Picture Production Code, which was initially born out of fear of cinema corrupting the minds of the youth. In 2015, a study by Michelle C. Pautz at the University of Dayton provided a more precise correlation between film and public perception. In the study, Pautz asked participants to fill out a questionnaire regarding their opinion on the U.S. government before and after watching the films *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Argo*. Nearly 25 percent of participants positively altered their opinion of

the government after viewing the films (Guida). While this is not definitive proof, it is powerful evidence that films can influence important opinions of audience members. Similarly, when early Hollywood films portrayed negative stereotypes of Asian immigrants, the American public took this perspective as truth.

At the birth of American cinema, the country's relationship with its Asian American population reflected a deep-seeded racism and ill-founded superiority complex. Hollywood picked up on the racist stereotypes of the era, and proliferated them at a rapid pace. Not only did Hollywood reinforce degrading portrayals such as the coolie and the deviant, but the physical use of yellowface erased Asian American identity, reducing the cultures to exotic and grotesque. The influence of film to create meanings is unquestionable, which begs the question "What role did film have in supporting the pervasive exclusion of Asian Americans from U.S. society?" Perhaps scholars will never know the full damage, but the earliest examples of cinematic yellowface are vital to the understanding of American opinion and perception at that time.

In keeping with Robert G. Lee's categorization of stereotypes, this project focuses on the earliest examples of cinematic yellowface, and how they reinforced these racist portrayals and supported legislation that enacted the exclusion of Asian Americans from the industry.

Chapter One explores the Asian as both pollutant and coolie. In exploring films such as *Chinese Laundry* (Edison, 1894) and the *Painted Veil* (Boleslawski, 1934), I attempt to highlight early examples of embedded racism against Asians within cinema.

Chapter Two explores the Asian as deviant. Here I will explore films including

Madame Butterfly (Olcott, 1915), *The Forbidden City* (Franklin, 1918), *Broken Blossoms* (Griffith, 1919), and *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (Capra, 1933) to examine how Hollywood punished the interracial romance, even before the Production Code's enforcement.

Chapter Three explores the Asian as yellow peril. This portrayal is best understood through the infamous Fu Manchu character, specifically in his most famous iteration, *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (Brabin, 1932).

The Conclusion will look at recent examples of Hollywood yellowface and explore the contemporary understanding and acceptance of the practice. It will also discuss recent activist movements to promote better representation for Asian Americans in the media.

One important note is that the term "Asian American" did not originate until the late 1960s. As previously mentioned, Asians in America had the legal classification of "alien" until 1952, and for the most part, Americans continued to refer to them as "Asians" or "orientals." For this reason, this project uses the term "Asian American" sparsely in the following chapters, instead opting to reflect the contemporary titling for this population.

While misrepresentation of Asians in Hollywood has a long and rather embarrassing history, it is imperative to examine the earliest examples to see the influence that they may have had on later iterations and generations. This attempts to answer why practices such as yellowface have had such a lasting impact and continue to this day.

Chapter 1: Representation of the Pollutant and the Coolie

Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States en masse in the mid-19th century as both a means of escaping the decline of the Qing dynasty, but also in the hopes of making their fortune in the California Gold Rush. Opposition to and discrimination of the Chinese came swiftly during this period, with Americans using the Chinese as a scapegoat for most social ills. The stereotypes of Asian as pollutant and Asian as coolie, the first two of Robert G. Lee's "Six Faces of the Oriental," derived during this time, and these threatening images of Asian immigrants colored much of U.S. interaction with Asians for the next century.

Pollutant refers to the mid-19th century image of Asians as the destroyers of the idyllic California, a land of freedom for white families. As Lee notes, "pollutants are anomalies in the symbolic structure of society, things that are out of place and create a sense of disorder" (R. Lee 31). The arrival of Chinese immigrants during the Gold Rush coincided with a rapid economic shift in the country, wherein the American marketplace was organized along capital lines. Small-scale, community-focused industries (i.e. agriculture) became rapidly commercialized, and this threw the country into chaos. Two major events that influenced this chaos were the end of American slavery (1865) and the completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad (1869). The former depleted the workforce in the South, destroying its long-established economic regime. The latter largely expanded the U.S. marketplace, increasing the reach of industries across the country. The creation of the railroad also provided an influx of jobs for immigrants, but upon its completion, the workers were left without opportunities. These game-changing

events caused great confusion, and an influx of immigrants found many people vying for limited employment opportunities, particularly in the West. Immigrants, specifically non-white immigrants, received the brunt of blame for any negative outcomes of these major economic shifts.

Coolie is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as a person who works for hire, typically for menial labor. The etymology of the term traces to the Tamil, an ethnic group of southern India. "Kuli" was a tribe of robbers who eventually settled down as respectable laborers. While the term has negative roots, referring to a criminal people, it likewise references a group of people that are unshakably hardworking. This could be viewed in a positive light, unless this group of people is vying for the same employment opportunities as white Americans. Europeans freely used the term for both South Asian and Chinese immigrants who worked as native laborers. Americans disparagingly targeted Chinese immigrants as coolies for their willingness to accept low wages for menial work. This image of Asian immigrants blossomed in the 1870s, specifically during the building of the Transcontinental Railroad.

Many films in early Hollywood integrated these stereotypes in their depictions of "Orientals," and the use of yellowface enabled such disparaging representations. As discussed in the introduction, the studios did not seek authentic Asian representation with their use of yellowface; rather, it allowed white actors to portray a new race, that of "Oriental," one which audiences voraciously consumed as spectacle. Before delving into films of this era that exemplify the images of Asian as pollutant and coolie, it is prudent to first explore the history behind such stereotypes, and America's early encounters with

Asian immigrants. In uncovering how the Orient first became prominent in the social consciousness of America, one can discover how such stereotypes gained ground.

History of the Pollutant

Historians believe that the earliest Asian immigrants arrived in California during the mid-18th century, when the territory was ruled by Mexico; these immigrants established themselves as sailors and merchants. A new group of immigrants arrived in the U.S. around 1815, when Sino-U.S. maritime trade began. The number of immigrants slowly increased over the next 30 years, but a boom in immigration hit in 1848, ballooning from 325 to 20,000 immigrants per year over the span of four years. Much of this chapter refers specifically to Chinese immigrants, who were the first Asian nationality to arrive in mass numbers and to whom the brunt of discriminatory sentiments and regulations were directed. Other Asian immigrants (of specifically Korean and Japanese descent) entered the United States soon after and faced similar mistreatment by the U.S. government. The error of lumping these nationalities into one race-based categorization is a predominant feature of Orientalism.

While Asian immigrants might not have arrived in earnest until the 19th century, images and descriptions of the Orient arrived far earlier, often displayed in museums and cultural displays. The exotic nature of the Orient fascinated American citizens, and early immigrants faced similar interest. While the earliest groups of travelers were solely men, the first female Asian immigrant arrived in New York in 1834 from her home in Guangzhou, China. Her name was Afong Moy, although the New York Daily Advertiser listed her as "*Juila Foochee ching-chang king*, daughter of *Hong wang-tzang tzee king*"

(Haddad 9). That is one small taste of the way in which the Orient was exoticized for American spectators. Billed as "The Chinese Lady," the teenage Moy and her manservant travelled the country as oddities. During her exhibition, Moy wore traditional Chinese clothing and stood in a "room of curiosities" filled with many Asian items (e.g. chop sticks, bamboo furniture, etc.). Her bound feet were a major selling point, as hordes of Americans crowded the exhibition halls to view feet that were "but four inches in length" (9). Moy is but one of many examples of live Asian exhibitions in America during the 18th century. She joins Chang and Eng Bunker, also known as the famed Siamese Twins, and the multitudes of other Asian participants in P.T. Barnum's "American Museum," as cultural oddities that peaked the interests of middle-class America. Boston even opened an entire "Chinese Museum" to attract curious visitors.

This successful exhibition of Asian bodies and artifacts placed the Asian culture at odds with what was considered the more civilized Western society. Afong Moy's feet fascinated audiences for the novel practice of foot binding, wherein tight binding adhered to the feet of developing girls deformed and altered their appearance. Although a painful practice, small feet became a symbol of beauty, and women of the highest social classes adopted it. Western audiences found this practice cruel, and thus linked the Orient with savagery. The very nature of exhibition produces an inherent hierarchy where the exhibitor dominates over the exhibited. These early portraits of the Orient with its strange customs and "savage" practices promoted America's feeling of superiority over Asian races. It planted the seeds of Orientalism.

It is in an environment of such sentiments when the first major wave of Asian

immigrants arrived in California with the hopes of equality and prosperity. Unfortunately, the stark differences between the Chinese culture — in dress, customs, and the overall ignorance of Victorian codes of conduct — and European culture proved a threat to white settlers. Popular American culture quickly began proliferating negative portrayals of Chinese immigrants. As Lee states, the arrival of minstrelsy in the 1850s reflected these stereotypes on a widespread level, although Oriental minstrelsy contained itself primarily in the Western states as opposed to the minstrels' national use of blackface (R. Lee 25). With the performers often in yellowface, minstrelsy predates cinema as a cultural influencer that spurred threatening images. The depiction of Chinese immigrants as harbingers of disease and filth quickly spread in public performances. Minstrel songs often categorized the Chinese diet as one including rats and bugs. In consuming filthy and disease-ridden animals, these songs depicted the Chinese as plague-carriers, literal pollutants. The American Medical Association began exploring germ theory in relation to Chinese immigration, believing that immigrants "carried distinct germs to which they were immune, but from which whites would die if exposed" (Luibhéid 37).

Similarly, many of the women who traveled to the United States in the early waves of immigration were transported for the use of prostitution. Consequently, there was a rise in brothels, and a spread of venereal disease among the laborers, including white laborers. American citizens targeted the Chinese women and blamed these women for the spread of this disease and immorality. The American Medical Association consequently studied female Chinese immigrants to determine whether they poisoned the American bloodstream (Luibhéid 37).

Public sentiment further vilified Chinese immigrants as promoters of vice and dereliction, specifically the abuse of opium. Opium dens were prevalent around the globe in the 19th century, but particularly popular in China. Along with the mass immigration of Chinese laborers came the introduction and proliferation of opium dens in California. These dens were often unfurnished, filthy, and populated by poorer working classes. Chinese men served as the primary clientele of these dens, but white workers soon became regular visitors. Community organizations quickly blamed Chinese immigrants for the spread of this new addiction.

In addition to harbingers of disease and vice, Chinese immigrants were also depicted as deceitful. “The Heathen Chinee,” a famed 1872 poem by Bret Harte, portrays a game of cards between two white men and a Chinese man, where the Chinese man is eventually found guilty of cheating. The stanza below describes this moment:

Then I looked up at Nye,
And he gazed upon me;
And he rose with a sigh,
And said, "Can this be?
We are ruined by Chinese cheap labor," —
And he went for that heathen Chinee. (Railton)

This poem quickly rose to prominence, and its success reflects the anti-Chinese sentiment of the era, but the poem also reveals deeper antipathy harbored against Chinese immigration. The “cheap labor” of course refers to the Chinese laborers’ willingness to accept lower wages then their white counterparts. This reality spawned the widespread

use of the term "coolie," which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. The second provocative stereotype in this stanza is the understanding of the Chinese as heathen. "Heathen" is an interesting classifier for Asian immigrants, one that was quite popular in the 19th century. The term can mean one who is uncivilized, uncultured, and immoral, and it most definitely was imbued with such intent when targeted towards Asian immigrants. But there is also a religious connotation to the term. In their otherness, the Chinese were viewed as ungodly. Despite the racism towards Irish and Italian immigrants at the time, these populations at least shared in the larger cultural tradition of Christianity. As Lee notes, California presented a utopia for white families, a land of free labor, but Chinese immigrants tainted "God's Free Soil" (R. Lee 15).

Furthermore, anti-Chinese campaigns repeatedly suggested that Asian immigrants were incapable and unwilling to assimilate to American culture. In this way, anti-Chinese activists separated Asian immigration from the less threatening white, European immigration, which allowed them to maintain the ideology of America as a nation welcoming to the "tired, poor, and huddled masses." As historian Erika Lee highlights, many witnesses before the 1876 California State Committee on Chinese Immigration stressed how the Chinese were too foreign, "unable to ever assimilate into American life and citizenship" (E. Lee 29). Europeans, however, were welcome additions to the United States, a nation of immigrants.

The stereotype of the Asian as pollutant therefore derives from the understanding of Asian immigrants as harbingers of disease, vice, poison, and ungodliness who would never accept American culture and thereby would destroy it. The notion of the Asian as

coolie extended this stereotype. In performing menial labor for low wages, the Chinese were accused of tainting the marketplace.

History of the Coolie

By 1852, Chinese immigrants managed a large share of the gold mining in California, and the amusement initially directed towards their culture quickly turned to antipathy. California began passing legislation to limit and dissuade Chinese immigrants from increasing their share in the labor market. In 1850, the state of California enacted the Foreign Miner's Tax in an effort to curb immigration. Under this legislation, any non-native person paid a fee of $20 to mine, but it largely excluded those of European descent. After failing to achieve results, a stronger tax followed in 1852, one that demanded a monthly subscription fee of $3 specifically from Chinese miners. When these taxes likewise failed to curb Chinese immigration, California's governor, John Bigler, took a more direct exclusionary approach. Bigler publicly stressed a desire for more whites to relocate to California, and he accused the Chinese of deception, greed, and anti-American sentiment (Wong iv). Bigler first used the word "coolie" in relation to the Asian workers. His anger struck a chord with white Californians, which led the California senate to pass a law in 1858 stipulating that "persons of Chinese or Mongolian races" could not enter the state of California, although this law was immediately challenged and ruled unconstitutional by the California Supreme Court. This exclusion act set the framework, however, for a series of subsequent legislation targeted towards Asian immigrants.

Bigler's sinophobic comments did not go unchallenged. As Wong notes, "[The

Chinese] went systematically about the task of publishing and arguing against the Governor's pronouncements…Efforts at clarification of terminology were made in order to discourage the use of the term coolie. All things considered, the Chinese presented a courageous albeit as later history was to prove an essentially ineffective stand on their own behalf" (Wong iv). Despite such organized stands against labor discrimination, the anti-Chinese sentiments proved too strong a barrier for any real progress.

"Coolie" is an important word to unpack, particularly since it does not trace solely to Asian immigration, although it has since been primarily associated with Asian immigrants. As mentioned earlier, Europeans first used the term in relation to Chinese and Indian workers who performed menial labor. In the U.S., the term was likewise associated with undesirable work performed by African Americans, and this comparison placed Asian immigrants on the same ideological level as slaves, at odds with the free labor of the white working class. Robert Lee explores the positioning of "Coolie Labor" as ideologically opposed to "Free Labor," and consequently representing a major threat to the white working class that rose to popularity towards the end of the 19th century. He notes that there were three major socioeconomic processes that adjusted the understanding of ethnicity in the United States. These processes included (1) the massive wave of immigration in the mid-19th century; (2) the emancipation of slaves; and (3) the "homogenization of industrial labor" (R. Lee 53). In response to these cultural upheavals, a new understanding of the working class rose to prominence in terms of both race and economic class.

The mechanization of factory labor in the 1870s limited the need for skilled

laborers, and consequently opened up large opportunities for unskilled, immigrant labor. A severe depression hit in 1873, and business owners turned towards mechanization and the use of immigrant labor as a means of cutting costs and promoting efficiency at the workplace (R. Lee 55). Foreign laborers including the Irish and Chinese were frequently called upon as strikebreakers. During the 1873 Depression, wages for laborers declined sharply, and unlike other sectors of the marketplace, these wages did not regain their pre-Depression levels before the end of the century (58). "Coolie" therefore became more than a derogatory insult for a people willing to perform cheap work. It became a threat to the entire working class. Although there was a complex system of actions responsible for the depression in the 1870s, much of the blame fell on the shoulders of Chinese immigrants. According to anti-Chinese sentiment, Chinese laborers lowered the wages of the white working class and consequently destroyed their Edenic Free Labor movement.

In the 1870s, organized anti-Chinese movements hit their peak, as groups such as the Anti-Chinese Union and the Supreme Order of the Caucasians formed with the sole purpose to push Asian immigrants out of the United States. As more immigrants moved to the U.S., violence broke out in the larger cities including Seattle and Los Angeles. As a result, Congress began formulating a federal response to the "Chinese problem." Eventually, Congress passed the Naturalization Act of 1870, which offered U.S. citizenship to African Americans, but continued the exclusion of members of Asian descent. A few years later, the Page Act of 1875 restricted immigration to those considered "undesirable," including Chinese laborers and prostitutes. The bill was sponsored as a means to "end the danger of cheap Chinese labor and immoral Chinese

women" (Peffer 28). In reality, the bill's implementation only diminished the number of female Asian immigrants, and it did little to curb the arrival of male laborers. Although unsuccessful, the Page Act proved a powerful precursor to the infamous Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

The Chinese Exclusion Act has the fame of being the first enforced law in the United States to limit immigration based on a population's specific ethnicity. Signed into law on May 6, 1882 by President Chester A. Arthur, the law was not repealed until 1943. Congress created this act to protect the "good order of certain localities" within the country to which Chinese laborers posed a threat. Therefore, the law specifically banned Chinese laborers, both skilled and unskilled. While non-laborers technically had the opportunity to enter the country, it was very difficult to prove such status. Erika Lee likewise noted that the Act promoted a built-in class hierarchy, wherein the rich, elite Chinese travelers found little trouble gaining access to the United States and faced little scrutiny from port officials (E. Lee 87). Furthermore, while the Act did not deport Chinese laborers already living within the country, it did ban the re-entry of laborers. Consequently, many Chinese men lost the opportunity to visit their wives and families that remained in China. The Act was initially in place for 10 years, but it was renewed for another 10 years in 1892, and then renewed indefinitely in 1902. It was only repealed for the sake of Chinese diplomacy in WWII. For 61 years, the Act halted Asian immigration in the United States.

It would be wrong to assume that all U.S. citizens supported the Exclusion Act. More liberal thinkers, such as Massachusetts' Senator George Frisbie Hoar condemned

the Act as the "legalization of racial discrimination" (Daniels 54). For more practical reasons, industrialists also condemned the exclusion of Chinese immigrants because it increased the cost of labor. Asian populations in the United States did not quietly accept the ruling. In the first few decades, thousands of appeals reached federal courts, with many petitioners winning their cases. These collective disapprovals, however, did not overcome the institutional support for the Exclusion Act.

In action, the Exclusion Act proved powerfully dangerous to Asian immigrants living in the United States because it publicly and legally reinforced the threatening stereotypes of Asian immigration. The ratifying of the Act proved an acceptance of Asian as both pollutant and coolie. Violence against Asian immigrants increased after the passing of the Act. The Rocks Springs massacre of 1885 is a terrifying example of anti-Chinese hysteria. In this massacre, a group of 200 white laborers attacked a group of 600 Asian co-laborers. By the end of the night, 29 Chinese laborers were dead and all 600 were driven from their home, which had been torched by the angry mob. All accused white laborers were acquitted due to a lack of evidence (R. Lee 64). Such violence shocked many Americans, and popular political cartoonists often defended the Chinese immigrants, arguing for fairer treatment by the U.S. government. The next section explores some of early visual depictions of Asian immigration that predate cinema.

Early Visual Representations

In the 19th century, factors such as the growing literacy rate, the invention of high-speed presses, and the creation of the telegraph all influenced the rise of mass media, particularly the popularity of newspapers. Consequently, around the time that Asian

immigrants first moved to the United States, political cartoons were also gaining influence with the American public. This is due in large part to the success of cartoonist Thomas Nast, who over the course of his three decades with the magazine *Harper's Weekly* popularized iconic American figures including Uncle Sam, the Democratic Donkey, the Republican Elephant, and even the modern representation of Santa Claus. Nast was fairly outspoken in the public debate surrounding immigration and the Chinese Exclusion Act, publishing over 40 cartoons that were predominantly sympathetic to Chinese immigration. On the other hand, satire magazines including *The Wasp* and *Puck* published many unfavorable depictions of Chinese immigrants, supporting the public's negative opinion. In particular, *The Wasp*'s cartoonist George Keller served as a counter to Nast, and his sinophobic cartoons influenced the mass hysteria that led to the government's exclusionary laws. In examining political cartoons of the era, one can map the ongoing debate in popular culture.

Thomas Nast is famous for his crusade against corrupt political machines and his fervent support for Abraham Lincoln and his associated ideals of democracy. Nast's cartoons primarily supported the Chinese, demonizing those who injured and oppressed them. However, his full body of work complicates his true opinion of Chinese immigrants. At the start of the Chinese immigration, Nast created unflattering cartoons of Chinese immigrants, including "The Martyrdom of St. Crispin" (1870, Fig. 1.2) and "The New Comet" (1870, Fig. 1.3). The former depicts two Chinese laborers, armed with the blades of "cheap labor," in the act of decapitating a shoe cobbler who is in fact St. Crispin, the patron saint of leather workers. St. Crispin also bears a striking resemblance

to Abraham Lincoln, Nast's role model. Similarly, "The New Comet" depicts a throng of people observing the descent of an unusual comet; it has the head of a Chinese laborer and its tail is emblazoned with the words "cheap labor." The stargazers below belong to such groups as "capitalists," the "press," "politicians," and "working men." These two cartoons promote the depiction of the Chinese immigrants as coolies, a danger to the white working class with their cheap labor. "The Martyrdom of St. Crispin" is particularly negative because it not only suggests a threat, but also depicts the threat fully realized. The image of St. Crispin references the anti-Chinese labor union "The Knights of St. Crispin" that actively rallied for the exclusion of Chinese laborers. This cartoon would only further garner support for such anti-Chinese activist groups.

Despite these initial offerings, Nast's cartoons quickly turned supportive of the Chinese, presenting the just treatment of immigrants as fundamental to American liberties. Cartoons including "The Chinese Question" (1871, Fig. 1.4) highlight the violence and cruelty against Chinese immigrants. After the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, cartoons such as "E Pluribus Unum" (1872, Fig. 1.5) focused on the hypocrisy of the United States as a country of immigrants that excluded one particular ethnicity. In cartoons such as "Blaine Language" (1879, Fig. 1.6), Nast also lampooned Republican politicians that courted votes with anti-Chinese rhetoric, specifically James G. Blaine. Nast not only saw the Exclusion Act as a betrayal of the Burlingame Treaty of 1868 (i.e. signed with China to improve relations and ease immigration practices), but also an act of betrayal to Lincoln's party, who so recently fought for the emancipation and equal treatment of African Americans. In his cartoons, Nast frequently compared the

conditions of African Americans and Chinese laborers to draw attention to their similarities.

While it is tempting to argue that Nast's sympathetic support of Chinese immigrants is based on moral integrity, one must take his political leanings into account. Nast had a fervent dislike for Irish labor unions, specifically the Workingmen's Party and its leader Dennis Kearney. This dislike likely rooted from Nast's distaste for the Irish "Boss Tweed," but probably increased based on Kearney's vitriolic anti-Chinese rhetoric. The slogan of the Workingmen's Party was "The Chinese Must Go!" Irish immigrants, who received their fair share of racist and exclusionary practices, used Chinese immigrants as a scapegoat for anti-immigrant hysteria. Thanks to unions such as the Workingmen's Party, the question of immigration was drawn along ethnic rather than national lines. Irish immigrants claimed themselves as "good," and non-white immigrants as foreign and untrustworthy. Consequently, Nast's fervent support of Chinese immigrants doubled as a campaign against violent Irish labor unions. "The Chinese Question" (Fig. 1.4) is one of Nast's most famous cartoons, and it is likewise a good example of his anti-Irish sentiments. This 1871 cartoon depicts Columbia (ideological personification of America) in the foreground, defiantly comforting a sobbing Chinese immigrant, while a mob of violent Irish workers stare angrily upon them in the background. The Irish are not only depicted as unnecessarily violent and cruel, but they are also depicted as traitors of American values.

Despite Nast's best efforts, sinophobia ran rampant among American citizens, and other contemporary cartoonists reflect this hysteria. Cartoonist George Keller repeatedly

pitted the Chinese immigrants against American laborers in his works published in *The San Francisco Illustrated Wasp*. In cartoons such as "What Shall We Do with our Boys?" (1882, Fig. 1.7) Keller depicts the Chinese as malicious thieves, stealing from the mouths of the American working class. *The Puck* is another satirical magazine that often explored the Chinese immigration question in unfavorable terms, at the expense of Chinese immigrants and without mention of the violence they faced. Cartoons such as "Dodging the Exclusion Act" (1905, Fig. 1.8) yet again depicted the Chinese as deceptive and untrustworthy, breaking American laws and refusing to assimilate to American culture.

Representation in Film

The influence of political cartoons is undeniable. Even Abraham Lincoln called Nast "our best recruiting sergeant," owing much of his successful campaign to the work of Thomas Nast (Paine 69). Still, the power of these cartoons pales in comparison to the power wielded by cinema only a few decades later. The U.S. industrial revolution had a powerful influence on the rise in popularity of cinema. The millions of factory workers in major cities flocked to nickelodeons at the start of the 20th century. For the working classes, film provided an affordable means of escaping the cramped and undesirable reality of their home lives. The silent films of the era proved popular with American citizens and immigrants alike; with few intertitles, these films transcended language barriers. While only a handful a nickelodeons existed in 1904, that number ballooned to nearly 10,000 in 1908. And while cinema was originally associated with the working classes alone, the rise of narrative film began attracting middle class audiences (Cook 26-27). The intense popularity of cinema as a mass medium only continued to grow during

the first half of the 20th century. Consequently, early Hollywood's portrayals of Asian immigrants had a far-reaching influence.

As previously discussed, the threatening stereotypes of Asian immigrants as both pollutants and coolies originated in the mid-19th century and culminated in the Exclusion Act of 1882. These sentiments predated modern cinema, and consequently there is little cinematic record of the public's early perception of Asian immigrants. There are, however, numerous examples of how these — and additional — stereotypes manifested themselves in later years, and this project aims to explore these films. In studying films prior to the Production Code that incorporated Asian characters, specifically when these characters were non-Asian performers in yellowface, one can map the evolution of the public perception of Asian immigrants. The reality is that these threatening stereotypes may have evolved into new paranoia, but they endured for decades, and in some form still endure to this day.

***Chinese Laundry* (1894)**

One of the earlier, if not the earliest, example of cinematic yellowface came courtesy of Thomas Edison's 1894 film, *Chinese Laundry*. This film stars two vaudeville players, Robetta and Doreto, who created two films for Thomas Edison. Little is known of these two actors, except that they are of Italian descent. This film not only encompasses the stereotype of Asian as pollutant — devious, cunning, and dangerous — but it also explores the heated relationship between the Asian and Irish communities. To have members of the Italian community parody this relationship further complicates the animosity across racial lines.

As was common with early short films, *Chinese Laundry* clocks in at less than one minute (24 seconds), but its brief action reveals a number of cultural associations plaguing Asian immigrant reputations in the late 19th century. The film centers on two popular racial stereotypes — the deviant Asian immigrant and the buffoonish Irish copper. As mentioned prior, Italian vaudeville stars played both characters, so the respective races are established with the use of facemasks. These masks incorporate exaggerated facial features (e.g. slanted eyes), so *Chinese Laundry* is the earliest example of cinematic yellowface.

The scene focuses on the antics of an Irish police officer attempting to capture an Asian immigrant. The setting is bare — composed entirely of two doorframes, akin to something you would see as a theatrical prop. In fact, this "scene" is likely pulled directly from their vaudeville act. Despite the quick action and bare setting, the scene includes cultural markers that would have been obvious to contemporary American viewers. For example, the criminal activity of the Asian immigrant is not divulged, but the very title of the short film speaks volumes. As previously discussed, opium dens began springing up in California as a result of Chinese immigration, and these dens influenced the stereotype of Asian as pollutant. Historically, these opium dens were often housed in the back rooms of Chinese laundries. Consequently, to have a "scene" in a Chinese laundry, Edison is positing that the Asian immigrant is evading the law for his opium use. The very title of this film reflects the understanding of Asian as pollutant.

The blocking in the short film highlights the public's distrust of Asian immigrants. The scene opens with the immigrant smashing a vase over the officer's head.

While the officer repositions, the immigrant runs through a doorway, followed shortly by the officer. The two characters swing through the revolving door for a few rotations before the immigrant disappears again, leaving the officer in a dizzy. The immigrant then opens the second door, pulling himself upwards to perch on the top of the doorframe. When the officer finally runs through the second door, the immigrant smashes a piece of wood over his head and then disappears once more. That is the end of the film.

Clearly, violence is a focal point of this film, but performed for comedic effect. The tense and violent relationship between the Irish and Asian immigrants is flattened and ridiculed. Immigrants as a whole are mocked, and by men of Italian descent, which is the one ethnic group that would benefit from the debasement of both Irish and Asian workers. One could argue that the Irish are depicted most negatively in the film, since the officer is incompetent. However, the Asian immigrant is not portrayed as a victor. The film ends with the chase ongoing. The Asian immigrant is entrenched in an endless game of cat-and-mouse, forever evading the law, much like the endless rotation of the first doorway. He is represented as cunning, deceitful, violent, and most importantly, illegal. This portrayal reinforces the notion that these immigrants will not assimilate to American law, and they cannot be trusted because they disappear at every opportunity.

***The Painted Veil* (1934)**

Chinese Laundry is a very early example of the representation of Asians on screen. Fast-forward forty years, *The Painted Vei*l (1934) depicts Asians with a very similar frame of reference. While there are a multitude of films in the interim period that likewise present disparaging portrayals of Asians, these films offer a similar

representation and they do so at opposing ends of my historical timeline. The juxtaposition of these films consequently proves how public sentiment against Asian immigrants continued unwaveringly throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

The Painted Veil is a romance set in China, and it is exemplary in the way that it represents Asians as pollutants/coolies, in need of Western domination. It follows a young Austrian woman who, bored with her life, marries a British doctor and moves to Hong Kong. Once in China, she quickly tires of her husband and starts an affair with a British diplomat, but the affair ends when the diplomat refuses to leave his wife. She then follows her husband to an undeveloped, remote town in China that is battling a cholera epidemic, and when faced with his selfless actions, she learns to finally love him.

The film stars Greta Garbo as Katrin and Herbert Marshall as her husband Walter Fane, but perhaps the real attraction of the film is its setting. Based in Hong Kong, *The Painted Veil* is an excellent representation of the exotic lens through which Americans viewed China. Even before China is pictured, the film constructs a mysterious aura around it. Katrin marries Walter, not for love, but because she is bored with her life in Austria; she longs for adventure, and Hong Kong presents that opportunity for her. When asked how she would like China, she responds, "I like all of the places I haven't been." This is the first mark of othering; its opposition to the Western world defines China. As Said notes, "It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation...constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries" (Said 57). The first shot of China furthers this understanding. The camera moves from the familiar European space (of Katrin's kitchen) and fades into the bustling and hectic port in Hong Kong. The

first image in the port is of a pair of hands pouring tea, and this serves as a cultural bridge, since tea is both a Western and Eastern tradition. However, this familiarity is quickly replaced with chaos, as groups of Chinese characters eat hastily (with chopsticks), wrestle pigs, and jostle through crowds. Katrin marvels at the spectacle, taking photos of the "old world."

The festival scene is particularly rich in its exoticization of Eastern culture. The festival is an elaborate set piece with dozens of actors in ornate costumes and makeup. Said notes that a motif of the Orient is "danger" (Said 57), and the festival scene capitalizes on this danger in the form of fire and dragons. It presents the tale of the "sun god" battling a dragon to rescue a helpless maiden. The scene is an assault on the senses with overlapping action and a cacophonous soundtrack. Katrin marvels that it is "enchanting" and "so strange." She glibly comments about Buddha and Confucius, chastising her partner for disrespecting these gods, but in her excitement and curiosity, displaying her condescension of Eastern religion. Perhaps the defining characteristic of the Orient is its opposition to Christianity, and a continuous theme throughout early Hollywood films is the need to subjugate and transform Eastern worlds into a Christian theocracy.

There are many Asian extras in the cast of *The Painted Veil*, but Swedish-American actor Warner Oland plays the most prominent Asian character, General Yu, in yellowface. The reality of a large Asian background cast is remarkable because many studios chose wide-scale yellowface, even for the background players, since the presence of Asian actors often distorted yellowface in comparison. In other words, the studios

feared that placing an Asian actor next to a white actor in yellowface would draw attention to the false, often laughable, way in which yellowface distorts Asian features. Rather than updating the cosmetics for a more authentic look or actually giving leading roles to Asian actors, however, the studios solved this problem by using yellowface for the entire cast.

There are no thorough studies on the percentage of Asian actors in early Hollywood, and there are likewise few records of Asian extras in early films. However, out of more than 1,500 acting nominations in the history of the Academy Awards, only 1% went to Asian Americans — and a quarter of those nominations belong to Ben Kingsley alone (Prois). The earliest example is Merle Oberon's nomination for Best Actress in 1935; she remains the only Asian American to ever receive a nomination in this category. At the time, Oberon's heritage remained secret; she felt it necessary to announce Australia as her birthplace. Oberon's hesitation in revealing her true heritage doubtlessly stems from the discrimination that Asian immigrants faced in the early 20th century. In Hollywood, this discrimination appears to have continued to modern day. The USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism published a study in 2015 that explored the representation of minority groups in Hollywood films from the years 2007–2015. The study revealed that only 3.9% of films during this time included an Asian actor in a speaking role, and not one of the films in those nine years included a lead or co-lead played by an Asian actor (Smith, Choueiti, & Piper 2). During Oberon's heyday, yellowface prohibited many opportunities for Asian actors, but statistics prove that these opportunities remain limited to this day, despite the overall decline of

yellowface in the media.

In returning to the analysis of *The Painted Veil*, the choice to play General Yu in yellowface, and the hiring of Warner Oland in his role, is typical of that era. Warner Oland made his career by playing Asian characters. Although born in Sweden, he claimed to have Mongolian heritage, which he used to explain his "ethnic" appearance, although this heritage has never been proven. He became famous for originating both Dr. Fu Manchu and Detective Charlie Chan on screen, and by the time *The Painted Veil* was released, he was already renowned for his yellowface performances. As General Yu, Oland used few of the cosmetic techniques associated with yellowface. In fact, Chinese-American Keye Luke, who received his first film role in *The Painted Veil* before going on to portray Lee Chan in the Charlie Chan film series, remarked about how little preparation went into Oland's appearance: "All he did, was put that little goatee on his chin. Otherwise, he had his own mustache. Everything was just like that. No makeup. It's amazing" (Hanke 1). As a result, Oland relies on facial hair to demarcate his character's ethnicity. There are no other distinguishing markers; General Yu does not even have a Chinese accent.

General Yu appears in the latter half of the film when Katrin and Walter relocate to a remote village in the countryside with a severe cholera epidemic. General Yu is the government presence in that area; he wields authority, although his part is small with few lines. This authority, however, explains the need for yellowface. A Chinese character with power would likely pose too great a threat to American audiences. Despite his seniority, however, it is worth noting that General Yu takes direct orders from Walter, the

British medical doctor, whose only inherent authority is his European ancestry. General Yu flippantly asks, "Are you in charge of the military, too?" Walter responds, "No you are...but this is war against cholera. I'll advise you as to what to do." General Yu submits to this response.

General Yu plays into the disparaging stereotypes of Asian immigrants in one important scene. With the cholera epidemic at its height, Walter demands that General Yu evacuate the town that he believes to be the epicenter of the outbreak. He then instructs General Yu to burn it down. The General responds, "Impossible. Warehouses full of hemp. Most valuable silk. Tons of money invested, sir." Walter is adamant, but General Yu refuses to carry out the order. Consequently, the outbreak increases, putting more lives at risk. In this scenario, Walter is the white savior who needs to protect the Chinese citizens from themselves. General Yu operates out of greed, deceitfully disobeying Walter's recommendation. When Walter later enforces the burning of the town, the people are outraged, rioting and pillaging. Walter gets stabbed in the fray. The film presents these Chinese citizens as the ultimate pollutants. Not only are they disease-ridden, but they rampantly spread it. When they are faced with the opportunity to end the epidemic, they selfishly choose to protect their assets over human lives. Their community quickly turns to chaos, and they murderously oppose the benevolent Western influence. *The Painted Veil* reinforces how the Chinese need rational, Western influence because they cannot care for themselves. It is a fervent supporter of imperialism.

What the film does not explore, however, is the careless and ruthless way in which Walter demands the destruction of 6,000 homes. He mechanically orders the

burning of a village without planning for the consequences. The film, however, never feels the need to clarify his attentions. As the white savior, Walter is placed in the superior position. The film does not question his decisions because it suggests that his decisions are inherently correct[1]. Consequently, the riot at the end of the film is viewed as chaos resulting from an undeveloped community rather than fear resulting from the loss of livelihood. In viewing this film, American audiences only see the irrational, chaotic, and dirty origins of Chinese immigrants. In protecting their own interests and failing to see the larger picture, the Chinese in the film are little more than animals with a mob mentality. This stereotype is then extended to Chinese immigrants in America, and more largely extended to all Asian immigrants. This is the danger of the pollutant and coolie stereotypes.

Conclusion

Chinese Laundry and *The Painted Veil* are among dozens of early Hollywood films in which Asian immigration is portrayed through a Western lens. I selected these two films because they are at the opposing ends of the date range in which this project falls (1894 – 1934), thus confirming that the harmful stereotypes of Asian immigration lasted well into the period of classical Hollywood cinema, and consequently were ingrained at the time the industry self-regulated with the Production Code. These films

[1] The 2006 version of *The Painted Veil*, starring Naomi Watts and Edward Norton, pays far greater attention to British colonial rule in the area, suggesting the dangers of imperialism and placing the Chinese anger, confusion, and customs into sympathetic context. General Yu (here Colonel Yu) is a far more impressive character, protecting the interests of his people while compromising with Walter's needs. The differences in the two films reflect the evolved perceptions of Asian citizens in the 70 years between debuts. Imperialism is now coded barbaric, while it once signified strength and necessity.

are also notable representations of both the coolie and pollutant conventions. *Chinese Laundry* conveys the Chinese as cunning and dangerous. In placing Chinese immigrants at odds with the Irish, the film makes reference to the way in which the Irish have blamed the Chinese for undercutting wages (coolie). In its setting, the film also ridicules the Chinese for polluting America with opium dens (pollutant). *The Painted Veil* similarly presents the Chinese as unruly and in need of dominion, diseasing their own land with their unhygienic practices (pollutant). Furthermore, the foreign setting exoticizes the Chinese immigrants, turning them into spectacle and reinforcing the superiority of Western lifestyles.

Both films also make use of yellowface in interesting ways, by first displacing Asian actors from positions of prominence on screen, and second by misrepresenting Asian bodies with the display of Orientalism. In casting Europeans to play these roles, the characters fulfilled these threatening stereotypes without imposing the humanity (and associated sympathy) that would have accompanied an Asian actor playing the role. Once again, it displayed the dominance of the Occident over the Orient. The foreignness of the Chinese bodies on screen is not natural; it is *made* foreign by non-Chinese bodies.

The pollutant stereotype in many ways foregrounded all future threatening stereotypes of Asian immigrants. As the unfolding of historical events displays, this fear of the Chinese polluting American soil informed not only political interactions with Asian countries, but also policy making. I would argue that it is an idea present in today's political climate; the U.S. government only traded the idea of the Chinese deflation of wages with the devaluation of currency, moving China's manipulation of the economy

from a national to global scale (Gough). As Lee succinctly notes, “The fact of John Chinaman’s arrival from the East, his language, food, dress and labor, his very body polluted the Eden that California represented” (R. Lee 50). Since their arrival in the mid-19th century, the very presence of Asian bodies on U.S. soil proved a threat, and that pollution only increased as immigrants entered the homes. This threat of Asian as sexual deviant will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Representation of the Deviant

In Robert G. Lee's "Six Faces of the Oriental," he introduces the concept of Asian as *deviant*, a stereotype that proved threatening to the white home and race. The previous chapter discussed the image of Asian as pollutant and coolie; in crowding the workforce and devaluing wages, these stereotypes threatened the livelihood of white families, but the deviant goes further by threatening the very genetic make-up of the white American. Still, miscegenation narratives proved popular in early Hollywood, much like the popularity of gangster films. There was something about the illicit (in terms of both sex and violence) that captivated audiences, even as it pushed the boundaries of censorship and spurred family activist groups into action. Interracial relationships were one of the most taboo themes available to filmmakers, and many made use of these narratives to elevate their craft; some, such as D.W. Griffith, even claimed to use miscegenation narratives, such as *Broken Blossoms* (1919), to promote tolerance of other races, although his desire to promote tolerance likely resulted from the criticism of racist depictions in *Birth of a Nation*. Regardless of the intention, Hollywood miscegenation narratives inevitably ended in heartbreak and death, thus neutralizing the threat that the Asian deviant posed to the white genetic line.

This chapter focuses on the history of the stereotype of the Asian as deviant and its subsequent media representation. I will begin this analysis by outlining the historical context surrounding the creation of this stereotype, as well as the U.S. government's response to this threat. I will then turn to Hollywood and explore how the Production Code complicated miscegenation narratives and influenced the industrial practice of

yellowface. Finally, I will explore how the stereotype of Asian as deviant played out in early Hollywood miscegenation narratives, and how these tales differentiated between female and male Asian bodies. For the study of female representation, I will use *Madame Butterfly* (1915) and *The Forbidden City* (1918) as case studies. For male representation, I will explore *Broken Blossoms* and *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933). While there are additional examples of early Hollywood romances between an Asian and white partner, some of them even offering starring roles to Asian actors, my focus remains on films that make use of yellowface, thus skewing Asian representation through a white lens.

History of the Deviant

Robert G. Lee notes that "Sexuality, like race, is a socially constructed category of power, formed by the social and political relations of a given culture at a given moment" (Lee 85). By the late 19th century, the average U.S. household underwent a transformation as a result of Victorian influence, and both upper and middle class homes subscribed to what historians call the "Cult of Domesticity." This culture divided the sexes into two distinct spheres wherein males dominated the public sphere of work, politics, economics, etc., while women dominated the private sphere of housekeeping, child-rearing, and religious education.

As this ideology took root in the fabric of the American nuclear family, millions of Asian immigrants relocated to the United States in the hopes of prospering. As was discussed in Chapter 1, Asian immigrants initially succeeded in both agricultural and industrial labor, but public sinophobia as well as a series of exclusionary laws pushed

Asian immigrants out of the workforce. As a result, many male immigrants moved into white households as domestic servants. Simultaneously, more than 10,000 Chinese women were brought into the United States for prostitution. These two events resulted in a clash of the spheres; Asian men inhabited the domestic sphere of the white woman, and Asian women inhabited the public sphere of the white man. As Lee notes, "The cult of domesticity, only partially successful as an ideology of sexual repression, succeeded in constructing the bourgeois family as a private sphere of chastity and piety" (88). Asian immigrants presented an erotic infiltration of both spheres, a destabilizing presence to the familial unit, and a pollution on the revered chastity and piety of the home life. Furthermore, they presented a third sex, "an alternative or imagined sexuality that was potentially subversive and disruptive to the emergent heterosexual orthodoxy" of the Victorian era (88).

Eugene Franklin Wong explains the basic threat posed by the Asian immigrant's infiltration of both the private and public spheres. "Generally speaking, the foundation of white racism is laid upon biological, that is genetic, ground. Thus because genetic intermixing or interchanging takes place by way of sexual intercourse, the maintenance of the so-called purity of the white race is contingent upon a prohibition against interracial sex and marriage" (Wong 21–22). Victorian ideology promotes sexual repression as a cardinal virtue, and eroticism was therefore a major sin. The close proximity of an Asian body within these spheres proved a threat on two fronts: (1) the immigrant threatened the stability of the Victorian family unit, and (2) perhaps more alarming, the immigrant threatened the stability of the white genetic line. Previously

transcribed as pollutants, Asian bodies furthered this stereotype as a source of racial pollution. Simply the possibility of interracial intimacy proved too great a threat to the home, and therefore the presentation of Asian as deviant allowed for the barring of miscegenation, which thereby preserved racial stability (Lee 10).

Although deviant referred to all "Orientals," it is important to break down the stereotype by gender, since early representations of Asians in popular culture varied greatly by gender. Regarding relationships between Asian and Caucasian people, the white male/Asian female pairing has historically been more acceptable to the public than its inverse. This, of course, is not surprising considering the white male's dominance in Western culture. As Wong notes, "White males are generally provided the necessary romantic conditions and masculine attributes with which to attract the Asian females' passion. Asian females are allowed to culminate their love of the white males in explicit sexual activity on the screen" (Wong 27). Asian females were shipped to the United States for prostitution; therefore, their very existence was sexualized. White men formed sexual relationships with Asian women in the public sphere, but they did not bring them into the sacred private, domestic sphere. Asian women in such relationships have historically been depicted as passive and silent, suffering for illicit love of their white partner, but accepting of the reality that they cannot be together. For all of these reasons — lack of aggression, exclusion from private sphere — relationships with Asian women proved more tolerable and less threatening, although such relationships would never be accepted as legitimate. The Asian woman is "an almost invisible and absolutely voiceless figure in nineteenth-century popular entertainment," and likewise there are few

depictions of her in early Hollywood cinema. When she is depicted on screen, however, she tends to be passive and victimized (Lee 90–91).

The pairing of the Asian male/white female was far more threatening to Americans in the late nineteenth century because, unlike the Asian female, the Asian male posed a direct threat to the domestic sphere, and by extension, the American family. Within the cult of domesticity, the "true woman" espoused four ideals: piety, purity, submission, and domesticity (Welter 152). This woman repressed sexual desires and served the needs of her husband and children. As previously discussed, many Asian men turned to domestic work when they were driven away from agricultural and industrial labor, working closely with these white women. Their presence posed a threat in several ways. First, the Asian male threatened the chastity of the true woman, whether through sexual aggression or romantic intimacy. Second, the Asian domestic servant threatened the gender norms of the time by infiltrating the domestic sphere and participating in "woman's work" (Lee 104). Consequently, Asian males in miscegenation narratives are depicted as either sexual attackers, preying upon white women, or as "character eunuchs" who are unable to obtain the love of the white woman or consummate a relationship, which thereby reinforce the dominance and fertility of the white male (Wong 26).

As a result of these fears of Asian bodies infecting the home and destabilizing Victorian ideology, white Americans further stigmatized Asian immigrants. In addition to the federal laws prohibiting Asian immigration, many local governments also passed laws to limit the freedoms of Asians already residing in the United States. With regard to the stereotype of Asian as deviant, the most relevant set of laws is the various anti-

miscegenation laws. These laws banned the marriage, and in some cases sex, between interracial partners, specifying such acts as felonies. In the United States, such laws have existed since the late seventeenth century within the thirteen colonies. While these laws often specified the banning of relationships between white and black populations, many laws used more generic terminology, referencing "colored" or "non-white" people. Certain states also made specific reference to Asian or "Mongolian" groups. In fact, by the year 1950, 15 states, mostly in the Western part of the country, had written anti-miscegenation statutes that specifically targeted Asian populations (Chin and Karthikeyan 3). While one could argue that these laws existed in states with large Asian populations, such as California, that was not always the case. Some states used these laws as a means of guarding the social and economic dominance of white populations, and therefore relegated Asian populations to the lowest strata of the class hierarchy in line with Black and Native American populations (4). For Americans at the height of the Jim Crow era, these laws protected the racial purity, and continued dominance, of the white American family. These anti-miscegenation laws remained in effect until 1967 when the Supreme Court ruled them unconstitutional in the groundbreaking case *Loving v. Virginia*. Inevitably, the threat of Asian as sexual deviant supported and prolonged these laws.

Miscegenation in Early Hollywood

Films that centered on the illicit — and illegal — relationships between interracial couples found some success in early Hollywood. In the 1920s, however, public criticism of morally questionable content forced the studios to self-regulate before the government

handled the task. In 1927, the studios drafted a list of "Don'ts" and "Be Careful's," based on material that had previously irked the censorship board. This list evolved into the 1930 Motion Picture Production Code, also known as the Hays Code after Will Hays, the President of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), which adopted the Code. From 1930 until 1968, this Code guided the content of all Hollywood films, although the Code was not strictly enforced until 1934. This Code banned various items including profanity, nudity, and childbirth, while warning studios to exercise caution when depicting things like sedition, marriage, and drugs. For the purposes of this project, the most important tenet of the Code is #6 on its list of banned practices: "Miscegenation (sex relationships between the white and black races)."

Hollywood's ban of miscegenation narratives should not surprise anyone considering the robust series of anti-miscegenation laws around the country. Still, Hollywood's enforcement of this provision has a different effect than its legal counterpart. As Susan Courtney argues in *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation*, the Production Code's "forms and effects were considerable and unique: it shaped not only who could be imagined doing what with whom, but also how spectators would be cinematically trained to read 'race'" (Courtney 15). In other words, while anti-miscegenation laws physically banned these interracial relationships, Hollywood's ban of them erased even the possibility of these romances. In erasing these relationships from the public's imagination, it demonized them far more effectively than any legal statute.

There is a paradox in the Production Code's anti-miscegenation clause. As was listed above, the Code clarifies that miscegenation is banned between people of "white

and black races." Therefore, miscegenation between members of white and other non-white populations is up to discretion of the censors, and this clause was enforced unevenly when referencing relationships between white and Asian populations. Courtney argues that this clause in the Production Code dichotomized our understanding of race into a "white" and "black" binary, and transferred understanding of race from bloodline to visual representations. She notes, "with the help of the miscegenation clause classical Hollywood cinema gradually shifts the location of racial meaning from invisible discourses of 'blood' and ancestry to visual discourses of skin, color, and cinema itself" (Courtney 15). This is important with regard to yellowface because this practice negotiated the understanding of the Asian race through certain visual characteristics (i.e. slanted eyes). This visual mapping of race allowed for the use of white actors in non-white roles.

The anti-miscegenation clause affected the representation of Asians on screen in several ways. On the production level, it influenced the widespread use of yellowface because it prohibited the coupling of interracial actors in leading roles. The anti-miscegenation clause not only barred interracial relationships between onscreen characters, but also the physicality of it between actors, regardless of the races they portray on screen. A good example of this is *The Good Earth* (1938), a film set in China focusing on the relationship between a Chinese husband and wife. Paul Muni was cast as the husband; famed Chinese actress Anna May Wong yearned for the role of O'Lan, the loyal wife, but she was overlooked for Luise Rainer, who ultimately won the Oscar for her portrayal. The censorship board blocked Wong's casting; a pairing between Muni and

Wong would violate the anti-miscegenation clause, despite the fact that both characters on screen are Chinese. The anti-miscegenation clause did not limit the number of films starring Asian characters; it just limited the number of Asian actors who received the opportunity to portray them.

Still, the use of yellowface could not hide the threat posed by the suggestion of interracial romance. As film historian Thomas Doherty notes, "Occidentals playing Oriental in an all-Asian world submerged the erotic tension behind the interracial makeup, but an Occidental cast doing double-duty as Asian and American could not disguise the desire for East to meet, and mate, West" (Doherty 269). Consequently, the enforcement of the Code complicated the popular miscegenation narratives. The clause's ambiguous language, however, posed some problems for the censors. Courtney rightly notes that several miscegenation narratives between whites and Asians, Native Americans, and Mexicans premiered after the enforcement of the Code and to great acclaim. This would seem to indicate that the censorship board adhered literally to the clause's binary of "black" and "white." There were also, however, deviations from this assumption. For instance, in 1929 the Hays Office reviewed a play *Congai,* which they summarized as "deal[ing] with the relations of a half-caste woman of Indo-China with French officers." Ultimately, they rejected the manuscript noting that it "deals directly with miscegenation — with sexual relations between yellows and whites...one of the eleven themes the producers...agreed to avoid" (Courtney 119). In this instance, the Hays Office identified any miscegenation as dangerous. Three years later, however, the Hays office approved the 1932 remake of *Madame Butterfly* arguing, "The interpretation of

miscegenation under the Code has always been guided by the second dictionary definition which specifies whites and negroes only" (122–123). Courtney suggests that the confusion over the clause could arise from the fact that the original 1930 pamphlet form of the Code did not include the parentheses denoting the black/white binary. Still, it seems that the ultimate reasoning behind such decisions escapes understanding and consistency. Courtney argues that it is an example of how Hollywood began reading race in a black/white binary, and consequently Asian immigrants were coded as either forbidden or acceptable, depending on the whim of the censor reading the script.

Case Studies: Asian as Deviant 1915–1932

I have mapped how the stereotype of Asian as deviant originated as a defense mechanism to protect white genetics in an era of increased protectivism wherein whiteness coincided with Americanness. This stereotype led to legal statutes banning Asian immigrants from basic freedoms, which subsequently led to studios banning them from the screen, although it did not ban the representation of Asian bodies on screen. Rewinding to the time prior to the Motion Picture Production Code, it is important to analyze how this stereotype manifested itself in early Hollywood representations, which in turn built the framework for the exclusionary miscegenation clause in the Code. I plan to use four film case studies that explore how Hollywood depicted Asians as sexual deviants. As previously discussed, society coded Asian men and Asian women differently, and consequently the films explore these differences. These films all star a white actor in yellowface as the Asian love interest, thus placating censors even prior to the implementation of the Production Code. I use these films because the white actors,

through the use of yellowface, represent their understanding of the Asian immigrant; this, of course, is an understanding founded upon and colored by the stereotype of Asian as deviant. Yellowface facilitates the depiction of Asians through a white lens, and consequently allows for an understanding of society's impression of these stereotypes.

Passivity and Assimilation: Asian Female Representation

The relationship between Asian women and white men is one littering the history of popular culture in the United States. Early representations of Asian women in Hollywood fell within one of two categories: the Dragon Lady or the Butterfly. The Dragon lady is cunning and manipulative. The Butterfly, on the other hand, is passive and loyal. Jessica Hagedorn, a Filipino artist, summarizes this binary best: "If we are 'good,' we are childlike, submissive, silent, and eager for sex or else we are tragic victim types. And if we are not silent, suffering doormats, we are demonized dragon ladies – cunning, deceitful, sexual provocateurs" (Hagedorn 74). Dragon Ladies are the villainesses in early Hollywood — think of Anna May Wong in her slinky dress, arched eyebrows, and long, weapon-like fingernails. The Dragon Lady exists to oppose and destroy the white, male hero. As such, she rarely consummates an interracial relationship; she is sexualized but without sex. While she is a fascinating stereotype, for the purposes of this project, I would like to focus on the Butterfly who is a staple of popular culture and the more widespread cinematic representation of Asian women, and more pertinent to the exploration of the deviant stereotype. The Butterfly and her consummated relationships with white men fully realize the threat of miscegenation and related blood pollution.

The Butterfly is a young Asian woman who is silent, obedient, and loyal. She is

mistreated by the Asian men in her life, and consequently in need of saving by a white, male hero. This archetype came to prominence at the end of the 19th century, first with John Luther Long's short story "Madame Butterfly," (1898) and next with Puccini's famed opera *Madama Butterfly*. While various pieces of the short story change in the adaptation, there are a few key elements that are consistent. An American officer arrives in Japan and takes a Japanese wife for the duration of his stay. He returns home to America while the young wife bears his child; she waits years for his return. Finally, he returns to Japan with an American wife, and they desire to take the child to America. In the majority of adaptations, the Japanese wife hands over her child before committing suicide. Four eponymous film adaptations were produced in 1915, 1919, 1932, and 1995, as well as a variety of loose adaptations including *The Toll of the Sea* (1922), which presented Anna May Wong in her first starring role. The variations between narratives are small in number. The primary differences are 1) whether the American loves his Japanese wife, and 2) the method in which the Japanese wife kills herself. In the short story, the Japanese wife harms herself, but decides to live; this is the exception, however. In the film adaptations, she always dies, either via hara-kiri or drowning.

This project will specifically focus on the 1915 silent film adaptation of *Madame Butterfly* directed by Sidney Olcott and starring Mary Pickford in yellowface. The narrative of this film follows the opera's closely. An unfeeling American husband, Pinkerton, abandons his Japanese wife, Cho-Cho San. She patiently waits, only to find out that he has married an American wife. The American wife asks to take the child of Pinkerton and Cho-Cho San to America. Cho-Cho San complies. After relinquishing her

child, Cho-Cho San ends her life by walking into a river.

Unending loyalty and frailty are the two primary traits of the Butterfly archetype. The film clearly highlights Cho-Cho San's loyalty through her actions, particularly the ultimate sacrifice of her life. Her last words are in honor of her husband, "O my ancestors. Never let that honorable Pinkerton know what I am going to do for him." She sits by the window for hours, awaiting his return. She thinks of his comfort to her last breath, despite his abandonment, betrayal, and overall lack of affection. In its final message, the film asks, "Could one give up more for love than did little Cho Cho San?" Continually, the film sympathizes with Cho Cho San's situation and vilifies Pinkerton. The character of the American Consul, a man that speaks kindly to Cho Cho San and refuses to shake Pinkerton's hand, personifies this feeling. The film sympathizes with her, yes, but also proves condescending, treating her situation as the mistake of a child. This childish frailty was planned in the very casting of Cho Cho San.

By the release of this film, Mary Pickford was bona fide Hollywood royalty. Known as "American's Sweetheart," she won over audiences with her virginal girlishness and sly personality. Her casting was an interesting choice for Cho Cho San because Pickford's personality was demanding, which seems at odds with the submissive Butterfly. Reportedly, Pickford and Olcott even fought over the character, with the director asking Pickford to be more reserved in her portrayal. Regardless, Pickford succeeded in representing the fragility of the "Pretty Daughter of Japan"; her small stature (just 5'1'') helped transmit childishness, particularly when she was placed next to the looming height of Pinkerton or the American Consul. The film reinforces this frailty

in its description of Cho Cho San. At various moments in the film, she is alternately called "little," "pretty," and "small." Kang argues that this frailty is an important feature of the Butterfly because it suggests that "she must desire to be saved from her fate in some way. By such projection, the European fantasized about the Eastern woman's emotional dependency on him" (Feng 75). This frailty insinuates that the Butterfly is available to the Western male gaze, both that of Pinkerton and the men in the audience.

Potentially, the Butterfly could pose a threat to the reputation of Pickford, who was celebrated for her virginal, unblemished characters. Although presented as innocent, the Butterfly still encapsulated the threat of immorality assigned to Asian immigrants. Yellowface protected Pickford from this scrutiny. In donning the face of an Eastern culture, she was not expected to adhere to the expectations of the Victorian West. Eastern women were already classified as pollutants, so in depicting a sexual relationship on screen, Pickford invoked this stereotype (Marchetti 84).

As previously discussed, *Madame Butterfly* places Cho Cho San in a favorable light, but it does not allow her to be happy. This is arguably her punishment for race pollution, but I also would posit that it results from her failure to assimilate to American culture. This film's message, above all else, is that assimilation is key to survival. This lesson is highlighted by changes the filmmakers made in adapting the short story. The film's title card reads "An exquisite picturization of John Luther Long's beloved classic," but the film alters key elements from Long's story, primarily relating to the heroine's ending. In Long's story, Cho Cho San survives, and keeps her child. In the film, Cho Cho San dies, and there is much meaning to glean from this decision. Her death is easily

explained as punishment for her transgression of miscegenation, but the baby's outcome is a far different story. The film makes a strong statement in the final scene with the American consul. The American wife asks to keep the baby, and Cho Cho San is outraged by the suggestion. Then, the Consul, who has been a friend to Cho Cho San, a voice of reason, and a stand-in for the sympathies of the audiences says, "Think of the baby's future. His father can do better by him." This statement is treated as fact, despite the father's betrayal and disinterest in the child. Cho Cho San immediately sees the logic in this statement and hands over her child. This exchange ensures Western dominance, and confirms the possibility of successful assimilation through a mixed-race child. It points to the West as the ultimate victor in love of both partner and nation (Marchetti 78).

In its argument for assimilation, the film presents another important comparison scene. While Pinkerton is in Japan, he receives a letter from his sweetheart in America. She declares her love for him in eloquent prose and beautiful handwriting. As he reads this note, Cho Cho San determinedly works on her own note for her husband. With shaky hands, she writes "I love you" in English. She walks outside to hand the note to her husband. He hurriedly hides his American love note and ignores Cho Cho San's declaration. She collapses on the ground, weeping at his reaction. As a viewer, this seemingly innocuous scene touched me more palpably than any other scene in the film. Cho Cho San's frailty is on full display; her handwriting is childish, but she endeavors so earnestly to complete the note. She has no chance to defeat her unknown rival, the educated and polished American woman. Cho Cho San's ignorance is worthy of sympathy, but this scene only further proves that the baby will have a more fulfilling life

in America with an educated family. Gina Marchetti notes in her book *Romance and the Yellow Peril*, "The Butterfly serves not only as a rationalization of American attitudes toward Japan; in her various guises, she also represents the necessary sacrifice of all people of color to assure Western domination" (Marchetti 79). Despite Cho Cho San's best efforts, she cannot successfully assimilate to Western culture because her upbringing was too far removed. But with her sacrifice, her child can succeed. The Butterfly is an archetype clearly pulled from this tale. Her loyalty is commended, but her frailty ultimately reinforces the necessity of Western influence. The Butterfly longs to be saved by a white man and pulled into his culture, but her foreignness proves too strong a barrier to her assimilation.

Another example of the Butterfly can be found in *The Forbidden City* (1918), a silent film starring Norma Talmadge as a Chinese princess in love with an American. The film is divided into two halves. The first half chronicles the forbidden love between the Chinese San San and American John Worden; they marry, have a child, and live happily until the Chinese emperor orders San San's death for her intermarriage. The second half of the film chronicles their child, Toy (also played by Talmadge), who moves to the Philippines as a Red Cross nurse and falls in love with the American Phillip Halbert. Halbert's guardian initially bans their union until it is revealed that the guardian is, in fact, John Worden, Toy's father. Toy and Halbert then marry and presumably live happily ever after.

There are clear differences in this story line from the archetypal Butterfly narrative. Primarily, the American is in love with the Butterfly, and while he departs

briefly on a mission, he returns for his wife. He departs the country with finality only after her death. John Worden also makes attempts at assimilation; early in the film we see that he is learning the Chinese language. It is unique for the white, male hero to take pains to assimilate into the Eastern world. Despite these differences, the themes pertinent to the deviant stereotype remain at the forefront of *The Forbidden City*.

The film opens with a foreboding quote from Rudyard Kipling: "The East is East and the West is West and never the twain shall meet." This quote is framed by a skulled figure in a long black robe — a visage reminiscent of the grim reaper. These words set the theme for the heartache and sorrow that accompanies the intermixing of the Western and Eastern worlds, or rather the intermarriage of people from the two. The title itself — *The Forbidden City* — hints at the unsanctioned romance between the races, one that results in the death of the Asian woman. It is interesting, however, how the cause of her death is at the hands of the Chinese emperor. The film places the burden on savage Eastern practices. The Western people might initially ban the intermarriage, but they ultimately relent to the love. This film presents the Western world as the sympathetic, moral superior.

Assimilation is another key theme in *The Forbidden City*, specifically with regard to how Asian female characters willingly assimilate to the world of the white, Western male. Like *Madame Butterfly*, successful assimilation is achieved through the child, but this film sees it fully realized. The half-American Toy is raised in the Emperor's harem where she lives as a quasi-jester to the Emperor's court. She stares longingly outside her window at the American flag billowing at the nearby consulate. She escapes the harem

and is finally accepted at the consulate, even earning the love of an American man. As the film suggests, Toy has finally found safety "under the flag of her father." I argue, however, that this acceptance is predicated on a few key details. First, Talmadge foregoes yellowface in her depiction of Toy; the intermixed daughter therefore, looks entirely white. Second, Toy ignores Eastern dress, even at the harem. Her appearance is entirely that of a Western woman. Her heritage only becomes clear when she announces it. Finally, her Western blood is the ultimate key to greater, if not full, acceptance. If she were not the daughter of Governor John Warden, her banishment would have continued. The "honorable" Americans can accept foreigners into society and approve of interracial marriage, as long as the foreigner looks, dresses, and belongs (at least partly) to the Western world. If not, miscegenation results in death — in this case of both parties — akin to the *Madame Butterfly* parable.

In comparing these two films, one other notable discussion is the depiction of Eastern lands. Japan in *Madame Butterfly* and China in *The Forbidden City* are identical. The landscapes, houses, even the rickshaws are replicas of each other. Even the yellowface of Pickford and Talmadge is similar. Said argues that one key element of Orientalism is the West's inability to distinguish between Eastern cultures. The similar ways in which Hollywood portrays China and Japan proves this argument. Furthermore, with regard to depiction of Asian women, "the genericization of Asian identities has been reinforced by the commonality of 'non-language' that these Asian female characters embody" (Feng 70). These women have no clear cultural markers to differentiate themselves from other Asian representations. They "speak" in the same, broken English,

praising their honorable husbands and saluting Buddha. Their foreignness is indistinguishable, and it is the Oriental identity that exists on screen.

Aggression or Castration: Asian Male Representation

Films with interracial relationships between an Asian man and Caucasian female offer one of two depictions of the Asian male: the eunuch or the sexual aggressor. Wong observes, "In romantic potential Asian males are essentially character eunuchs. In sexual potential they are depicted as primarily character rapists. In either capacity, Asian males are by the institutional racism of the film industry destined to acknowledge the sexual superiority of the white male and the untouchability of the white female" (Wong 27). *Broken Blossoms* and *The Cheat* are two films that support Wong's argument by characterizing Asian men as oversexed or sexless. In all cases, however, the men fail to earn the love and acceptance of the white female. And akin to the Butterfly narratives, all of these films inevitably end in heartache and death.

Broken Blossoms is a 1919 silent film by famed director D.W. Griffith. Upon its release, the film had an alternate title, "The Yellow Man and the Girl," which is an important indicator of how Griffith framed the film. He classifies the Asian male as "yellow" but the white female is just called "girl." This is a prime example of how whiteness is naturalized and coded as the dominant, primary race. In fact, Griffith does not present it as a race at all; it is the norm.

The plot centers on a young girl, Lucy Burrows, who is abused by her boxer father. She meets a Chinese man, Cheng Huan, who takes care of Lucy and ultimately falls in love with her. Despite Cheng Huan's best efforts, Lucy dies at the hands of the

father. Cheng Huan kills her father as a result, and ultimately takes his own life. The film is based loosely on Thomas Burke's story "The Chink and the Child." Griffith significantly altered the role of Cheng Huan to promote tolerance between races. As one might expect from a story with the epithet "chink" in its title, the short story paints Cheng Huan as a vagabond who frequents both opium dens and brothels. This representation, of course, aligns with contemporary understanding of Asian immigrants as both pollutants and coolies. Griffith, however, updates Cheng Huan to the status of missionary who travels to Western worlds to spread the good news of Buddha. Griffith was still in the process of rebuilding his reputation from his 1915 masterpiece *Birth of a Nation*, which received severe backlash for its racist depictions of African Americans. Griffith indignantly defended himself from charges of racism, and spent the rest of his career attempting to fix this image. *Broken Blossoms* is one such exercise where he promotes tolerance of interracial harmony on the surface level, but the film follows many racist tropes that further prove Griffith's own intolerance.

In interracial romances with an Asian male and a white female, there is often a love triangle where a white male bars the romance. In the case of *Broken Blossoms*, the white male is the alcoholic, abusive father of Lucy. Cheng Huan first officially meets Lucy crumpled in front of his shop, dying from a recent bout of abuse at her father's hands. Cheng Huan had previously protected her from the prying eyes of hungry men on the streets. In presenting an abusive father, the film highlights Lucy's frailty, naming her as "the butt of uncouth wit or ill-temper." This is only heightened by the casting of Lillian Gish as Lucy, a muse of Griffith known for playing innocent, suffering women.

Small in stature, Gish infuses Lucy with a childish temperament, and that makes the physical abuse of the father only more harrowing for viewers. Griffith explicitly shows the violent episodes in which the father whips Lucy with his switch. She dies with a baby doll in her hands. Such rough depictions of child abuse offended many audiences, but it certainly painted Cheng Huan as the hero of the tale. In this way, *Broken Blossoms* is the inverse of a film like *The Forbidden City*. Rather than the white male protector, Cheng Huan saves the white female in distress, providing what the film calls "the first gentleness she has ever known."

Despite this gentleness, Lucy does not reciprocate Cheng Huan's love. Griffith allows a seeming reliance on each other, but he does not suggest a true miscegenation story. In fact, when Cheng Huan leans in for a kiss, Lucy stares at him confusedly until Cheng Huan backs away. In this way, the Asian male is sexless. He does not fulfill his desires, although he dreams that she is his own. Lucy does not even consider him her equal; her pet name for him is "chinky." In this way, Lucy classifies him as a foreign object, one that does not pose a sexual threat. When her father bursts into Cheng Huan's shop to punish his daughter for their relationship, Lucy screams "It wasn't nothing wrong." Wrong, of course, would refer to a romantic relationship between Lucy and Cheng Huan, and on her part she was correct. She engaged in nothing more than a friendship.

The use of yellowface in this film is interesting because it does not comply with the exaggerated features used in so many other depictions of yellowface. To depict Cheng Huan's Chinese heritage, actor Richard Barthelmess hunched his back, wore Chinese

garments, and squinted his eyes. The only exaggerated cosmetic application appears to be arched eyebrows. Marchetti suggests that this light application of cosmetics feminizes Cheng Huan, and the "elaborate, exotic dress, his languid posture and gestures, and the use of soft focus and diffuse lighting to render his features less angular, more 'womanly'" (Marchetti 35–36). In feminizing Cheng Huan, Griffith neutralized the sexual threat that an Asian male posed to the white female. It also references how Asian immigrants invaded the domestic sphere and the public consequently feminized them for participating in "women's work." Even when the white male is the villain, his sexual dominance prevails.

Griffith's attempt at promoting tolerance does little more than garner sympathy for a deluded Chinese man who dares to dream of an interracial romance. Griffith does not allow even the fantasy of this romance to carry out unpunished. Marchetti perhaps summarizes best, "Stripped to its barest elements, *Broken Blossoms* still features the white virgin exposed and humiliated by contact with a man of another race, who loses his life for daring to presume he could possess her" (Marchetti 38). Griffith strips Cheng Huan of all masculinity so that he does not pose a threat to the white virgin, but he still kills all involved for the mere suggestion of miscegenation. Cheng Huan is sympathetic for his honest and pure love for a white woman, but ultimately remains sympathetic for knowing his place as a "yellow man."

The opposite trope in a white female/Asian male miscegenation narrative is a sexually aggressive Asian man bent on polluting the innocent, virginal white female. Inevitably, there exists a love triangle with a white male, but in this scenario, the white

male is the hero and protector, while the Asian male is the villain, who is punished for his transgressions. *The Cheat*, a 1915 silent film by Cecil B. DeMille is one of the best examples of this character dynamic. In this film, a wealthy Japanese admirer preys on a desperate white female, paying her debts in return for the promise of sex. She manages to pay him back and attempts to back out of the bargain, but he becomes violent and brands her back with a hot iron, claiming her as his property. In return, she shoots him in the arm. During the trial for the shooting, her husband pleads guilty to protect his wife, but when the guilty verdict is read, she relates the whole truth to the judge and courtroom. When she shows her branding, the courtroom erupts into chaos and attempts to attack the Japanese "cheat." He is arrested and the couple leaves the courtroom, the husband a free man.

The Japanese admirer is violent in his lust for the woman. When she is unconscious, he steals a kiss. When she attempts to back out of the bargain, he beats her and grabs her hair, throwing her to the ground. Of course, he also mutilates her flesh with his branding iron. He is the deceitful, selfish, manipulating immigrant depicted in the sinophobic cartoons at the end of the 19th century. He is a predator to the white female, and by extension the American family. He is the fear and cause of anti-miscegenation laws. Consequently, he receives deserved punishment by the justice system and crowd of angry, white citizens.

The Japanese admirer is played by Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa, one of the stars of the silent film era, and along with Anna May Wong, certainly the most famous Asian actor in early Hollywood. He made a career out of playing the forbidden love

interest or the sexually aggressive villain. *The Cheat* catapulted him to fame, while ironically also making him a heartthrob for white female audiences. It appears that the fantasy of illicit miscegenation excited, rather than offended, many female viewers. It is a provocative thought that an Asian villain, when played by an Asian actor, humanizes the character in some way. In this film, Hayakawa's villain does not die, but is rather imprisoned for his offense. He violently assaults a white female, but audiences come to admire him. How would this role have changed with the performance of a white actor in yellowface, depicted through the lens of Orientalism? Presumably, the villain would have been less attractive, more villainous, and more stereotypical. Viewers would be watching their prejudiced understanding of an Asian immigrant, rather than a nuanced performance by one in the flesh.

Eluding Classification: *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*

The final case study for this chapter is Frank Capra's 1933 pre-Code film *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*. This film proves an interesting study because the eponymous Chinese protagonist, General Yen, eludes the archetypes previously described. Yen (Nils Asther, in yellowface) is most certainly sexually aggressive, but he is also gentle to the American Megan Davis (Barbara Stanwyck). Over the course of the film, their romance evolves, and by the end, is reciprocal. While the two never consummate their relationship, this miscegenation narrative is more fully formed and realized than its predecessors. Still, Capra relies on many stereotypical tropes of Asian immigrants in this film.

The film follows an American missionary who travels to China to spread her

Christian message. During a riot, she is knocked unconscious and General Yen saves her, bringing her to his palace. The two then engage in a battle of the wits and — in Megan's opinion — soul. She believes she can change Yen and prove her Christian ideals. He believes she is naive. All the while, their mutual attraction grows, despite Megan's attempts to resist it. When Yen's concubine betrays him, Yen orders her death, but Megan intervenes and appeals to his humanity. Yen spares her life, but the concubine betrays him once more, and Yen loses his fortune and his army. Feeling guilty, Megan pledges herself to Yen, but he ultimately poisons himself, and she returns to America with the promise that they will be reunited after death.

The film had a prestigious opening at Radio City Music Hall on January 3, 1933, but it was a box office failure. Stanwyck blamed its poor reception on racist backlash to the interracial romance; she was quoted as saying, "The women's clubs came out very strongly against it....I was so shocked. [Such a reaction] never occurred to me, and I don't think it occurred to Mr. Capra when we were doing it" (Sterritt). Capra, however, knew of the risk in creating the romance. He even welcomed it. In his autobiography, he called this pet project "Art with a capital A," his opportunity at finally earning a glance from the Academy. By 1933, Capra had earned many accolades as a filmmaker, including the public's support, but he had not yet won an Oscar. His sole purpose for the film was to push boundaries, and he argued that it was "thirty years ahead of its proper time" (Capra 142). His intentions are even highlighted in the promotional posters for the film, which depict Megan in a scanty dress with the eyes of the Chinese Yen glued on her body. His hope was to provoke controversy, and he got his wish. The production of the film was

mired in the bureaucratic processes of the censorship board. At this time the Motion Picture Production Code was technically in effect (as of 1930), but it was not fully enforced until a year later. Consequently, Capra snuck his miscegenation treatment past the censorship board right in the nick of time. Overall, the board was relatively compliant with Capra's vision, waiving the Code's clauses on both miscegenation and derogatory depictions of foreigners, despite expectations of anger from morality groups and the Chinese foreign office (Doherty 272). Capra's desire to win an Oscar is important to any analysis of this film. He claims it is a beautiful romance, but in order to promote his award agenda, he accentuates Yen's foreignness and highlights the tropes of miscegenation narratives. This includes the aggressive Asian male who is castrated in his failure to consummate his relationship and who dies as a result of his illicit fantasy.

As previously mentioned, Yen inhabits both depictions of Asian males in miscegenation narratives; he is aggressive and gentle, oversexed and sexless. His aggression is apparent from his first screen appearance. Yen and Megan's "meet-cute," as it were, occurs when Yen runs over a Chinese servant with his cart, killing the boy. When Megan registers shock at his thoughtless destruction of human life, Yen shrugs his shoulders. Yen also executes rebels in Megan's presence, and treats his household servants (including his concubine) with aggression and disdain. There is also Yen's abduction of Megan, which aligns with the cinematic trope of the non-white male abducting the virginal while female. While the white hero normally saves her, this film features very few white, male characters. In fact, Megan separates from her fiancé on her wedding day, and he disappears for the rest of the film. There is a white male love-

interest for Megan, but he fails to protect and save her.

Capra also considered aggression in the casting of Yen. According to Capra, he initially wanted to cast a "tall, overpowering, real Chinese" actor in the lead role, but did not find any Asian options "imposing" enough for the austere general (Capra 141). At six feet, Swedish-born Nils Asther did make quite an impression as Yen, and Capra believed that his face promised the "serenity and mystery of a centuries-old culture" (141). His cosmetics emphasized sharp, angular features including the eyebrows and jaw line, as opposed to the softer, more feminine features of Cheng Huan. Capra's General Yen was methodically crafted to pose a threat to the virginal, Christian Megan. The greater the threat, the greater the film's controversy.

Despite Yen's violence, he showed interest in and gentility towards Megan. He did not condescend, but truly engaged in conversation with her. He altered his lifestyle to meet her wishes. In the end, he even ignored his instincts to please her. Megan wanted to change Yen, to convert him to a true Christian life, and Yen wanted to give that to her. This, of course, led to his downfall. In the East, it appear that Christian morality proves little effective in the face of more savage local practices. Capra paints China as a cruel, unfeeling country where the people are crude and deceptive. General Yen bucks this trope to some extent, but he also had a close American friend, Jones, who was able to teach Yen the intricacies of Western culture. If his character proves more sympathetic to audiences, it is because he shows signs of assimilation.

In his complexity, Yen fulfilled the illicit fantasies of Western woman, while also providing a pure love. With this combination, Megan began reciprocating his romantic

feelings, an anomaly for the white female in miscegenation narratives. As Wong notes, in most miscegenation narratives, "The sexually animalistic character of Asian males is shown in the context of an attack upon otherwise helpless white women: there can be rape, but there cannot be romance" (Wong 25). In *Bitter Tea*, there is a paradoxical romance, and Megan is far from helpless. She is strong, opinionated, and resourceful. Initially, Megan detests Yen, but the turning point in their relationship occurs during a dramatic dream sequence in which she fantasizes about him. This sequence grapples with Yen's two personas and is worthy of a close analysis.

The dream sequence opens with an invocation of the moon shining over the Eastern landscape. We are transported to Megan's bedroom, where she wore silk pajamas, cowering from the advances of an intruder who is breaking down the door. This intruder is none other than Yen, but a version of Yen with exaggerated Asian features, a Nosferatu-like stature, and a Chinese dressing gown. His advances are punctuated with an Eastern soundtrack. Clearly, his Oriental side proves dangerous. As his hands close around her throat, her protector jumps into the bedroom, a masked man wearing Western garb. The hero vanquishes the villain, and pulls Megan towards him into an embrace. When she unmasks her savior, however, she realizes it is none other than — Yen! His Western side has protected her. Megan smiles gratefully, and pulls him towards her bed. The camera spins in a dizzying circle, presumably emphasizing the confusing intermix of Yen's personalities. The sequence closes with an illicit kiss; consequently, the interracial romance is realized in Megan's fantasies, if not in Yen's. He is never able to physically fulfill his sexual desire.

Yen's binary is emphasized to great effect in this sequence, and the Western half prevails, much like it does in Yen's daily life. He generally foregoes Eastern garb, instead choosing to regularly wear his Western-styled battle uniform. He prefers the company of Westerners, and his large, imposing figure is unlike that of his countrymen. Despite Yen's foreign blood, which still proves the foremost barrier to their relationship, he embodies a Western lifestyle that allows the possibility of interracial romance, or at least acquiesces to the fantasy of it.

In her essay, "The Desiring of Asian Female Bodies" L. Hyun-Yi Kang writes, "I am interested in the uncanniness, that inexplicable 'somethingness' of the (abrupt) realization of the (sudden) closeness of the unfamiliar-distant" (Kang 5). She is writing about the desiring of Asian women, but I believe this observation proves particularly relevant to Megan's dream sequence. Megan grapples with the combination of East meets West, which typically results in violence or perversion. She detests Yen for his foreign ways, but is simultaneously attracted to this exoticism. The dizzying camera movement highlights this uncanniness, or her attempts at understanding her confused desires. In a way, Megan is grappling with her own Orientalism, her fetishism of an Asian body, and her illicit desires to assimilate it into her culture.

Assimilation is a complex theme in the film. General Yen assimilates to Western culture in key ways, including his dress, friendships, and desire for Megan. He also agrees to Megan's Christian plans to forgive his concubine. This attempt at assimilation results in his death, and the film consequently punishes Yen's attempt to shed his foreignness. Megan, on the other hand, ultimately attempts to assimilate into Yen's

world. At the end of the film, before his suicide, Megan approaches Yen in traditional Chinese costuming, and she serves him as would his concubine. She offers her body, life, and even her Christian identity to save Yen, but she ultimately fails. While Yen's suicide is a result of his public shame and ruination, it is also his final romantic gesture. In dying, he frees Megan from her illegal and "unnatural" love. He sacrifices himself, as Cheng Huan did for Lucy. In this way, Capra satisfies the censor board. He presents a romance that is neither consummated nor lasting. However, Megan also returns to America without her white fiancé. Jones comforts her with the thought that she will one day be reunited with Yen. While illegal on Earth, Capra posits that their romance might be sanctioned in the afterlife, although neither Yen nor Megan could agree on the understanding of an afterlife. Ultimately, his foreignness (and exotic religious upbringing) even prohibits this comfort.

Conclusion

Wong argues that "Interracial sex and death...have been allegorically associated with genetic intermixture and equated with race pollution, that is, the death of racial purity according to the ideology of white racism" (Wong 28). This is the root cause of the deviant, a threatening stereotype attributed to Asian immigrants and proliferated through miscegenation narratives in early Hollywood cinema. These films provide flattened portraits of onscreen relationships between Asian and Caucasian partners; there rarely is love, and even when it exists, the couple must be punished for it. Wong nicely summarizes the stipulations of these early miscegenation narratives:

> The system tradition of double standardized miscegenation permits [for] three gender relationships on the portrayal of interracial sex between Asiatics and whites: the first standard may allow interracial sex if the partners, both as actors and screen characters, are a white male and an Asian female. The second standard a) prohibits the depiction of interracial sex between an actual Asian male actor and a white female actress, and b) permits the simulation effect of interracial sex to be shown on screen so long as the Asian male character is in fact a white man in cosmetics. (28)

The first relationship is chronicled in the Butterfly narrative. In these tales, the relationship results in a child, so the sexual relationship is insinuated, even if it is never simulated. Films such as *The Cheat*, which starred Japanese actor Sessue Hayawaka, confirm the second relationship. He might have been attractive to white women, but his identity prevented any onscreen romance with a white counterpart. The third relationship — which is also the most rare — is confirmed by *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*. In Megan's fantasy, the two have sex, but that is only allowed because of Yen's Western features, as well as the casting of Swedish actor Nils Asther. The censor board would have likely been far stricter had Capra achieved his vision and cast an Asian actor in the role of the Chinese general.

Ultimately, these narratives prove that genetic impurity was a dominant and serious threat to the American family, and it could not be tolerated, even in the fantasy of Hollywood. In other words, these films proved how the "vulnerability of white femininity is what is at stake," and "it becomes equally clear that it is the frailty of white

masculinity, and its claims to authority and privilege" that these films protected (Courtney 65). Interracial romances with Asians threatened the dominance of the Western world. Consequently, Hollywood's miscegenation narratives were crafted to reinforce and ensure this dominance, hence the patriarchal desire of the Butterfly or the death of the oversexed and sexless male suitors. Even when directors such as Griffith or Capra intended to promote interracial tolerance, they reinforced this ideology by subconsciously presenting the character tropes already established for Asian immigrants. In all of these films, the dominance of the white male is protected and reinforced.

The next chapter looks at another dangerous threat that Asian immigrants posed to white Americans. The deviant might have threatened white genealogy, but the yellow peril threatened American lives.

Chapter 3: The Realization of the Yellow Peril

Jack London, the author of famed novels including *White Fang* and *Call of the Wild*, worked as a war correspondent for William Randolph Hearst at the start of the 20th century. While covering the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), he observed the stunning defeat of Russia at the hands of Japan, a small island nation whose victory catapulted it to the level of global superpower. In response to this war, London penned the following warning:

> The menace to the Western world lies, not in the little brown man, but in the four hundred millions of yellow men should the little brown man undertake their management…four hundred million indefatigable workers (deft, intelligent, and unafraid to die), aroused and rejuvenescent, managed and guided by forty-five million additional human beings who are splendid fighting animals, scientific and modern, constitute that menace to the Western world which has been well named the "Yellow Peril." (Tchen and Yeats 177)

For Americans, Asia constituted a far-away realm filled with savage people and mystical customs, but the safety of geographical distance weakened when Asians began immigrating to the U.S. in the mid-19th century. That safety then shattered with Japan's defeat of Russia. As London noted, Japan's military prowess suggested for the first time that Asia's citizens could organize, and this organization posed a severe threat to Western nations.

The previous threats that Asians posed to Americans — as *pollutant, coolie*, and *deviant* — related to their immigration into the United States, and the ideological struggle

to qualify America as a nation of immigrants while also maintaining the hegemonic dominance of the white, European genealogy. While Americans attributed these threats to all "Orientals," the brunt of prejudice actually targeted the Chinese whose immigration far surpassed that of other Asian countries. At the start of the 20th century, however, America's gaze turned outward towards its imperialist efforts in the East. These efforts to colonize Eastern lands escalated the Asian threat, not only because it created a new pipeline for Asian immigrants, but also because it awakened the imperial spirit in Eastern nations, including Japan. For the first time, the hordes of Asian citizens posed more than a threat to American culture – they posed a threat to American liberty. This fear of the East conquering the West, as Genghis Khan achieved in the 12th century, is known as the *yellow peril*, the fourth of Robert G. Lee's "Six Faces of the Oriental."

This chapter explores the origins of the yellow peril and the early Hollywood films that promoted this stereotype. It begins by outlining the historical background of the term, specifically resulting from the West's colonial expansion into Eastern territories. It next explores the multitude of threats awakened by these imperialist intentions. Regarding Hollywood, this chapter primarily focuses on the most infamous of yellow peril figures, Fu Manchu. By exploring the background of the Fu Manchu legend and providing a close analysis of the 1932 film *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, I will attempt to unpack how Hollywood proliferated the yellow peril stereotype, escalating American fears in the first half of the 20th century that continue into modern cinema.

ORIGINS OF YELLOW PERIL

Legend states that in the 1880s, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany had a prophetic dream wherein a giant Buddha riding a dragon traveled in a monstrous storm to destroy Europe (Tchen and Yeats 12). This dream affected the Kaiser so deeply that he commissioned artwork to depict this inevitable invasion (Fig. 3.1). The Kaiser coined this threat "die Gelbe Gefahr," or "the Yellow Peril," and this epithet quickly spread among Western nations, the preferred term to encapsulate Western paranoia of Eastern military aggression. As London suggested, while the presence of thousands of Asian citizens on U.S. soil concerned white Americans, the fear of millions invading their land terrified them.

Before delving into the acknowledged threats arising from the concept of the yellow peril, I must also comment on white masculinity's need for such narratives. Lee argues that "In an age of beleaguered Victorian masculinity…the 'fight to the knife' for racial survival served as a masculine tonic, another opportunity for regeneration through violence" (Lee 116). Richard Slotkin coined "regeneration through violence" as the ultimate myth of the American experience. He argues that the frontier posed a land of boundless opportunity for early American settlers, where they could freely practice their religion, pursue their passions, and gather their fortunes. To harness this frontier, however, the white settlers had to take it from the natives, typically through violent means (Slotkin 5). This violence resulted in the Indian Wars, a series of battles between European settlers and Native Americans. Slotkin writes "The Indian war was a uniquely American experience. Moreover, it pitted the English Puritan colonists against a culture

that was antithetical to their own in most significant aspects. They could emphasize their Englishness by setting their civilization against Indian barbarism" (21). I highlight this phrasing because it parallels American treatment of Asian immigrants, but this time the Americans emphasized their "Americanness" against what was seen as barbaric customs of Asia.

Consequently, the creation of the yellow peril narratives resulted from more than fear of Asian aggression. They presented an opportunity for white men to reassert their dominance, to use violence to shape and control the definition of America. As European settlers defined America by erasing all traces of Native Americans, the descendants of these settlers prohibited any foreign influence on this cultivated identity. Furthermore, the use of violence reaffirmed this very identity. This savage desire could not be acknowledged, however, nor did Americans necessarily understand it. Rather, white men masked these desires in their quests to protect their families. The fear of Asians invading their home, among other threats, gave the appropriate excuse for Americans to satisfy their more tribal hunger.

Christopher Frayling highlighted four threats against Western civilization that constituted the yellow peril. These threats came in the form of economic, immigrant, racial, and militant concerns (Frayling 254). According to Frayling, the economic threat arose from the fear of the Asian nations learning the strengths of modern industry, inundating the market with their products, and running Western businessmen out of the East (254). I would argue that the economic threat also existed on American soil, as was seen through the stereotype of Asian as coolie. Asians not only threatened to mass-market

products but also to mass market their labor, thus devaluing American wages.

The immigrant threat arose from the "hordes" of Asian immigrants flooding the streets of Western cities. In America, this threat was already realized by the influx of Chinese immigrants beginning in the mid 19th century. In the yellow peril narrative, U.S. imperialism only heightened this threat, specifically with the U.S. annexation of Hawaii in 1898 and U.S. victory over the Philippines in 1902. Additionally, by the turn of the 20th century, the United States held dominion over Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam, and Samoa. These imperialist practices inspired Rudyard Kipling to coin the phrase, "the White Man's Burden," in relation to the West's obligation to civilize "lesser developed" nations. The United States' interest in outward expansion is muddied. Doubtless, the U.S. felt pressure to join the imperialist race led by European empires that in 1878 controlled 67% of the earth's surface; less than 40 years later, Europe and the U.S. controlled 84% of the world (Ninkovich 9). A deeper reason underlies this manifest destiny; historian Frank Ninkovich believes imperialism served as the tool through which the United States confirmed its national identity. As a melting pot of cultures, the United States failed to cultivate the homogenous identity of its European allies. Imperialism helped this cause by fashioning the United States as a leader at the "forefront of civilization" (37). Anti-imperialist parties felt that colonization proved a betrayal to the very heart of American, democratic ideology. It reinforced, however, that the true American myth relied on violence rather than liberty. The U.S. shaped its identity by destroying others.

Despite several successful annexations, the acquisition of new territories in Asia brought the renewed threat of immigration from Asian bodies. A slew of anti-colonial

groups formed. Some believed imperialism stood at odds with America's founding principles; some argued against the brutality of the Philippine-American War; but a majority feared for an influx of immigration from "yellow and brown" bodies (Lee 109).

The racial threat posed by the yellow peril came in the form of miscegenation, and consequent blood pollution, as discussed in the chapter on Asian as deviant. But even beyond the fear of intermarriage between races, the yellow peril brought the fear of social degeneration and a redefining of "whiteness." At the founding of the United States, the government banned the naturalization and citizenship of non-white persons. The Naturalization Act of 1870 specifically extended this privilege to "aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent," but other non-white populations remained excluded as a direct result of anti-Chinese sentiment. In the 1920s, two naturalization cases protested this legislation. It is important to note that they did not protest the laws on the grounds of anti-discrimination; rather these cases pushed the boundaries on the legal definition of "Caucasian."

In 1922, a Japanese man named Takao Ozawa, who had lived in the U.S. for over 20 years, filed for United States citizenship with the argument that he had fully assimilated to the culture. Ozawa moved to the U.S. in 1894 and first declared his intent to naturalize as a citizen in 1902. Twelve years later, he submitted his paperwork to naturalize, but federal courts in both Northern California and Hawaii turned down his petitions. Finally, Ozawa took his case to the Supreme Court. One of the greatest concerns about the naturalization of non-white persons is their inability to assimilate to American culture. Ozawa's lawyers argued that Ozawa was firmly assimilated, but also

that Japanese citizens were fundamentally different from Chinese citizens, who at the time were already banned from both immigration and naturalization. In his defense, Ozawa argued:

> In name, I am not an American, but at heart I am a true American...I am sending my children to an American church and American school in place of a Japanese one...Most of the time I use the American (English) language at home, so that my children cannot speak the Japanese language...I chose as my wife one educated in American schools…. instead of one educated in Japan. (Lee 141)

Despite these pleas, in *Takao Ozawa v. The United States*, the Supreme court unanimously barred Ozawa from U.S. citizenship on the grounds that he could not claim himself a "free white person," as was dictated in the Naturalization Act of 1906. Therefore, the Supreme Court drew acceptable naturalization cases along a racial line. Ozawa could not make a claim to whiteness since he did not descend from a "popularly understood Caucasian race" (142).

In the 1923 Supreme Court case *United States v. Baghat Singh Thind*, Thind's lawyers learned from Ozawa's failure. Rather than building their argument on assimilation, they argued that the Indian-born, former U.S. Army Sergeant was, in fact, Caucasian. Thind moved to the United States in 1913 to pursue a degree at the University of California. He was recruited by the U.S. Army in 1918 and served in World War I. At that time, anthropologists classified some Indians of the high caste as Caucasian, and consequently, Oregon granted Thind citizenship in 1919, but it was quickly revoked. In the Supreme Court case, Thind's lawyers used similar reasoning, arguing that as a

member of the high caste, Thind belonged to Aryan genealogy, and was ethnographically Caucasian, thus eligible for naturalization as a free white person. Ultimately, however, the Supreme Court likewise ruled against Thind's petition, noting that race was defined by popular standards rather than ethnography. In their decision, Justice Sutherland wrote "it may be true that the blonde Scandinavian and the brown Hindu have a common ancestor in the dim reaches of antiquity, by the average man knows perfectly well that there are unmistakable and profound differences between them today" (Lee 143). Consequently, the United States barred naturalization on the arguments of both assimilation and genetics. Instead, "whiteness" could only be classified according to popular understanding. In their fear of the yellow peril, even the United States' highest judicial system stepped in to prevent the dilution of whiteness.

Military Threat of the Yellow Peril

According to Christopher Frayling, the final threat of the yellow peril is military in nature, a classification that sets the yellow peril apart from other anti-Asian stereotypes. As Jack London's quote revealed, the West experienced a growing fear of the "four hundred million indefatigable workers" uniting against Western aggression. Of course, Genghis Khan created this threat in the 13th century when he conquered the Western world, annexing it into his Mongol Empire. Europeans archived this threat in its history books, passing it down to future generations and along to its American descendants. For 20th century Americans, this fear grew from two specific episodes of violence in the East: the Boxer Rebellion and the Russo-Japan war.

The Boxer Rebellion was an anti-colonial and anti-Christian campaign that took

place in China between 1899 and 1901. The movement began by the Yihetuan (known in English as the "boxers"), a Chinese nationalist, anti-foreign group that spurned both Western and Christian influence in China. For several months, all foreigners and Chinese Christians lay under siege by the Boxers and the Imperial Army of China. By the end of the skirmish, rebels killed nearly 200 foreigners, including the women and children of missionary families. Historians estimate that over 30,000 Chinese Christians died in the rebellion, although their deaths went largely unreported. International journalists deemed the murder of the Western missionaries a global tragedy, and eight nations (the Empire of Japan, the Russian Empire, the British Empire, the French Third Republic, the United States, the German Empire, the Kingdom of Italy, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire) gathered 45,000 troops to oppose the rebellion.

For the Western world, the Boxer Rebellion proved that the Chinese, who had overall been considered a weaker race, 1) abhorred Western involvement, and 2) had the means of organizing itself to impressive effect. Overall, the West condemned this rebellion, not only for its violence against peaceful citizens, but also for its ungracious spurning of Western civilization. The so-called "White Man's Burden" became more burdensome when the natives refused to accept help. This rebellion caused concern for all of the United States' recent colonial acquisitions, whose people might similarly rise up against U.S. dominion in their area.

The second, larger event that caused concern for Western rule was the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905, which definitively proved that Japan had the capability of organizing successful military campaigns. Before delving into this specific event,

however, it is important to give background of Japan's ascent to global power.

Until the mid-19th century, Japan played a relatively small role on the global stage. This changed when the United States desired Japan's cooperation in its commercial endeavors. In 1853, U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan with a large, imposing navy to "open a highly reluctant Japan to U.S. interests" (LaFeber xviii). The U.S. viewed Japan as a strategic stepping block to lucrative Chinese ports. Treaties with European nations followed, and in the early 1860s, both American and European fleets fired on Japanese cities as a display of their military superiority. In 1868, after these embarrassing coercions, Japan entered a new phase in its history with the Meiji Restoration. Western influence, with its modern warfare and successful industrialization, had great impact on Japan, and within the next 40 years, Japan underwent a series of rapid transformations. By the turn of the century, Japanese goods successfully competed with European products, and Japan had turned her imperial sights to the conquering of East Asia. In 1895, Japan declared war on China and won, annexing Taiwan in the process. In 1905, Japan declared Korea a protectorate of Japan, and by 1910, Japan annexed Korea entirely.

Japan's quick transformation into a global economic and military power earned the respect of the Western world. In 1902, Japan entered into the Anglo-Japanese Alliance with Great Britain, and consequently it became the first Eastern nation to be received on equal footing with Western nations. Japan took great pride in this distinction. In the late 19th century, Japan and the United States collaborated in the control of China, primarily relating to a fear of a Russian invasion in North China (LaFeber xviii). Cue the

Russo-Japanese War, which was fought between Russia and Japan over imperialist ambitions in China. Russia sought land in the Pacific for maritime trade. Japan initially offered a deal wherein Russia could claim control of Manchuria in exchange for the acknowledgement of Korea as Japanese territory. Russia refused, and Japan elected to go to war, seeing that Russia proved a threat to their military expansion. Japan battled Russia's fleet in several sneak attacks, and despite his overwhelming losses, Tsar Nicholas II kept Russia engaged in the war to avoid an embarrassing peace treaty with an Eastern nation.

The war eventually ended with the Treaty of Portsmouth, negotiated by U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt. World observers watched in awe at the first modern military victory of the East over the West, or as Walter LaFeber notes, "as a yellow race triumphed over a white race with an efficiency that stunned Americans and Europeans" (xix). This war escalated the fear of the yellow peril by presenting an image of Eastern people enslaving the West. As a result of their success, Japan replaced China as the great harbinger of the yellow peril. Their victory over Russia, of course, was a source of great pride for the Empire of Japan. It is no wonder, then, that Japan expected its citizens to be treated with respect in foreign lands, at least with more respect than citizens of neighboring Eastern countries like China. The United States, however, sadly disappointed.

The U.S. exclusionary laws of the late 19th century primarily targeted Chinese immigrants. Japanese citizens, therefore, received far more legal benefits in the United States, and the U.S. government as a whole respected Japan's ability to Westernize. In

fact, "Japan adjusted comparatively smoothly and efficiently to the Western impact without the heavy burden of Confucianism, the social and political thought of Japan were more flexible than those of China and Korea" (Wong xiii). Unfortunately, the abounding Orientalism in the United States placed Japanese citizens on the same level as the Chinese, and they received their fair share of discriminatory practices at the hands of American citizens. As a result, Japan took great pains to differentiate itself from other Asian countries, highlighting its Western customs and its ability to assimilate to modern society. On the global level, Japan argued in a way similar to Takao Ozawa when he pled for naturalization in front of the Supreme Court. Due to its commercial and military victories, Japan believed itself the "white man of Asia" and demanded not only the respect of a military superpower, but also the respect of a racial equal (67).

U.S. relations with Japan proved a confusing, and often contradictory, series of negotiations. Japan warily observed U.S. expansion in the East, and for the most part, the U.S. idly watched as Japan gained growing dominion over the Pacific. Both nations viewed each other as a threat on the Pacific stage, but neither showed aggression in fear of retaliation. The U.S.'s neutral stance even resulted in its violation of treaty commitments to Korea. The U.S. and Japan eventually signed a tenuous alliance with the Taft-Katsura agreement, wherein the United States would not interfere with Japan's designs on Korea as long as Japan would not interfere with the U.S. annexation of the Philippines. Anti-Asian sentiments in America, however, threatened this unstable peace.

In 1906, the San Francisco Board of Education ordered that all Asian students be taught in a racially segregated school. Believing itself superior to both China and Korea,

Japan acknowledged the reason behind such segregation, but took great offense to its own inclusion in such an act. As a whole, Japan saw itself as an equal to the Occidental races, and found anything that placed them on the same level as the Chinese to be "degrading and humiliating" (Wong xvi). By capitalizing on Roosevelt's fear of Japanese aggression in the Pacific, Japan wrangled the Gentleman's Agreement of 1907 in response to the humiliation of the school segregation. This informal agreement stated that the U.S. would not ban Japanese immigration as long as Japan limited the number of immigrants travelling to the U.S. It is indeed ironic that Americans initially placed yellow peril fears on Chinese immigrants, but it was Japan that worked the most doggedly to tear down anti-Asian legislation and practices. While the Gentlemen's Agreement pleased both nations for a short while, anti-Japanese sentiment could not be contained, and the tension between the two nations only increased as a result of American popular culture.

Early silent films, such as *The Yellow Peril* (1908) and *The Japanese Invasion* (1909) had already planted the seeds of Asiatic villainy in the minds of Americans, and these visuals were augmented by widely proliferated scare literature. Homer Lea's *The Valor of Ignorance* (1909) is one such writing that had an incredible impact on U.S.-Asia relations. In this book, Lea prophesies a war between the United States and Japan, and he includes many details — and maps — on ways in which Japan could successfully strike and weaken U.S. defense systems. The book was incredibly popular with military officers, both U.S. and Japanese alike, and it eventually became mandatory reading for Japanese officers (Wong 72).

In *The Valor of Ignorance*, Lea warns the United States against underestimating

the military prowess of the Japanese. He further warns against transferring discriminatory sentiments from the deemed weaker Chinese immigrants to those of Japanese heritage. Lea believed that the Japanese would react violently to racism rather than accepting it, as did the Chinese. In this way, Lea successfully predicted the future Japanese aggression against the United States. In fact, the eventual attack on Pearl Harbor bore an eerie resemblance to much of the strikes outlined in Lea's book (Wong 72).

While many publishers distributed such scare literature, perhaps the biggest proponent of the yellow peril narrative was William Randolph Hearst. The U.S.'s largest publishing mogul harbored a strong dose of anti-Japanese sentiment. As previously discussed, Hearst financed Jack London's coverage of the Russo-Japanese war, and the resulting sensationalist, anti-Asiatic reporting. Hearst also funded *Patria*, a 15-chapter serial film that incorporated such extreme anti-Japanese propaganda that it permanently severed the diplomatic relations between the two countries and forced President Wilson's hand in censoring the films.

William Randolph Hearst became increasingly wary of Japan at the start of World War I. This wariness was no doubt fueled by Japan's successful foray into world dominion, as well as its outspoken criticism of U.S. politics. Hearst firmly believed that Japan would "attack the United States behind her back" once the U.S. agreed to enter the War (Wong 89), and consequently he funded *Patria* as a means of arousing anti-Japanese sentiment. Hearst also subscribed to Lea's warning, and the film series assumes that the U.S. is defending herself from a Japanese war, even though Japan was a U.S. ally at the time of its release.

Patria's plot surrounds a beautiful heiress, Patria Channing (Irene Castle), and a U.S. Secret Service agent Donald Parr (Milton Sills) who unite to stop Japanese spies from stealing the Channing fortune. With the use of this fortune, Japan plans to connect with Mexico and collectively invade the United States. Warner Oland, already famous for portraying Asian villains, played the Japanese Baron Huroki. The film was an instant success, selling out many of its theatres, but its offensive depictions of the Japanese had far-reaching political consequences. Reportedly, the film "gravely" offended the Japanese Ambassador Masanao Hanihara, and it also displeased President Wilson who at that time spent a great deal of time trying to pacify the Japanese government (Wong 92). In a letter, Wilson directly asked Hearst to remove the film from distribution, for he found it "extremely unfair to the Japanese" and "calculated to stir up a great deal of hostility which will be...extremely hurtful" (92). Hearst refused to shutter the film series entirely, but he compromised by making several key changes to the narrative that removed anti-Japanese hostility. For instance, Olan's villainous Huroki became "Manuel Morales," and rather than kimonos, he started wearing suits. The action also moved entirely to Mexico in episode 11; consequently, the series ended with a distinctly anti-Mexican perspective. Oland's seamless transition from Japanese to Mexican villain makes an important point about America's ignorance of its foreign neighbors. Orientalism accounts for the amalgamation of all Asian races, but early Hollywood also engaged in the amalgamation of all people of color.

Immediately prior to WWI, Hollywood produced several additional film serials that capitalized on the yellow peril narrative. Many of these serials also fulfilled the

"damsel in distress" trope, wherein the virginal white female suffers entrapment at the hands of the foreign (in this case, Asian) villain, and must be saved by the heroic, white male. Of many such narratives, *The Exploits of Elaine* (1914) is worth mentioning for its dastardly Wong Long Sin, a Chinese villain that significantly inspired many future yellow peril films. While the Japanese surely heightened the yellow peril paranoia, the Chinese continued to remain the primary focus of anti-Sinitic representation. Long Sin typifies the "monstrous Mandarin" with his exotic name and long, drooping mustache that came to be immortalized in the Fu Manchu films (Wong 94).

Yellow Peril hysteria came to a head in 1924 with the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act (also known as the "Asian Exclusion Act"). Despite the focused efforts of previous U.S. presidents, including both Roosevelt and Wilson, to mend the strained relations between the U.S. and Japan, anti-Japanese sentiment raged well into the 1920s. Signed into law by President Coolidge, the Johnson-Reed Act limited the number of immigrants to 2% of the number of people from that country already residing in the United States. The U.S. government intended this measure to restrict Eastern and Southern Europeans in order to build a homogenous American identity. More pressingly, the Asian Exclusion Act entirely banned entry to any population that could not be naturalized as citizens. This, of course, directly targeted Asian immigrants, specifically the Japanese since the Chinese had already been excluded from immigration. Consequently, this legislation betrayed the Gentlemen's Agreement, which had previously provided Japan with the power to limit immigration to the U.S., an arrangement that Japan had been dutifully fulfilling. The U.S. also banned entry to

Korean citizens, due to Japan's annexation of Korea. Consequently, Japan's imperialist practices, rather than America's racism, were directly responsible for Korea's exclusion (Wong xxii).

The Asian Exclusion Act severely wounded Japan's pride, and altogether shattered diplomatic relations between the two countries. As Wong eloquently states, "after what was for Japan a long contest with the white nations, most outstandingly the United States, on the issues of national and racial equality, the 1924 Immigration Act was a stunning defeat, the disgrace and humiliation of which was unprecedented" (Wong 115). Many historians argue that this legislation single-handedly set the stage for the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. Indeed, many Japanese leaders felt that the Asian Exclusion Act served as the hand of fate, suggesting that a war between the two countries was then "decreed by Heaven" and would serve as a "moral tonic" for the Japanese people (118). Americans had consistently suggested this war, both in literature and film, even going so far as to outline the details in which Japan would attack. By their very hand, they provoked a sleeping giant, and the racist practices that had been born by the Chinese immigrants only incited the militarized culture of Japan. Japan's press quickly became anti-foreign, and their ire specifically targeted the United States, in addition to more Western, Anglo-Saxon nations. In 1930 Ambassador Hanihara, who had felt so offended by Japanese representation in *Patria*, commented that Japanese resentment would remain incited "as long as the wound inflicted remains unhealed" (119). Inevitably, this wound only intensified with the attack on Pearl Harbor, in which Japan fulfilled its role as yellow peril. Throughout these decades of political turmoil, yellow peril narratives

continued to score big at the box office, but perhaps none succeeded so splendidly in either popularity or influence as the films of Fu Manchu.

Geographic Distinctions

Before delving into the numerous Fu Manchu films, one must explore how geography plays a part in the yellow peril mythology. Fu Manchu's power arises from his liminal existence between the East and West, and this poses the greatest danger to his Western adversaries. I would argue that yellow peril paranoia itself arose from the clashing of geographical boundaries, the mix between Eastern and Western cultures. This inevitably spawned from U.S. imperial agendas. The U.S. first moved East in search of a kingdom. In turn, the U.S. inspired Japan to do the same; Japan moved West to prove itself equal. It is in the meeting of these nations, these cultures, where the perils arose. This liminal space likewise exists within each nation. In the United States, this geographical paradox is the "Chinatown" of major cities; in Europe, it is the Limehouse district. Yellow peril films recognize these spaces as areas of danger; often, the action takes place entirely in Chinatown. As an area of the East transplanted in the West, it is depicted as unstable and polluted. The character of Fu Manchu personifies this culture clash. He is successfully treacherous because he straddles both worlds. Fu Manchu's terror arose from his "Asian mastery of Western knowledge and technique...his access to mysterious 'occult' powers (his eyes can hypnotize victims); and his ability to mobilize the yellow hordes" (Xing 57). Fu Manchu's greatest power is his blending of Eastern heritage and Western intelligence that enable him to organize resistance. He represents a new form of miscegenation, a mixing of blood, and his treacherous existence proved to

animated moviegoers the dangers that this hybridity poses to Americans.

The Many Films of Fu Manchu

As previously mentioned, Wong Long Sin, the villainous Mandarin in *The Exploits of Elaine,* served as prototype for Dr. Fu Manchu, the most renowned of the yellow peril villains. Fu Manchu, however, had many other origins. He was first introduced to the world in 1913 in the first of a series of novels by British author Sax Rohmer. In the next 50 years, Rohmer published a total of 13 novels featuring the nefarious Fu Manchu, and the series continues to this day.

Fu Manchu is a Chinese scholar, credited with terminal degrees from four separate Western universities. Rohmer positions him as exceptionally clever and extremely evil, using his inestimable knowledge to overthrow the Western (read: white) world. In many versions, Fu Manchu's daughter aids his dastardly plots. Her cunning and sexuality fulfill the stereotype of Asian as deviant; she is the prototypical Dragon Lady. Fu Manchu's opposition is the Anglo-Saxon Denis Nayland Smith, a dogged investigator who is either a police commissioner or British spy, depending on the version. Smith and Fu Manchu respect each other, even as they plot each other's downfall. Inevitably at the end of each tale, Smith wins the battle, but never the war. Fu Manchu always returns.

Rohmer created the fiendish Fu Manchu with the absent-minded racism rampant in the yellow-peril era. Rohmer's reportedly found his inspiration for the tale in Britain's Limehouse district, the unpopular, neglected home of the U.K.'s Chinese population, which also happened to be the setting of *Broken Blossoms*. These areas proved inspirational to many artists captivated by the mysticism of the East. Rohmer's

inspiration reportedly came from an assignment wherein he traveled to the "Asiatic colony" in Limehouse to report on the activities of "Mr. King," a criminal mastermind who supposedly controlled much of the area's drug trafficking (Frayling 66). Rohmer rented a small apartment in Limehouse and observed the area for "some time." In many promotional tours for his book series, Rohmer recalled the first night he saw Mr. King — his Fu Manchu. He recalled, "I saw a tall and dignified Chinese gentlemen alight from a car before a mean-looking house. He wore a fur-collared overcoat, and so far as I could make out, a fur cap of the kind once associated with Kemal Atatürk...Dr. Fu Manchu was complete: at last he lived" (67). Rohmer is always vague about this meeting, or whether it actually occurred, but he consistently assigned inspiration to Fu Manchu's personage on this vague "Mr. King." When asked to describe King's features, Rohmer always replied the same: look to Fu Manchu. Rohmer is indeed descriptive in the initial introduction to Fu Manchu in the first of his series, *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu* (1913):

> Imagine a person tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare, and a face like Satan, a close shaven skull and long magnetic eyes of true green cat. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources…of a wealthy government…Imaging that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man (Lee 113–114).

Rohmer confirms the purpose of Fu Manchu as the personification of the yellow peril. In this one paragraph, Rohmer's describes Fu Manchu alternately as both Satan and an animal, imbibing the East with a barbaric, devilish mysticism. In creating this creature, he

subscribed to the Orientalist approach of representing the East as a mystic, foreign, dangerous space. Interestingly, this representation of Fu Manchu mirrors one that President Theodore Roosevelt suggested in a history of Asia. In describing the army of Genghis Khan, Roosevelt wrote "the squat, slit-eyed, brawny horsemen, 'with faces like the snouts of dogs', seemed as hideous and fearsome as demons, and as irresistible by ordinary mortals" (Tchen and Yeats 174). The comparison to both demons and animals seems a common motif when describing Asian aggression. This description is also one of many ways in which Fu Manchu compares to Genghis Khan and reignites the fear of Asian military dominance over the West.

Lee argues that Orientalism relies on "establishing authority over the Other through knowledge of and access to the Other's language, history, and culture as a privilege of the colonial agent" (Lee 114). Undoubtedly, Rohmer believed that he found this access through his limited exposure in Limehouse, but the Limehouse district, as most Chinatowns, filter Eastern culture through a Western lens. Rohmer, therefore, took an already-diluted image of the Chinese and diluted it even further by creating a yellow peril narrative with a flat villain whose sole purpose is to undermine the West. He consequently deployed Orientalist authority while reducing "the Orientalist tradition of humanistic scholarship and textual authority to a simple racial struggle between the evil Fu Manchu, bent on nationalist revenge, and his Anglo-Saxon nemesis" (114). Since its creation, millions observed Fu Manchu's various incarnations in novels, comics, radio programs, television, and film. For many Americans, he is their first impression of Asia. It is exceptionally ironic that so many Americans' foundational understanding of China

came from a man with no understanding himself. Sax Rohmer even once exclaimed, "I made my name on Fu Manchu because I know nothing about the Chinese" (Wong 98). Rohmer did not understand the Chinese, but he did understand the paranoia that the West felt for the East, and he understood how to profit from it. This is a crux of Orientalism; Rohmer's Fu Manchu is not realistic, nor should he be. He is what the public both expected and desired.

Fu Manchu's popularity in novels, mixed with a heightened desire for yellow peril films (such as *The Exploits of Elaine*), led to the Fu Manchu film series. Irish-born Harry Agar Lyons first portrayed Fu Manchu on screen in the 1923 silent film, *The Mystery of Dr. Fu Manchu*, and he returned the next year with *The Further Mysteries of Dr. Fu Manchu*. In 1929, Warner Oland stepped into the role in the first talking portrayal, *The Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu*, and Oland portrayed the villain in two more films in two consecutive years. By this time, Oland had made a career out of playing Asian characters, such as the villain in *Patria*, and he would soon become famous for his portrayal of the affable Asian detective, Charlie Chan. *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (1932), starring Boris Karloff in the title role, has become the most infamous film incarnation, often decried for its racist portrayal of Asian characters, and its cartoonish portrayal of both Fu Manchu and his sex-crazed daughter. I will analyze this film in greater depth below. Fu Manchu disappeared from the screen for nearly 35 years, with the exception of one small film serial produced in 1940. Christopher Lee stepped into the role in 1965, and ultimately donned the mustache a total of five times. The last authorized film appearance came in 1980 when Peter Sellers doubled as both Fu Manchu and Nayland Smith in his comedy,

The Fiendish Plot of Dr. Fu Manchu. By this time, the character and his signature mustache became public shorthand, and Fu Manchu had several unauthorized film appearances, including a brief cameo in the 2007 film *Grindhouse* with Nicholas Cage as the villainous Mandarin.

In all film iterations, white men in yellowface played the Chinese Dr. Fu Manchu. His hyperbolic hatred for the Western world, and his cartoonish plots (e.g. death in a pit of alligators) are a result of this stilted representation. The argument has been made that the campy performances of Dr. Fu Manchu are obvious indicators that Fu Manchu is a parody of Eastern culture, and that audiences never believed Fu Manchu's hatred an accurate representation of the East. Perhaps this is true for later iterations, but the earliest films debuted at the apex of yellow peril hysteria. As Wong notes, Fu Manchu fully satisfied the "white racist craving for an Asian enemy whose avowed purpose would be the total subjugation of the white race, exposing in the process the exotic and mysterious world of the East" (Wong 95). The representation of Fu Manchu as dangerous criminal and sexual psychopath fulfilled and fed this hysteria. Interestingly, the earliest version of the character showed more restraint than later iterations. Warner Oland's portrayals, in particular, showed a calmer, controlled villain with very specific criminal goals, rather than the general destruction of the Western world. It is really with the Boris Karloff film when the character became truly unhinged. All later portrayals pull from this popular performance, and consequently the common understanding of Fu Manchu pull from this film. Since it presented Fu Manchu as the psychopath the world has come to expect, it is

vital to explore the specific representation of Fu Manchu in *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (1932).

***The Mask of Fu Manchu* (1932)**

In Sax Rohmer's fifth novel, *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, Fu Manchu races the British museum to unearth the golden mask of the prophet Mohammed, which would unite the Muslim world and defend it against British imperialism. This novel was adapted into a film of the same title in 1932, but the plot changed in key ways. Although MGM distributed the film, William Randolph Hearst's Cosmopolitan Productions financed its making, which likely explains some of the alterations which ultimately threw the Western world into a better light, presenting the British as the innocent victims of Fu Manchu's greed. The primary alteration is the erasure of British imperialist practices, thus "cleansing the violation of and violence upon a people into a simplistic tale of defense against a horde of costumed extras" (Tchen and Yeats 9). The film never makes mention of Britain's colonial history, and consequently Fu Manchu's hatred of the West has no logical foundation. Furthermore, the film replaces the mask of Mohammed with that of Genghis Khan, thus "connecting Fu Manchu's terrorizing ambitions to a long (imagined) transhistorical fantasized tradition of Eastern antagonism against the West" (9). Genghis Khan's historical dominance over the West proved a powerful foundation to the yellow peril mythos. History showed how a unification of the Eastern nations could create an army powerful enough to enslave the world. In many ways, Fu Manchu is Genghis Khan's natural successor. In the film, Smith even exclaims that should Fu Manchu succeed, "All of Asia rises...hundreds of millions will take over the world. He will be

Genghis Khan come to life again!"

The film opens with Sir Denis Nayland Smith warning British Egyptologist, Sir Lionel Barton, that he must quickly find the tomb of Genghis Khan to prevent Dr. Fu Manchu from reaching it first. Fu Manchu plans to use the sword and mask from the tomb to proclaim himself Genghis Khan's successor and convince Asia to destroy the Western, white races. Not soon after, Lionel Barton goes missing, and Barton's daughter accompanies Smith in finding the tomb, and hopefully her father alongside it. The British find the tomb first, and Fu Manchu negotiates a swap — Barton for the relics. Barton's daughter agrees, without informing Smith. The plan goes terribly wrong, Fu Manchu kills Barton, and he entraps the rest of the British grouping, including Smith, Barton's daughter, and her fiancé. Fu Manchu cooks up creative and dastardly techniques of torture for the men, and he plans to sacrifice Barton's daughter in front of a large horde of Eastern emissaries. Ultimately, Smith escapes, frees his comrades, and incapacitates Fu Manchu with a death ray, allowing them all time to escape. On a traveling to England, Smith tosses the sword into the ocean to protect it from Fu Manchu. Although Fu Manchu is presumably dead, Smith insinuates that he will return.

As previously mentioned, Fu Manchu is particularly dangerous, not for his Eastern characteristics, but for his Western. This film presents Fu Manchu as a blending of the two worlds, a man with a Western mind and the capability of uniting millions of Asians into an army. Fu Manchu's Western traits are reflected primarily in his intellect. Early in our introduction to him, he informs audiences that he is a doctor of philosophy, law, and medicine; and he received all of these degrees from top Western institutions. Fu

Manchu's Western influence is also apparent in his "tall, lean" appearance. Chinese men are typically characterized as short, squat figures; hence the argument for the need of white actors to portray imposing Chinese characters such as Frank Capra's General Yen. Consequently, Fu Manchu's inspiration seems to come less from historical Chinese figures (such as Genghis Khan) and more from the villains of contemporary British literature (Frayling 234). In fact, it is entirely likely that Sax Rohmer found great inspiration in James Moriarty, the archenemy of Sherlock Holmes, who is initially described in "The Adventure of the Final Problem" as "extremely tall and thin, his forehead domes out in a white curve...retaining something of a professor in his features" (Doyle 244). The casting of Boris Karloff, a British actor who towered at nearly 6 feet, provided the right combination of Western appearance with just enough Oriental features. The Western Fu Manchu — unlike his Chinese relatives in both appearance and intellect — is the only worthy adversary for Sir Nayland Smith. "Both sorcerer and scientist, [Fu Manchu] blends the mysticism of the East with the rationalism of the West, a doubly whammy of supernatural and scientific power" (Doherty 269). While his rational, Western qualities heighten his danger, they also explain his success as a villain. Ultimately, the British always succeed in the Fu Manchu narratives, but first they come close to failing, and usually at the cost of Western lives. While this would be an embarrassment for Western readers, it is allowed as a result of his exceptional cunning, his Western-like ingenuity. The greatest yellow peril is a reflection of the West itself.

Karloff's height might have fit the prescribed figure of Fu Manchu, but his casting also held great symbolic importance for the yellow peril narrative. By the debut of this

film, Karloff found stardom playing monsters in horror films, specifically the undead Monster in *Frankenstein* (1929). Karloff plays Fu Manchu as the ultimate monster — vindictive, psychopathic, and insane. His application of yellowface is also cartoonish and exaggerated, more so than contemporary yellowface applications. Reportedly, it took 2.5 hours each morning to convert Karloff into Fu Manchu. Like most cases of yellowface, Karloff's makeup focused on facial exaggerations including "pointing ears, slanting eyebrows, thin shell front teeth, long moustache" (Frayling 296). The mustache, of course, served as the true signifier of Fu Manchu, but the rest of his face looked deformed, particularly around his eyelids. Other films with yellowface attempted a semblance of "accurate" Asian images, and while yellowface ultimately just presented an idea of Oriental features, at least the characters looked human. Karloff's Fu Manchu looks truly inhuman, in line with Karloff's previous monsters. His Fu Manchu truly personifies the yellow peril; he is the nightmare for the West.

Racial Peril of Fu Manchu

Fu Manchu is an Eastern peril hoping to dominate the Western world; that much was made clear in Rohmer's series of novels. The film, however, bases his hatred on racial boundaries rather than geographical ones. Karloff's Fu Manchu does not specifically target the Western world, so much as the "white" world. At the end of the film, Fu Manchu threatens, "I will wipe out the whole of your white race." This is paramount to the yellow peril myth. Its creation paralleled a consolidation of whiteness, much as Orientalism prescribed a consolidation of Asian races (Lee 106). The yellow peril was not named "Eastern peril" for an important reason. Asian immigrants and

Eastern aggression threatened the intermixing and ultimate destruction of whiteness, and this threat likely proved important to Hearst's racist portrayal of Fu Manchu. There are two important scenes in the film through which the racial threat of Fu Manchu is both exemplified and intensified.

The first scene warranting close analysis is the initial torture scene of Terry, the fiancé of the white, virginal Sheila (Barton's daughter). Terry enters the lair of Fu Manchu to negotiate the surrender of Dr. Barton. Fah Lo See (Myrna Loy), Fu Manchu's daughter, takes a liking to Terry. Consequently, Fu Manchu captures Terry and allows his daughter to arrange his torture. Fah Lo See takes Terry to a remote cave and oversees his assault. She watches as two men whip Terry, feverishly demanding that they whip faster and sexually aroused by the urgency of each stroke. Ultimately, Fu Manchu offers Terry to his daughter as a pet.

There are many levels to unpack in this scene. Clearly, Fah Lo See offers a mixture of both the sexual deviant and the yellow peril. Her erotically charged torture suggests an ultimate intermixing of races, and the violence with which she subjugates Terry presents a peril to the white world. There are many creative torture scenes in this film that highlight the insanity of Fu Manchu. He throws Smith into a pit of alligators, he straps another man to a chair as two walls of spikes slowly threaten to crush him, and he even hypnotizes Terry. However, Fah Lo See's torture scene stands out for its eroticism. Fah Lo See suggests that non-white races pose a sexual threat to the white world, on top of a deadly threat. This is only heightened by the fact that her servants are both black. This is a small-scale representation of how Fu Manchu threatens to unite "hordes" of

non-white soldiers to destroy all white races. The hiring of Myrna Loy enables the truly sadistic qualities of the character. Asian actors had portrayed Fu Manchu's daughter in past films (most notably Anna May Wong in *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931)), but none to the level of insanity with which Loy portrays Fah Lo See. Loy's "Oriental" portrayal of the daughter heightens the yellow peril, while an Asian portrayal would have inevitably added complexity to the role, perhaps even humanity.

The second scene worth analysis is Fu Manchu's climactic speech to his Eastern followers. Once he receives the relics of Genghis Khan, Fu Manchu addresses a crowd as their new presumed leader. He exclaims that their vengeance will "rain down on the white race and burn them." He directs the crowds to "Conquer and breed. Kill the white man and take his women." The crowd erupts into cheering, hungry for the opportunity to destroy their "white" — not "Western" — enemies. Before he can finish his speech, however, Smith attacks the crowds with a death ray, ultimately preserving white dominance, yet again, from the brink of Asian aggression. It was the "supremacy of right and white," the opportunity for the white viewers to reassert their superiority (Wong 90).

The film closes with a white victory, but it is ultimately a cautionary tale about the threat of Asian races unifying and destroying white culture. The insanity of Fu Manchu and his daughter, their monstrous appearances, the needless violence they inflict upon innocent people, and the irrational hatred they spread take Sax Rohmer's yellow peril narrative to new heights. Reportedly, Sax Rohmer disliked *The Mask of Fu Manchu* because he thought it "too crude" and Fu Manchu's portrayal as "too obvious" (Frayling 308). Financed by sinophobic producers, the film proves less an adventure story and

more a call-to-action, influencing white audiences to protect their lives from the invasion of non-white populations.

This film elicited strong reactions from its viewers. While incredibly popular at its debut, the film was ultimately lambasted for its dangerously racist portrayals of Asians. Many contemporary critics agreed with such complaints, preferring Warner Oland's saner portrayal of Fu Manchu. MGM initially suggested a sequel, but the Chinese Consulate in Los Angeles immediately filed a complaint, and MGM backed down, likely because it did not want to provoke Eastern aggression (Frayling 308–309). During the Asian American Movement in the late 1960s through the mid 1970s, protesters adopted this film as the poster-child for racism in the media. In 1972, the Japanese-American Citizens League even contacted MGM, demanding that the company pull the film from its back catalog. Their letter explained:

> ...[the film] falsely depicts Asians as a mindless horde blindly worshipping the bloody activities of Genghis Khan and Fu Manchu. When United States foreign policy is reaching out for understanding of Asian people, this rehash of Yellow Peril cannot be tolerated by any patriotic American…Fu Manchu is an ugly, evil homosexual with five-inch fingernails while his daughter is a sadistic sex fiend. (Frayling 309)

While MGM did not remove the film from its catalog, it did delay its release to video, and when it finally became available to the public, MGM edited some of the film's more controversial material. In particular, MGM deleted all of the quotes previously mentioned in this chapter, heavily editing Fu Manchu's final speech, in particular (309). However,

Warner Bros. reinstated all of these scenes in the film's most recent releases on DVD.

Conclusion

The threat of the yellow peril serves in many ways as the culmination of all previous threatening Asian stereotypes. *The Mask of Fu Manchu* is an excellent example of how the yellow peril operates. It emphasizes how the large groups of Asian immigrants corrupt society and pose a danger if united by a ruler (pollutant). It makes direct reference to the disloyalty and untrustworthiness of "coolies." It directly tackles Asian as deviant in two ways. First, as previously described, Fah Lo See covets a white man and violently assaults him for sexual gratification. In doing so, she also threatens a symbolically pure, white union between Terry and Sheila. Second, Fu Manchu hypnotizes Terry and inhabits his body during the erotic scenes with Fah Lo See. The film, therefore, suggests both miscegenation and incest. On top of these threats of corrupting white society, white economy, and white genetics, the film displays how Asians ultimately threaten white lives. For this reason, the film is generally recognized as one of the most racist films that Hollywood ever produced.

At a time in history when international alliances proved vital to national security, yellow peril narratives destroyed the U.S.' important relationship with Japan. Additionally, these racist media depictions undermined the careful and tentative peace negotiations that U.S. Presidents such as Roosevelt and Wilson achieved, regardless of their own colorful opinions of the yellow peril. In convincing the general public that the East posed a deadly threat to Western culture, and repeatedly suggesting an inevitable war between races, the yellow peril narratives proved a self-fulfilling prophecy. They

influenced the U.S. government's public ban on Asian immigration, which set into motion a series of aggression that ended with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Despite this deadly history, the yellow peril narrative lives on in current media portrayals, including the continued use of Fu Manchu serials. At a time when the U.S. government's relationship with the East continues to prove unstable — this time with China serving as global superpower — it is more important than ever to denounce such portrayals for national security, if not global peace.

Conclusion: Moving Forward

This project explored Asian American representation in the early Hollywood, specifically in films ranging from 1894 until 1934, the start of the strict enforcement of the Motion Picture Production Code. This span of forty years aligned with a political period that saw some of the most anti-Asian legislation in American history. Consequently, the film industry both reflected and reinforced inflammatory representations of Asian immigrants, specifically the first four entries into Robert G. Lee's "Six Faces of the Oriental": pollutant, coolie, deviant, and yellow peril.

The stereotypes of both pollutant and coolie specifically targeted Chinese immigration, positioning the Chinese as the source of corruption in contemporary notions of the edenic West. As pollutant, the Chinese introduced vice and disease; as coolie, the Chinese devalued wages and stole opportunities from the white, working class family. Asian as deviant emphasized fears of racial pollution, suggesting that Asian immigrants, often nefariously, seduced and corrupted their white counterparts. Asian as yellow peril referenced the fear of militant Asian societies dominating and enslaving the Western world, akin to the reign of Genghis Khan. Consequently, through these representations, Asians threatened the social structures, industry, genes, and very lives of white Americans.

Although these stereotypes initially referenced Chinese immigrants, Americans conflated Asian nations and extended their discriminatory practices to all Asian races, in line with Edward Said's notion of Orientalism. Hollywood's use of yellowface exemplifies Said's argument that all representations of the East are defined in opposition

to Western identity. The exaggerated cosmetic application of yellowface does not portray authentic facial structures of Asian citizens, but white filmmakers never sought this authenticity. These films showcase the "Oriental" look, a race devised entirely by Western popular culture. The exaggerated portrayal of yellowface, accompanied by exotic dress, accent, customs, etc., reinforced the peculiarity and savagery assigned to Asia by American viewers.

Comfortable in their dominance, Americans continued to produce racist films, which in turn fanned the racist and violent acts on U.S. streets. The U.S. government supported these practices through its exclusionary laws and insulted the whole of Asia with its restrictions. By ignoring national specificity and discriminating on racial rather than national lines, the United States particularly offended the Japanese government that worked doggedly to separate itself from Asian nations such as China, which it deemed inferior. These exclusionary laws displayed a willful ignorance of diplomacy and an inflated sense of power that directly contributed to Japan's attacks on Pearl Harbor.

Such racist representations littered American popular culture from the mid-19th century, and early Hollywood films portray how these sentiments persisted well into the 20th century. As Wong notes:

> The fact remained that although the industry was conspicuous in its efforts to encourage the belief that whites were being victimized by the Chinese, the white "star system" and the general profitability of the serials excluded the Asian artists from both stardom and profit, while accounting for a simultaneous increase in cinematic and social anti-Sinicism. (Wong 103)

The limited mobility Asian stars had in early Hollywood only decreased with the enforcement of the Motion Picture Production Code, which initially existed as a set of best practices for Hollywood studios, but became far more rigidly exercised beginning in 1934. The enforcement of the Code affected Asian representation in Hollywood in two significant realms. While the Code banned many themes, the two relevant restrictions are (1) "The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly"; and (2) "miscegenation (sex relationships between the white and black races…shall not appear in pictures" (Doherty 364). A film such as *The Mask of Fu Manchu* clearly defied the former tenet in its exaggerated depiction of Fu Manchu as an evil, sex-crazed fiend bent on the destruction of the Western world. The silver lining, however, is that Fu Manchu represented a facet of Asian culture, exaggerated as it may be. After the enforcement of the Code, with the directive that all nations be treated fairly on screen, Hollywood largely ignored Asia rather than find an unbiased way to depict it. As Doherty writes, "Turning away from racial and ethnic diversity, the Breen Office smoothed out the multicolored rawness of pre-Code Hollywood into a monochromatic monotony. In practice, the Code's injunction to respect non-Anglo-Americans generally meant to ignore them" (339). This practice proved very harmful to Asian actors because it severely limited their opportunities on screen. Although yellowface limited their exposure in starring roles, it at least allowed for Asian supporting roles. In abandoning narratives with Asian themes, Hollywood likewise abandoned its Asian casts.

The banning of miscegenation narratives likewise limited opportunities for Asian representation on screen and behind it. While forbidden romances such as *Madame*

Butterfly proved popular with audiences, the Code explicitly prohibited them, and Hollywood acquiesced. Similarly, this tenet affected the few films set in Asia. The Code banned the semblance of miscegenation, so casting directors only hired actors of the same race in romantic roles, regardless of the race of characters. Since starring roles went to white actors, that further limited the opportunities for Asian actors. They could no longer play supporting romantic roles.

Ultimately, these negative portrayals of Asians limited their participation in the film industry and society at large. Robert G. Lee also suggested two additional stereotypes that negatively affected Asian Americans later in the 20th century: the model minority and the gook. While neither of these stereotypes reflected early films, I will summarize their impact because they provide a fuller depiction of Asian representation and discrimination in the 20th century.

Asian as model minority originated in 1950s America when the McCarthy-era government felt required to prove to both its citizens and other nations successful examples of U.S. assimilation. Asians were the ideal minority for this suggestion because they were "politically silent and ethnically assimilable" (Lee 145). A frequent example of this political silence related to U.S. welfare in 1970. Less than 4% of Chinese families in New York signed up for welfare, even though 15% were classified in the poverty level (151). The American government took this statistic as a representation of the "obedience, self-control, individualism, and loyalty to the needs of the nuclear family" that Asian families depicted (189). The alternate narrative, of course, is that the Asian families were suspicious of relying on a government that historically disenfranchised their people.

Asian as gook originated with the Vietnam War in the 1960s. This stereotype contradicted the "positive" representation of the model minority. Like the Viet Cong who were invisible, silent, and deadly, the gook had attributes of both the model minority and the yellow peril, an enemy in plain sight (Lee 180). As Lee notes, through the threat of the gook, Asian Americans received the brunt of both the "anxiety over economic decline and the psychic trauma of the Vietnam War" (190). Through this threat, Americans were able to celebrate successful assimilation while simultaneously keeping the exotic at bay.

Asian as model minority and gook complete the "Six Faces of the Oriental" proposed by Robert G. Lee to encompass Asian representation in American popular culture. These representations systematically weakened Asian influence and participation in U.S. society, and they received a great deal of criticism in the late 1960s during the Asian American movement.

Changing Tides

After years of legal exclusion from both immigration and citizenship, Asians finally gained the rights to citizenship with the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act. This law resulted from a political calculation to make peace with Chinese populations due to an alliance in World War II. This legislature banned the prior laws preventing naturalization and it also banned the prior exclusion acts. Instead of outright exclusion, the act allotted visas via a quota system. The main issue with this law was that the quotas were based on race rather than nationality, and the United States once more conflated all Asian nationalities into the Oriental race. Consequently, this act limited the number of visas allotted to Asian groups. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act improved this

situation by abolishing the discriminatory origins quota. Finally, for the first time in nearly a century, Asians received fair treatment in terms of both immigration and naturalization, regardless of their race.

The momentum of these critical laws, as well as the influence of the counterculture movement of the 1960s led to the Asian American movement that began on college campuses in California. Prior to the late 60s, the term "Asian American" did not exist. Asian immigrants were called Orientals with the legal classification of "alien" until the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act. Finally, Kuji Ishioka, an adjunct professor at UCLA, suggested the term "Asian American" to classify Asian citizens in the United States, granting them a unified identity and national claim. Ishioka further influenced Asian participation by co-founding the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) with Emma Gee. The AAPA started at UC Berkeley in 1968 as a unifying platform for Asian Americans to push forth social and political movements. According to Ling-Chi Wang, the former director of the Ethnic Studies Department at UC Berkeley, the AAPA was the "first time that an Asian American organization decided to assert its own identity. It also showed that Asian Americans have a shared experience and destiny in America and that they won't be passive in accepting racist treatment in society" (Kim). This rejection of the passive model minority proved an important goal of Asian activist groups, but prior to the founding of the AAPA, such groups formed along national lines and found little success advocating with such a narrow scope. United, however, the AAPA found unparalleled success, and the group petitioned for fairer treatment for all Asian Americans. The group's political aims are perhaps best summarized by the words

of Richard Aoki at a 1968 AAPA Political Rally: "We Asian-Americans believe that American society has been, and still is, fundamentally a racist society, and that historically we have accommodated ourselves to this society in order to survive" (Aoki). Aoki further argues that Asian Americans should demand agency and fight the racist practices by hegemonic institutions such as the U.S. government and universities. Aoki also expressed how "Asian-Americans oppose the imperialist policies being pursued by the American government" (Aoki). Here, Aoki summarizes the two main intentions of most Asian activist groups: raise awareness of both historical and contemporary U.S. racism, and put an end to U.S. imperialist practices in Asia. Here, the AAPA's demands dovetailed nicely with the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), and the two groups found great success with their organized strikes at both San Francisco State University and UC Berkeley.

The TWLF was a powerful coalition of African American, Latin American, and Asian American activist groups. As the AAPA unified different Asian ethnic groups, the TWLF unified all non-white populations. The group organized two strikes — one at San Francisco State University (November 1968 – March 1969) and UC Berkeley (January 1969 – March 1969). The general goal of this strike was to establish "autonomous Ethnic Studies programs for the racial minority-groups in the TWLF, programs in which the students would control both the faculty and the curriculum" (Wei 15). The specific demands included the creation of an Ethnic Studies department, the hiring of non-white faculty members, the acceptance of non-white applicants, and the retention of non-white faculty members. The San Francisco State strike, in particular, held great influence, and

both students and faculty joined the fervor, eventually closing down the school. While not all demands were met, members of the TWLF did succeed in creating their coveted Ethnic Studies departments, and they also gained the recognition of the country's activists. These strikes proved that Asian Americans would be vocal for their freedom, but also non-violent in these pursuits, disproving both the model minority and gook stereotypes.

Where Are We Now?

The success of these Asian American activist groups signaled a change in America's understanding of Eastern nations. This should have likewise influenced a change in the media's representation of Asian Americans on screen, or at least one thought. The reality is that modern Hollywood indulges in consistent racist depictions of Asian nations, and it continues to exclude Asian Americans from the film industry. Yellowface is still used in modern films, but thanks to the Asian American movement, along with the raised awareness of the Civil Rights era, it is used far less often. In early Hollywood, studios attributed yellowface to a shortage of Asian talent; that argument no longer convincingly applies. Yellowface is now an artistic choice, a pastiche of early cinema. Thus, Nicolas Cage's version of Fu Manchu is positioned as deferential; the abysmal yellowface in *Cloud Atlas* symbolizes the "continuity of souls" in the characters. This reasoning lacks overt racism, but it is racism nonetheless. Yellowface not only continues in its original form, but recently it has also evolved into less obvious forms of racism, the most prominent being whitewashing.

Whereas yellowface is the cosmetic practice of disguising a non-Asian actor as an

Asian character, whitewashing removes the need for cosmetics. Whitewashing is the hiring of non-Asian actors in what should narratively be Asian roles. Occasionally, it is an obvious mishiring, such as Emma Stone's casting as Allison Ng in *Aloha* (2015); the film offers the flimsy explanations that Allison is "half" Asian. More commonly, the character's race is calculatedly omitted in the film, although the source material defines it as Asian. One example includes the cast of *21* (2008), a film based on the true story of Asian MIT graduates. The lead roles went to white actors. More recent examples include the hiring of Scarlett Johansson as the lead Japanese character in *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), Tilda Swinton's role as the historically Tibetan "Ancient One" in *Dr. Strange* (2016), and Matt Damon's baffling white savior role in *The Great Wall* (2016) where he plays a European mercenary in 11th century China at a time when Europeans had virtually no presence in Asia.

The inevitable backlash to whitewashing elicits half-hearted defense statements from the studios. Marvel stated that their studio hires a diverse cast that "regularly departs from stereotypes and source material to bring its MCU to life," so the hiring of Tilda Swinton actually promoted diversity (Sage). Similarly, Matt Damon blamed the public backlash to *The Great Wall* on the modern internet age and negativity of "clickbait" journalism. He also argued that he "didn't take a role away from a Chinese actor" (Shepherd). With this argument, Damon illustrates how the complex reality of whitewashing is oversimplified by Hollywood. Damon argues that his role was always intended to be European, so his casting did not harm Asian American actors. The important question that he overlooked, however, is *why* the role was written for a

European in a time and setting that so clearly dictated an Asian hero.

Discrimination against Asian Americans continues in Hollywood, despite the dogged attempt of activists during the Asian American movement to assert a new, stronger identity for Asian American communities. Why do such discriminatory practices such as yellowface and whitewashing persist? The obvious answer is that white culture continues to dominate. The white savior figure repeatedly returns in Hollywood. As Marchetti argues, all films dealing with issues of race or internationality explore the "same fundamental crisis of Anglo-American culture desperately trying to reconcile its credo of 'liberty and justice for all' with its insistence on white, male, bourgeois domination of the public sphere" (Marchetti 218). In other words, America supports the existence of other cultures, as long as the white male remains in power. The white savior is therefore a tonic for fragile white masculinity.

But how can a similar cinematic practice, such as blackface, be rightly abolished from acceptable realms of popular culture, while yellowface persists? One answer lies in the seeming passivity of Asian Americans. Similar to the myth of the model minority, Asian Americans are viewed as non-violent and amenable, acquiescent and understanding of the whims of white culture. The castrated male in *Broken Blossoms* or the fragile, female victim in *Madame Butterfly* left their mark on American consciousness. Asians are expected to work hard, care deeply, and even sacrifice themselves for their ideals; but they are not expected to overcome white hegemony or even rock that boat.

The institutional racism against Asian Americans likewise remains. Few Asians

have opportunities in media, and even fewer have opportunities as screenwriters. A general excuse is that Hollywood does not have enough parts meant for Asians. Wong rightly argues that this explanation is a "definite indication that the industries rather than viewing Asian Americans as Americans have stagnated on race-specific and culture conscious characterizations of peoples whose assumed racial and cultural affinities are based on descent lines only" (Wong 267). In other words, Hollywood will only hire Asian actors for what are deemed Asian parts. An even more ironic excuse for the lack of hiring of Asian actors is the fact that, in Aaron Sorkin's words, "there aren't any Asian movie stars" (Chow). This statement was mirrored by director Ridley Scott who, when defending his hiring of the cast of *Exodus*, argued that he could not create a successful film when the "lead actor is Mohammad so-and-so from such-and-such" (Chow). The obvious paradox is that Asian actors cannot become "stars" without the opportunities to build their acting portfolio. Furthermore, international giants such as *The Fast and the Furious* franchise irrefutably prove that non-white leads can dominate the box office.

One solution for this issue is to provide more writing opportunities for Asian talent. Wong notes, "until such time as white writers are provided the incentive to learn of the Asians before they write about them, it will to a large extent remain for the Asians themselves to provide the source materials" (Wong 274). Asian writers are the only writers who can provide the depth and nuance required in the writing of an Asian part. But Asian writers, in line with all writers of color, maintain a miniscule share of the screenwriting workforce. According to the 2016 Writers Guild of America, West's Hollywood Writers Report, "minorities continued to be underrepresented by a factor of

about 5 to 1 among employed film writers" (Mitchell). Consequently, white writers are creating the bulk of minority characters, and they are doing so through a white, Orientalist lens. That is the root of Fu Manchu and Mr. Yunioshi. True change and opportunity must come from writing, but recent studies have shown that the diversity of screenwriters remains stagnant, if not decreasing.

Additionally, it is no wonder that such discriminatory representations exist in Hollywood films when they are reflected in America's very fibers. One needs only to look at modern politics to understand how this embedded racism persists. Asian as pollutant remains linked to bustling Chinatowns that are disparaged as dirty and exotic. Asian as coolie has made a resurgence in the most recent election cycle when Donald Trump promised to "Make America Great Again" by bringing back manufacturing jobs to the United States, decrying cheap Chinese products, and accusing China of global wage devaluation. Asian as deviant is not as publicly persecuted in modern media as in early Hollywood, but there is an overall dearth in interracial romances in the media, particularly between Asian and white lovers. And the yellow peril returned with China as our greatest competitor and North Korea as an unstable enemy in possession of long-range missiles. These early stereotypes that were embedded in the very formation of the United States have not been erased. They have been hidden by in political correctness, but the racism remains, no matter how subtle.

Wong notes that "white racism, whether individual or institutional, can be condemned in the film, television, and other visual media only so far as it is allowed to go unchallenged by the persons against whom it is directed" (Wong 276). The Asian

American movement challenged Asian racism in the media, but the activism must continue for further change; and as recent events have shown, this activism must come from an individual level.

Checking White Privilege

Social media has had a profound effect on most aspects of 21st century America, including social activism. Asian representation in films and on television has found its spotlight over the past few years, particularly regarding public outcry over instances of whitewashing. While angry tweets have not earned a sweeping institutional change, there have been small victories, usually as a result of well-organized hash tag campaigns. The #OscarsSoWhite campaign targeting the 2016 Academy Awards is an excellent example of a successful hash tag campaign. #OscarsSoWhite was a response to the release of the Oscar nominees, and the fact that all 20 nominees in the Acting categories were white — for the second year in a row. These omissions also occurred in a year with many acclaimed films starring people of color, including *Straight Outta Compton, Creed,* and *Beasts of No Nation*. The trending hash tag influenced a boycott of the Oscar ceremony, championed by celebrities including Will Smith, Spike Lee, and Michael Moore. As a result of this very public campaign, the governing board of the academy unanimously agreed to double female and minority members by the year 2020, which would allegedly bring fresh perspective to a member board that in the year 2012 was 94% white and 77% male. Notably, the 2017 Oscar nominations included a far more diverse pool of talent. Eight of the acting nominees were people of color, and a film with a predominantly non-white cast (*Moonlight*) took home Best Picture. The result of this

campaign truly exemplified the collective power of social media.

The #OscarsSoWhite campaign highlighted a general lack of diversity in the film industry, but it by no means targeted the Asian American community. In fact, much of the emphasis was on the lack of black nominees. Much like the success of the TWLF, however, the campaign had strength in numbers, and victories can be attributed to the unifying efforts of all non-white populations. Targeting Asian Americans in particular, an interesting example of a campaign run through social media is #NotYourAsianSidekick, a 2013 effort organized by freelance writer Suey Park who wanted to raise awareness of the media's representation of female Asian Americans, in particular. Park explained that the hash tag was an effort to showcase that "there is no model for what an Asian American is" and to create a "new space where Asian American feminism does not leave any group behind and where they'll be anything but a sidekick" (Capachi). The hash tag was quickly adopted not only by females Asian Americans, but also by the community as a whole. It became a rallying cry for Asian Americans to embrace their community, to dismantle American individualism and find strength in their numbers. This hash tag exemplified the greatest fears of the yellow peril crusaders — an organized calling for Asian Americans to rise up against America's dominant social order. The #NotYourAsianSidekick campaign had relative success. It received a fair share of news coverage, and it certainly did raise awareness, but it resulted in no large institutional changes. Despite its lack of tangible achievements, the hash tag started a conversation — with 45,000 tweets in just 24 hours — one that dovetailed nicely with the start of the whitewashing scandals.

As previously mentioned, the last few years introduced a series of films in which a white protagonist plays a role originally conceived for an Asian American. These casting choices ultimately resulted in controversy as viewers voiced their concerns on social media. Many of these industry professionals released a public response to the controversy. As was previously mentioned, some professionals largely discounted the complaints, such as Matt Damon. Some, however, acknowledged their ignorance and pledged to "do better." Emma Stone is one such example. After her miscasting as a half-Asian character in *Aloha*, Stone explained "I've learned on a macro level about the insane history of whitewashing in Hollywood and how prevalent the problem truly is. It's ignited a conversation that's very important" (Smith). Social media has consequently succeeded in not only raising awareness, but also forcing accountability for such representations.

One final example of a recent whitewashing controversy surrounds Disney's live action remake of *Mulan*, which is set for release in 2018. In fall of 2016, an anonymous open letter was posted online by a man who allegedly read a spec script in which a European tradesman would play Mulan's love interest. The letter quickly went viral, social media blew up with angry responses, and an online petition signed by nearly 120,000 people called for viewers to rally against whitewashing in the media. In response, a Disney "industry insider" sat down with *Vanity Fair* to reassure fans that the letter is incorrect. The source revealed, "Mulan is and will always be the lead character in the story, and all primary roles, including the love interest, are Chinese" (Desta). Allegedly, the power of social media forced the hand of one of the largest media

corporations in the world to account for its representation of Asians.

Conclusion

Discriminatory representations of Asian Americans began in early cinema and continue to this day. These representations not only colored the American viewpoint of Asians, but also directly led to the exclusion of Asians from U.S. society, and indirectly led to the exclusion of Asians from the film industry. This exclusion, in a large part, also continues to this day. While yellowface only rarely rears its head in contemporary films, whitewashing is a continued and consistent issue.

However, recent films have called attention to these discriminatory practices, in a very large part due to the accessibility and communal qualities of social media. While previous activist movements found strength in protests and rallies, modern activism achieves ten times the response with a tenth of the work. Online campaigns (such as trending hash tags) magnify individual participation, and the industry is finally starting to take notice. To overturn the harmful stereotypes proliferated by early media, there must be an overhaul of American perception of Asian immigrants, and by extension, Asian Americans. It will not be an easy feat, but Asian American activist groups are growing rapidly and the spotlight continues to shine on their work.

APPENDIX A

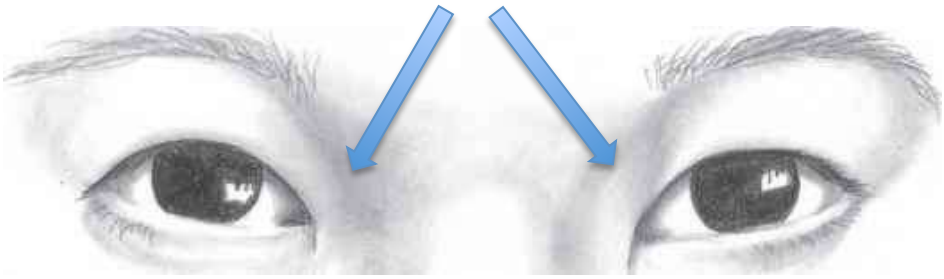

Figure 1.1 - Epicanthic Fold

Figure 1.2

The Martyrdom of St. Crispin

Figure 1.3

The New Comet

Figure 1.4

The Chinese Question

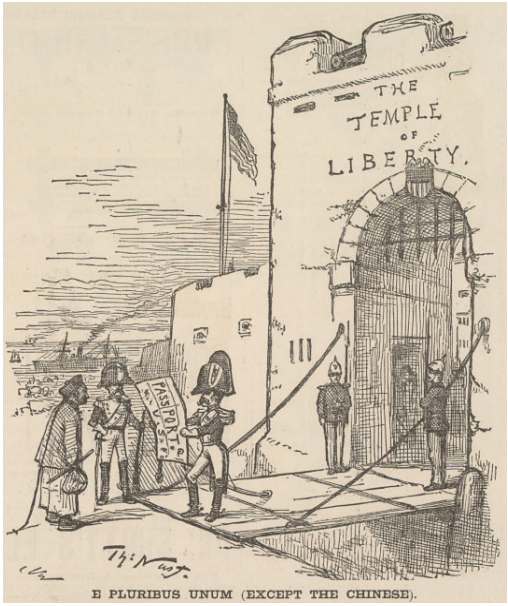

Figure 1.5

E Pluribus Unum

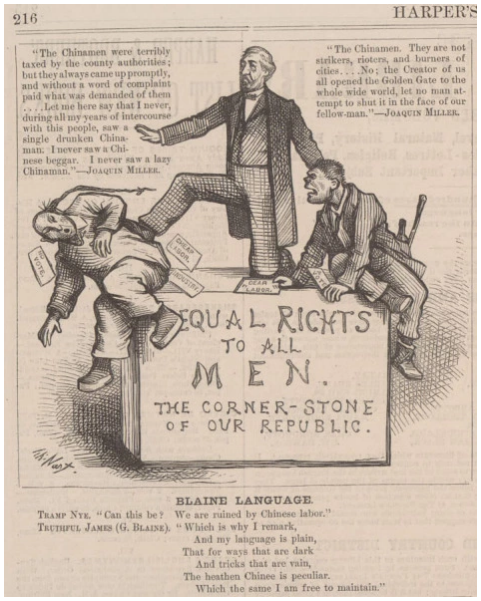

Figure 1.6

Blaine Language

Figure 1.7 - What Shall We Do with our Boys?

Figure 1.8 – Dodging the Exclusion Act

Figure 3.1

Die Gelbe Gefahr

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