

Portrayals of Chinese Women's Images in Hollywood Mainstream Films — An Analysis of Four Representative Films of Different Periods

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Abstract: How do Western films speak to issues of gender, difference, history, and cross-cultural relationships? Have messages about gender and race in Hollywood films about Chinese women changed over time? How does historical social reality find its way into the messages conveyed by Hollywood films? This paper intends to address these questions through analysis of women's portrayals in four representative Hollywood films spanning from 1930s to early 2000s. The four films include *Daughter of Dragon* (1931), *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), *Year of the Dragon* (1985), and *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997), starring renowned Chinese American actresses of three different generations in Hollywood. By tracking various elements – Oriental dresses, geographies, ideologies, stereotypes across these various generations of films, this paper reveals that Hollywood's portrayal of Eastern women has not changed significantly over time. The paper also explores how historical changes in gender, race, and interracial relationships in American society, find their way into these films by examining the expression of Oriental "otherness" and anxiety about cross-racial relationships.

Keywords: Portrayal, Chinese women, Hollywood, film, otherness, stereotype

1. Introduction

How do Western films speak to issues of gender, difference, history, and cross-cultural relationships? Have messages about gender and race in Hollywood films about Chinese women changed over time? This paper focuses on the "cultural work" being done in some of Hollywood movies about Chinese women's depiction. It does not ask if the films are good art, but rather what they are good for. What messages do they convey as they entertain? How did the different social and historical background influence Hollywood films to produce that kind of movies? This paper will mainly look at the films *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931), *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), *Year of the Dragon* (1985), and *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997). The reasons for choosing these four movies are as follows: first, they are Hollywood movies enjoying certain popularity with Chinese women as leading characters; second, these movies all describe the romance between East and West; third, these movies starred three generations of Chinese actresses who had gained certain acknowledgement in Hollywood in different historical periods. Thus, the author believes these movies are typical representations in addressing issues of gender and cross-cultural relationship in Hollywood mainstream films from a synchronic

and historical perspective. This paper will analyze how Chinese women have been portrayed in these Hollywood mainstream films, thus intending to explore how anxieties about gender, race, and interracial relationships circulating in Western, particularly, in American society in different historical times, find their way into the films.

2. The Formulation of the Image of “Oriental Women”

In this part, the paper is going to explore how the dress, stereotypes and geographies in the films have been used to tell who the women are and what they do, and thus what kind of images of “Oriental women” have been formulated in these Hollywood films in different historical periods.

2.1. Dressing

Until Lucy Liu, Anna May Wong had been the most famous Chinese-American actress in the world. One of her most notable films was *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931), in which she played a scheming, murderous, other-worldly beauty who killed coldly and mercilessly. She is a stage performer in the film. In the film, Wong makes a spectacular entrance dressed in a sparkling Chinese “goddess gown” with a huge pomp-style headdress. Dressed in this kind of strange, exotic style, she dances on the stage, attracting a large audience. The white male leading character has seen her on the stage and is so attracted by her that he falls in love with her despite having a fiancée already. Even until nowadays, some Western viewers (IMDb user review, 2008) say “the film’s worth watching just to look at her [Wong’s character] in an array of flattering outfits from scene to scene”. The dress with heavy brocades together with sliding doors and London’s Chinatown helps to create Eastern mysticism, which at that time greatly catered to the white audiences. The fantasy towards Eastern mysticism dated back to Afong Moy, the first recorded Chinese woman in America, who came to New York City in 1834 at age sixteen as an exhibit. Museums in New York and Brooklyn displayed her on an Oriental lattice-work chair, wearing a silk gown and four-inch-long slippers on her bound feet. Audiences watched with fascination as she ate with chopsticks, counted in Chinese, and did computations on an abacus. A few years later, “P. T. Barnum brought the second Chinese-woman exhibit, and the circus featuring her attracted 20,000 spectators in only six days” (Prasso, 2005). This extreme difference of the East from the West finds its way into Hollywood films and exerts a powerful and lasting effect on social reality.

In *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), clothes, and especially the *cheongsam*, become significant markers of Chineseness. In the Suzie Wong book (Richard Mason, 1988 version), Lomax notices Suzie because “she wore jeans — green knee-length denim jeans. That’s odd, I thought. A Chinese girl in jeans. How do you explain that?” (p.5). In the movie version the jeans are there but not evident, covered by a longish coat. What one does see clearly is Suzie’s high Chinese collar. Lomax paints Suzie mainly in Chinese “costumes” — an Empress dress and the traditional black pants with “Hakka hat”, which were probably more “foreign” to her than Western clothes. On one occasion Suzie enters wearing a Western dress and hat. Lomax becomes so furious. He rips the clothes off her and throws them out of the window, saying,

“Take that terrible dress off. You look like a cheap European streetwalker.” It is unclear whether he is accusing her of looking like a whore, which she is, or of looking like a Western whore.

Chinese women wearing Western clothes signal a cultural transgression that Western men seem unable or unwilling to tolerate. The “authenticity” signaled by the *cheongsam* becomes an external manifestation of the other thing that makes Oriental women attractive to Western men. A dance sequence in the Hong Kong bar scenes of *The World of Suzie Wong* tells this point clearly. The formally trained dancer Nancy Kwan sways her hips in a tight, white *cheongsam*, a matching hair band pulling back her long black hair. The eyes of men follow every move of her hips, which are wrapped in the mini-skirt version of the tight Chinese dress. The thick silk fabric of the dress wraps her whole body tightly and pushes up her breasts. Suzie flips her hair and dances flirtatiously with the white sailor in a tight-fitting uniform to the rhythm of the beat. Inside a booth sits her customer, a British businessman named Ben who shivers with desire as he looks at her dancing. This big-budget Hollywood film, organizes its elaborate production around the Asian Woman lead, considering her life worthy of narration, with her as both desiring subject and object of desire. The otherness, symbolized by Suzie’s dress, obviously was the desire of the Western characters in the film as well as the Western audience outside of the film.

From *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931) to *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), thirty years passed. During this period, the Magnuson Act in 1943 finally repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; Congress passed the Displaced Persons Act, giving permanent resident status to Chinese caught in U.S in 1948; in the same year, California repealed a law banning interracial marriage; in 1949, the U.S. broke off diplomatic ties with the newly formed People’s Republic of China. These ups and downs in Sino-U.S. relations barely found their way into mainstream mass media. The East continued to be described as Otherness and opposite to the West. Rather than portraying three-dimensional individuals, these characters often “manifest prejudice and reinforce bigotry” (Bolante, 2006), just as the above-mentioned women characters in the two films. Too often, “mainstream film and television misrepresent the world they claim to reflect. Their stories revise history, and rationalize inequities” (Bolante, 2006). Moreover, these persistent messages encourage viewers to internalize confining definitions of identity and self-worth.

Less violent but equally telling are moments in both the films *Year of the Dragon* (1985) and *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1996). In *Year of the Dragon*, in the setting of Chinatown, Detective White becomes involved with the character of Tracy Tzu, a TV newswoman with a short, sassy haircut and a professional lifestyle. Tzu as in Tzu Xi, the Empress Dowager and Dragon Lady of China. Her clothes are very impressive with long pants on most occasions and a grey wind coat which makes her look quite manly. Throughout the film, one will find her depicted as a classic, exotic seductress of the married Mr. White. In *Tomorrow Never Dies*, Michelle Yeoh plays a Chinese secret agent, in which we get a more-nuanced and less-sexualized portrayal of a Chinese woman. She partly wins equality to James Bond with her brains and martial arts talent. Her Chineseness, however, is marked by the high-collar evening gown which she wears in attending the evil media mogul’s party, which doesn’t seem quite fit in a western-style party. However, compared with the other three movies, her “Oriental Otherness” marked by dresses is less obvious and strange than in the previously mentioned three movies. By the end of the 20th century, the East-West encounter and cooperation have been increasing, which reflects itself in

the mass media as well.

Despite the difference, Hollywood utilizes the prop of dressing to portray to the audience that women in the East are different or “Other” from the West, which contributes partially to perpetuate the audience’s stereotypes towards the Eastern women.

2.2. Stereotypes

Anna May Wong, the pioneering actress, whose screen career was memorialized with the words “she died a thousand deaths,” and for whom the twin legacies of “dragon lady” and “butterfly” lived on within her own lifetime, influenced numerous American screen portrayals of Chinese in later days. In the film *Daughter of the Dragon*, Wong plays this monstrously “masculine” female figure. Despite her love for the white man character, Wong’s character, nonetheless, plots to kill him. She “drugs the wine and ties up her love interest and his fiancée, but is thwarted by Scotland Yard which bursts in and kills her...” (Prasso, 2005), leaving the white couple to live happily ever after. The emergence of the Dragon Lady of the Hollywood screen is complete.

From 1919 to 1960, Wong appeared in approximately sixty films, most of them made in Hollywood, but also in Germany, France, and England – where she became an exotic stage and screen sensation as well. Wong started out playing slave girls, prostitutes, temptresses, and doomed lovers, and carried on those roles in dozens of films throughout her career. It is from her roles on the black-and-white screen that people take images of the Dragon Lady. Of course she didn’t originate the stereotype, but her on-screen representations of it helped make the image an unforgettable part of Western consciousness. Like Lucy Liu, Wong was often criticized for perpetuating stereotypes. She responded that “when you are just starting out, you don’t have much choice about the roles you get to play” (Prasso, 2005). Wong, however, had complained publicly on several occasions that she was “tired of the parts” she had to play. Speaking directly to the Hollywood filmmaking community through fan magazines, she withheld little of her dissatisfaction, “Why should we (screen Chinese) always scheme, rob, kill? I got so weary of it all – of the scenarist’s concept of Chinese characters” (Sakamoto, 1987).

The World of Suzie Wong was the Paramount Pictures’ adaptation of the popular 1957 Richard Mason novel. The book was written in the patronizingly British tone of cultural superiority over the uneducated, “dirty yum-yum girls” of Hong Kong’s red-light district. The book tells the tale of Robert Lomax, an English artist who, by sketching Asian women, finds himself stirred in primitive, sexual ways – ways that English women had never moved him. In the movie, he becomes an American with slightly more progressive ideas who escapes from the West to Hong Kong and meets his China Doll – Suzie, played by Nancy Kwan. Suzie is an illiterate, orphaned prostitute. He hires her to model for him, and finds himself first pitying her and then falling in love with her when she persistently keeps entering his life. After she begs him to help save her illegitimate child, who dies in a flood, he becomes her white knight, saving her from the dirty world of prostitution. Lomax in the book gives the reason why he wanted to marry Suzie. It is escapism. If he married an English girl who offered to get him a good job in a bank, he would be trapped and confined in his own little social circle. By rescuing his China Doll, he could escape the confines of his own world and find the exotic realm of the Oriental.

From Anna May Wong's "Dragon Lady" in 1930s to Nancy Kwan's "China Doll" in 1960s, Eastern women have been repeatedly described as extremes in mass media. This begs the question of why and who perpetuates the stereotypes of Eastern Asians. Back then it was conceivable that Eastern women (not only women but also men) be characterized in extremes because Western exposure to the Far East was limited and the two peoples were not nearly as intertwined with each other as they are today. Especially in 1949, U.S. broke off diplomatic ties with newly formed People's Republic of China. Since then until Nixon's visit to China in the 1970s, few contacts proceeded between U.S. and China. The easiest way to generalize Eastern people was to build fictional characters of an extreme. Movies and the mass media thus help to form Western audience's worldview by shaping Eastern women's identities, and define their roles as extremes – on screen and off. These extreme stereotypes have lasted even until nowadays, long after the formal or informal contacts between East and West increased dramatically.

In *Year of the Dragon* (1985), Tracy, despite being a professional woman, is described as a sexy and seductive figure. In one scene, Mr. White visits Tracy Tzu's house. While he is walking around her house, she is leaning against her sofa, in a quite flirtatious way. From time to time, she fiddles with the wine glass in her hand. In another scene, she gets up early in the morning, half-naked, walking towards the huge window and sitting on the window sill in the dawn. We do not see her very clearly, only a beautiful profile in half darkness, giving the audience a lot of room for fantasy. This is no exception from previous Hollywood descriptions of female Chinese characters at all – sexy, mysterious and seductive, although at first she appeared to be a normal professional news woman.

Compared with the previous two movies, *Year of the Dragon* was shot scores of years later. Why have Asian women continued to be (and to some extent, still are) suppressed and marginalized in American society? Asians and Asian descendents in America have experienced a long, turbulent history; however, "the documentation of which has been nearly eclipsed by the much more blatant oppression of other minority groups" (Cho et al., 1999). As a result, mainstream Americans know very little about Asian people, culture, and the uneasy place Asians have in American society. What little information does reach mainstream ears is radiated by mass-consumed media, like Hollywood films. However, the portrayal of Asians in film has been "insensitive at best, damaging and insidious at its worst" (Cho et al., 1999). Rampant stereotyping of both people and culture is "just the skin of a long American tradition of suppression and domination" (Cho et al., 1999).

In the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1996), Michelle Yeoh played her role as not just the typical Bond girl but a Chinese secret agent with both brains and martial arts talent. Despite this, her role is cool, steely, ethereal, professional, and in control of her emotions. Although the description of her character goes a big step forward in describing a Chinese woman, she can't escape the main constraint of being a "dragon lady" and Eastern other. In one sequence, the accidental allies get handcuffed together, then share a wild motorcycle ride through the crowded streets and across the rooftops of an Asian city. In this scene, the unlikely partners must cooperate while conflicts arise from time to time too. On the motor, we can see that Yeoh wears a red shirt, which symbolizes the leftist ideas in the East while James Bond wears a blue shirt, which symbolizes the rightist ideas in the West. These two figures symbolize the cooperative competition between East and West, which explains why the Eastern women

in Hollywood movies are always depicted either as a “Dragon Lady”, a threatening image; or a “China Doll”, a submissive image. There are only binaries, no middle ground.

Actually, the Western attitude towards the East has always been one of opposites. While the West perceived itself as dominating, progressive, strong, and rational, the East has been portrayed as submissive, backward, weak, and irrational, like the previous movies the paper has discussed. In this way, the West has given itself the role of the male, and assigned the East the traditional female, and so the West has taken it to assert itself over the weak, feminine East. Historical events such as those that led to the Opium War between Britain and China, and the forced opening of Japan’s trade channels by the Americans are just part of a long imperialist history of the West over the East. Because of the East’s innate traits as “submissive” and “backwards”, the West validates its actions by stating that the East seeks out domination by the West and its associated modernization and westernization.

2.3. Geographies

Some scholars see a direct relationship between the geography of the world and the geography of the imagination (Blythe, 1991, cited in Xing, 2000). Said (1978, cited in Xing, 2000) defines the “imaginative geography” as a typical example of “Orientalism”: “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences (p.195)”. As a creator of grand narratives and ideology, Hollywood has long used physical, social, and psychological “distancing” as strategies in its ridiculous representations of Asians (including Chinese). Asian locales in American films – from the mysterious Chinatown, USA, to the colonial Hong Kong, to the Vietnam jungles – are presented as exotic tourist attractions and dangerous wildernesses for colonialist adventurers.

Daughter of the Dragon and *Year of the Dragon* are deliberately situated in Chinatown for many reasons. Chinatown, since the days of Fu Manchu eighty years before, has consistently been portrayed in films as exotic, mysterious, criminal and dangerous. In *Daughter of the Dragon*, audiences are fascinated by the London China town with its plotting chamber, sliding doors and the labyrinth of the streets. Sinister Orientals spy on enemies through panels in the wall, and gongs are struck at key moments in the dark room as Dr. Fu Manchu chants such lines as: “My flower daughter, the knife would wither your petal fingers.” The film *Year of the Dragon* opens with a location shot on New York City’s Chinatown Street, a street scene showing a Chinese-style funeral. Files of people walk through the street in Chinese funeral style dress, upholding a huge photo of the dead man, who was then the leader of the mafia in Chinatown. As the tagline advertises, “It isn’t the Bronx or Brooklyn. It isn’t even New York. It’s Chinatown...and it’s about to explode” (IMDb). The audiences’ desire to see things “to the very limit” first takes them to a Chinese club, where they witness the bloodshed gang fight and dead bodies; next they are taken to a Chinese restaurant where a dead body was floating on the filthy water in a big sink of restaurant waste. Then they visit a living place for Chinese low-ranked gangsters where people are gambling and which, as indicated in the film by the gangster leader, “smells like the sewer”. Whichever place is described in the film, the audience experiences it at its most sensational and awkward. James Moy (1993), thus, has located U.S.

representations of the Chinese in the context of a commodified, dehumanized spectacle of Chinatown, in which they were exhibited as an “objectified or dead Other (p.14)”, a strategy meant to establish Americans’ imperial superiority. History moves forward, but Chinatown remains the same over years. That’s why *Year of the Dragon* sparks controversy and protests by Asian Americans. In response, the studio later has to agree to add a disclaimer to the film, stating that the film’s depiction of Chinese American gangsters does not reflect the majority of Chinese Americans. The “Other” life depicted by Hollywood, however, reaches the mass audience and leaves lingering imagery in their minds.

In her pioneering work *Romance and the Yellow Peril*, Gina Marchetti (1993) notes that cities like Saigon, Casablanca and Hong Kong promise romance, adventure and an escape from the mundane reality of everyday life. Hong Kong is seen as home for both the Oriental and the Occidental. Its main attraction is its duality or “two-ness” and here’s a perfect setting for the Western dominance to meet the Eastern backwardness. Let’s take *The World of Suzie Wong* as an example. The opening scene of the film focuses narrowly on a cluster of boats waving in the water. Then the camera shifts the focus on ordinary people – Western and Chinese heading towards the Star Ferry, which is both a common mode of transportation as well as a symbol of Hong Kong. The title, *The World of Suzie Wong*, shows the constraints of this particular world through the limited perspective of a single, poor, Chinese bargirl. Her world includes the poorer Chinese areas of Wanchai and the shanty huts where she lives with her baby son. The people she knows are the common folk – street and boat people and the other “ladies of pleasure” as they were called. Lomax, the association of whiteness with wealth, gradually learns to negotiate Suzie’s world with her help and has become a part of her world crossing borders of race and gender. Just as Marchetti (1993) notes, Hong Kong is an ideal site where all kinds of binaries can be played out: East – West, capitalism – communism, rich – poor etc. Geographically too, Hong Kong as portrayed in this film, symbolizes the stereotypical binaries of the East as feminine, poor and narrow in contrast to the West as masculine, rich and spacious.

3. Anxiety about Cross-Racial Relationships

All of these films are anxiety-laden cautionary tales about people who try to transgress gender boundaries or cross over from one racial, cultural, or class context to another. There is no indication in any of the films of the changes in US society marked by historical events such as the Vietnam War, feminist movements, and multiculturalism. Inter-marriage – culturally and sexually – is still taboo when it comes to Asia (including China).

Yet, as multiculturalist views of US culture have documented, cross-racial, cross-cultural relationships have been present from the beginning of cultural contact between Native Americans, European colonizers, Africans and Asians in America. Despite this fact, such relationships have historically been subject to legal censure, suspicion and ridicule. In film *Daughter of the Dragon*, the Anna May Wong character has fallen in love with this white guy who’s deemed responsible. Once, they nearly kiss but do not. (Anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting marriage, cohabitation, or sexual relations between Caucasians and members of other races were not lifted in California until 1938, so the Motion Picture Code did not allow scenes of interracial relationships). The film’s ending, marked by suffering and death of the

Wong character, has been a staple of Hollywood movies. Like Anna May Wong has said in a critical tone, “after my death, my tombstone should engrave the words ‘she died a thousand deaths’ ”, which tells of her screen life, that as an Asian woman she was always being killed and never got a happy ending in an interracial relationship. As Liu (2000) points out, “Wong’s characters conveniently ‘elect’ suicide so as not to mar the future happiness of their white lovers and their white fiancées, in the process consoling Western audiences with a fantasy of colonial power over the ever-yielding East” (p. 25).

In *The World of Suzie Wong*, Suzie and Robert stroll off contentedly toward Hong Kong Harbor, agreeing to stay together “for as long as he wants her around.” But this ending is marked by the death of Suzie’s son Winston, who has been killed in the collapse of a Hong Kong shantytown during the floods. The film cannot get Suzie and Robert together unless the obstacle – here, the Chinese son – has been got rid of. Within the white, male-dominated Hollywood tradition, Asian women, like the Nancy Kwan character, suffer from “marginality”. They are subordinated from their white knight, submissive and docile.

In the film *Year of the Dragon*, Tracy, the news reporter, is independent and career-minded. But White dominates her as their relationship progresses. He rips her clothes; she slaps him; he threatens to rape her. He moves in with her, verbally and physically abuses her, tells her how to do her job, and takes away her independence. The audience can see scenes of her walking around naked or topless. White’s dominance over the Asian woman as a representation of foreign and feminist threat is legitimated throughout the movie. Tracy is forcibly transformed from Dragon Lady to submissive China Doll by the power of Mr. White in the course of two hours. There is little doubt that Tracy, while Chinese-American, well-off, and well-educated, is a representation of “Asia” that must submit to the dominance of White. Just as in the movie White says, “I’m tired of Chinese this and Chinese that. Does the fact that bribery, extortion, and murder have been going on for a thousand years make it kosher? Well, this is America, which is two hundred years old, so you’d better adjust your clocks.”

In *Tomorrow Never Dies*, Yeoh plays Wan Lin, an agent of the People’s External Security Force in Beijing. She strikes up an unlikely partnership with James Bond, an agent of Her Majesty’s Secret Service, and they join forces to battle an evil media mogul. Although Yeoh’s character is not a traditionally typical Bond girl, she’s still inferior to James Bond in her brains and martial arts talent. More than once she is seen to be rescued by James Bond and by the end of the film she would have died if it had not been for Bond’s rescue in their last attempt trying to destroy the evil media mogul’s boat base. The success has been marked by what Bond’s boss says, “James Bond made it!” Yeoh, after building her name as an Asian action superstar, has stated publicly that she only wants to appear in non-stereotyped roles that serve to better the depictions of Asian women in Hollywood movies. In the joint U.S.-Chinese production *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000)*, Yeoh’s portrayal of an unrequited love interest gives her some room for nuanced expression at the end of the movie to a degree not typically seen in Hollywood films.

What anxiety is behind Hollywood’s urge in description of the West’s dominance over the East in inter-racial relations? It is a fear of racial subversion. In 1854, the law forbids Chinese from testifying in court against Whites. In 1859, there was the exclusion of Chinese from public schools in San Francisco. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act suspended Chinese immigration

over half of the century. While America seeks to modernize and influence Asian cultures, the influx of immigrants has always sparked fears of the spoilage of white American purity. Asian cultures and habits were seen as decadent and degenerate, and are simultaneously exoticized while demonized. The greatest fear lies in interracial romance, which implies the loss of racial and cultural purity. Especially losing white women to foreign races is to lose the core of white American purity. Jun Xing writes that “there is ample evidence to support the argument that sexual practice has been used repeatedly to enforce hierarchies of gender, race, and class in Hollywood industry” (Xing, 1998). This argument brings up many issues, particularly the contradictions within the representation of Eastern men and women, the fact that Hollywood exoticized these taboo interracial romances, and that while whites socially ridiculed Asian men, they took the East – and its women – at will.

4. Conclusion

By tracking these various elements — Oriental dresses, geographies, ideologies, stereotypes across various generations of films, we reveal that Hollywood’s portrayal of Eastern women, has not changed significantly over time. The mutually shaping relationship between society and cultural products like films, ballets and maybe theatre plays, has kept certain stereotypes in circulation. The Asian mail-order bride phenomenon indicates the persistence of a Suzie Wong archetype that still holds the imagination of the Western male. One fact noteworthy to point out is that in the Hollywood movies of the early 2000s in which Asian women play prominent and more equitable roles, they attain that power through martial arts ability. Yeoh, Liu, and others, while fearsomely proficient and technically skillful in the art of self-defense, ultimately are limited by those roles as well. What’s more, Hollywood tends to erase the ethnic identity in movies like that. In a film like *Charlie’s Angels (2000)*, Lucy Liu is indistinguishable from the other angels except that she looks Chinese. Similarly, there have been few moderate portrayals of Eastern women. Instead, most characters are either extremely feminine or masculine or both; most attention is focused on the character’s ethnicity and its associated imagery. In discussing the power of the film industry in defining roles to perpetuate imagery, Gina Marchetti (1993) writes,

the image Hollywood creates of race and ethnicity points to something more fundamentally pernicious about the relationship between American society and the mass media. Hollywood has the power to define difference, to reinforce boundaries, to reproduce an ideology which maintains a certain status quo. Although organized protests always exist as a last resort, the means to challenge Hollywood’s hegemony over the representation of race and ethnicity remain elusive. Alternative media exist, but appear marginal and far-removed from a popular audience. Access to the industry also exists, but entrance demands a tacit agreement to assimilate, at least to a certain degree, with the dominant culture. (p. 278)

Finally, people may ask, “How should Asians be depicted?” Xing (1998) may give us some inspiration: “Asians and Asian Americans are not stoic, emotionless people”, as he puts

forward, “the Asian characters can be emotional, political, and fallible. They could laugh, cry, and swear. ... They were ordinary human beings (p.229)”.

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