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Asian and Asian American Representation in Selected American Films

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Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná práce se bude zabývat zobrazením Asiatů a Američanů asijského původu ve vybraných amerických filmech. V úvodu práce studentka nastíní historicko-kulturní kontext ohledně asijské menšiny v USA, konkrétně zmíní přístupy k asijským přistěhovalcům a určité stereotypy či předsudky (např. rasa a rasismus, nerozlišování jednotlivých asijských národností, asijské karikatury, "Dragon ladies", apod.). Studentka také krátce zmíní literární postavy (Fu-Manchu a další), které ovlivňovaly většinou společnost v jejich pohledu na Asiaty. Dále studentka také nadefinuje termíny, se kterými bude pracovat v analytické části (např. menšina, "hyphenated identity," orientalismus, žlutá hrozba, apod.). Jádrem práce bude analýza vybraných filmů z hlediska způsobu, jak přistupují k výše zmíněným stereotypům, předsudkům, zobrazení Asiatů/Američanů asijského původu obecně, atd. Studentka také pojedná o žánrovém zařazení vybraných filmů. Ve svých analýzách bude odkazovat na primární díla, své vývody bude konfrontovat/opírat o sekundární zdroje, případně kritické filmové recenze. Závěrem analýzy shrne a vysloví obecnější závěr ohledně zobrazení Asiatů a Američanů asijského původu ve vybraných filmech.

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis deals with the topic of Asian and Asian-American representation in American film. It examines the development of the way Asians were and are treated by Westerners, namely Americans, the effect media has on general public and describes stereotypes, which are often associated with Asians. It then applies this information in the analysis of the two films *My Geisha* (1962) and *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) and the way they approach Asian representation on the silver screen.

KEYWORDS

Asian Americans, American film, representation, minority, stereotypes, whitewashing

NÁZEV

Zobrazení Asiatů a Američanů asijského původu ve vybraných amerických filmech

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem reprezentace Asiatů a zejména asijsko-americké menšiny v amerických filmech. Zkoumá vývoj přístupu Američanů k Asiatům v průběhu času, vliv médií na veřejnost a pojmenovává konkrétní stereotypy, za pomoci kterých je často na Asiaty nahlíženo. Poznatky poté aplikuje v praktické analýze filmů *My Geisha* (1962) a *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) a jejich přístup k zobrazování Asiatů na stříbrném plátně.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Američané asijského původu, americké filmy, reprezentace, menšina, stereotypy, whitewashing

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Introduction

Representation of ethnic minorities is, in modern day, a topic more relevant than ever before. With the rise of media of all kinds in the last few decades, the number of people from all around the world who have access not only to newspaper, books and magazines, but also to the internet, television, radios, cinemas and so on, is rising. As Valerie Adams-Bass, Keisha Bentley-Edwards and Howard Stevenson note at the beginning of their journal article, it is long proven by numerous psychologists that the myth of media influence on people, and especially the youth, is not at all just a myth in the end, but a real occurrence that needs to be taken into account. They support their claims by pointing to studies carried out by Brown and Witherspoon (2002), Hall and Smirh (2012) or Tynes and Ward (2009).¹ Although Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards and Stevenson focus specifically on the issue of media representation of black people, similar, though not quite the same, approach could be taken when speaking of media representation of other minorities as well.

This thesis deals with the topic of representation of minorities in American film, specifically those of people of East Asian descent, and the way the viewpoint of media shapes public opinions about things, cultures and ethnicities. Film, being one of the pieces of media to slowly climb up the popularity ladder and eventually spread worldwide, may seem quite innocent at first. It may even be argued that film on its own is supposed to serve for entertainment purposes. While that is certainly true, we must not forget the power that it holds. It may not be the film's primary goal to influence and shape minds of its viewers, however that on its own is inevitable. As pointed out by Martin Quigley in his article, "[a]lthough the theatrical motion picture is dedicated only to the purposes of entertainment, and does not seek to affect the thoughts or conduct of its patrons, it is probably foremost among the means of influencing the millions who are its regular patrons."² In other words, the film industry overtime became a wielder of a powerful tool. A tool which can easily influence masses, given that it can hold their attention for the duration of the picture. Some saw this as a business opportunity – clever product placement in a popular film may indirectly boost the product's profitability simply for being associated with the picture. Quigley sees this as a kind of proof of the

¹ Valerie N. Adams-Bass, Keisha L. Bentley-Edwards, and Howard C. Stevenson, "That's Not Me I See on TV...: African American Youth Interpret Media Images of Black Females," *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 2, no. 1 (2014): 79. <https://doi.org/10.5406/womgenfamcol.2.1.0079>.

² Martin Quigley, "Public Opinion and the Motion Picture," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1937): 131. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2744920>.

industry's importance and power that motion pictures are able to popularize otherwise quite basic and ordinary articles of everyday use.³ It may be assumed that the same goes for popularizing outlooks on various topics or issues which can end up being a crucial influence on a person's own opinion regarding these topics. This can be especially true in the case of young children who tend to be much more easily influenced. As Carolyn A. Stroman hints, most children of modern day have easy access to countless types of media, television being one of the most widely spread with 98% of American households containing at least one television.⁴ She also mentions that "children and adolescents spend more time watching television than they do engaging in formal education," stressing the amount of time dedicated to their consumption of media.⁵ Keeping this fact in mind, a conclusion can be made that children are, to some extent, raised by what they view on television. Naturally, this influence can range from good to bad depending on the type of content the children consume. That is why proper on-screen representation of minorities is so important. Not only can films serve as means of entertainment, they can also educate and attempt to play their role in forming a safe, peaceful and inclusive society.

This thesis studies the two films *My Geisha* (1962) and *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) while paying close attention to their approach to Asian representation. Those two films were specifically chosen for this analysis so that the evolution of depicting Asians in film could be closely studied. The release dates of the two romantic comedies are nearly 60 years apart and, during that period of time, the public opinion regarding healthy representation of minorities has shifted rapidly. This thesis aims to highlight those changes. Due to the nature of this paper, the theoretical and practical parts are intertwined to better illustrate the ties between theory and its application or presence in the studied films.

The introductory chapter of this thesis takes a look at the past to attempt to uncover potential roots of American attitudes towards Asians. It tries to understand the ties between the history of the United States of America and its ties to East Asian countries as well as their people. It points out a sort of fear many Americans began to feel towards Asian immigrants in expectation of the newcomers taking away their jobs, their money and essentially their land and their entire country. It discusses not only the blame for the fall of California's so-called "golden era" was pinned on the arrival of Chinese immigrants, but also the projection of attitudes

³ Quigley, "Public Opinion and the Motion Picture," 131.

⁴ Carolyn A. Stroman "Television's Role in the Socialization of African American Children and Adolescents." *The Journal of Negro Education* 60, no. 3 (1991): 314. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2295485>.

⁵ Stroman, "Television's Role in the Socialization of African American Children and Adolescents," 315.

towards Asians in form of the literary villain character Fu Manchu created by the author Sax Rohmer. Lastly, the first chapter takes a look at the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which escalated the events of World War II and essentially transformed a formerly European conflict into one of worldwide scale. The aftermath of this attack and its influence on the way Americans began to treat Asians is also highlighted.

The second chapter speaks on the issue of stereotypes and prejudices held against people of Asian descent. It outlines Edward Said's description of the term "Orientalism" and uses this information in an attempt to understand a Westerner's outlook on Asians and Asia as a whole. It names and describes stereotypes such as model minority and tiger parenting and touches on the topic of assimilation and hyphenated identity. This chapter also dissects Shu-Ching Lee's five aspects of a traditional Chinese family and takes a look at the presence (and lack) of distinction between things Asian and Asian American. Throughout the chapter, the theoretical information is intertwined with the analysis of *My Geisha* and *Crazy Rich Asians* in order to showcase the topics as they are reflected in the selected films.

The third and final chapter discusses the quality and equality of on-screen representation of Asians, focusing specifically on Hollywood productions. It notes that *Crazy Rich Asians* is the first film featuring a fully Asian cast in 20 years and discusses its way of presenting Chinese culture. It opens up the topic of whitewashing, the use of yellowface and their relevance to the "white savior trope." Along with the description of these terms, this chapter presents their connection with the two films analyzed in this thesis.

1 Attitudes towards Asians in the past

Before this thesis begins speaking on the topic of Asian and Asian American on-screen representation, attention must be paid to American history and its overall experience with Asians, which undeniably eventually led to shape the public's view on far Eastern minorities.

Due to the West rarely being presented and faced with the East in the past, a kind of fear of the unknown developed. What can also be labeled xenophobia has influenced the attitudes American citizens had towards Asians. Americans started to feel threatened by Asian immigrants, often afraid of the spread of Asian power and influence or scared of losing their jobs to cheap working force. Viet Thanh Nguyen shares a personal experience in his article, supporting this claim. He mentions a distant memory from early 1980s, a time when he was 12 or 13 years old and his parents ran a small store. One day, the words "Another American driven out of business by the Vietnamese" appeared in the window of a nearby shop, suggesting that it was his parents who ruined an American's business by opening a store on the same street.⁶ Robert J. Lee discusses the lyrics of a song called "California As It Was and Is" which was published in 1855 in John A. Stone's *Put's Original California Songster* and comments on it, saying that it "laid the blame for the passing of California's "golden" era squarely on the arrival of immigrants from China."⁷ He then argues the song's claims are not true as the arrival of Chinese workers in the mines of California was in no way related to the decline in gold prices, which the song is mourning.⁸

Just like other minorities, Asian Americans were usually not portrayed in media, and if by any chance they were, it often shed a negative light on them or was made precisely in order to mock them. After the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882, suspending Chinese immigration for ten years and prohibiting naturalization for the Chinese people who were already living in the United States at the time, the attitudes towards Asians worsened. This can be seen for example in the notorious Fu Manchu, a fictional character created by the British author Sax Rohmer. Fu Manchu was seen as a great threat to the West, being a witty and sly Oriental villain, and has now become a symbol of the so-called yellow peril genre despite the books that featured him achieving great success at the time of their publication.

⁶ Viet Thanh Nguyen, "Asian American Are Still Caught in the Trap of the 'Model Minority' Stereotype. And It Creates Inequality for All," *Time*, June 25, 2020, accessed March 22, 2023. <https://time.com/5859206/anti-asian-racism-america/>.

⁷ Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (USA: Temple University Press, 1999), 16.

⁸ Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*, 17.

The West's characterization of Asians as the "yellow peril" stems from events long lost to the past. As Gina Marchetti points out, the roots of this derogatory label can be traced back to times of Genghis Khan and those of Mongolian invasions of Europe which took place during the 13th and 14th centuries. Marchetti notes that the yellow peril, a racially driven metaphor, "combines racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East."⁹ In other words, it is a term that paints Asians as an inevitable threat to the Western world. To add to its malicious characteristics, it does not seem to differentiate between Asian nationalities and rather views all people with Eastern features as one singular enemy. Stanford M. Lyman stresses this fact by pointing out namely China, Japan and North Korea as the countries that seemed to be the "face" of the yellow peril.¹⁰ This suggests that the term gradually evolved overtime and its meaning was bent to fit the current situation and issues that America was facing in any relevance to the East.

Fu Manchu, the fictional evil antihero which stemmed from the yellow peril, has accumulated great publicity among all age categories and therefore took great part in shaping the Western idea of Orient. From the nature and actions of the character it can be easily assumed that the public's outlook on Asians was not impacted in a positive way. Another issue arises when we realize that, as Frayling mentions in his book, a fictional character is much more well-known than any other Chinese person aside from Mao Zedong, also known as Chairman Mao, the Chinese communist revolutionary.¹¹ It becomes especially worrisome when, in Fu Manchu's case, the representation turns against the represented because of their portrayal in such anti-West way.

As already mentioned, the Chinese were in no way the only stereotyped or marginalized Asians in the past. Shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1942 which prompted the US to partake in the Second World War, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered for the Japanese Americans to be relocated from the West Coast because they were seen as potentially harmful by the Americans who were shaken to the core and perhaps blinded with rage and fear which they proceeded to take out on anyone of Japanese descent. More than a hundred thousand

⁹ Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (USA: University of California Press, 1993).

¹⁰ Stanford M. Lyman, "The 'Yellow Peril' Mystique: Origins and Vicissitudes of a Racist Discourse," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 13, no. 4 (2000): 684. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20020056>.

¹¹ Christopher Frayling, *The Yellow Peril: Dr. Fu Manchu and The Rise of Chinaphobia* (USA: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2014).

Japanese Americans were moved to internment camps across the country. Some of those who have survived the camps argue that the term “internment” is highly inappropriate when referring to the detention of innocent US citizens as opposed to the one of actual enemies and spies. Years later, in 1988, the camps were deemed a failure of political leadership and the U.S. Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act, which compensated the Japanese American survivors with \$20,000 each. In 1991, George H. W. Bush issued a formal apology for the ordeals the Japanese American citizens suffered during WW2:¹²

A monetary sum and words alone cannot restore lost years or erase painful memories; neither can they fully convey our Nation’s resolve to rectify injustice and to uphold the rights of individuals. We can never fully right the wrongs of the past. But we can take a clear stand for justice and recognize that serious injustices were done to Japanese Americans during World War II.¹³

As Bush states in his letter, money and words can never fully compensate suffering. The same goes for the damage on the reputation of Japanese American citizens who have, following the events of and leading up to WW2, joined the Chinese in the “bad Asian” role. The former *Star Trek* star George Takei, arguably one of the most well-known survivors of the internment camps, spoke on a panel at Asia Society in Los Angeles in April 2016 in reaction to a skit at the Oscars which featured three Asian children and was seen as racist or inappropriate. He mentioned how nowadays, many stereotypes towards Asians are described as bland and often brushed over without much thought and expressed his worries regarding these seemingly harmless stereotypes becoming damaging and dangerous overnight. He uses his own family’s experience after the Pearl Harbor bombing as an example as he recalls the horrors of being held at gunpoint by American soldiers and then being sent into a camp surrounded by barbed wire. All of that happened because of the hysteria caused by the war which inflicted suspicion, fear and hatred in the American citizens who now saw Asians as potential threats simply because their looks resembled those of the people who carried out the attack on Pearl Harbor.¹⁴

¹² The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Japanese American internment," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, October 18, 2021, accessed February 2, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Japanese-American-internment>.

¹³ George W. H. Bush, Washington, DC: The White House, October 1990.

¹⁴ Asia Society, “George Takei Discusses the Harm of Stereotypes,” July 25, 2016, recorded April 23, 2016 at the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYNEjtY9WAM&ab_channel=AsiaSociety.

2 Stereotyping of Asians

According to E. Said, the term “Orientalism“ is rather general and vague and it can be understood from multiple points of view rather than be explained in one universal way.¹⁵ Ultimately in many cases, context is a crucial requirement. The term is generally understood as an umbrella term for studies carried out by the people of the West regarding Eastern cultures, societies and languages. Alternatively, it can also include enthusiasm and interest in all things Asian.

It needs to be noted that the sole word “Orientalism” might not hold the same meaning to a British person as to, for example, an American. Said points out that the American version of Orientalism is more likely to be linked mainly to China and Japan. He then goes on to mention multiple possible understandings of the term, such as “a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts“ or “an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of "interests.""¹⁶

It is not unusual for the term to be met with certain negative connotations, as the word “Oriental” tends to be used as a derogatory term towards people of Asian descent.¹⁷ One of the reasons for that can be traced back to the era of European imperialism. With the idea of expanding colonies and power further to the East comes the concept of the “white man’s burden”. It could be argued that, although at the start there perhaps stood some good intentions and genuine interest in foreign cultures as part of the Orientalism studies, white people eventually began to feel a sense of duty and right to manage the affairs of the people of different ethnicities, believing that their cultures and societies were underdeveloped which would then later lead to their self-destruction. Essentially, white people felt superior to them and considered themselves their saviors. This is why Said expresses his belief that those who study the Orient can never truly understand and comprehend the East. He explains that “because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action.”¹⁸ The Orient had been dominated by the people of the West for so long that it is practically impossible to pinpoint the

¹⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 2.

¹⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

¹⁷ Viet Thanh Ngyuen, “Asian American Are Still Caught in the Trap of the ‘Model Minority’ Stereotype. And It Creates Inequality for All,” *Time*, June 25, 2020, accessed March 22, 2023. <https://time.com/5859206/anti-asian-racism-america/>.

¹⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

truly Oriental aspects as the culture was vastly influenced, one could almost say shaped by those in power.

Those in power are also often responsible for what the opinion of general public regarding a situation is. One could say that it is mainly thanks to them that stereotypes and misperceptions exist. Albert H. Yee uses the model minority stereotype as an example, recalling back to the words the American president Ronald Reagan said in 1984. Yee paraphrases and later on quotes the president, who claimed that the Asian and Pacific Americans “preserve (the American) dream by living up to the bedrock values of the U.S.”¹⁹ Asians became seen as one homogeneous unit rather than multiple rich, individual cultures. This fact shows clear ignorance towards the minorities and the possible various differences between different Asians according to their nationality. Model minority does not differentiate between the Chinese, Japanese or Korean.²⁰ It certainly does not only apply to those mentioned, the stereotype places all of the individuals of East Asian descent under one umbrella. However, due to the nature of this research as a whole, this thesis will only more closely focus on Chinese, Japanese and Korean Asians. That in no way means to suggest that other Asian nationalities do not face the model minority stereotype.

A few examples of the model minority stereotype can be found even in the film *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018). Rachel Chu, as the main character, falls under the description of model minority. She is portrayed as a woman who is well-educated and career-driven even though she comes from a quite struggling background. She attended not only Stanford University, but also Northwestern University and later landed herself a job as an economics professor at New York University. This emphasis on her self-made past and academic achievements can even be understood as a hint at the stereotype about Asians being held to incredibly high standards when it comes to their education. Though, admittedly, this is not entirely the case of Rachel who was not pressured by her family into academic success and strove for it on her own accord.

The model minority stereotype is certainly not the only aspect of migrating to the United States that Asians had to face. Migrating over to a completely different country comes at the cost of giving up, or rather leaving behind one’s home country. However, that does not necessarily mean that the entire culture of their homeland is forgotten by that individual. This can be illustrated on the way immigrants choose to identify by using the so-called hyphenated

¹⁹ Albert H. Yee, “Asians as Stereotypes and Students: Misperceptions that Persist,” *Educational Psychology Review* 4, no. 1 (1992), 96. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23359579>.

²⁰ Donna Y. Ford, *The Journal of Negro Education* 65, no. 2 (1996), 248. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2967321>.

identity. As a process of assimilation to the new environment, in this case the United States, immigrants of ethnic background tend to adopt a hyphenated label containing their original nationality and their obtained American citizenship. It is important to stress that this usually applies to non-white immigrants and that the white immigrants often have an easier time adapting and identifying themselves as unhyphenated Americans. Tanya Golash-Boza supports this claim by writing:

“While whites self-identify as Americans, non-white Americans recognize that they are not Americans, but African-Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans or Latino/a Americans. In this sense, how one becomes American or how one assimilates into American society depends in large part on one's racial status.”²¹

In other words, hyphenated identity is to be taken as a symbol of dual heritage, as pointed out by Jessica Jacolbe. She also emphasizes that although the hyphen was officially removed from identity labels by the Associated Press in 2019, punctuation will always be used differently by different people.²² According to Peter Feng, Asians are an especially hyphenated community due to their diversity. He explains that “the term Asian encompasses several distinct cultures – Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, Indian, Laotian, [...] Even Chinese culture can be broken down further: mainland Chinese vs. Taiwanese, Cantonese vs. Mandarin.”²³ In relation to this, Feng states that he sees the label “Asian American” as a political term rather than one denoting a cultural designation.²⁴ He mentions the problematic aspect of it: “as “America” is popularly understood to refer to the United States (and not to other North and South American nations), “Asian American” yokes together a continent and a nation.”²⁵ With this taken into account, the Asian American label begins to feel far too generalized and therefore partly loses its original intended purpose of helping Asian immigrants in the States to stay connected with their culture. It certainly does not help that to some people, the sole word “Asian” might only mean certain parts of the entire continent. Feng uses the example of Americans usually using it to refer to East Asia (especially China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines), while to a British person, it may instead describe South Asia (mainly Indians and Pakistanis).²⁶ Returning to his claim that the term “Asian American” is rather political, Feng

²¹ Tanya Golash-Boza, “Dropping the Hyphen? Becoming Latino(a)-American through Racialized Assimilation,” *Social Forces* 85, no. 1 (2006): 28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3844404>.

²² Jessica Jacolbe, “On Hyphen and Racial Indicators,” *JSTOR Daily*, August 19, 2019, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://daily.jstor.org/on-hyphens-and-racial-indicators/>.

²³ Peter Feng, “Being Chinese American, Becoming Asian American: ‘Chan Is Missing,’” *Cinema Journal* 35, no. 4 (1996): 88. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1225719>.

²⁴ Feng, “Being Chinese American, Becoming Asian American,” 90.

²⁵ Feng, “Being Chinese American, Becoming Asian American,” 89.

²⁶ Feng, “Being Chinese American, Becoming Asian American,” 89-90.

explains his feeling that the term is an imposed one. He admits that although it indeed does differentiate Asian Americans from Americans, it does so on the sole basis of race instead of cultural background. In Feng's words, "to identify one's self as Asian American is to both accept and critique the externally imposed label which denies the specificity of one's cultural heritage and defines one's otherness in racial terms."²⁷

As mentioned earlier, sometimes it can feel as if the original culture of a minority gets gradually erased when the members of the minority enter the United States and begin their new life there. That is, however, contrasted by the fact that some Americans might not see a clear distinction between Asians and Asian Americans and rather group them all under the Asian label. This occurrence could very well not be racially motivated and might just be a secondary product of misrepresentation in film and other media. As Smail mentions in her film review, it is not often that we see any real distinction being made between Asian and Asian Americans on the silver screen.²⁸ This is yet another quite revolutionary and daring step taken by *Crazy Rich Asians*. As the protagonist, Rachel, finds herself in her boyfriend Nick's home country, Singapore, the differences between attitudes and overall world-views from the two similar, yet very different groups start to surface. This on its own may not seem very new and never-done-before, however, attention must be paid to the way the film paints those differences. They are approached in such fashion that attempts to broaden its viewers' horizons and perhaps even teach them something new that they may not know otherwise. That may be because the film is constructed with keeping healthy Asian representation in mind as one of its goals. This approach could be somewhat contrasted by the way Asians are treated in the 1962 film titled *My Geisha*, directed by Jack Cardiff.

Though the film *My Geisha* does not aim to be blatantly racist, it does include a few elements which could be seen as appropriating. It could be argued that it was created that way in order to use shock and outrages to its advantage. After all, it is true that controversy sells much better than just about anything else. But money and overall success of the film might not be the only reason why *My Geisha* chooses to represent Asians in the way that it does. If looked at from a different angle, the film may be actually trying to use the stereotypical and flat out appropriating elements in order to shed light on the problem itself. The film revolves around an American director obsessed with the idea of 'unstained' and 'pure' vision of the Orient. It could be considered satire on the approach of some American producers who tend to see the East as

²⁷ Feng, "Being Chinese American, Becoming Asian American," 93.

²⁸ Smail, "Crazy Rich Asians Review."

a pretty concept rather than an actual place. This, in the film, is represented in the character of Paul Robaix, a successful director whose new project consists of bringing the classic play called *Madame Butterfly* to the silver screen in picture form. He demands that only a real Japanese girl can be cast for the main role of the geisha, claiming that is so that the film is not “just an opera, but real.”²⁹ Paul is very set on his idea of bringing a ‘raw’ Japanese-inspired picture to life, though he does so only on the basis of the Japanese aesthetic. This claim is further supported later in the film when Paul arrives in Tokyo and is very unfamiliar with local culture, traditions and even the endeavors entailed in the life of a real geisha which his film is supposed to portray. Paul’s wife Lucy Dell, a famous actress, is, however, very displeased with his decision to cast a Japanese girl instead of her, as she has been the leading star of his greatest movies in the past. Paul refuses her idea of taking the lead role saying “[having her] in *Madame Butterfly* would be offensive,”³⁰ which could reflect his initial honest attempt to bring more Asian representation to Hollywood, though he does not execute it very well in the end. He does end up going to Japan as per his wish to cast a real Japanese girl to play the role of his envisioned geisha, however, the casting process does not go according to his plan. The actresses who apply for the geisha role do not live up to his expectations, or rather fetishized visions of Oriental women. At one point, Paul is even heard complaining that the girls are acting “too American” and that they are “more Western than the girls at home.” He also states that “[he knows] there was an American tendency [in the East] but they are making a fetish of it, they are not Japanese anymore.”³¹ This statement is quite ironical, especially coming from Paul. He mentions his assumption that Americans are, in his words, fetishized by the Japanese. Paul himself blatantly fetishizes and obsesses over Oriental visuals, however he only finds such practice offensive and problematic once it is directed towards his nationality. He does not seem to realize that he is essentially doing the same thing and that making this accusation comes off as rather hypocritical on his part. Later on, the viewers learn that Paul cannot really tell a Japanese girl from an American one – he cannot even recognize his own wife, Lucy, under heavy makeup when she comes to audition in disguise. He is amazed by her, fully convinced that she is a Japanese girl that perfectly fits his vision for the role. Paul ends up casting Lucy under the impression that he is actually casting a real geisha named Yoko Mori. This very much shows that he is unable to judge what or who is or is not Japanese, as he himself cannot recognize a fake Japanese girl even when sitting six inches apart from her. Admittedly, he does confess that he took a liking

²⁹ *My Geisha*, directed by Jack Cardiff (Paramount Pictures, 1962), 00:04:29.

³⁰ *My Geisha*, 00:04:56.

³¹ *My Geisha*, 00:22:40.

to Yoko because she reminds him of Lucy, though this does not necessarily mean that he saw through her disguise. If anything, it defeats Paul's entire noble need to cast a real Japanese girl as he ended up picking his actress by the criteria of someone who resembles his purely American wife.

In other words, the East is often used for its aesthetics while any further insight into its diverse number of cultures is dismissed. Cardiff might just be trying to cleverly reference this fact and point fingers at it. That being said, the approach of appropriating in order to stop appropriation may not be the best route to take when speaking of on-screen representation of minorities, or even overall.

In contrast, the approach taken by the director of *Crazy Rich Asians*, Jon M. Chu, does seem to do a better job at presenting and introducing elements of Eastern culture. Firstly, right after her arrival, Rachel, the female lead, experiences a sort of a reverse culture shock when she is exposed to the overwhelmingly different nature of Singapore as compared to the US where she was raised. This way, the film introduces a few cultural aspects of the Eastern world even to the viewer of the film who is able to experience everything along with Rachel and perhaps even relate to the feeling of being an outsider. The importance of street food is one of the many new things she comes in contact with right away. Street food in Asia is a much more valued market than in the States, where such food stalls might be looked down upon or considered informal and local people might prefer visiting a restaurant over eating out in the street. As Winarno mentions, in Asia, people from all fields and classes are customers of food stalls.³² Nick gives Rachel a short introduction and highlights that the street food market is “one of the only places in the world where street food vendors actually earn Michelin stars,”³³ hinting that non-Asians might not consider a street food stall worthy of such title, either thanks to presumed poor hygiene or something enjoyed by predominantly the lower class of society due to its low costs. Not only are they easily accessible, cheap and offering a wide variety of dishes to choose from, they also play a role in the social aspect of eating with other people. This dinner scene subtly shows that people in Asian countries dine with many side dishes which are then shared by everyone around the table, unlike the people of the West who usually tend to have a plate of food only for themselves.

³² Florentius Gregorius Winarno, “Street food in Asia: An industry that is much better than its reputation,” *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, March 21, 2017, accessed March 22, 2023. <https://th.boell.org/en/2017/03/21/street-food-asia-industry-much-better-its-reputation>.

³³ *Crazy Rich Asians*, directed by Jon M. Chu (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2018), 00:19:48.

The second day after Rachel and Nick's arrival in Singapore they are set to attend a party hosted by Nick's family. Earlier in the film, the protagonist Rachel is seen picking out a suitable dress for the occasion of meeting the family of her boyfriend. Her mom is helping her choose and makes a comment about color symbolism in China. She does not want her daughter to pick a blue and white dress, because these colors tend to represent death and are worn at funerals. Instead, she suggests Rachel picks a red dress, as the color red is considered to be lucky and a symbol of fertility. This is contrasted later in the film when Rachel has already arrived in Singapore and is visiting her college friend, Peik Lin. Lin's family makes remarks about the red dress Rachel is wearing, saying that red is indeed a lucky color, but only if "you're an envelope,"³⁴ hinting at the tradition of gifting red envelopes containing money on Chinese New Year. This suggests that perhaps the Western assumption of colors wielding so much importance in the East is a bit of an old-fashioned concept and some modern Asians do not consider it rude or inappropriate to wear "funeral colors" during special occasions.

Later on, at the entrance of the celebratory party itself, Rachel and Nick are presented with two bowls of clear water by the waiter. Rachel immediately assumes the water is for drinking, however is stopped by Nick shortly after and he explains that the bowls serve the purpose of washing one's hands. The bowls are also called "finger bowls". This scene highlights the different cultural customs between Rachel's background and the one of Nick, who is obviously used to using finger bowls. Finger bowls can be found not only in Asian countries, but also Britain or the US.³⁵ There arises the question of why Rachel was not aware of this practice, coming from America herself. This could, however, have quite an easy answer: Rachel comes from a lower class background and finger bowls are nowadays used far more often by people of higher class. It also needs to be noted that the use of finger bowls in North America has plummeted circa after the 1950s. Ultimately, it can be assumed that the phenomenon of washing one's fingers before a meal has eventually lost its meaning of cleanliness and leaned more into the social etiquette aspect of dining.³⁶

Another example of clear distinction between things Asian and Asian American can be found in the way Nick's mother, Eleanor, treats Rachel. Eleanor is portrayed as a more conservative Asian parent who deeply respects set tradition and seemingly does not like

³⁴ *Crazy Rich Asians*, 00:32:03.

³⁵ Meher Varma, "The Finger Bowl Is an Old Dining Etiquette Tradition That Could Soon Disappear," *Eater*, October 28, 2020, accessed March 22, 2023. <https://www.eater.com/21516159/finger-bowl-tableside-rinse-history-dining-etiquette-covid-19>.

³⁶ Judith Martin, "The Tragic Lot of the Fingerbowl," *UExpress*, May 19, 2002, accessed March 22, 2023. <https://www.uexpress.com/life/miss-manners/2002/5/19>.

straying away from it. That is why she would rather Nick marry an Asian girl rather than an Asian American. This shows on multiple occasions, especially in her interactions with Rachel herself. When discussing Rachel's background of chasing her goal of becoming a university professor and having her mother's full support in doing so, Eleanor is heard saying: "Pursuing one's passion, how American. Your mother is very open-minded, not like here, where parents are obsessed with shaping the life of their children."³⁷ Her choice of words and sarcastic undertone underline the negative feelings she holds towards Americans, no matter if they are of Asian descent or not. The last sentence of Eleanor's comment shows that she is aware of certain stereotypes that Westerners hold towards Asians. In this case, it most likely hints at the tiger parent stereotype which, ironically enough, Eleanor's character in the movie represents quite well.

The so called "tiger parents" get their name from the majestic beasts for a good reason. Tigers are often seen as a symbol of unyielding power, strength and ambition. They are also carnivores, therefore they radiate the aura of something to be feared. The mere presence of a tiger makes one feel inferior and respect the animal for its reputation of being an agile and powerful hunter. The term tiger mom was coined in 2011 by Amy Chua in her book *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, which sparked endless debates on the topic of the "right way" to raise children. Debates which pit the Western liberal way of parenting against the Chinese authoritative style, which demands undying respect. While the first is considered to be softer and take into notice the child's individualism and feelings, the latter prioritizes being tough and strict. In her book, Chua suggests that Chinese parenting is often seen as a surreal concept by the Western parents and that they tend to wonder how is it possible for Chinese parents to consistently keep raising such successful offspring.³⁸ That being said, she also mentions that although she uses the term tiger parenting in association with Chinese parents, there really is no barrier stopping any person of any ethnicity from adopting this style of parenting.³⁹ The terms "Chinese" and "Western" are used very loosely in Chua's book and the same will apply to their use in this thesis.

The core of tiger parenting essentially lies in the parent's complete control over their child's life. That way, they are able to influence and carefully dictate each and every step their offspring take which then eventually leads to their success. However, the tiger parent does not

³⁷ Crazy Rich Asians, 00:40:21.

³⁸ Amy Chua, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, (USA: Penguin Books, 2011), 11.

³⁹ Amy Chua, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, 12.

operate only in the field of academic smarts of their child or teaching their kid how to play the piano or violin. Chua provides a list of few of the many things her daughters, Sophia and Louisa, were prohibited from doing. The list of prohibitions includes points relating to the daughters' success in the school field, such as getting any grades other than straight A's (even bringing home an A-minus is deemed unacceptable) or not excelling at all subjects, P.E. and drama club excluded. However, the kids are also not allowed to have sleepovers at their friends' houses, watch TV, play videogames or choose their own after-school activities. Any form of complaining about anything is also not allowed.⁴⁰

This, to any Western person, might seem as an overly strict and almost abstract concept of parenting. Some may even consider it shocking and unheard of. That, to an extent, is true, however it must not be forgotten to mention the cultural differences between the West and China, which inevitably leave marks on the way children are raised in both regions. The world, as it is wide and large, is just as culturally diverse. Each and every culture values different things and upholds different customs. The Chinese way of parenting therefore vastly differs from what someone from the West might perceive as a common standard. According to Shu-Ching Lee, the Chinese family system is greatly influenced by its past form and has not seen any severe changes in the last two thousand years. To fully understand the reasoning behind Chinese parenting, Lee introduces the definition of the term "familism" and states that it seems too abstract and unspecified when speaking about the complex concept. Instead, he suggests five core elements in order to re-define the term for the purpose of his paper.⁴¹ Keeping these five elements in mind, most of them can be applied to their respective parallel which occurs in the Young family during the film *Crazy Rich Asians*.

Firstly, there is the importance of the father-son relationship.⁴² It is a known fact that in China, family is the core value of local society and is considered to be much more important than individualism or chasing one's passion. However, as it is a highly patriarchal society, not all members of a family are created entirely equal. As Lee points out, the well-being of the entire household practically relies on the relationship between father and son, without which "there would never be familism, in some cases not even a stable family."⁴³ This could, ironically, be assumed to be one of the reasons behind the troubles the Young family faces in

⁴⁰ Amy Chua, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, 11.

⁴¹ Shu-Ching Lee, "China's Traditional Family, Its Characteristics and Disintegration," *American Sociological Review* 18, no. 3 (1953): 272. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2087881>.

⁴² Shu-Ching Lee, "China's Traditional Family, Its Characteristics and Disintegration," 272.

⁴³ Shu-Ching Lee, "China's Traditional Family, Its Characteristics and Disintegration," 272.

Crazy Rich Asians. The father figure is completely missing from the picture and therefore there is no hypothetical stable building stone for the family, which inevitably results in problems.

The second element of Chinese familism, according to Lee, is family pride.⁴⁴ It is something that goes hand-in-hand with family being such a valued concept in the East. Naturally, each of its members represents and is responsible for the public face of the entire family. But the same way a family member's success is accounted to the family name, so is each of their slip-ups. Amy Chua recalls a similar situation in her book, going back to her childhood. She had once won the second place in a history contest held by her school and invited her parents to the award ceremony. After someone other than Chua was awarded the first place, she recalls her father telling her to never embarrass him in this way again.⁴⁵ Though at first glance it might not be obvious from a Westerner's point of view, Chua's father considered his daughter ranking second place to be his own personal failure. And although these events took place in the US, where it can be assumed that no one would really care about such fact to this extent, her father saw the second place as a humiliation to the whole family. That is why Eleanor Young is so afraid of her son Nick getting together with Rachel. Or rather, she is afraid of the effect this could have on the family's image in the public eye. She sees Rachel as an American despite her being Asian American and considers her to be someone who does not have any knowledge about Eastern traditions and definitely does not honor them. She comes from an upper middle class background, while the Youngs could, with a pinch of salt, almost be considered royalty. All these reasons accumulate and paint the picture of her not being a suitable woman for Nick, as she is not someone who would be conventionally accepted by the others and therefore would stain the perfect image of the Youngs.

The third attribute listed by Lee is the encouragement of large families. In all properly traditional Chinese families, it is expected of blood relatives to share the roof above their heads.⁴⁶ This could essentially be attributed to the first two points made by Lee. If the father-son relationship is satisfactory, there is no reason for the family to split up. Ironically, the son moving out could even become the reason for the entire family's falling out. As mentioned above, the patriarchal setting in Chinese families becomes the glue that supposedly holds the family together. If the son were to move out, that bond would be considered broken. If the bond were to be broken, the public face and the pride of the family would be stained. It can be

⁴⁴ Shu-Ching Lee, "China's Traditional Family, Its Characteristics and Disintegration," 272.

⁴⁵ Amy Chua, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, 22.

⁴⁶ Shu-Ching Lee, "China's Traditional Family, Its Characteristics and Disintegration," 272.

assumed that although there is no father figure to Nick in *Crazy Rich Asians*, his mother does not want him to marry Rachel because she is afraid that he would relocate to the United States permanently. Which would, with Nick being the only male heir in his generation, fundamentally result in humiliation of the Youngs. It would appear as though there are some internal problems within the family. That, in the end, might even lead to the fall of the Young family business as no one in Singapore would want to associate themselves with those whose name is surrounded by so many question marks. Another example of the emphasis put on living under the same roof can be found near the beginning of the movie, where Rachel and Nick first fly over to Singapore to meet his family. They end up booking a hotel room instead of staying at the Young's residence. This fact stresses that the family members (or, to be precise, Nick's mother) do not want an outsider staying under their roof.

The 'cult of ancestor worship' is placed second-to-last on Lee's list of five elements which constitute the term familism, as re-imagined by him. He makes another reference to the relationship between the father and son, claiming that as a "link of an unending chain between generations, [it] leads upward to ancestor worship and downward to the "sin" of no posterity."⁴⁷ In *Crazy Rich Asians*, the father-son relationship is, in this context, somewhat substituted by introducing Nick's grandma to the scene. She represents the older generations of the Young family and is nearly worshipped by the family members. She is at the top of the family ladder and her word is not to be disobeyed. Even Eleanor Young, as a confident and ambitious tiger mother, yields before the older woman. Although there are no physical offerings just yet, it may be assumed that Nick's grandma will go down in the history of the Youngs and, after her passing, she will be remembered and praised for her doings for the greater good of the family.

Lee closes the re-definition of the term familism by listing the common ownership of property by the family. He contends that "[p]erhaps no family could achieve unity unless the destiny of its members were bound together by a mutual sharing of prosperity and disaster."⁴⁸ Keeping this statement in mind, it can be assumed that although the ideological values tied to Chinese families are usually highlighted as the most important thing that holds a family together, on their own, they are not nearly enough. Mutual ownership of property might even serve as an imaginary chain tying the family members together even if, for whatever reason it may be, they do not honor the abstract traditions.

⁴⁷ Shu-Ching Lee, "China's Traditional Family, Its Characteristics and Disintegration," 273.

⁴⁸ Shu-Ching Lee, "China's Traditional Family, Its Characteristics and Disintegration," 273.

Given these five attributes, the Young family in *Crazy Rich Asians* can be considered to properly represent Lee's idea of the way Chinese family system is constructed and the way it works in practice. Although both the film and its predecessor in form of Kevin Kwan's book are works of fiction and therefore are unable to perfectly reflect reality, they do a relatively good job at painting the picture of the more traditional sort of family from the far East. However, it must be mentioned that as Lee himself states in his paper, this theory of familism tends to apply more to those families which are a part of the wealthy class than to those of lower social status.⁴⁹ It might turn out more difficult for the less fortunate families to sustain all the attributes of familism, though that does not necessarily mean that they do not honor some of them or uphold other traditions. Arguably the most difficult element to sustain is the third one, maintaining a large family that lives under one shared roof. If a family is not wealthy enough to efficiently support all of its members, they will inevitably need to venture out into the world and look for other ways and places to earn money so they can continue living comfortably. As Lee summarizes, "the large family is the universally exalted ideal, but only those who possess ample wealth are in a position to attain it."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Shu-Ching Lee, "China's Traditional Family, Its Characteristics and Disintegration," 273.

⁵⁰ Shu-Ching Lee, "China's Traditional Family, Its Characteristics and Disintegration," 273.

3 Yellowface and whitewashing of media

Undeniably Asians and Asian Americans, to this very day, struggle to find accurate representation in the Western media. Many Asian American actors have and continue to openly express their feelings and viewpoint on the current state of Asian representation in American film. An example can be found in what actor Daniel Dae Kim, who is mainly known for his role in the American action police series *Hawaii Five-0*, stated in his interview for The New York Times. Kim voiced his opinion on the general struggles which actors of all races and ethnics face while trying to break through and find work in their field and also added that it “puts actors of color in a very difficult position.” Kim is certainly not the only actor speaking up on the topic of Asian and Asian American representation. Among other actors fighting for more equal representation on screen are, for example, Ming-Na Wen of Marvel’s *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, George Takei of *Star Trek* or Constance Wu of *Fresh Off The Boat*.⁵¹

With the natural evolution of society and the perception of what is perceived as culturally appropriate, representation on-screen evolves as well. The romantic comedy *Crazy Rich Asians*, released in September of 2018, was about to make a defining point in the history of Asian American representation on the silver screen. Well over 20 years had passed since the last Hollywood film featuring a cast predominantly consisting of Asian actors, which is a milestone of its own. Smail also makes the point that in 2017, the year previous to the release of *Crazy Rich Asians*, only four out of the hundred highest-grossing movies featured an Asian main hero.⁵² According to New York Film Academy, *Crazy Rich Asians* opened up a new, fresh way of representing a minority without unnecessary references to stereotypes such as martial arts, nerdy Asians or the popular period-focused plot lines taking place in ancient times.⁵³ However, it would be a lie to say that there are no stereotypes present in the film. But the way in which they are used must be highlighted. The stereotypical references aim not to mock or place Asians in one imaginary box, but to enlighten the viewer and shed some light on their

⁵¹ Amanda Hess, “Asian-American Actors Are Fighting for Visibility. They Will Not Be Ignored.” *The New York Times*, May 25, 2016, accessed December 21, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/movies/asian-american-actors-are-fighting-for-visibility-they-will-not-be-ignored.html>.

⁵² Gretchen Smail, “Crazy Rich Asians review – glossy romcom is a vital crowd-pleaser,” *The Guardian*, August 13, 2018, accessed March 20, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/aug/13/crazy-rich-asians-review-kevin-kwan>.

⁵³ NYFA, “Asian Representation in Film: The Impact of ‘Crazy Rich Asians’” *New York Film Academy*, February 8, 2019, accessed March 13, 2023. <https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/asian-representation-crazy-rich-asians/>.

misuse in many past films about, or representations of Asians in general. *Crazy Rich Asians* works with the stereotypes and uses them to its advantage.

The film is a live action adaptation of a book wielding the same name, written by the Singaporean novelist Kevin Kwan. In his interview with *The Guardian*, Kwan expresses some of his worries which arose with the film's production. He goes on to mention feeling a certain sense of responsibility towards any potential future Asian movies shot for Hollywood's big screen, saying he was afraid that "if this movie bomb[ed], there [would] never be another Asian movie done for 50 years." This suggests that even the author himself was aware of the importance of *Crazy Rich Asians* to Asians all over the globe, who have not seen a prominent piece of representation in American film in years. Despite that, Kwan says he was not ready for the overwhelming success and support the film had received shortly after its release. It scored the incredible amount of 238.5 million dollars at the box office worldwide and quickly rose to claim the top spot in the category of romantic comedies released in the last decade.⁵⁴

The enormous success of the film itself scored a win not only for the Asian community in terms of representation and being seen, but also for the actors themselves. Their roles in this big silver screen project put them in the spotlight and view-finders of casting agencies and opened up new doors to new opportunities. It can be said with certainty that Michelle Yeoh, an actress of Malaysian descent, who played the role of the male lead's mother in *Crazy Rich Asians*, is one of those actors, although she has already made a name for herself in the industry long ago. At the 2023 Oscars ceremony held on March 12, Yeoh became the first south-Asian woman to win the best actress award. She earned the award thanks to her role in the sci-fi comedy-drama *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022). Yeoh's triumph represents a beacon of hope for the entire Asian community, showing that hard work really pays off and that the on-screen minority representation is another step closer to being equal. "We deserve to be heard. We deserve to be seen. We deserve to have equal opportunity so we can have a seat at the table. That's all we're asking for. Give us that opportunity. Let us prove we are worthy," Yeoh stated at the Oscars press room, according to Los Angeles Times.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Nosheen Iqbal, "Kevin Kwan: 'With Crazy Rich Asians my life exploded and I'm still trying to put it back together'" *The Guardian*, June 26, 2020, accessed March 13, 2023.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jun/26/kevin-kwan-crazy-rich-asians-novelist-publishing-diversity>.

⁵⁵ Michael Ordoña, "Michelle Yeoh becomes first Asian performer to win best actress Oscar," *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 2023, accessed March 13, 2023.

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/awards/story/2023-03-12/oscars-2023-michelle-yeoh-best-actress-first-asian-winner-historic?fbclid=IwAR0dklWq6MxB2J9fy-TTVvsvWYIN1Yx8kaiUXYLdxm9wqlzFPUrd-mobeEg>.

When speaking of Asian representation in American film we must take into account the use of “yellowface” and a practice called “whitewashing.” The two terms, though the first describes an alteration of the actor’s looks and the other is more of an umbrella term, both refer to the erasure of people of color in media by having white actors portray characters of different ethnic origin.⁵⁶ Whitewashing generally refers to Caucasian actors being cast for ethnic roles, possibly even without applying any feature-changing make-up. On the other hand, yellowface essentially describes the act of altering a white actor’s facial features in various ways in order to make them seem more “Oriental” for their role. The alterations used for a white actor or actress’ visuals to resemble those of a person of Asian descent range from the mere usage of colored contact lenses to whole lengthy procedures.

Those procedures can be directly presented on the example from Jack Cardiff’s movie *My Geisha*, in which the white actress Shirley Maclaine was cast to play the role of Lucy Dell, a white actress who decides to deceive her producer husband by dressing up as a geisha named Yoko Mori. As described by Chan in her article, the procedures included, among other things, plaster alloys, which were poured into a wax mold resembling eyes and, after hardening, carved into the desired “Oriental shape”. This whole process took four whole days and the final product was then glued to Maclaine’s face. In addition to that, the assigned make-up artists also used skin-colored pieces of plastic which they attached to the actress’ temples to create the “slanted eyes” stereotypically associated with people of Asian descent.⁵⁷ However, the offensive practice found in *My Geisha* does not end there. Just moments before her first transformation, Lucy Dell is amazed by the makeup and traditional clothes worn by the real geishas. It must be pointed out that this on its own is not a bad thing, as admiration does not always equal appropriation. However, Lucy goes on to ask whether she could “put on those costumes and make [her] face white” like the Japanese ladies dressed in their geisha attire.⁵⁸ This statement alone suggests that Lucy does not see the geishas as cultural beings with years and years of geisha training and tradition. It gives the idea that Lucy only sees them for they are to her eyes – “costumes,” as she herself describes them. The entire essence of what Japanese geishas represent or do is swept under the rug simply because their exterior seems very Oriental and aesthetically pleasing to the Western eye.

⁵⁶ Jamie Harrison, “What Is Whitewashing – and Why Is It So Harmful?” *Shape*, November 4, 2021, accessed March 22, 2023. <https://www.shape.com/lifestyle/mind-and-body/whitewashing-definition>.

⁵⁷ Felicia Chan, “Cosmopolitan Pleasures and Affects; Or Why Are We Still Talking about Yellowface in Twenty-First-Century Cinema?” *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, no. 14, Winter 2017, 42. www.alphavillejournal.com/Issue14/ArticleChan.pdf ISSN: 2009-4078.

⁵⁸ *My Geisha*, 00:13:42.

Though in recent day, yellowface has, like blackface, become a very controversial and offensive practice and therefore was withdrawn from cinematography almost completely, whitewashing still remains a hot topic to this day. Zhang Yimou's relatively recent film *The Great Wall* (2016) was met with major social media backlash revolving whitewashing to the point that Matt Damon himself went on to address the issue, arguing that although the story is predominantly Chinese, the film itself is a fantasy action movie and therefore he believes that no harm was done, as it is just a "monster film". The actor even went as far as saying that the viewer outrage only happened because of clickbait and fake news being spread around by online news sites, claiming that "[i]t suddenly becomes a story because people click on it, versus the traditional ways that a story would get vetted before it would get to that point."⁵⁹ It must be noted that creators of the film have mentioned that the role was specifically crafted for a Western actor. Waylae Gregoire makes the point that *The Great Wall* is a film of international production after all as it is a collaboration of Chinese and American producers, so it would make sense to fit three non-Asian actors into a cast filled with Chinese actors.⁶⁰ While it is true that the movie is a co-production, it does not entirely justify the casting choice. In a world where Asians struggle to find representation and how hard it can be for actors of some minorities to score roles in Western media, it can only add to the frustration when white actors are cast to fill the few roles that are widely expected to be taken on by actors of certain minorities. Not only that, but the argument that the film's cast is predominantly made up of Chinese actors undermined by the fact that these roles serve a secondary purpose while the leading roles are reserved for non-Asians.

Even *Crazy Rich Asians* had to face the American need to whitewash a project in hopes to make it more successful and appealing for the Western market. Although both the book and the film were created specifically with Asian culture in mind, in an interview with *Entertainment Weekly*, Kwan reveals that he had been offered the idea to whitewash the project. He mentions that this did not come off as a surprise to him, as Hollywood does have a past in casting white actors in roles best suited for actors of color. It was even before the release of the book that Kwan was asked to remake the entire character of the protagonist, a Chinese-American girl named Rachel Chu, into a white girl. The author refused, as doing so would

⁵⁹ Louise Watt, "AP Interview: Matt Damon defends being cast for 'Great Wall,'" *AP News*, accessed January 30, 2022.

<https://apnews.com/article/d10af27b00d140d9bb5648e62878d960>.

⁶⁰ Waylae Gregoire, "We Saw 'The Great Wall' to See Just How Offensive it Was to Asians," *Next Shark*, February 20, 2017, accessed January 30, 2022.

<https://nextshark.com/zhang-yimou-the-great-wall-review-asian-whitewash-hollywood/>.

critically change not only the character's identity, but even the entire plot line of the book. *Crazy Rich Asians* was always supposed to be a tale about a Chinese-American woman venturing back to Asia and experiencing reverse culture shock along the way. As Li states in her article, "to remove that aspect of the character by making her a white woman would have made it a completely different story."⁶¹

In the end, the predominantly Asian-cast film proved the old Hollywood tendencies to whitewash Asian roles to be wrong. It has also shown that filmmakers do not necessarily need to cast white people in order to cater to wide audiences, in this case even those of non-Asian descent.

The lack of proper ethnic representation is not a new concept and is in no way attributed only to Asians. When speaking of yellowface, we must not forget to take its predecessor, blackface, into account. The issue of blackface is far more widely understood in American culture. Misrepresentation of other races dates far back, one of the examples being the Jim Crow era in 19th century America, where media was used to mock and disregard African American individuals and theatre actors often practiced blackface, an African American equivalent of yellowface where black body paint was applied to imitate darker skin. Aside from imitating their skin color, the theatrical make up often included enhancing the actors' lips to make their mouths appear larger, and wooly wigs, which served to imitate African American hair. As Holland states in his article, this form of entertainment became widely spread and popular especially among post-Civil War white men. This practice was, however, deemed offensive and disrespectful from the very beginning and eventually lead to the implementation of new laws regarding racial segregation in the South of the US. The laws were named after Jim Crow, a famous caricature character created and popularized by the entertainer Thomas Dartmouth Rice, which was used to mock and disregard people of African American origin.⁶²

Such physical alterations are nowadays vastly seen as unacceptable and inappropriate by the general public. With the rise of social media in the past few years came the opportunity for people to voice their opinion freely, which enabled ethnic minorities to speak up and spark debates on the uneven representation in Western media. Chan states in her article that

⁶¹ Shirley Li, "Hollywood wanted to whitewash *Crazy Rich Asians*," *Entertainment Weekly*, November 3, 2017, accessed March 14, 2023. <https://ew.com/movies/2017/11/03/hollywood-wanted-to-whitewash-crazy-rich-asians/>.

⁶² Jesse J. Holland, "AP Explains: Racist history of blackface began in the 1830s," *AP News*, February 4, 2019, accessed March 16, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/entertainment-ralph-northam-us-news-race-and-ethnicity-ap-explains-daaacc648c0e49b68fa42a15d6f26a05>.

whitewashing is an instance of racial appropriation and mentions multiple examples to support her point. She uses the recent film *Ghost in the Shell* (Rupert Sanders, 2017) as one of the examples. The film is strictly based on the original Japanese manga/anime piece of media of the same name, yet Scarlett Johansson, a Caucasian actress, is cast for the lead role. Her character had even undergone a Europeanized name change from the original Japanese Major Motoko Kusanagi to Major Mira Killan, perhaps in an attempt to distract from the obvious displacement.⁶³

However, it seems as though the backlash some movies have received for whitewashing over the past few years did not make a difference. Just like in *Ghost in the Shell*, many other directors have made the strange choice of boosting the movie's numbers by casting a widely known actor or actress, which in itself would be understandable from a marketing standpoint. The viewers are more likely to watch a movie that features a famous movie star rather than a rookie. The directors' only mistake lies in choosing an actor that feels completely out of place in the context of the movie simply because their ethnicity does not match the setting or the story as a whole. We do not have to look too far for an example – as this chapter already mentioned, the director Zhang Yimou has made the executive decision to cast Matt Damon for the leading role in his movie *The Great Wall*. One would have thought, judging by the movie's title alone, that the picture would feature an Asian cast as it tells a story of The Great Wall of China, unsurprisingly, set in China, an Asian country, and the plot revolves around Chinese tropes. Instead, a white character is placed in the story to “fix” the problems of the locals. This raises the question of feeding into the white savior narrative, hinting at the fact that a white person is needed in order to free ethnic people of their struggles.

The concept of the “white savior” dates all the way back to February 1899. It was then when the British novelist and poet Rudyard Kipling published a poem titled *The White Man's Burden*, which would end up becoming one of his most infamous pieces of work. The content of the poem appeals to white men and describes them as superior, indirectly encouraging and glorifying colonial and imperial thinking. The speaker of the poem claims that the best men should be sent abroad to the Philippine Islands in order to save the local people, who he describes as “half-devil and half-child”.⁶⁴ This statement indicates that the original settlers are not thought of as human or anything of the sort, but rather as wild animals who have yet to be

⁶³ Chan, “Cosmopolitan Pleasures and Affects.”

⁶⁴ Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man's Burden: The United States & The Philippine Islands, 1899,” *McClure's Magazine* 12, February, 1899.

tamed and cultured. That is what the white man's burden is; to invade the faraway land and attempt to improve the locals' way of living. It implies that the natives are under-developed, feral and not able to think for themselves and therefore they need to be saved by something of higher form, in this case, the white man. The term white savior was originally used in the context of the Philippines, but nowadays it has spread widely and is used to refer to white people's invasions into the lives of many other ethnic groups. In modern day, the term is often present when speaking of Africa, a continent with great colonial history.⁶⁵

The very opening scene of *Crazy Rich Asians* perfectly shows the white savior trope taking place in a modern day setting which is not related to colonialism or other political affairs. The scene takes place at the Calthorpe hotel, which, at first glance, radiates the impression that this is a luxury spot reserved for only the best and richest of visitors. That theory is later proven by the attitude of the white staff members at the front desk towards a woman and her family, who are of Asian descent and enter the lobby drenched and dirty from the storm that is raging outside. The woman claims to have made a reservation for a suite, yet the receptionist does not believe her and makes the remark that her and her family "rather go explore Chinatown."⁶⁶ It is a blatant and racist statement that stems purely out of the family having Asian features and suggests that people of color are not welcome at the hotel. The nature of this remark could also refer to the common stereotype when, from a Westerner's point of view, there is little to no distinction between different nationalities from the East. As Nguyen points out, with China being the largest East Asian country, it is not unusual for people from other East or South East Asian countries to be ignorantly presumed to be Chinese.⁶⁷ The attitude of the receptionist in *Crazy Rich Asians* perfectly embodies this issue and sheds light on how insensitive such statements are. Later in the same scene, the lady and her family are getting ready to leave the hotel lobby at the threat of being escorted by security. That is when Mr. Calthorpe, the owner of the hotel, enters the scene and rushes the hotel staffs to get the woman's suite ready. We learn that her name is Eleanor Young and her family is actually in talks with the current owner about purchasing the hotel. That is when the receptionist and other staff members finally start to acknowledge her importance and start respecting her as a human being. Not because of who she is, but because of the wealth of her family and her connections with Mr. Calthorpe. This fact could perhaps be an inconspicuous reference to the "white savior" phenomena, when a

⁶⁵ Chunhua Yu, "An Examination of the Institutionally Oppressive White Savior Complex in Uganda Through Western Documentaries," *International Social Science Review*, 97, August 2021.

⁶⁶ *Crazy Rich Asians*, 00:02:03.

⁶⁷ Ngyuen, "Asian Americans Are Still Caught in the Trap of the 'Model Minority' Stereotype."

person of color faces difficulties which are resolved only when a white man intervenes and rescues them. In this particular scene it is Eleanor Young, a woman, who is being saved by the white man, Mr. Calthorpe. This could very well also be a reference to gender issues surrounding this theme. A woman is placed in a setting where she is deemed helpless, vulnerable and cannot control the situation on her own, let alone solve any problems. She needs to wait for the white man to show up and stand up for her. There arises the question of whether the all-male staff did not look down on Mrs. Young not only because she is of a different ethnicity, but also because she is a woman.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to understand and analyze the outlook that Westerners – mainly those from the United States – hold towards Asians and Eastern cultures and the way it reflects in the field of local cinematography.

The struggle of people of Asian descent in the West is in no case a new occurrence. Starting from the medieval invasions of Europe by the Mongolians in the 13th and 14th centuries or times filled with the great fear of Genghis Khan, Asians have been faced with certain prejudice and derogatory stereotypes. The term “yellow peril” surfaced and brought a label which combines colorist racism with the fear of the West being overpowered by the East. It demonized the entirety of East Asia as dark, occult and evil, and did not differentiate between separate Asian nationalities. This left an imprint in literature which, being one of the only kinds of media present at the time, inevitably led to altering the public’s view of Asians. Arguably the most popular character tied to the yellow peril genre is the infamous Dr. Fu Manchu, a supervillain created by the English author Sax Rohmer. As can be guessed from the supervillain title, Fu Manchu essentially personifies the West’s worries tied to its fear of Eastern expansion and growing power. This fear was illustrated on Americans’ unwelcoming nature towards Asian immigrants which stemmed from the assumption their jobs would be taken by the newcomers. Aside from the poor representation in media, Asians were granted another hit by the attack on Pearl Harbor that the Japanese carried out in 1941, ultimately turning the formerly European conflict into one of worldwide scale. With people rarely acknowledging the difference between people from various countries especially in Eastern and South Eastern Asia, after this event, some Americans began feeling intense dislike towards people with Asian features.

This thesis introduced Edward Said’s complex definition of Orientalism and things it entails, leaning into the theory that the Eastern world cannot in fact be understood in its entirety by a Western person. It suggested that the so-called Orient was influenced by the existence of Orientalism to the point that it partly lost its authenticity. Another cause of this could be the intermission of white people who happened to consider the Orient an untamed and underdeveloped place that needed saving and therefore they entitled themselves to manage its affairs. As mentioned by Said, this ultimately led to the East being shaped by Westerners in power.

The term model minority was introduced and later presented on the character of Rachel Chu, the protagonist of *Crazy Rich Asians*. Being a self-made and career-driven woman who has a couple of degrees from prestigious American universities to her name despite her struggling background, Rachel fits this stereotype almost perfectly. This thesis then pointed out the existence and meaning of hyphenated identity along with the fact that it is not very often that we see any real distinction being made between things Asian and Asian American despite both groups living on the opposite sides of the world. Though they may share similarities in looks, the way they honor their traditions can vastly differ. Some Asian Americans might even consider themselves more American than Asian if they do not keep in touch with the country of their origin. This may be especially true for later generation Asian Americans born and raised in the States whose families have lived there for decades. While the film *Crazy Rich Asians* took on the task of shedding light on those differences and showing them to the general American public in a healthy way, *My Geisha* did not grasp Asian representation with the intentions to represent them. It rather played off the “Oriental aesthetic” and used Asian culture as a pretty accessory. Admittedly, the film does come from the year 1962 when on-screen representation certainly was not a topic so widely and seriously talked about as it is today. *My Geisha* can be placed on the opposite end of the imaginary “quality of representation” scale from *Crazy Rich Asians*, a film much more recent, where a certain development of filmmakers’ attempts to use their pictures for the greater good shows through.

This thesis paid a lot of attention to the “tiger parent” stereotype. The term coined by Amy Chua in the year 2011 characterizes the strict nature of Chinese parenting, when a parent has near full control over their child’s life. This way of raising children is often contrasted by the “Western way” which entails an emphasis on emotions and the child having much more freedom, ultimately being able to choose the path they want for themselves. Even despite the fact that sometimes, that path may not be the best route they could take. This stereotype is then shown on the character of Eleanor Young, the mother of the male lead in *Crazy Rich Asians*. Her controlling nature and cold demeanor clearly show her disapproval of her son, Nick, bringing home an Asian American woman, whom Eleanor views as purely American. Eleanor is a firm and traditional woman who, as is not unusual in the East, greatly honors the elder family members and their wisdom. This thesis named and presented Shu-Ching Lee’s five aspects of a traditional Chinese family on the case of Eleanor, Nick and the Young family. The entire film is essentially centered around their family affairs, once again showing the emphasis on Eastern familism.

The final chapter of this thesis discussed the issue of “whitewashing” and “yellowface.” The two different practices essentially share the point of erasing ethnic minorities from cinema and replacing them with white actors. The link between yellowface and blackface was discussed and the use of yellowface was then shown on both the actress Shirley Maclaine and the character of Lucy Dell which Maclaine played in the film *My Geisha*. Through the application of lengthy procedures, the features of the white actress’ face were transformed in an attempt to make them mimic those of Asian women. Although yellowface is now seen as offensive and is rarely present in the cinematography of today, whitewashing remains a strong topic. One may even argue that it is taken much more seriously now than it was ever before. The term is in no way related only to the erasure of Asians, it is an issue that all ethnic groups are forced to face. However, due to the topic of this thesis, whitewashing was discussed in relation to Asians and Asian Americans. The films *Ghost in the Shell* and *The Great Wall* were briefly mentioned for they share one important attribute – both films feature white actors or actresses cast in the leading roles despite the stories taking place in Asia and discussing Asian topics. The meaning and origin of the white savior trope were then introduced in relation to the film *The Great Wall*, where white characters are in the spotlight while attempting to solve the problems of Chinese locals. If examined closely, an example of this very trope can be found even in the opening scene of *Crazy Rich Asians*, when Eleanor Young gets in dispute with hotel staff members who do not believe she could possibly have made a reservation at such luxurious place. No sooner does this issue get resolved than when the owner of the hotel Mr. Calthorpe, a white man, appears and confirms Eleanor’s claim.

The Western cinematographic representation of Asians and Asian Americans alike is not yet nearly at a place where it could be considered satisfactory or spoken of in relation to complete equality. Despite this fact, clear improvements and change in the approach of this topic from film directors can be seen. Nearly 60 years have passed between the releases of the films *My Geisha* and *Crazy Rich Asians*. With both of the pictures being labeled as romantic comedies, it is their approach to the depiction of Asians that greatly differentiates them. As observed by this thesis, the earlier film, *My Geisha*, used the Oriental aspects primarily for aesthetic purposes. In contrast, the more modern *Crazy Rich Asians* already put much more emphasis on healthy Asian representation not only between the lines of its story but also by not succumbing to the whitewashing practice which perhaps could have made it more “marketable” for the Western audience.

Resumé

Cílem této bakalářské práce je nahlédnout do tématu reprezentace menšin v zábavním průmyslu. Konkrétně se zabývá především zobrazováním Asiatů a Američanů asijského původu v amerických filmech, přičemž se soustředí na oblast východní a jihovýchodní Asie. K tomuto účelu využívá historický kontext, který váže Američany a Asiaty, pohlíží na západní stereotypy vůči Asiatům, zkoumá tendence filmařů a své poznatky aplikuje v analýze filmů *Šíleně bohatí Asiaty* (2018) a *Moje gejša* (1962). Teoretická a praktická část práce jsou pro lepší porozumění vzájemně provázány.

Pro co nejlepší pochopení pohledu Američanů na Asiaty a jejich přístupu k nim tato práce v první kapitole vyzdvihuje historické události a zkoumá jejich spojitost se smýšlením západního obyvatelstva. Nelibost vůči lidem asijského původu bylo možno sledovat již ve 13. a 14. století během mongolských invazí do Evropy, kdy panovaly obavy z Čingischána. Již touto dobou se začal objevovat pojem „žlutá hrozba“, který zachycuje rasistické předsudky vůči Asiatům a strach západních zemí z možného ovládnutí zeměmi asijskými. Termín také obecně zastřešuje zprávu od lidí ze západu, která hlásá, že „žlutí“ lidé z dalekého východu nejsou na jejich půdě vítáni. Díky rozšíření tohoto demonizujícího označení, které se mimo jiné promítlo i v americké literatuře, se přístup západních obyvatel k Asiatům začal přiklánět nenávisti. Jednou z nejznámějších literárních postav spadajících do žánru žluté hrozby je nepochybně Dr. Fu Manchu od autora Sax Rohmera. Fu Manchu je fiktivní orientální superpadouch známý pro svou vychytralost a vypočítavost, který představuje obavy západu z východní nadvlády. Knihy, ve kterých se Fu Manchu objevil, se ve své době těšily vysoké popularitě, a tak jim nelze upřít fakt, že se podílely na podporování negativního smýšlení amerických obyvatel vůči Asiatům. Tato práce strach z rostoucího vlivu asijských zemí ilustrovala na migraci Asiatů do Spojených států amerických za vidinou dosažení amerického snu a vybudování lepšího života pro jejich rodiny. Američané však tuto skutečnost pocítili v podobě ztráty vlastního zaměstnání, jelikož východní migranti do států přinesli levnější pracovní sílu, což přililo olej do ohně americké nenávisti směřované právě na asijské přistěhovalce. Další špatnou zkušeností s východem byl japonský útok na Pearl Harbor během druhé světové války v prosinci roku 1941, který původně evropský konflikt změnil v celosvětový. Jelikož často nebylo a dodnes není rozlišováno mezi Asiaty a Asiaty amerického původu a ani mezi jednotlivými rozdílnými asijskými národnostmi, nelibosti byli nuceni čelit všichni lidé s východoasijskými rysy.

Druhá kapitola této práce se zabývá rozšířenými stereotypy a předsudky vůči Asiatům. Jako první však vyzdvihuje definici Orientalismu od Edwarda Saida, se kterou dále pracuje. Práce zdůrazňuje, že tento termín je velice široký a může mu tak býti porozuměno jinak v různých kontextech různými lidmi. Said jako jednu z možných definic uvádí, že Orientalismus jako takový se obecně užívá jako zastřešující termín pro západní nauku o východních kulturách a jazycích, ale stejně tak může popisovat obecný zájem o Asii. Bývá však využíván i v negativních konotacích. Tato práce dále zmiňuje Saidovu myšlenku toho, že východ již nelze považovat za autentické místo z důvodu jeho okupace západními dobyvateli. Uvádí, že původní Orient byl natolik ovlivněn nadvládou „vetřelců“, že již prakticky není možné pozorovat pravé tradiční aspekty místních kultur. Jinými slovy, Asie byla podrobena moci západu, který ji svým vlivem, dle Saida, přetvořil k obrazu svému.

Práce dále pracuje s teorií, že lidé při moci jsou schopni kultivovat a ovlivňovat myšlení jiných, a aplikuje ji v kontextu vlivu médií na společnost. Právě tuto skutečnost považuje za hlavního původce rozšíření stereotypů a předsudků vůči menšinovým skupinám. Ve spojitosti s Asijskými migranty uvádí příklad stereotypu modelové menšiny, který Asiaty vyobrazuje jako „ideální přistěhovalce“ a při tom je kategorizuje jako jednu homogenní skupinu. Charakter Rachel ve filmu *Šíleně bohatí Asiaty* se dá považovat za příklad modelové menšiny, a to zejména díky její pracovitosti, vzdělanosti a přínosu pro americkou společnost, který se jí, jakožto profesorce ekonomiky na univerzitě, dá připsat. V souvislosti s tím, že na Asiaty je na západě často pohlíženo jako jednotnou skupinu, tato práce dále diskutuje téma „identity se spojovníkem“, jež pomáhá etnickým menšinám vyjádřit svůj duální původ, avšak za cenu toho, že nikdy nebudou viděni jako „čistí“ Američané. Na toto práce navazuje zviditelněním rozdílů mezi Asiaty a Asiaty amerického původu. Oceňuje film *Šíleně bohatí Asiaty* za jeho přístup k tomuto tématu, jelikož ve filmu bylo vyobrazeno hned několik rozdílů mezi těmito podobnými, avšak rozhodně ne identickými skupinami lidí. Tato pozitivní reprezentace může být kontrastována zobrazením Asiatů ve filmu *Moje gejša*, kde je Orient využit jako pouhý estetický koncept. Toto ukazuje vývoj přístupu filmařů k zobrazování menšin; film *Moje gejša* pochází z roku 1962, doby, kdy reprezentace ve filmech nebyla tématem tak diskutovaným, jako je dnes. *Šíleně bohatí Asiaty*, kteří se v kinech objevili v roce 2018, na tuto problematiku nahlíží již z mnohem aktuálnějšího úhlu a viditelně se tak snaží přispět ke zdravé reprezentaci Asiatů v Hollywoodu.

Dalším zkoumaným stereotypem je takzvané „tygří rodičovství“, jež bylo definováno a popsáno autorkou Amy Chuovou v roce 2011. Tento termín charakterizuje přísný způsob,

kterým čínští rodiče vychovávají své ratolesti a ve své podstatě mají kompletní kontrolu nad životy svých dětí. Jde o poněkud kontroverzní způsob rodičovství, zejména v porovnání s tím západním, kdy je důraz kladen spíše na individualitu a emoce dítěte spíše, než jeho úspěchy. Tento stereotyp práce prezentuje na charakteru Eleanor Young, matky hlavní mužské postavy ve filmu *Šíleně bohatí Asiati*. Eleanořino chladné vystupování a téměř obsesivní touha diktovat aspekty života jejího syna, Nicka, z ní dělají perfektní příklad tygří matky. Eleanor je taktéž velice tradičně založená žena, která respektuje starší členy rodiny a jejich moudrost. V souvislosti s tímto faktem tato práce nastiňuje pět aspektů tradiční čínské rodiny podle Shu-Ching Leea a prezentuje je na případě rodiny Youngů kolem jejichž rodinných záležitostí se odehrává celý děj *Šíleně bohatých Asiátů*.

Posledním tématem diskutovaným v rámci této práce je takzvaný whitewashing a využívání yellowface v kinematografii. Tyto dva rozdílné termíny sdílí jeden atribut: nahrazování příslušníků etnických menšin ve filmech bílými herci. Práce zmiňuje spojitost mezi yellowface a blackface, jeho afroamerickým předchůdcem, a dále yellowface ukazuje na případě herečky Shirley Maclaine, jež ztvárnila Lucy Dell ve filmu *Moje gejša*. Rysy její tváře byly zdlouhavými procesy uměle upraveny tak, aby více připomínaly vzhled asijských žen. Ačkoliv yellowface je v dnešní době považován za nepřijatelný a ofenzivní a v kinematografii se již objevuje jen velmi zřídka, whitewashing nadále zůstává diskutovaným problémem. Tento termín se, na rozdíl od yellowface, netýká pouze Asiátů a dotýká se množství ostatních menšin. S ohledem na téma práce je však toto téma diskutováno ve spojitosti s Asiaty a Asiaty asijského původu. Zmíněny jsou filmy *Ghost in the Shell* a *Velká čínská zeď*, jelikož oba spojuje fakt, že v jejich hlavních rolích byli obsazeni bělošští herci i přesto, že se dané příběhy odehrávají v Asii a diskutují asijská témata. V případě *Velké čínské zdi* bílí hlavní hrdinové získávají místo na výsluní, jelikož se jmenují řešit problémy, kterým čelí místní obyvatelé. V relevanci k této situaci může být poukázáno na slova Edwarda Saida, jenž tvrdí, že běloši v minulosti vnímali východní země jako nevzdělané a divoké, takže se rozhodli zakročit a „zachránit“ je dříve, než zničí samy sebe. Toto je obsaženo v takzvaném komplexu bílého spasitele, jehož instanci je možno nalézt i v úvodní scéně filmu *Šíleně bohatí Asiati*. V této scéně se Eleanor Young dostává do neshody se zaměstnanci hotelu. Ti Eleanor nevěří, že by mohla mít rezervaci v tak luxusním podniku, jako je jejich hotel a dávají jasně najevo, že jejich přístup je rasově založený. Tuto situaci rozuzlí až příchod samotného majitele hotelu, pana Calthorpa, který se za Eleanor přimluví. Její nesnáze jsou tak vyřešeny pouze za asistence bílého muže, jehož slovu zaměstnanci hotelu přikládají mnohem větší váhu.

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