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Changing the Definition of the Orient Through Hollywood

A Thesis by

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Orange, CA

Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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May 2022

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May 2022

Changing the Definition of the Orient Through Hollywood

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I'd like to thank my parents for all of the support and time that they have invested in me and my education.

ABSTRACT

Changing the Definition of the Orient Through Hollywood

by Amanda C. Yaghmai

In 2018, the film, *Crazy Rich Asians* showcased the glitz and glamour of the life of the one percenters of Singapore, one of the richest countries in the world. The film fueled the obsession that American media already has with cultures that are not their own. The purpose of this paper is to underscore the ways in which postcolonial theory applies to the way that American media and culture has warped the understanding of Asian cultures. I will use Edward Said's definition of Orientalism and the theories set forth by Said's work as a framework to explain how American media has commercialized and fetishized Eastern cultures for their advantage. Through the analysis of the work of Asian-American authors, such as *Crazy Rich Asians*, both the trilogy and the movie, by Kevin Kwan, the casting process of Hollywood, and the Pixar short film *Bao*, the orthodoxies of "the Orient" are challenged. The way that these pieces showcase Asian cultures that have then been commercialized to fit an American standard in media highlights the fetishization of Eastern cultures for the consumption of a larger public. It is not the intent of an author to commercialize their piece for a larger audience, but the intent of the media to create something that does not stray from what their audience already understands. I will demonstrate how American media has created a niche market for Eastern cultures to be showcased in the way that American media understands it, and not as it actually exists. The taking of Eastern cultures and warping it to fit in with an American perception and belief system is an issue that has plagued Asian-American creators and the work that they hope will highlight the culture to which they came from and belong to.

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Introduction

In a study done by USC Annenberg, it was revealed that between the years 2007 and 2017, out of 1,100 films, 70.7% of characters were Caucasian and only 6.3% were of Asian descent. Even further, out of 1,100 films, “65 films did not include one Asian female speaking character.” And that “in contrast, only 7 films were missing white females.” Even in the world of directing, the study found that “in 2017, 4 Asian directors helmed one of the 100 most popular movies—all of these individuals were male. This translates to 3.7% of the 109 directors working in 2017. A mere 3.1% of all directors were Asian or Asian American across 1,100 films and 11 years. Asian female directors are nearly invisible in the sample—of the three slots held by Asian women, two represent the work of Jennifer Yuh Nelson on the Kung Fu Panda films” (2).

The purpose of presenting this particular study is to show the way that Hollywood has left out a space for Asian cultures to be represented in the entertainment industry. Instead of encouraging an inclusion of different cultures, Hollywood is instead opting to create a world where they are in control of creating a definition for those cultures. They are taking cultures that the average American may not necessarily have access to and giving it their own definition so that they are in control of the perception of that culture. Hollywood has been incorporating an Orientalist approach to creating their movies for mass consumption for years and it is damaging to the cultures they are “representing” as well as to the people who want to learn more about that culture.

Orientalism is a constantly shifting theory, as evidenced by the way it has been showcased as an inherited theory in the United States. There has been a shift away from the definition that was outlined by Said in the sense that it has been adapting to the society that it

exists within. The East versus West binary and construct does in fact exist as a result of the inheritance of Orientalism that exists in the United States, as the media has made obvious. Asian-Americans are pushing against the pillars of Orientalism that have carried over the years and are attempting to take back their culture and express it in a way that shows how the East and the West can exist in harmony without making one a more dominating factor over the other. It is important to acknowledge hybridity in terms of Asian-American culture and identities because it is something that has been and is a tool creators use to express the culture that they come from. By combining the two worlds that they associate with the most, Asian-American creators are creating their own branch of discourse that lets them begin to overturn the consequences that Orientalism has forced their cultures to endure.

Orientalism is an issue that the United States has seemed to have adopted with open arms. Even though it is something that numerous other cultures and countries take part in, many of the most relevant cases of Orientalism are found to be done by American artists. There are so many movies and novels that have been made and written by American artists about a culture that they have only ever researched, never been a part of. Even so, it is not just the creators of these “Oriental” pieces that are to blame for the rise of Orientalism. Consumers tend to believe what they see or hear without any other corroborating evidence. Orientalism is an issue that is so prevalent in the United States that consumers do not even think twice about the consequences these pieces may have. The primary problem of Orientalism is that it misrepresents the culture being featured, discredits those who are a part of that culture, as well as perpetuates and encourages stereotypes of both the culture and its people that others start to believe and adopt themselves.

Orientalism

Edward Said spends his work *Orientalism* exploring the ways that the West tends to represent Middle Eastern societies and cultures in both a fictional and a nonfictional manner. Even though Said is viewing the way that the West affects Middle Eastern cultures, his points are very applicable to Asian cultures considering the parallels that exist between the two cultures. Said discusses the numerous ways in which Western works tend to paint Eastern cultures as these inferior beings that could never live up to the standards that the West puts forth. Despite this, the West still exploits Eastern cultures to create an image of diversity for the sake of saying that they are diverse, instead of making attempts to actually try and be diverse. Hollywood is doing the bare minimum required to be considered diverse. Orientalism is an issue that has been around for a long time, but people tend to just ignore it because it is easier than addressing it as they continue to be enamored by the exotic. It is an issue that has been inherited and built upon as time has passed, as opposed to it being an issue that is being erased from the world. The Orient has been and continues to be synonymous with the exotic because of the way that it has been capitalized on. The world should be working to get rid of the instinct the media tends to have to exoticize the East, but instead the world is inadvertently encouraging this form of exoticization to continue to have a place in society.

Orientalism is a theory that has developed upon itself in the United States as time has gone on. Instead of moving away from the consequences of Orientalism, it has been built upon itself and just continued throughout our history. The legacy of Orientalism has shifted and changed as the theory is applied to more and more cultural artifacts. The definition of what once fell under the umbrella of Orientalism has changed from the time that Said outlined what the

theory meant to modern times now. The dynamic that Orientalism perpetuates is constantly shifting, so long as people continue to take part in utilizing Orientalism, whether that is indirectly or directly.

Said stresses the way that the West uses the word “Orient” and the way that the labeling word has essentially become derogatory. Said wanted to bring awareness to the fact that “the Orient” is not a universal term; it is a “European invention” (9). His goal, as stated, was to point out that “the Orient...is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe...” (9). The word “Orient” quite literally means “the East,” giving the impression that the East is a more unique and exotic place to reside based on its label (9). The act of labeling an entire culture set that deviates from the norm speaks volumes. Instead of simply just referring to the culture as “the East” in the same way that the West is, there is an assignment of an exotic name of “the Orient” that effectively Others the East from all other cultures on a global scale. By labeling it as the Orient, the West is showing that they view the East in a subordinate manner. The West is giving themselves the label of the colonizer and the East is given the label of the colonized in the sense that the West better understands what the East needs. By ignoring the way that the culture in the East exists and giving it their own definition, the West is culturally colonizing the East.

Said states that “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (10). This distinction that Said is describing is placing an emphasis on the idea that the Occident believes themselves to be superior to the less-than Orient. It is what has caused Orientalism to be

an issue in the first place because it has now become “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,” thus, indirectly colonizing the East and its culture (11). Orientalism addresses the fact that the way that most of the world understands the East is through the way that the West has situated it through their own culture and experiences. Instead of allowing the East to speak for themselves, the West is taking it upon themselves to speak on their behalf.

Said points out in his first chapter the fact that most writers are focused on how Western society has helped the “Other” countries. He states that it is not normal, specifically in his particular example the Egyptians, “...to let the Egyptian speak for himself, since presumably any Egyptian who would speak out is more likely to be the ‘agitator [who] wishes to raise difficulties’ than the good native who overlooks the “difficulties” of foreign domination” (41). Said’s point is that so many scholars view these countries as unable because they are not part of a Western culture. They cannot have a voice because they do not understand what is best for them and it is up to the West to show them how they should be functioning.

Said also brings up the way that Orientalism needs to be used as a discourse. This is borrowed from Michel Foucault and his work, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, but Said uses Foucault as a launching point for his own theory. Foucault’s practice of discourse is based on the definition that there is a system in place that essentially governs the way a person obtains knowledge (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 139). By looking at Orientalism as a discourse, it allows people to fully comprehend the way that the West was able to construct their own definition and traits of the East that became more widely accepted than the actual definition and traits of the East.

Orientalism vs Occidentalism

In our society, Asian cultures and their decedents have been a prominent example of how Western media Others an entire culture. This relationship that exists between the East and the West highlights the way that the West tends to exude a colonizer attitude over the cultures and countries that they view as “less than.” Othering is used as a way to gain control and power, while also highlighting that there will always be a level of separation that exists between Eastern and Western cultures.

In the article titled “Orientalism versus Occidentalism?,” Wang Ning brings up the way that “inside China, some scholars or critics attack film directors Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige whose successes in various international film festivals depend largely upon their being recognized by Western scholars and critics because their films are regarded as a version of Orientalism, or more exactly, as images made exclusively for a Western audience” (57). Ning’s statement addresses a larger issue that is found within the media industry of Hollywood: that there are constraints placed on what goes up on a big screen for a larger audience. In order for a culture to be recognized by the West, there are certain aspects of that culture that need to be transformed in order to better fit the understanding of the specific culture as put forth by the West. Filmmakers like Yimou and Kaige are giving up the integrity of their culture in order for their work to be seen by a larger market audience. There is a form of Orientalism that is occurring here, but from within the culture that is being labeled as the Other. Instead of seeking to erase the stereotypes that Hollywood has perpetuated, cultures that have been labeled as the Other due to Orientalism have embraced that title to the fullest and used it to their advantage to make a name for themselves in an otherwise white-dominated field. While there is a move

happening in the direction of a hybrid East and West identity, it is coming too late and advancing too slow for Othered cultures to fully erase the work that Hollywood has already previously done in the past. No matter how much of the hybrid identity of these cultures is put up on a big screen, there will always be the representation of those cultures that Hollywood once perpetuated and created for audiences.

There is a moment of surrender to the power dichotomy that is the West. Because the West needs their definition of a culture to remain theirs, people who come from these “lower” countries need to give up part of who they are and their understanding of the culture that they hail from in order to fit in the West. As the film industry has proven over the years, Hollywood is reluctant to produce films that feature more diverse casts and less Western ideals; instead moving those films down the levels to an independent film studio to produce instead, thus causing the film to have less visibility than it would if it was produced in Hollywood. In a sense, what Ning is discussing is a form of playground bullying, in which the West understands just how much power and influence they hold, and because of this, they need to exert that power over the Eastern countries, which may not have as much of an influence.

Ning states that “the Orient geographically exists separately from the Western world, but the “Orient” does not merely refer to a geographical location,” acknowledging the fact that the phrase or label of “the Orient” has become synonymous with a form of Othering (59). He points out that without this use of “the Orient” has a form of Othering, the West would then have no one else to reflect their image of the “Other” onto, which would prove problematic in making themselves the country to beat. Ning’s point also supports Said’s claim, as previously mentioned, of- “the Orient [being a] European invention” (9).

Ning also discusses the way that there is a pressure for these Eastern countries to “reframed in Western discourse in order to become significant...to be modernized simply means to be Westernized” (59). In countries like China, India, and Japan, Ning is noticing this move towards a Western way of living because these countries do not want to be labeled as “the Other” by the West as they so would be if they did not “westernize” themselves. Ning describes this as “the implication of superiority of the West to the East” (60). The West is pushing for a universal definition of understanding the world in a way that conforms to the definition that they created and they are putting out.

This idea is mentioned in Said’s work through the “imaginary” definition of the East. The West has gone out of its way to create an image for the East that they believe is most accurate, when in fact, it is not how the East necessarily views themselves. The West spins these “imaginary tales” that are pushed out to its people, and then that becomes everyone’s understanding of a culture simply because they have nothing else to believe. This creates more room for Othering within the world by creating a gap between the storytellers and the people that the stories are about.

The History of Casting

Orientalism tends to misrepresent the culture being featured because, more often than not, the creator of the piece that is utilizing Orientalism is not a part of the perception that they are using to create something. As mentioned before, this is an issue that is mostly seen in the movie industry, which will capitalize on these “Oriental” pieces to gain a wider audience — for example, the book-turned-movie *Crazy Rich Asians*. *Crazy Rich Asians*, when released in 2018, made waves because of the fact that it was the first major Hollywood studio production to feature

a predominately Asian cast since *The Joy Luck Club* was released in 1993. While there were a number of all-Asian casts showcased in films such as Jackie Chan's movies, these were not films that were produced by Hollywood, thus reaching a different audience and having a lower budget. What many do not realize is that there is a difference between a film being produced by Hollywood and every other film created. Even the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (starring the actress who portrayed the matriarch in *Crazy Rich Asians*, Michelle Yeoh) which won 4 Oscars, is not considered a Hollywood film, thus putting it in a category of its own in the movie industry. Independent films are a way for those unseen cultures to be seen on the big screen. They give creators an outlet to represent a culture that is not often represented in a way that does not necessarily need to constrain to the ideals and the beliefs of a bigger system. This 25 year gap that exists between the production of *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians* demonstrates the way that Hollywood prioritizes the wants of white audiences over other cultures. Instead of allowing a number of cultures to be seen on the screen, Hollywood as an institution relies on the desires of their white audience in order to "predict" what would be most popular.

Whitewashing

Hollywood is by no means a stranger to whitewashing. An article published by the *New York Times* brings up the way that Tilda Swinton was cast as the Ancient One in the "Doctor Strange" franchise of Disney's Marvel movies. The character of the Ancient One, as portrayed in the comic books, was always pictured as a Tibetan man, as that Tibet is where Doctor Strange travels in order to begin his healing process with the Ancient One. Filmmakers chose to cast Tilda Swinton in order to debunk "the cliché of the wizened, old, wise Asian man," as Kevin

Feige, the president of Marvel Studios stated in an interview in May of 2021 (*MensHealth*).

Feige went on to discuss the way that he and the studio regretted casting Swinton in the part. He stated that hearing the outcries and controversy surrounding Swinton's role in the film was a "wake-up call to say, 'Well, wait a minute, is there any other way to figure it out? Is there any other way to both not fall into the cliché and cast an Asian actor?'" And the answer to that, of course, is yes" (*MensHealth*).

Swinton even went on to do an interview herself a month after Feige's interview, in which she voiced how "very, very grateful" she was over Feige's comment and regret and the fact that there was a discourse occurring over her miscasting (*Variety*). A few months after the release of *Dr. Strange* in theaters, Asian-American actress Margaret Cho appeared on Bobby Lee's podcast, *TigerBelly*. While on the podcast, Cho told Lee about how Swinton reached out to her because Swinton "wanted to get [her] take on why all the Asian people were so mad...and it was weird," to which Cho responded that "our stories are told by white actors over and over again and we feel at a loss to know how to cope with it" (*TigerBelly*). Cho told Lee how Swinton's emails and requests to "essentially make the criticism go away" made her feel "like a house Asian; like I'm her servant" (*TigerBelly*). Cho's outspoken voice against Hollywood's whitewashing made her the most probable person for Swinton to reach out to concerning this issue, despite the fact that, according to both parties, they had never met before. Swinton's decision, however well-intentioned it might have been, came across as very privileged, as she was asking one Asian person to explain the anger and frustrations of every Asian-American over the whitewashing issue that Hollywood has. It is clear from the exchange that happened back in 2016 and the discourse that resurfaced in 2021 prior to the release of Marvel's *Shang-Chi and the*

Ten Rings, that there was some uneasiness surrounding Swinton's casting from all parties involved, including Swinton herself.

Tilda Swinton is just one of many white actors and actresses who has been placed into a role that would have been more accurately portrayed by an Asian or Asian-American actor or actress. In 2015, Scarlett Johansson was confirmed to be cast as Motoko Kusanagi in the live-action remake of *Ghost in the Shell*, a manga series (*TIME*). The casting of Johansson in this part caused a large amount of pushback from fans of the manga series, many of whom were just confused as to why a white actress was even considered to play the role of the Japanese lead, when it was obvious from the get-go that the lead character should have been Asian. Actress Ming-Na Wen, who starred in Marvel's *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* tv show retweeted a first look of Johansson as Motoko Kusanagi, saying "Nothing against Scarlett Johansson. In fact, I'm a big fan. But everything against this Whitewashing of Asian role," adding in a disappointed emotion (Twitter). Wen's comment was just one of many similar ones made by her peers and fans. In the C-100 Asian Americans in Hollywood panel done in 2016, the star of *Crazy Rich Asians*, Constance Wu spoke out against Johansson's casting as well. She called Johansson's casting "particularly heinous because they ran CGI tests to make her look more Asian. Some people call it 'yellow-face,' but I say 'the practice of blackface employed on Asians' because that's more evocative" (*The Hollywood Reporter*). Wu went on to explain how the reported CGI tests were an issue because "it reduced race and ethnicity to mere physical appearance, when our race and culture are so much deeper than how we look" (*The Hollywood Reporter*). This goes back to the issue with the way that the East is portrayed in Hollywood. Instead of taking the time to research

the culture and background of these actors and actresses and the roles that they are casted to play, Hollywood simply boils them down to the exotic nature of their appearances.

But unfortunately, this practice of whitewashing within Hollywood has been happening for decades. Just for some perspective, the same *TIME* magazine article that voiced the concerns of Scarlett Johansson's casting in *Ghost in the Shell* also mentions the way that Katharine Hepburn's makeup for her role of the Chinese character Jade in *Dragon Seed* in 1944 was done with the intention of making her eyes more of an almond shape so that she appeared Chinese. The controversy surrounding Hepburn's role in the film resurfaced in 2017, when YouTuber Michelle Villemaire started a project in which she "attempted" to fix Hollywood's infamous yellow-face problem. Villemaire embarked on a journey to recreate iconic whitewashed roles and having photos done of an Asian actress in these costumes instead of the original white actresses. "I wanted to shine a light on how ridiculous it was that these women were cast in these roles. I just find it hard to believe that Asian actors were hard to find back then," Villemaire stated in regards to her project. She recreated photographs for iconic roles such as Luise Rainer in the 1937 film *Good Earth*, Myrna Loy in the 1932 film *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, Rita Moreno in the 1956 film *The King and I*, Scarlett Johansson in the 2017 film *Ghost in the Shell*, Emma Stone in the 2015 film *Aloha*, and of course Katharine Hepburn in the 1944 film *Dragon Seed* (Villemaire).

Margaret Cho

In an article titled "Maybe I could play a hooker in something!" Asian American Identity, Gender, and Comedy in the Rhetoric of Margaret Cho," Michaela D. Meyer references an interview given by Asian-American comedian Margaret Cho, where she said: "one agent told

her, ‘Asian people will never be successful in entertainment’” (281). Although Cho identifies more with her American identity than she does her Asian identity, as she has pointed out in a number of interviews and in *Notorious C.H.O.*, her physical appearance groups her with the stereotypical image of the East that Americans have created. Cho’s experience in television led her to the utilization of Western rhetoric in her film. Cho was forced to fit into the mold of “mainstream white actresses” while she was trying to get her start in Hollywood because it has been such a white-dominated field that actresses of other identities, like Cho, feel like they can only play one part (281). Having films that feature more Asian or Asian-American actors and actresses opens up the door for so many different cultures to be represented on a larger scale. It is a matter of making sure an artist is using the culture in a manner that makes it as misrepresented as possible.

Meyer’s main idea is introduced in the first sentence: “to a critic schooled in western rhetoric, one interpretation of *Notorious C.H.O.* is that Cho is acting from her Asian identity to provide a critique of racism in America” (281). She is trying to draw attention to the fact that Orientalism has become a form of racism in America that is not being resolved in any way. The primary audience of films such as *Crazy Rich Asians* and *Notorious C.H.O.* is looking for something different than the white American that they are used to seeing on the big screen. Different looking has become synonymous with entertaining. Races have become more of an entertainment than an identity in America.

As whitewashing has showcased, there is a desire to see the “exotic” on the screen, but there is a resistance or laziness when it comes to accurately portraying those characters. The reason for that may never truly be clear to audiences, however, it is very clear that Hollywood

would rather use a culture to their advantage as opposed to educating audience members on that culture. By putting these stereotypes that the media creates, Hollywood ends up perpetuating racial biases that already exist in society.

Meyer also speaks on the fact that Cho uses stereotypes of African Americans and Korean Americans in her film in order to show “that ethnic groups should be uniting against common oppressors rather than struggling with one another” (284). Cho is saying that there is an injustice to fix in America and it is the fact that minorities are being taken advantage of. From the perspective of a comedian, Cho’s only real solution is to take advantage of their differences for themselves, instead of for the benefit of others. Why should a Caucasian screenwriter and director combo take advantage of the minority entertainment industry when the minorities can be using themselves as their subjects? The issue with Cho’s train of thought is that it helps build Orientalism up. Even though Cho’s actions and thoughts should be applauded for taking back her culture and the way that it is represented on a screen, the American dream of wealth is overpowering the need to fix the injustice that has been done to these numerous cultures. Orientalism has turned into a social norm that nobody can change because it has become expected. However, Cho is on the right track because by playing into the hands of Orientalism, she is able to control the way that she and her culture are portrayed. She is taking back the culture that Hollywood has adopted as its own creation by showing a first-hand perspective and interpretation of said culture.

“Call me when an Asian American is a lead in a film. #WhitewashedOUT” (Twitter).

On May 3, 2016, Margaret Cho tweeted this out in response to the year bringing not one, but two white actresses being cast in roles that should have starred an actor or actress of Asian

descent. Margaret Cho has been extremely outspoken when it comes to whitewashing in Hollywood, always advocating for more to be done for the Asian and Asian-American acting community. She sent out this particular tweet in support of the #whitewashedout movement that was started by Keith Chow, editor-in-chief of *The Nerds of Color*.

Chow gained initial support for the movement from a number of Asian-American actors and actresses, including Margaret Cho. He stated in an interview with NBC News:

it's important for studios and moviegoers to know that the way Asian-Americans are presented (or not, in many cases) is wrong. There shouldn't be cases like *Aloha*, or *The Martian* or *Gods of Egypt* or *Doctor Strange* or *Ghost in the Shell* in the 21st century. The fact that so many people responded so quickly is proof that the community isn't going to be silent on this.

Chow and Cho's desire to garner this support and bring light to the attention shows the strides that the Asian-American community is taking in order to see their culture properly put on the big screen. It is no longer just about seeing representation, but seeing representation done in a way that Asian-American creators are able to control. It is a call for Hollywood to diversify its screens with new cultures instead of whitewashing them. By giving Asian-American creators the proper platform to address and portray their culture, it is removing Hollywood as that unnecessary middle man.

Casting Crazy Rich Asians

It is the breaking through of the constraints placed upon actors and actresses of color that caused the release of *Crazy Rich Asians* to be such a big deal. Having the film be considered a Hollywood production and have an all-Asian cast would be groundbreaking for the roles of Asian and Asian-American actors and actresses from all descents. Kevin Kwan, author of the *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy, released his first novel in 2013. Kwan is a Singaporean-American

novelist who wrote the series as a satirical piece that is commenting on Singaporean culture and the families that live in Singapore, specifically the ones hailing from Chinese descent. According to USA Today's "24/7 Wall Street" team, which did a research project to calculate the world's twenty-five richest countries using data from the World Bank, Singapore is considered to be the third most prosperous country in the world. This only confirms the ideas presented in Kwan's novel: that the inhabitants of Singapore are, in fact, crazy rich Asians. The most important factor here in terms of Orientalism is the fact that the novel, and subsequently the film, *Crazy Rich Asians* gained a lot of popularity because of the exotic and crazy lifestyle of Singapore's elite that was being portrayed in front of an audience.

Jon M. Chu, the director for *Crazy Rich Asians*, faced a lot of issues when it came to casting for the film. The last time Hollywood saw this many Asian actors and actresses on the screen, again, was *Joy Luck Club*, of which many of the main characters are currently out of the business or not alive. As a result of this, Chu decided to host an open casting call for any Asian or Asian-American actors and actresses to star in his film. Even this proved to be problematic for Chu and his casting crew because, even though there was a ground-breaking response to his call for stars, there was also the question of how they were going to go about casting the parts of the film. Chu and his crew wanted to stay true to the heritage and the descent of the characters in the book, which meant they were not just hiring someone just because they checked the box of being Asian. As a *New York Times* article regarding Chu's casting process brings up, "As roles were considered and cast, the filmmakers contended with questions about identity amid the Asian diaspora. Could an Asian play an Asian-American? Could a Malaysian play a Singaporean? And what about an Asian guy with a white mom or dad — could he even be in the running?" (NYT).

The casting process was as extensive as it was because the filmmakers were trying to ensure that their film would accurately portray Asians and their culture. There was not going to be room for misrepresentation on their screen, as there so often is in Hollywood.

Chu's way of finding his stars for his movie ensured that he would reach any and all actors and actresses of Asian descent. He wanted to ensure that every single character in Kwan's novel was accurately represented and portrayed on the big screen. This included a veto from Kevin Kwan when it came to the decision to potentially make the character of Rachel Chu white. On NPR's show "Fresh Air," Kwan spoke about how "in 2013, a producer that approached [him] about optioning the book said he would only do so if the lead was a white female." Kwan obviously refused and even spoke about how if his novel were to become a film, he never expected it to be produced by Hollywood; he was expecting it to be an independent film. Obviously both Kwan and that producer were wrong, as the film went on to gross \$174 million in the United States and Canada, with Chinese-American actress Constance Wu starring as Rachel Chu.

Kwan's experience with that specific producer back when his novel was first released parallels the experiences that actors and actresses of Asian descent, such as Margaret Cho, go through when trying to get their foot in the door in Hollywood. As Cho discussed, there were only certain roles that her agent and the bigwigs of Hollywood would expect her to play. As a result of this, her career was stunted because of the lack of roles that were available to her. Even though Cho was willing to play a number of different parts, as any beginning actor and actress would, it was the industry that was preventing her from truly coming into her true potential because of the way she looked.

Changing the race of Kwan's main character in his novel would completely change the way his audience portrayed his novel. Instead of watching a story about an Asian-American leading lady, the audience would have ended up watching a story that is constantly put up onto the screen: the love story of a white woman. *Crazy Rich Asians* gave Asian-Americans an opportunity to see themselves on the screen, instead of seeing the Hollywood norm thrown up in front of them. In his NPR interview, Kwan stated "I think that it was a request born out of sheer ignorance of the project, and it was a very knee-jerk reaction that was indicative of how Hollywood saw its industry, how they felt movies needed to be made, and how they feel a movie with all Asians would just never work." His response to that producer asking him to consider casting his leading role highlights the way that he was adamant about staying true to his culture and not straying away from it simply for the sake of gaining popularity.

Crazy Rich Asians

Crazy Rich Asians is about the relationship between Rachel Chu (Constance Wu) and Nicholas Young (Henry Golding), both of whom are professors at NYU. Nick invites Rachel to accompany him to his best friend's wedding in Singapore, without warning her of what his family is like. Rachel believes that his family is simply a middle-class family, similar to her own, and that they live a humble life in Asia. However, she is soon shown just how wrong she is and that Nick and his family are crazy rich. Rachel is thrown into this family dynamic that she is not accustomed to, having been raised by her single mother. Rachel is given a rude awakening by Eleanor Young (Michelle Yeoh), Nick's mother, in what she expects her son to be doing with his life, which obviously does not include Rachel or their life in America. The film was produced by Warner Bros. Pictures, had a budget of \$30 million, and grossed \$238.5 million in box office

(IMDb). It was nominated for 64 different awards, taking home 14 of them (IMDb). The film did remarkably well for a film that people were concerned was not going to succeed based on the race of the cast.

Kwan paints an extremely glamorous life, while still entwining obvious traces of character's Chinese backgrounds, which is obviously very different from a Western background. In the novel, readers see the way that the life of the eldest son, Nick, is controlled by his parents, mostly the mother, Eleanor. However, when the novel was turned into a film, it was obvious that producers felt that the film would be more relatable to a Western audience if Western ideals were entwined into the film. So instead of keeping true to the roots of Asian cultures and the novel that Kwan wrote, the film was changed to include more Western ideologies and a Westernized understanding of Asian cultures, specifically in regards to the last scenes of the film.

For one thing, the filmmakers chose to add in the iconic mahjong scene that takes place in the film, but does not take place in Kwan's novel. In the mahjong scene, Rachel invites Eleanor to a mahjong parlor and together, they play a round of mahjong. When Eleanor arrives, Rachel is already seated at the table and Eleanor takes the remaining seat open: the dealers seat, better known as the "East" seat¹. Eleanor's seat is also directly across from Rachel's, meaning that Rachel has been placed in the West seat. The particular significance of this scene is the fact that Eleanor is sitting in the East seat, thus representing the East, or Asia, and its ideals. Rachel is seated in the West seat, thus representing the West, or America, and its ideals.

¹ In mahjong, the four seats at a mahjong table are named for the four directions of a compass. The dealers seat is the East seat and the one across from it is the West seat, with the South and North seat being in between them.

It is obvious from their interaction that Eleanor is confident that she has one-upped Rachel in both the game and getting what she wants out of Nick. However, as they play the game, Rachel regales Eleanor with a story about her life and the family that she came from and then asking Eleanor why she was against her from the get-go. Eleanor chalks it up to the Hokkien phrase “our own kind of people,” thus implying that she disliked Rachel because of Rachel’s background and the way she grew up. Eleanor’s strategy for mahjong, as well as her words to Rachel, shows that Eleanor dislikes Rachel because of the way that the West shaped her.

It is during the game that Rachel reveals that Nick proposed to her, even after Eleanor told him not to. Rachel tells Eleanor about the way that Nick would have abandoned Eleanor and his family in order to be with Rachel, obviously keeping Eleanor in suspense to scare her a little bit before revealing that she turned him down. As this is happening, Rachel draws an eight of bamboo, which is the tile that she would need in order to complete her hand and win the game. Eleanor responds to Rachel’s admission with “only a fool folds a winning hand,” to which Rachel informs her that “there is no winning.” Rachel explains that if she had said yes, then Nick would have lost his family and everything he loved. But if he had chosen his family, he might end up spending the rest of his life resenting Eleanor for making the decision of who to love for him. In either situation, Nick ends up losing his mother, thus putting him in a lose-lose situation.

Rachel then puts down the eight of bamboos tile, thus allowing Eleanor to take the tile for her own hand, which she obviously does, and Rachel allowing Eleanor to win the game because she sacrificed her own winning hand. As Eleanor reveals her winning hand, Rachel tells her that she hopes Nick finds the life that Eleanor wants for him in the future, and that when he does, it is

crucial that Eleanor remember that it was Rachel that made that possible. Rachel then flips over her own hand, revealing that she would have won if she had not given up the tile that allowed Eleanor to win and then she walks away to join her mother, who Eleanor thinks so poorly of.

This addition of this scene allowed Western ideals to infiltrate the film and the messaging behind it. By putting Rachel in the West seat and Eleanor in the East seat, it is creating that divide that exists between the East and the West. To top it off, the film has the West overpowering the East and allowing them to think that they did the East a favor, when in reality, they simply did something that now left the East indebted to the West, thus giving the aspect of the colonizer and the colonized.

Although the addition of the scene allowed an Asian daughter to stand up to an Asian mother for something that she believes is right, it also showed the East being forced into the position of owing something to the West. Eleanor is forever indebted to Rachel for letting her son go and allowing Eleanor to create the life that she wants Nick to have, instead of him leaving her behind for Rachel. Rachel's position as the American outsmarting the Asian woman is a parallel for the way that Western ideals "outsmart" Eastern ones, which is an addition to the film that Hollywood incorporated and Kwan did not write in his novel. In regards to the addition of the mahjong scene, director Jon M. Chu shares his rationale in an interview with *Digital Spy*:

This [referring to the dynamic created by the mahjong game] is what is happening in my head my whole life growing up. Which side am I? Am I the American side of, make yourself happy and follow your passions? Or am I the Chinese side of, sacrifice your own happiness for your family? This is the thing that we all have been dealing with. To physicalize it in these two amazing actors - and not have them move around but just stare at each other and play this silent game to the rhythm of picking up and discarding tiles, it's all done through their eyes - to me, this was the mental mahjong game that I've been playing in my head since I was a kid.

Chu's decision to include this scene channels his own feelings of being torn between the two cultures that he grew up knowing. He wanted that feeling to be emphasized with the characters of Rachel and Eleanor, both of whom grew up with very different ideals from the other. While Eleanor grew up with the Chinese side that Chu is speaking to, Rachel grew up with the American side that he speaks of. He wanted these two strong female characters to recognize and respect each other and the other's ideals, while still staying true to their own.

In an interview with *Vulture*, Adele Lim, Chu's co-screenwriter, brought up the way that the film's two leading ladies really got into character and were clashing on the way that the scene was written before they even got a chance to act it out. Chu and Lim recall how "each one wanted to say very specific things and didn't want the other one to run them over. Michelle was like 'I would never let this little American girl say these things to me, I need to say this, because I refuse to be a villain. And then when Constance read that version, she was like 'Wait, I would never let her talk to me like this! I need to say these things, and defend my way of living!'" (*Vulture*). In the same article, Chu and Lim opted to go with a scene that combined both actresses requests, still making just as strong of an impact, while allowing both characters to keep their belief systems in-tact.

Even the choice to have them play mahjong was a way for the filmmakers to stay true to the roots of the film. Chu and Lim both brought in an interview that they were aware "that Western viewers may not understand the specifics of what goes on in the game, [but] the larger meaning is clear" (*Vulture*). By having the two female characters play mahjong, it shows a side of Rachel that Eleanor did not know before. It shows a level of culture that Rachel has that

Eleanor did not think her capable of having, thus showing Eleanor that Rachel is not as much of an outsider as she has assumed she is.

The addition of the mahjong scene works by emphasizing the hybridity. Although the scene is playing into stereotypes of Chinese culture and the game of mahjong, it is setting up the stage for that hybrid identity to be more widely recognized. By having Rachel challenge Eleanor, while still trying to respect Eleanor's belief system and culture, Chu is honing in on that hybrid identity that he seems to closely associate with. There is a change in Rachel where she is still staying true to the person that she is, while still taking a step back and seeing where Eleanor is coming from.

In addition to the inclusion of the mahjong scene, the ending to the novel was also changed for the sake of the movie. In the film, we see Eleanor come to Nick's hotel room after the mahjong scene in a sort of resigned silence. The audience is left to assume that they had a conversation regarding what happened at the mahjong parlor. After this, it cuts to Rachel boarding her flight back home to America with her mother in economy seating, which is vastly different from her arrival with Nick. As they are making their way down the airplane aisles, we hear Nick call out Rachel's name as he approaches her and proposes.

The kicker of their proposal was that when Nick opens the box, the audience sees Eleanor's huge emerald ring, which her husband had specially made for her when he proposed because his mother did not approve of Eleanor in the same way that Eleanor did not approve of Rachel. This was an important detail as it showed the audience that Rachel got through to Eleanor and this was her way of giving Nick permission to marry Rachel and live the life that he wanted, instead of the life that Eleanor wanted for him. Following the engagement, we are

moved to a scene of their engagement party, where the crowd parts, and the camera pans over Eleanor and her bare left hand and Rachel and her acknowledging what Eleanor did for her son.

This particular scene was also added in, as Rachel and Nick never got engaged at the end of Kwan's novel. As seen in the novel and the film, once Radio One Asia, the gossip source of Singapore, makes it known that the infamous Nick Young would be bringing a woman named Rachel Chu home with him for the wedding of the century, it is evident that Eleanor is displeased with this information. Although she does not attempt to dissuade Nick from bringing this woman home with him, she does not go out of her way to make Rachel know that she is an outsider in this new world.

Even though Rachel and Nick do end up getting married within Kwan's trilogy, it does not happen until after Nick decides to give up his family and his money in order to be with Rachel. Nick essentially disowns himself in order to follow his heart and go to be with Rachel instead of giving in to the life that his grandmother and his mother expect him to live. The novel, as Kwan wrote it, ends with the hope of a second novel, which obviously did happen. The way that the novel is written sets up Rachel and Nick's relationship to go back to America without his family's influence and without his family's money. There is a moment in the novel, where Nick is taking Rachel to a family house in order to surprise her with a proposal. It is in this moment that Eleanor and Ah Ma crash the proposal in order to reveal to Nick that he does not have their permission to marry Rachel and that Rachel's supposedly dead father is still alive and in prison in China. By dropping this information, they are hoping to ruin Nick and Rachel's relationship; however, it is this moment that actually drives Nick closer to Rachel and proves to him that he needs to be as far away from his family as he possibly can. While this scene also occurs in a

smaller manner in the film, it is what follows that is drastically different. As Kwan writes in the second novel, Nick leaves his family behind in Singapore and chooses to purchase an engagement ring for Rachel from his own savings, instead of his family's money, or as the movie portrays it, with his mother's ring.

The novel was gearing up for a fight against Orientalism in the sense that it was showing the formation of the hybridity of the Asian-American identity that exists in the United States now. Kwan gives his readers an example of the East through Eleanor and an example of the West through Rachel. He also gives us the example of the hybrid identity through Nick, who struggles with his identity throughout the novel based on his desire to stay true to his roots, while also keeping true to the person he has become away from his family. Nick represents the hybrid identity that many Asian-Americans can relate to in the United States, especially when they have immigrant parents, much like Nick does. By removing this acceptance of his identity and his taking back his life from the control of his family for the sake of the film, the piece loses that hybrid identity that Nick develops, and instead, moves Rachel into the limelight as the character that is taking back her life by crushing the "harsh" reality of Eastern ideals that American stereotypes create.²

² The stress being placed here on the change in endings between the novel and the film is important to recognize because of Kwan's follow-up novels in his trilogy. Without the inclusion of the disowning of Nick at the end of the first novel, there is no natural way for potential films to cleanly follow the plot of the next two novels. The second novel, *China Rich Girlfriend*, follows Nick's struggle with his identity now that he has given up his family and the money that he came from. It shows Rachel's frustrations with Nick and his wishy-washy attitude that comes through now that he is adjusting to life as an adult without his family's money, since he was disowned. He and Rachel wed in this novel, and none of his family is invited, except for his cousin Astrid. The novel still shows the perspectives of his family, including Eleanor, who is trying to get her son back. The third novel shows Ah Ma on her deathbed and asking for Nick to come home so that she can make her peace with him and apologize for her actions and wrongdoings in his relationship with Rachel. Again, by westernizing the ending of the first film, there is no way for the next two novels to be turned into films without adjusting the plot of them.

Contrary to the novel, the fairytale ending solidifies Western ideals. The movie could not have ended on a negative note where Nick lost his money and almost lost his girl, or else the film would not have appealed to audiences. James Macdowell explores the complexity that is a “happy ending” in his book *Happy Endings in Hollywood Cinema: Cliché, Convention and the Final Couple*. In his conclusion, Macdowell writes:

the reputation of the Hollywood ‘happy ending’ is predicated precisely on discouraging questions - providing a closure that rights all wrongs, resolves all problems, and ties up all loose ends...it is my hope that this book has convincingly argued that we should no longer cease asking questions simply because a movie might conclude, say, with a kiss (194).

Macdowell makes a good point that filmgoers do not want to leave the theater asking questions on what is to come. They want a complete ending, as opposed to a cliffhanger that readers so often get in a book series. And on top of a complete ending, they want to know that the couple they just watched on screen for 90 or more minutes is going to make it through and that will be their love story forever. There is an idealization placed on fairytale endings in our society and without those types of endings and a lack of closure, a film tends to become less exciting for viewers.

However, it is funny to think that the novel did insanely well with that exact ending, but yet the film was not expected to do the same. Producers opted to change the ending of the novel and allow Eleanor to loosen her grip on her son and the reality that she hoped would come to fruition in order for him to be happy instead of pleasing his family.

This ideal is something that greatly differs from an Eastern culture. Throughout the novel and the film, various extra characters are seen constantly asking Eleanor when her son is going to return home and fulfill his obligation as eldest son for their family, as opposed to “fooling

around” in America. As Nick is the eldest son, thus meaning that he is the heir to the family fortune, it would generally be expected that Nick would be the one to take over the family business and carry on the family name in Singapore, very similar to the way that the royal family of England operates. But instead, he is choosing to chase an American girl and follow her back to America, thus turning his back on his family and his country.

Kwan writes the novel so that it is clear that Nick’s family does not approve of his choices to follow Rachel back to America, which is why they cut him off. However, a Western audience may view that in a negative way when it is put on a big screen because it is discouraging people to follow their dreams and their hearts. A changed ending means that a Western audience is still getting the fairytale happy ending that they are used to seeing on the big screen, instead of seeing the reality of a non-Western dominated culture.

The Lack of a Tiger Mom³

In many instances, the Eleanor that Kwan writes in his novels represents the stereotypical “tiger mom” that Asian children, specifically those of Chinese descent, are so familiar with. The “tiger mom” has become a contemporary form of Orientalism in the sense that it is constantly used as an American-made stereotype embedded into a character or characterization of a person.⁴

The “tiger mom” figure is something that has become expected of from American media portrayals of Asian or Asian-American families. There are multiple “tiger mom” figures seen in

³ It is important to state that this is not a full discourse of the “tiger mom” and the definition of the phrase; however, it is relevant to the topic at hand in terms of the characters found in the artifacts and the fact that it is a prevalent stereotype that is used in the media in association with Asian and Asian-American family portrayals.

⁴ It is interesting to note that the concept and stereotype of the “tiger mom” is not something that is discussed in Asian-American studies discourse, such as the work *Asian Americans and the Media* by Kent Ono and Vincent Pham.

Crazy Rich Asians alone, and even Constance Wu portrays a figure of the sort in ABC's sitcom *Fresh Off the Boat*. In Pixar's animated short film *Bao*, there is also a "tiger mom" figure that received a wide amount of criticism over the sheer misunderstanding of her actions. The "tiger mom" has become a figure that American media must include the creation of an Asian-inspired work in order to not disappoint their audience.

The definition of a "tiger mom" is something that can change depending on a cultural approach. However, as Scarlett Wang points out in her essay "The 'Tiger Mom': Stereotypes of Chinese Parenting in the United States", a Chinese parents' definition of parenting looks different from the American viewpoint on Chinese parenting skills. Wang brings up Amy Chua, deemed "the most well known tiger mom", and the fact that the phrase "tiger mom" has become the blanket phrase for the American stereotype placed on Chinese parents. Amy Chua writes in her memoir *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* sums up the difference between Chinese parenting and Western parenting:

Western parents try to respect their children's individuality, encouraging them to pursue their true passions, supporting their choices, and providing positive reinforcement and a nurturing environment. By contrast, the Chinese believe that the best way to protect their children is by preparing them for the future, letting them see what they're capable of, and arming them with skills, work habits and inner confidence that no one can ever take away.

This is the side of Eleanor that the novel that Kwan writes gives us, but his film does not. In the novel, Eleanor stays true to this side of her parenting instincts and wants to protect her son from anything that is going to deviate him from having a better life than she did. She stays true to her feelings and even though it is obvious and later revealed that she is wrong about Rachel, Eleanor does not allow her son to tell her how she should be a parent and instead, lets him go to the point

where she would rather not see him than to see him be miserable, as she believes he will be. On the other hand, in the film, the producers allow Eleanor to give Nick what he wants, thus giving him the power in their parent/child dynamic. While both versions of Eleanor do want what is best for her son in any situation, the book Eleanor has Eastern ideals, while the film Eleanor has more Western ideals.

Even with Ah Ma, Nick's grandmother and the head of his family, there are hints of that "tiger mom" mentality that is seen from Eleanor. In the film, Ah Ma's character is not totally in support of Nick and Rachel's relationship, which she is also not supportive of in the novel, but throughout the film, she is not nearly as vocal about her displeasure as Eleanor is. However, the audience can still see just how wary she is of the fact that this American girl that their family does not know is trying to "steal" her grandson away from his family. In both the novel and the film, Ah Ma's character puts pressure on Eleanor to control her son and make sure that Nick is doing and making the right decisions when it comes to his life in a way that will benefit their family. There is pressure on Eleanor to ensure that Nick leaves behind his life in America and comes home to Singapore to deal with his family and his life at home because that is where his responsibility lies.

Ah Ma's character is acting as the "tiger mom" figure by controlling Eleanor's parenting skills with her son. As made evident in both the film and the novel, Ah Ma blames Eleanor for allowing Nick to go to America in the first place, and as a result of that decision, not come home to Singapore and his family.

The incorporation of Western ideals in the tiger mom figure in the film highlights just another way that Hollywood takes advantage of cultures they do not fully understand and twist it

so that it better reflects the ideals that they represent. Instead of allowing the Eastern ideals of Eleanor's Chinese background come through in the film, they had to Westernize her in order to better appeal to the audience.

A Complete Misunderstanding (and a Presence of Ignorance)⁵

In 2018, Domee Shi's animated short film, titled *Bao*, premiered before the film *Incredibles 2*. For Asian-Americans, *Bao* plucked at heartstrings around the world because it was something that they could finally relate to without the message being white-washed. The reality that was being created in *Bao* was one that a number of mothers go through when their children finally leave the home, no matter what their cultural background is. However, this is something that is commonly seen in Asian-American households because of the lack of an expectation for their children to move out as soon as they turn eighteen.

The short film was about an Asian mother experiencing empty nest syndrome. She is alone with not even the company of her hardworking husband to fill her time. One day, one of the dumplings she makes lets out a cry right as she is about to eat it. Much to her surprise, the dumpling turns into a baby. From then on, she goes about her day running errands and caring for this baby dumpling. As the dumpling gets older, he begins acting out and rebelling like an average American teenager. One day, she has enough and cannot risk losing yet another baby, so she eats the dumpling in order to prevent him from going off and getting married. At the end of the short film, her actual son comes home and makes amends with his mom and this is when the audience realizes that both mother and son were experiencing this loss that comes with gaining independence at a young age.

⁵ Domee Shi's short film *Bao* features a mother who is dreaming of having a dumpling baby. She does not actually eat a child.

Shi is also playing a part in incorporating this hybridity identity of Asian-Americans in the United States. While the mother is obviously upset about her son wanting to leave her and their home, the mother also obviously regrets getting so angry and pushing away her son because of her own personal feelings. She immediately starts crying after eating her imagined dumpling baby because it is obvious that she regrets not understanding the need for her child to be his own person. The hybrid identity is brought in in the form of the adaptation of the mother's feelings, as well as her son's desire to live a more Westernized life, but also still knowing how to handle his mother's feelings without driving her away. The ending shows her son coming home to her and sharing their favorite snack buns together in silence. The very last scene shows the son bringing home his white girlfriend to make dumplings with his parents, thus combining the East and West identities that are at war throughout the short film.

After the short film premiered, many critics, primarily Caucasian, took to social media sites to voice their confusion and frustrations with it. Many users claimed that it was "awkward" and "confusing" because they could not understand the lack of independence that comes with being raised in an Asian American household (Twitter). This just goes to show how a number of Americans consistently take other cultures and use them as their topics, but yet do not actually understand what is going on. Domee Shi is Asian herself, so she is trying to not give the audience the typical American happy ending because it is not always a practical ending.

Many filmmakers and authors tend to use these cultures, such as Asian and Middle Eastern, as their focal points even though they exclude and do not understand the decisions and sacrifices that the mothers of these cultures make for their children in order for them to have an "Americanized" lifestyle. The mother in *Bao* did not eat her baby to be selfish or cruel; she ate

her baby because she could not go through the heartbreak of having another child leave her behind. It is not the norm for Asian children to move out as soon as they turn 18. In fact, it is not the norm in numerous cultures, but Americans do not seem to acknowledge that not all cultures are the same as theirs.

Conclusion

The importance of staying true to Asian culture and roots with this particular film is one way that Chu is adding to the fight against Orientalism in the United States. Instead of allowing Hollywood to take Asian culture and stereotypes and put them up on the big screen to do as they please with it, Chu was going out of his way to ensure that there would be no misrepresentation of the culture of the book in his film. He was allowing the movie to speak for itself and the Eastern cultures that are being represented on the screen, instead of Western audiences coming to their own conclusions, or accepting the white-washed version that so often plagues our screens. He is throwing the hybridity identity into the pool of proper representation that allows Asian-American creators to own the identity that they so closely associate with, instead of making them associate with the identity that Hollywood creates. There is obviously a reason that there was a 25-year gap between two all-Asian casts gracing the Hollywood big screen and Chu was gearing up the fight against another 25-year gap.

And Chu's fight obviously worked because most recently, Marvel produced *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, adding an Asian superhero to Marvel's roster. The film, once again, featured a predominately Asian cast and was produced by Hollywood, effectively shortening that gap that already existed between Hollywood produced Asian-cast films. *Shang-Chi* featured a number of actors and actresses that had starred in *Crazy Rich Asians*, which

proves another issue in itself. While Chu went out of his way to include lesser-known names in his film and seek out auditions from actors/actresses from all over the world, Marvel chose to go with actors/actresses who pretty much already had a name for themselves, minus the role of Shang-Chi himself. The choice to cast a number of the same actors/actresses was a small defeat in an otherwise large triumph.

The issue of accurate representation of Asians and their culture is one that is still ongoing. There is still a fight that needs to be fought in order to truly erase the stereotypical and toxic image of “the Orient” that Orientalism has created in many Western minds. Hollywood has created a negative space for Eastern cultures to be ridiculed and stereotyped as cultures that need the aid of Westernization. But that is just not true. There needs to be more room for Eastern cultures to represent themselves, instead of others to represent them. As Nico Santos, who portrays cousin Oliver T’sien in the *Crazy Rich Asian* film states, “We should be allowed to fail. How many chances do white people get? How many [crappy] movies do they get to make over and over again? They get so many chances to fail at the box office. This is our first chance, so let us throw the dart. If it doesn’t stick, then ok. Give us another dart” (CNN).

The world of film would be lucky to receive a complete makeover in the cultures being represented on the screen. For there to be 25 years between two films that feature an all-Asian cast shows how close-minded Hollywood can be and just how outdated the entire system has become. Hollywood is due for an upgrade to completely get rid of this stereotype that the Orient has become and it is time for the Orient to be completely redefined so that it better represents the cultures it is referring to as opposed to the exoticization and fetishization of Asian cultures. There

needs to be more implementation of the hybrid identity in the film industry, instead of just glossing over it as something that is not relevant to the larger conversation at hand.

Orientalism has seeped into so many corners of American culture that now it is rare to see or read something that is not discussing something exotic or Oriental. Authors such as Kevin Kwan have shown that individuals from these “Oriental” cultures draw upon their own cultures to appeal to a broader audience. By writing about what the people want, authors and filmmakers can ensure that their work is successful. By creating things that are accurately representing Asian-Americans and the identity that they associate with, authors and filmmakers can ensure that their vision is being properly executed and that their work is actually being related to.

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