

Charlie Chan No More: Asian Americans and Media Images

VISIBILITY AND INVISIBILITY

The door of opportunity is beginning to break open for Asian Americans in the mainstream media and they are gathering a wider and more appreciative audience. Among the best known major market "cross-over" breakthroughs include George Takei's portrayal of Lt. Sulu on the original *Star Trek* television series (1966–1969) and Bruce Lee's kung fu classic *Enter the Dragon* (1972), along with Maxine Hong Kingston's novel *Woman Warrior* (1976). Amy Tam's novel *Joy Luck Club* (1989) was later produced as a major motion picture (1993) and B. D. Wong's Tony award-winning performance in the Broadway play *M. Butterfly* (1988) also served to open the door for Asian Americans in the media. Other well-known examples include Margret Cho's short-lived television sitcom *All-American Girl* (1994), Lucy Liu's regular television role on *Ally McBeal* (1997–2002), and Ming-Na's (aka Ming-Na Wen) major roles on *ER* (1994–2004) and *Inconceivable* (2005). There is the pioneering work of Anna May Wong, Sessue Hayakawa, and James Shigeta in major Hollywood motion pictures, and there are the contemporary U.S.-made films featuring Jackie Chan, Jet Li, and Chow Yun-Fat. In addition, there are some lesser-known films with Asian Americans in lead roles such as *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2003) and *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004).

Today's images of Asian Americans in popular culture have improved and provide more breadth than in the past. This is a contrast from earlier days when popular images of Asians and Asian Americans were predominantly mediated

by non-Asian studio executives and writers. The earlier characterizations were often quite negative and demeaning. Unfortunately, some of these images are still perpetuated today. Asian American media watchers and critics continue to complain about racist stereotypes that emerge in popular culture. Several Asian American organizations recently expressed outrage at the Internet entertainment site Icebox.com for its promotion of the cartoon series *Mr. Wong*, which premiered in 2001. The cartoon features an aged and buck-toothed Chinese "houseboy" who serves a wealthy white socialite, Ms. Pam. Along with episodes of *Mr. Wong* on Icebox.com, there are comments from viewers, the vast majority of which crudely chastise those who complained that the cartoon is racist. "All you Chinese Americans mellow out," wrote DonDon (1/19/01). "This is true art and Wong is no offence [sic] to anyone. Just because you have dirty little secrets doesn't mean you have to spoil it for everyone." Another writer, Your Mother (1/18/01), wrote: "People who like to curtail free speech scare me. . . . I thought we taught them a lesson in 1945, but it seems the view-point must always continue." Another commentator was similarly direct. "If you don't like Mr. Wong then don't watch it you dumb ass!" wrote T-Man (1/18/01). "Your [sic] the idiot that gets on the web and spends 5 minutes watching a cartoon you hate. Mr. Wong is a humorous (sometimes sick) cartoon that makes people (including myself) laugh."¹

In February 2004, the *National Lampoon* and Maverick Entertainment released a DVD compilation of *Mr. Wong* cartoons. It is no coincidence that the renewed interest in *Mr. Wong* immediately followed the humiliating January 27, 2004, appearance by William Hung, the 21-year-old engineering student from UC-Berkeley who sang the Ricky Martin song, "She Bangs," to a national audience on the television program *American Idol*. Hung got only as far as the first chorus before the judge Simon Cowell ordered him to stop. "You can't sing, you can't dance, so what do you want me to say?" asked Cowell in disgust. The Hong Kong-born Hung, who looks and sounds like a younger version of Mr. Wong, replied in all sincerity that he tried his best despite no professional training and had "no regrets at all." Perhaps it was his grace in the face of ugly rejection that captured attention, but Hung immediately became a most unusual comic pop star. Hung was featured in numerous television talk shows, news programs, commercials, music videos, and print articles; he has his own fan Web site, has given concerts across the United States and Asia, and has released three CDs. Hung's first CD, *Inspiration*, sold more than 3,000 its first day and has since sold tens of thousands more.²

Many Asian Americans took the Hung phenomenon lightly, assuming his novelty act would fade out rather quickly. However, Hung has persisted much to the chagrin of many observers who saw him as negative racialized caricature of Asian American males propagated by the mass media similar to Mr. Wong. "Asian Pacific Americans have been so quiet on William Hung's rise to fame, it's puzzling," wrote *AsianWeek* columnist Emil Guillermo. "Or is the community really blinded by the infantilization of the APA male in our pop culture, looking the other way because, after all, Hung appears to be successful. . . . Perfect for a white mainstream culture."³ Asian American men, in particular, and especially those

involved in acting and the music industry, were appalled by Hung's accidental success. "I am disgusted at what is going on," wrote struggling Asian American actor Dennis Takeda. "The entertainment industry is still using this stereotype of the Asian American male for their pocketbooks, and William is perpetuating it." He added, "I guess if we want to work in this industry, we should have ourselves made over like him!"⁴ While these comments may come off as sour grapes, one needs only look at Harleem Lee, who won the national television talent show *FAME* in summer 2003, only to fall into instant obscurity. As the winner of the summer-long competition, Lee received a management deal from a top music manager, one year of training at the Debbie Allen Dance Academy, and free accommodations at the W Hotel in Los Angeles for one year to help him launch his career. Lee's story could not be more different than William Hung's. Lee struggled for years to break into the music industry, and he was 35 when he finally got his break winning the *FAME* talent contest, besting much younger competition on the show. His shaved head, alto soprano voice, and high-energy dancing made him appear at least ten years younger; neither his real age nor ethnicity seemed to matter to the prime-time audience who week after week voted for him as the most talented performer.

Lee released a CD titled *Introducing Harleem Lee* in November 2003, but despite positive reviews the CD sold just five hundred copies and was pulled from the shelves because of low sales. In June 2004, Lee posted a message on his Web site thanking his fans for their support, but admitted he was "disappointed" at how things have turned out since *FAME*. "I have been completely invisible since winning *FAME*, and unable to capitalize from all my hard work and national exposure gained from the show," Lee wrote. "If it weren't for my unemployment checks and my year-long stay at the W Hotel, I would be completely penniless and homeless." Lee stated that he was denied the most basic promotion and marketing resources, and the justification given to him was that his story was not "compelling enough." He added, "without their machinery behind you, you will definitely not be seen nor heard."⁵ Lee's experience comes as no surprise to Chihui Yang, director of the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival. According to Yang, William Hung became popular precisely because he was seen as a comical figure with no talent who sings with a thick accent: "What informs that kind of humor is something that is deeply rooted in the American depiction of Asian men as ineffective, effeminate or wimpy, and I think William Hung fits right into it. On the other hand, someone like Harleem who is talented hasn't gone very far. It feeds back into the people with the marketing dollars and knowing what the American public wants to see or what is familiar."⁶

This chapter focuses on how dominant media images have impacted how others see Asian Americans and how Asian Americans see themselves. Particular emphasis in this chapter will be on film, television, and theater. In addition, this chapter examines the relatively recent influx of Asian and Asian American professional athletes and its impact on popular culture. Although there has been a great surge of important and highly acclaimed literary works written by Asian Americans, it is far beyond the scope of this chapter to cover this area. This chapter first provides an overview of popular images of Asians and Asian

Americans in motion pictures, highlighting important gender differences, how they've changed over time, and how they emerged again in the heavily protested film premiere of *Rising Sun* (1993). This section also examines two high-profile feature films, *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2003) and *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004), to discuss the future of Asian Americans on the big screen. Next, this chapter looks at Asian Americans on television with emphasis on dominant Asian American characters in recent shows. Third, this chapter details the controversies generated by two major theater productions, *M. Butterfly* (1988) and *Miss Saigon* (1990), in their long-term impact on theatrical casting and production leading to the updated revival of the stage musical *Flower Drum Song* (2002). Lastly, in recognition that sports is a major part of both the television and print media, this chapter examines the recent surge in Asian Americans in sports and the media attention it has garnered.

HISTORY OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN MOTION PICTURES

The depictions of Asians and Asian Americans in motion pictures can be categorized in two general ways. The first focuses on Hollywood films that include roles for Asian Americans. Most of these films do not explore Asian American themes but rather are highly influenced by dominant society's image of Asian Americans here in the United States and Asians abroad, most of which have been negative. The second category focuses on films that are written, produced, and/or directed by Asian Americans. These films include documentaries and independent feature films often, but not exclusively, about the Asian American experience. Most of these films are in English. While I do not focus on foreign films from Asia, it is important to mention them because many of the most prominent Asian actors and directors working in Hollywood today reached international acclaim through their work in Asian films. This section does not judge Asian Americans in motion pictures exclusively in terms of "positive" versus "negative" portrayals; instead the intention is to provide a critical examination of the historical and social trends with an understanding of how and why certain images are perpetuated and others are not. Attention is also given to the diverse perspectives and identity formations that make up the ever-changing Asian American experience that, in turn, creates broader social change.

Negative images of Asians in mainstream Hollywood motion pictures can easily be traced back to the mid- to late 1800s when Asian migrants first arrived in large numbers in the United States. The common theme was of the "Yellow Peril," or an invasion of faceless and destructive Asiatics, who would eventually overtake the nation and wreak social and economic havoc. There are a number of recent books focusing on Asian Americans in motion pictures including Russell Leong (ed.), *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts* (1991); Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (1999); Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril"* (1993); Jun Xing, *Asian America Through the Lens* (1998); Darrell Hamamoto and Sandra Liu

(eds.), *Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism* (2000); and Peter Feng, *Identities in Motion: Asian American Film & Video* (2002). All argue that Hollywood films are not merely harmless entertainment, but are reflective of race, class, and gender ideologies and pressing social and political concerns.⁷ Edward Said's seminal book *Orientalism* (1978) examines how the West (Occidental) views itself has traditionally and fundamentally based on its own disappearing images, descriptions, and attitudes of the East or the "other" (Oriental).⁸ Thus, the dominant ideology of Western superiority versus Eastern inferiority eventually led to the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Law, as well as a multitude of other anti-Asian legislation. Among the most powerful anti-Chinese statements during this period is writer Bret Harte's poem, "The Heathen Chinese," published in 1870. The immensely popular poem was reprinted across the country. In the poem, Harte describes a "peculiar" Chinese character, Ah Sin, who is wily and sly, but gets caught cheating at a card game. Ah Sin is then attacked and beaten by his white competitor, who yells, "We are ruined by Chinese cheap labour."⁹ Similarly, Atwell Whitney's novel *Almond Eyed* (1878) depicts hoards of Chinese immigrants polluting the environment, degrading American labor, debasing white women, and destroying American society. These types of images continued with the advent of silent films such as *Tsing Fu, the Yellow Devil* (1910), where the sinister Chinese wizard plots revenge against a white woman who rejects his lecherous intentions. The rise of Japan as a military and industrial power following the 1905 Russo-Japanese War was the inspiration for *The Japanese Investigation* (1909), which prominently featured the threat of U.S. involvement in an Asiatic war.¹⁰ The theme of the "Orientals" being the "other" was a consistent theme in Hollywood films for decades.

The 1920s and 1930s saw a series of movies that provided highly stereotypical images of "good" and "bad" Asian characters. The personification of evil was seen in the infamous Fu Manchu movies. Fu Manchu was the world-threatening villain originally created in a 1911 short story by British author Sax Rohmer, but this character was soon found in novels, heard on radio programs, and eventually seen on the big screen. Fu Manchu served only to enhance the most negative images of Asians and the Yellow Peril. On one hand, he possessed superhuman intellect and ambition, and on the other, he was subhuman in his immorality and ruthlessness. Contrasting Fu Manchu is the benign and non-threatening character, Charlie Chan, the cherubic and inscrutable Chinese American detective from Honolulu. Charlie Chan began as a series of novels by Earl Derr Biggers and quickly made it into the movie houses. Nearly fifty Charlie Chan movies were released between 1926 and 1949. Chan was a super-sleuth who solved complex murders while reciting phony "Confucius say" proverbs, such as "Bad alibi like dead fish; can't stand the test of time."¹¹ These popular Asian characters were not only created by white writers and producers, whites usually portrayed the Asian characters as well. All the actors in the early Fu Manchu movies were whites grotesquely made up to look Asian. The first two Charlie Chan movies had Japanese American actors in the lead role, but as the films gained popularity the actors were replaced by white actors who colored

their hair jet black and used scotch tape to alter the shape of their eyes. Ironically, Charlie Chan frequently worked with his bumbling number one and number two sons, both of whom were always played by Asian American actors.

Asian and Asian American roles were quite rare in Hollywood, but when one did come up, it was often "scotch tape Asian" actors who got the parts. Paul Muni and Louise Rainer, both Austrian Jews, played the lead roles in the epic *The Good Earth* (1942), the film adaptation of Pearl Buck's classic novel about heroic Chinese peasants. Some rather well-known actors were also given the opportunity to play roles that were simply not available to Asian Americans. For example, Katherine Hepburn played a feisty Chinese peasant in *Dragon Seed* (1941) and Marlon Brando played a Japanese interpreter in *Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956). Micky Rooney in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) is probably the most infamous example of a scotch tape Asian. In this romantic comedy, Rooney plays a Japanese photographer complete with thick glasses, squinty eyes, and buck teeth. Another notable example of a scotch tape Asian is in *Year of Living Dangerously* (1983), starring Mel Gibson and Sigorney Weaver. In this film, actress Linda Hunt was cast to play the part of a male Chinese photographer.

The casting of a woman actress to play an Asian male character presents yet another media image issue that is not only racist but highly gendered. Popular media images of Asian males historically have been depicted as either uncontrollably lustful or completely asexual. Fu Manchu's lasciviousness toward white women was, of course, never directly acted upon on screen, but the threat was always there. At the other end of the spectrum, Charlie Chan exemplified the completely asexual Asian male character. Although he was married and had a large family, audiences were introduced to only two of his sons. We never get to see his wife and, of course, Chan was never enticed by other women nor were any women enticed by him. In most other instances, Asian American males were depicted as domestic servants, never having a life outside of catering to whites and doing their jobs. More recently, Asian American males have been seen as nerdy and inept characters, who are clumsy rather than threatening in their attraction to white women. A good example is the Chinese exchange student in the film *Sixteen Candles* (1984) played by Gedde Watanabe. Even virile Bruce Lee in his mega-hit *Enter the Dragon* (1972) was precluded from having any interest in women, unlike his white (John Saxon) and black (Jim Kelly) co-stars. Lee may have been one of the few chaste action heroes in Hollywood. A similar example can be found in Chow Yun-Fat's first Hollywood feature film, *The Replacement Killers* (1998), where at the end he says goodbye to his female co-star, Mira Sorvino. In the theater version of the film, Chow touches Sorvino's face and then they walk away in opposite directions, assuring no sexual tension or contact. In the alternative ending that is included on the DVD release of the film, Chow passionately kisses Sorvino before the two separate. As they walk away in opposite directions they turn around and look longingly at each other, creating the image of sexual attraction, albeit unrequited. However, the Jackie Chan film *The Medallion* (2003) does end with Chan and his female co-star, Claire Forlani, running off together as a couple ready for the next fight. This was a genuine motion picture rarity for an Asian man in Hollywood.

The Ballad of Little Jo (1993) provides a typical gendered image of the Asian American male with a fascinating twist. In this Western, a young middle-class, educated woman from the East Coast bears an illegitimate child and leaves home in disgrace. She discovers that the rugged, untamed, and ruthless West during the late 1800s is no place for a woman alone. Josephine Monaghan (Suzy Amis) cuts off her hair and disguises herself as a young man named Little Jo. She conceals her true identity for years, successfully confronting the dangers and challenges the Wild West has to offer. She eventually purchases some property on the outskirts of town and builds a cabin to live in seclusion. Over time, through hard work and self-sufficiency, Little Jo becomes a respected—although distant—part of the community. The film changes direction when Little Jo saves a Chinese laborer (David Chung) from a group of harassing townfolk by agreeing to take him home as her houseboy. In the company of another person for the first time, Little Jo cannot for a moment let her guard down for fear of giving away her secret identity. Under this pressure, she initially treats him with contempt, verbally abusing him and forcing him to sleep outside the cabin like an animal. The gender role reversal is particularly stark with the lean long-haired houseboy acting demurely toward scruffy Little Jo. He even tries to win her favor by cleaning, cooking, and baking her favorite fruit pies. Perhaps because of the injustices she has faced, Little Jo slowly begins to treat her houseboy with more civility, then with affection, then eventually with love. He is the only one with whom she shares her secret, and then the two share a secret relationship of their own. The male–female roles between the two outcast lovers become somewhat more egalitarian in the privacy of their cabin; but in public, she must maintain her dominant masculine persona while he maintains a submissive feminine one. Their secret life together lasts for many years, but eventually he dies of an unknown illness. Little Jo must suffer alone in silence over the loss of her mate, and soon she herself becomes extremely ill and dies. *The Ballad of Little Jo* was directed by Maggie Greenwald and is keenly aware of the race and gender dynamics of the era it depicts.

With a few notable exceptions, Asian men have most often been depicted as strangely asexual characters. Asian women, on the other hand, have often been depicted as almost completely sexual. The Asian woman's sexuality is based on images of being petite, exotic, and eager to please and serve men. Another extreme element of this stereotype is the "dragon lady" character who uses her exotic charms to seduce innocent, unsuspecting men for evil purposes. This type of character is best seen in the early films of Ann May Wong, produced in the 1920s and 1930s. Wong was born in Los Angeles' Chinatown and started her career as a movie extra. Her big break came playing opposite Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., in the silent classic *The Thief of Baghdad* (1924). But Wong became most famous for her dragon lady roles as Fu Manchu's daughter in *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931) and *Shanghai Express* (1932), starring opposite Marlene Dietrich. The other version of the sexual Asian woman can be seen in *Sayonara* (1957), starring Miyoshi Umeki. Umeki won an academy award for best supporting actress for her portrayal of a Japanese woman who falls in love with an American serviceman stationed in Japan after World War II. One scene from the

movie has Umeki gently scrubbing her lover's back in a Japanese bathtub. Umeki is so loyal to her man, she commits suicide when she finds she is not allowed to marry the American and live with him in the United States. A similar scenario is seen in *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), starring Nancy Kwan. Kwan plays a Hong Kong prostitute who falls in love with an American artist, played by William Holden. In the film, Suzie is willing to give herself unconditionally to the white man, but expects nothing in return.

Asian American studies professor Elaine Kim, who has written extensively on racial and sexual stereotypes in the media, argues that these types of images are deeply ingrained in American attitudes, that "it is sometimes difficult to distinguish fact from fantasy or to see members of racial minority groups as individuals." She adds: "We would be hard pressed to think of many portrayals in American popular culture of Asian men as lovers of white or Asian women, but almost every exotic Asian woman character is the devoted sexual slave of a virile white man. The image of the Asian woman as exotic sex object describes the sexual power and significance of the white man at the expense of the Asian man."¹²

Nonetheless, a few Asian American men have, in fact, distinguished themselves on the big screen in other ways. A popular dramatic actor and romantic lead in early silent films was Sessue Hayakawa. His career faded rather abruptly with the advancement of talking films and the increased anti-Japanese sentiment before, during, and after World War II. However, Hayakawa did return and gave an Academy Award-nominated performance in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957). Hawaiian-born James Shigata was the best-known Asian American lead actor during the late fifties and early sixties for films like *The Crimson Kimono* (1959), *Walk Like a Dragon* (1960), *Bridge to the Sun* (1961), and *Flower Drum Song* (1961). His up-and-down career is a reflection of changing interest in Asian American characters, but through the years he has kept busy with movies, television, and cartoon voice-overs. The actor Mako was also nominated for an academy award for his bravado work in *The Sand Pebbles* (1966). One of Hollywood's most distinguished cameramen was the late James Wong Howe, who worked on 125 films during his 52-year career in Hollywood. And first-time actor Haing Ngor, a physician from Cambodia, won an Academy Award for best supporting actor in the powerful film *The Killing Fields* (1987). Two films are rather exceptional. One is *Go for Broke* (1951), about the all-Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team and its heroic campaigns in Europe during World War II. The other film is the musical *Flower Drum Song* (1961) based on the 1957 novel by Chin Yang Lee. This was the first and only film that featured Asian Americans in singing and dancing roles. Although both films are heavily burdened with assimilationist sentiments, they provide a different perspective on Asian American life to mainstream audiences.

In response to the lack of quality roles in Hollywood, young independent Asian American media artists and activists began producing their own films. Filmmaker Renee Tajima has described Asian American cinema as going through two stages of development. The first stage took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, sparked by increased ethnic awareness and social consciousness.

These early filmmakers were dedicated to highlighting the Asian American experience and changing the distorted images of the past. In 1970 the first Asian American media organization, Visual Communications, was formed in Los Angeles to provide technical and distribution assistance to a new generation of media producers. Visual Communications produced a number of documentaries including *Pieces of a Dream* (1974) and *Cruising J-Town* (1976), as well as a feature film, *Hito Hata: Raise the Banner* (1980). The second stage emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s as a period that Tajima calls "institutionalization, pragmatism, and skills attainment." During this time several other media-related organizations across the country formed and gave greater attention to art and professionalism over politics and to expanding the audience. High-quality documentaries such as Loni Ding's *Nisei Soldier* (1983) and *The Color of Honor* (1987), Arthur Dong's *Sewing Woman* (1983) and *Forbidden City, U.S.A.* (1989), Felicia Lowe's *Carved in Silence* (1987), Lisa Yasui's *Family Gathering* (1988), Rene Tajima and Christine Choy's *Who Killed Vincent Chin* (1988), and Steven Okazaki's *Unfinished Business* (1984) and *Days of Waiting* (1990) are examples of films and videos produced during the second-stage period. Feature films also started to emerge during this stage. Wayne Wang's first film, *Chan Is Missing*, opened in theaters in 1981 and received rave reviews. Other notable films during the 1980s include Peter Wang's *A Great Wall* (1984) and Steve Okazaki's *Living on Tokyo Time* (1987).¹³

Another stage can be added beyond the first two described by Tajima. This stage can be called "mainstreaming." During this period there were major gains made by Asian American actors, directors, writers, and producers in Hollywood. Joan Chen emerged as one of the most highly recognized actresses in Hollywood during this period with starring roles in two major films *The Last Emperor* (1987) and *Heaven and Earth* (1993). Neither of these films focused on Asians in the United States, but did employ large Asian casts. Since then she has appeared in a number of mediocre films such as *Golden Gate* (1994), *On Deadly Ground* (1994), *Wild Side* (1995), and *Judge Dredd* (1995). More recently Chen has taken roles in ensemble and independent films such as *What's Cooking* (2000) and *Saving Face* (2004) that offer her broader opportunities for her acting skills and maturity. Chen made her mark as the director of the critically acclaimed independent film *Xiu Xiu* (1999). The success of the film led her to direct *Autumn in New York* (2000), a big budget Hollywood film starring Richard Gere and Winona Rider. Tia Carrere was another recognized actress who is of mixed Asian Pacific (Hawaiian, Filipino, and Chinese) and Spanish ancestry. However, the roles she's played have been fairly limited and stereotypical. She played the exotic Asian female in *Wayne's World* (1992) and the dragon lady in *True Lies* (1993). But Carrere also had a major role in *Rising Sun* (1993), a controversial film that is discussed in the next section. Since then, Carrere has starred in a series of forgettable "B" movies. She has made a comeback of sorts doing voice-overs for animated films like *Lilo & Stitch* (2002) and *Aloha Scooby-Doo* (2005). Currently, the most busy and recognized Asian American actress in motion pictures is Lucy Liu. Liu has played a dominatrix in the film *Payback* (1999) with Mel Gibson, a Chinese princess in *Shanghai Noon* (2000) with Jackie

Chan, and one of the lead characters in *Charlie's Angels: The Movie* (2000) and *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* (2003) with Drew Barrymore and Cameron Diaz. Liu was also the female villain in *Kill Bill: Vol. I* (2003). The film *The Joy Luck Club* (1993) has generally been heralded as a major breakthrough specifically because of its Asian American theme, its mainstream appeal, and its move away from stereotypes of Asian and Asian American women. The Disney animated film *Mulan* (1998) was also a breakthrough of sorts. Although it was not specifically an Asian American theme, it did provide an important boost to Asian American actress Ming-Na, who was the speaking voice of the lead character, and a positive image of Asian women. Martial artist and actress Michelle Yeoh is best known by U.S. audiences for her role in the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997) and her stunning performance in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). Kelly Hu can be seen in recent films *The Scorpion King* (2002), *Cradle to Grave* (2003), *X-Men* (2003), and *Star Wars: The Sith Lords* (2004). Sandra Oh has had important roles in blockbuster hits *Under the Tuscan Sun* (2003) and *Sideways* (2004).

These actresses have varied backgrounds and have played a wide range of film roles, but the best-known Asian actors in Hollywood all came to the United States only following phenomenal success in Asia and are limited to martial arts/action hero roles. The most well-known are Jackie Chan, Chow Yun-Fat, and Jet Li. Chan was born in Hong Kong and was formally trained at the China Drama Academy where he learned martial arts, acrobatics, singing, and acting. His breakthrough Hong Kong martial arts movie was *The New Fist of Fury* (1976), which was a remake of the original Bruce Lee classic of the same name. For the next two decades Chan made numerous action-comedy films in Asia where he became widely popular. However, it wasn't until the Hong Kong-made *Rumble in the Bronx* (1996) that Chan caught the eye of Hollywood producers. Chan's first major U.S.-made movie was *Rush Hour* (1998); it was unique in that it combined Chan's martial arts and comedy skills with the culture clash of an African American Los Angeles cop (Chris Tucker) and a Hong Kong cop (Chan) for a cop/buddy theme. The film was a smash hit and Chan went on to star in a string of comedies with the same formula that feature his martial arts prowess including *Shanghai Noon* (2000), *Rush Hour 2* (2001), *The Tuxedo* (2002), *Shanghai Knights* (2003), *The Medallion* (2003), and *Around the World in 80 Days* (2004). Although his movies are popular and make lots of money, Chan yearns to move on beyond his typecast roles. "It's all the same, cop from Hong Kong, cop from China," Chan admits. "Jet Li, Chow Yun-Fat and I all face the same problem. Our roles are limited."¹⁴ Chow Yun-Fat made more than seventy action films and was a cult hero in Hong Kong before making his film debut in the United States. His first two Hollywood films, *The Replacement Killers* (1998) and *Corruptor* (1999), were full of action, but empty in plot. His third film, *Anna and the King* (2000), was a big-budget extravaganza with co-star Jodie Foster. This film provided him the opportunity to break out of the action film mold. Of course he returned to his action role with *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) and again in *Bulletproof Monk* (2003). Jet Li was a national martial arts champion in China before his

film career began. After a number of successful films in China and Hong Kong, Li has had prominent martial arts related roles in *Lethal Weapon 4* (1999), *Romeo Must Die* (2000), *Kiss of the Dragon* (2001), *Cradle 2 the Grave* (2003), and *Unleashed* (2005).

Asian American men with talent but without accents seem to be having a much more difficult time in Hollywood. In the early 1990s Jason Scott Lee emerged as the first Asian American actor cast as a romantic lead with broad major-market appeal since Sessue Hayakawa in the early silent screen era. Lee starred in *Map of the Human Heart* (1992), *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* (1993), and *Jungle Book* (1994). Lee's success waned a bit, but he recently starred in the made-for-TV movie *Arabian Nights* (2000), playing the part of Aladdin, and has kept busy with lead roles in action thrillers *Dracula II: Ascension* (2003), *Timecop: The Berlin Decision* (2004), *Dracula III: Legacy* (2005), and *The Prophecy: Forsaken* (2005). He also did voice-overs for animated cartoons *Lilo & Stitch* (2002) and *Lilo & Stitch 2* (2005). Paolo Montelban, the handsome Filipino American singer and actor best known for his role as Prince Charming in Disney's *Cinderella* (1997), has also learned the limits of casting for Asian American men. Following his critically acclaimed film debut in *Cinderella*, he was cast as the lead in the short-lived television martial arts show *Mortal Kombat* (1998–1999). He was not seen on the big screen again until he appeared in the Filipino American independent film *American Adobo* (2001). He appeared next in a small role in *The Great Raid* (2005), a film based on the true story of the daring rescue of five hundred U.S. and British soldiers from a Japanese World War II prison camp in the Philippines by an elite team of U.S. Army Rangers and Filipino guerrillas.

Behind the camera, Asian Americans have made better progress. *The Joy Luck Club* provided director Wayne Wang with big-budget experience, and the film's success has opened opportunities for him to direct other Hollywood films such as *Smoke* (1995), *Blue in the Face* (1995), *The Chinese Box* (1998), *Anywhere But Here* (1999), *Maid in Manhattan* (2002), and *Because of Winn-Dixie* (2005). Other filmmakers are branching out in Hollywood and directing films not at all related to Asian or Asian American themes. Ang Lee directed the heralded film *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) based on the book by Jane Austen, although, he is best known as the director of the acclaimed films *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) and *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* (1994), as well as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), a Chinese-language film that was custom-made for a Western audience. Lee, however, is also the Academy Award-winning director of the recent film *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), which is considered a major mainstream breakthrough film focusing on the relationship between two gay cowboys. Meanwhile, Hong Kong action film director John Woo was behind the camera on a series of recent blockbusters. They include *Broken Arrow* (1995), *Face Off* (1997), *Mission Impossible II* (1999), *Windtalkers* (2002), *The Hire: Hostages* (2002), and *Paycheck* (2003).

Internationally acclaimed writer and director Mira Nair has done films that focus on her native India such as *Salaam Bombay!* (1988), *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love* (1996), and *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), as well as films focusing on the United States and England. Her film *Mississippi Masala* (1991) focused on a

relationship between an Asian Indian woman whose family was in the motel business and an African American man in the Deep South, while *The Perez Family* (1995) told the story of Cuban refugees in Florida. Writer and director M. Night Shyamalan's film, *Sixth Sense* (1999) received rave reviews and two Academy Award nominations, one for best picture and another for best director. Since that time he has been sought after by director specializing in dramatic thrillers like *Unbreakable* (2000), *Signs* (2001), and *The Village* (2004), all of which have received positive reviews from critics. Only his first film, *Praying With Anger* (1992), related to Shyamalan's Asian Indian background. An up-and-coming writer and director is Gurinder Chadha, who specifically looks at the Asian Indian experience in her films. Chadha started out directing several award-winning documentaries for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) before branching off into wildly successful films on the Asian Indian experience in England such as *Bahi on the Beach* (1993) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). Her film *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) is a musical comedy based in Los Angeles. Another up-and-coming director is Timothy Linh Bui, whose most notable film, *Green Dragon* (2003), was not well received by critics but was acknowledged as a breakthrough in that it focused on the early post-war experiences of Vietnamese refugees in the United States and not the U.S. Armed Forces' experience in Vietnam.

The rapid ascent of Asian Americans behind the camera may be attributed to the increase of Asian Americans gaining powerful positions with major studios and production companies. Top executives include Janet Yang, president at Oliver Stone's Ixtilan Productions; Fritz Friedman (of Filipino and Jewish descent), vice president at Columbia TriStar Home Video; Teddy Zee, executive vice president at Columbia Pictures; and Chris Lee, senior vice president of production at Tri-Star. In 1992 Friedman and independent producer Wenda Fong formed the Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment, with the intention of creating a network for Asian Americans in the film, television, and music industries. "People are so intimidated by Hollywood," says Janet Yang. "It's important to help each other out because it's such a tough business."¹⁵

Outside the Hollywood mainstream, Asian American independent filmmakers are making their mark, addressing love and relationship themes not commonly portrayed on the screen. Less well known but critically acclaimed independent films include Eric Koyanagi's *One Hundred Percent* (1999), which focuses on the lives of three Asian Americans as they grapple with love, success, and identity. There is also Chi Muoi Lo's *Catfish in Black Bean Sauce* (2000), a comedy featuring a Vietnamese American and his African American girlfriend. Bertha Bay-Sa Pan's *Face* (2002) also features an Asian American and African American romance, this time with an Asian American woman and an African American man. Eric Byler's film *Charlotte Sometimes* (2003) is an unconventional romantic drama featuring two Asian American couples. Alice Wu's *Saving Face* (2005) is a unique romantic comedy about a 28-year-old Chinese American lesbian, who is shocked when her 48-year-old mother comes to her doorstep pregnant. Both have secrets to hide from each other about unspoken loves, cultural taboos, and how best to confront life honestly.

In addition to independent feature films, Asian Americans are making their mark in documentary films as well. For example, Jessica Yu won an Academy Award in 1997 for her documentary *Breathing Lessons: The Life and Work of Mark O'Brien*, about a remarkable journalist and poet living with severe physical disabilities as a result of childhood polio. She also received acclaim for her latest documentary, *Realms of the Unreal* (2004), focusing on the life of visionary artist and novelist Henry Darger, who lived in obscurity and worked most of his life as a janitor. The National Asian American Telecommunications Association is the clearinghouse for documentaries, feature, and experimental films and their program list can be found at <http://www.naatnet.org>.

From *Rising Sun* and *Pearl Harbor* to *Better Luck Tomorrow* and *Harold and Kumar*

Despite these recent advances, many Asian American media artists and activists contend they still need to be vigilant. This vigilance is best seen with the release of two controversial motion pictures, *Rising Sun* (1993) and *Pearl Harbor* (2001). The big-budget thriller *Rising Sun*, starring Sean Connery, Wesley Snipes, and Harvey Keitel, is based on a 1992 book by Michael Crichton that told the story about a beautiful blonde woman murdered by a Japanese businessman. The book was released during a period of sharp tensions between the United States and Japan over trade issues and around the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor; it was very reminiscent of the Yellow Peril books written one hundred years earlier. In Crichton's book, the inscrutable Japanese were described as superior in terms of their technology, discipline, and efficiency. But at the same time the Japanese were seen as morally inferior because of their ruthless ambition to take over the U.S. economy, corrupt nature and predatory business practices, manipulation of trade laws, and lustful behavior toward white women. Although Crichton had never spent more than forty-eight hours in Japan, he was heavily influenced by the work of writers like Pat Choate, Clyde V. Prestowitz, Jr., Karl van Wolferen, and others who have argued that Japan is plotting to take over America. It is clear that Crichton wanted his book to be more than a mere murder mystery, as evidenced by the inclusion of an afterword and bibliography at the end of *Rising Sun*. Japanese economic success has not been accomplished "by doing things our way," Crichton writes. "(T)he Japanese have invented a new kind of trade—adversarial trade, trade like war, trade intended to wipe out the competition—which America has failed to understand for several years."¹⁶

Within this context, Asian American activist groups began organizing and expressing their concerns when plans for a major motion picture based on Crichton's novel were released. Representatives from the group Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA), met with the film's production team in early 1993 and requested that they be allowed to view a rough cut of the film. MANAA also wanted the film to begin with a disclaimer stating that it is a work of fiction and "not meant to imply that all Japanese people are trying to take over America." MANAA was seeking a similar disclaimer to be

added to director Michael Camino's film *Year of the Dragon* (1984), which depicted criminal activity in New York's Chinatown. MANAA emphasized it was neither trying to serve as censor nor attempting to defend Japanese trade, corporate, or government practices. At the same time, MANAA was fearful about a possible rise in anti-Asian violence because the portrayals in *Rising Sun* could "fuel racial paranoia, resentment and violence against Asian Americans because of the confusion many Americans have with differentiating between Asian Americans and the fictional images in the media."¹⁷ When the talks broke down, MANAA sent a letter of protest directly to Strauss Zelnick, president and chief operating officer of Twentieth Century Fox, the studio producing the film. In its letter, MANAA reiterated its demands and this time threatened a high-profile protest upon the release of *Rising Sun* if their demands were not met. Zelnick rejected MANAA's demands, citing both free speech rights and damage to the film's "commercial potential."¹⁸

Although the studio and the film's producers did not concede to MANAA's demands, the group's demands did not go completely unheard. The revised movie script did blunt some of the more strident anti-Japanese attacks and the murderer in film was changed from the original book's version. These changes so irked Crichton and co-screenwriter Mike Backes, they walked off the project after just seven weeks. *Rising Sun* director Philip Kaufman denied he was influenced by Asian American protests. In a *Los Angeles Times* profile he stated, "I don't think the movie softsells any of the [political] issues at all. In fact, if anything, it opens up discussion." In terms of the movie script that differed significantly from the original book, Kaufman added bluntly, "(Y)ou can't make a movie that lectures or has a bibliography of sources the way the novel does."¹⁹ Despite these changes, MANAA made good on its threat and organized demonstrations in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and Washington, DC. In a news conference, MANAA president Guy Aoki complained that Japanese characters in the film were depicted as "ruthless, aggressive people intent on getting their way in business through blackmail, extortion and even murder."²⁰ These types of portrayals, he added, could contribute to escalating hate crimes against Asian Americans. Even actors in the film were uneasy about the final results. Veteran actor Mako, who played a Japanese executive in the film, had his concerns. "There aren't enough Japanese elements in *Rising Sun*," he said. "What you see is a superficial glimpse." Actor Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa, who played the film's primary murder suspect, "Fast" Eddie Sakamura, admits there were parts of the film he would liked to have changed. "I think so, only because I've played a lot of stereotypes."²¹

The tangible results of the *Rising Sun* protest are subtle. MANAA never called for a boycott of *Rising Sun*, nor criticized the actors for accepting roles in the film. Instead, MANAA worked to educate both the studio and the movie audience on issues important to Asian Americans, especially increased concern about anti-Asian violence. In this way MANAA has earned respect and credibility in Hollywood. MANAA has shifted its emphasis from reacting to negative depictions of Asians in film. They now focus on working with studios to discuss the need for greater representation of Asian Americans in all areas of the entertainment

business and to help producers develop more positive Asian American-themed projects for the mainstream audience. Asian American actors and actresses appreciate MANAA's efforts and hope they will eventually lead to the creation of more roles for them to play. Actor Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa found the creation of the film he starred in to be refreshing. "This was the first nationwide Asian American mobilization since *Year of the Dragon*," he explained. "And in America... if you're not rebellious you don't get noticed."²²

Years after the *Rising Sun* controversy died down, another controversy erupted. When John Tateishi, national executive director of the Japanese American Citizen's League (JACL), read that Walt Disney Studios was planning to make *Pearl Harbor* (2001), a film about the 1941 Japanese attack on U.S. forces in Hawaii, he knew he had to respond. In this case it appeared that both sides learned important lessons from the fight over *Rising Sun*. The first thing Tateishi did was request a meeting with executives at the Walt Disney Company, which he received. He was assured that the film would be sensitive to Japanese Americans. Next, Tateishi asked for a meeting with the film's producer Jerry Bruckheimer. "When I saw it was a Bruckheimer production, my immediate reaction was, 'Oh my God,'" Tateishi said. Bruckheimer is one of the most successful contemporary Hollywood producers with a long track record of making blockbuster action films such as *March or Die* (1977), *Top Gun* (1986), *Crimson Tide* (1995), *The Rock* (1996), and *Con Air* (1997). Bruckheimer agreed to meet with Tateishi and even gave a copy of the script to Tateishi to review. According to Bruckheimer, "[Tateishi] had very legitimate concerns and we wanted to honor them. If we feel suggestions don't hurt us artistically, then we try to make changes."²³

These meetings demonstrate the growing influence of groups confronting media stereotypes in film and television. Despite the congeniality between the movie studio and Asian American community leaders, precautions were still taken. Prior to the Memorial Day weekend premiere of *Pearl Harbor*, U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii), a decorated World War II veteran and a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient for battle-wounds he suffered, issued the following statement: "The movie 'Pearl Harbor' may well revive the emotion of 60 years ago and cause some people to reflect negatively upon the Japanese residents of our nation. . . . However, we hope that those who may be so inclined will recall that, notwithstanding the incarceration of [Japanese Americans], thousands of Japanese Americans volunteered to stand in harm's way for our nation." John Tateishi was equally cautious when the film was first being released. "I've ordered the security in this building stepped up," he said from the JACL national headquarters in Washington, DC. "I've talked to the directors of my organization around the country and sent out an alert action plan to chapters around the country."²⁴ While there were reports of hate messages sent to individual JACL offices, there were no specific incidents of physical hate violence or hate crimes related to the release of *Pearl Harbor*.

Just two years after *Pearl Harbor* hit the big screen, a new film created a major stir and a different type of controversy. Justin Lin's independent work *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2003) is the story of four high school overachievers in

upper-middle class Orange County, California, who are the stereotypes of the "model minority" in terms of their academic prowess and, at the same time, the Yellow Peril for their violent criminal behavior. The film was initially shown at the Sundance Film Festival in 2002, where the audience was perplexed about how to categorize it. Some criticized *Better Luck Tomorrow* (*BLT*) for its share of sex and graphic violence, and accused the filmmaker of perpetuating Asian stereotypes. Some commented on the characters' moral corruption and found the lack of positive Asian American role models in the film offensive. Others, including film critic Roger Ebert, spoke in favor of *BLT*, arguing that it was condescending to think that movie depictions of Asian Americans only have to be good. "This film has the right to be about these people and Asian American characters have a right to be whoever the hell they want to be," Ebert told the crowd. "They do not have to 'represent their people.'" *BLT*, with its all-Asian American cast, was made for only \$250,000, but the exposure at the Sundance Film Festival encouraged MTV Films to pay \$500,000 for the rights to the film and invest \$1 million to market it nationwide. In April 2003, *BLT* opened in thirteen theaters and, to the surprise of many, earned more than \$360,000 its opening weekend. By the third week, *BLT* was showing in 380 theaters and earned over \$1 million. After six weeks in the theater, *BLT* made just under \$3.7 million.²⁵

On the heels of *BLT* came *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004), a comedy adventure that is nonetheless notable in that it was the first mainstream Hollywood film that featured two Asian American male leads whose characters weren't foreign-born, didn't have accents, weren't martial arts fighters, and weren't high achievers. Marketed as a movie "starring that Asian guy" from the film *American Pie* (1999) and *American Pie 2* (2001) "and that Indian guy" from the film *Van Wilder* (2002), the film uses a lot of low-grade adolescent humor to tell the story of two twenty-something potheads whose search for White Castle hamburgers leads them into a series of misadventures. "A Hollywood movie with two Asian American male leads? I didn't think the film would ever get made," said John Cho, who plays Harold Lee in the film. "Even while it was being made, I couldn't believe it." Cho was also in *BLT*, playing a very different type of role as the eventual murder victim. Cho adds: "This is our big at bat fiscally. Hollywood has put out a product with two [Asian American] leads and the question is, will audiences vote for it?" *Harold and Kumar* ranked seventh in the box office the first week of its release, earning almost \$5.5 million in just over 2,100 theaters. Reviews of the film were mixed at best, and after eight weeks it was pretty much out of the theaters. By that time, however, it had earned more than \$18 million. *Harold and Kumar* was listed in the top ten home videos sold the first two weeks it was available, earning an additional \$1 million. The financial figures are not bad, but it remains to be seen if major Hollywood studios will take another chance on Asian American actors to carry a film or if this is just another trend that will come and go. Those who have been involved in the motion picture industry for a while have seen this before and even the newcomers understand that all the attention to *BLT* and *Harold and Kumar* might be temporary. "I know something like this may not come around again," admits Cho.²⁶

This realization increasingly has led Asian American actors frustrated in their media careers to leave the United States all together. This was the case for Allan Wu, an aspiring actor, who despite his good looks and flawless English could get auditions in Hollywood only for bit parts or stereotypical negative Asian male roles. Wu decided it was better to move to Asia rather than give up completely. Since moving to Singapore, Wu has starred in two television dramas, appeared in several movies, and done numerous commercials throughout Asia. Although he is not a superstar, he is making a living, which is something he could not do in the United States. "You come to Asia and realize there's a huge market," Wu said. "I'd like to stay in entertainment, maybe go behind the camera, directing and producing—which I can learn out here, too." Wu was born and raised in California and worked in the biotechnical field for a short time before going to Asia to launch his new career. Because he did not speak much Chinese while growing up, he had to work intensely with private language tutors in both Cantonese and Mandarin before his career could take off.²⁷

ASIAN AMERICANS ON TELEVISION

The Asian American experience on television parallels what has happened in the movie theaters. Like the movies, network television mirrors the ideology and events of its times. Asian Americans have for the most part been portrayed in predictable stereotypical fashion. The best analytical work on this subject is Darrell Hamamoto's book *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation* (1994). Hamamoto writes, "In the postwar era, television has been the principal medium by which rituals of psychosocial dominance are reenacted daily. . . . Even the most seemingly benign TV programs articulate the relationship between race and power, either explicitly or through implication."²⁸ Hamamoto found one of the most common roles for Asian American males on television until recently was as a domestic servant to whites. Three early television programs of this kind were *Bachelor Father* (1957–1960), starring John Forsythe as a single man caring for his orphaned niece with the help of his "houseboy," played by Sammee Tong. In *Have Gun Will Travel* (1957–1960, 1961–1963), gunfighter Paladin (Richard Boone) had a personal valet, "Hey Boy," played by Kam Tong. Tong was replaced on the show after the 1960 season. His replacement was Lisa Lu, who was known as "Hey Girl." Easily the most famous Chinese domestic servant was Victor Sen Yung, who was the character Hop Sing in the *Bonanza* series that ran for fourteen years (1959–1973). Even Bruce Lee got his start on television as the faithful houseboy Kato in the show *The Green Hornet* (1966–1967). A Chinese domestic, played by actor Chao-Li Chi, was also seen in the nighttime soap opera *Falcon Crest* (1981–1990).

Roles for Asian American men have been extremely narrow on television. Indeed, television has consistently insulted Asian American men, as witnessed by its own version of a scotchtape Asian in the series *Kung Fu* (1972–1975). This was the show originally conceived by Bruce Lee, who desperately wanted to play the

lead role. The story line involved a Shaolin priest who escapes China in the late nineteenth century after avenging the death of his mentor, and finds adventure wandering around the American West. It would have been the perfect vehicle for Lee to demonstrate his martial arts prowess to a national audience that wanted more after his debut in *The Green Hornet*. Lee seemed primed for network stardom, especially after his well-received guest appearance on the detective show *Longstreet* (1971–1972) where he played a martial arts instructor. When *Kung Fu* premiered on television, the starring role was played by David Carradine. The character was changed from Chinese to half-Chinese, half-white. Lee was terribly embittered by this rejection and he left the United States to make his mark in Hong Kong martial arts films. Although *Kung Fu* was a personal disappointment for Lee, it did provide an opportunity for a number of Asian American actors in co-starring roles and guest appearances, which had been extremely rare.

Drawing from the Charlie Chan stereotype in motion pictures, Hamamoto cites police detectives as another common role for Asian American males on television. A recent example is seen in the San Francisco-based show *Nash Bridges* (1996–2001), starring Don Johnson, where Cary-Hirokyu Tagawa had a recurring role as Lt. A. J. Shimamura. Except for Sammo Hung in *Martial Law* (1998–2000) and Pat Morita starring in his own short-lived series *Ohara* (1987–1988), all Asian American detectives have played backup roles to white males. For example, Jack Soo as Sergeant Nick Yemana had a secondary role in the program *Barney Miller* (1975–1982). In the popular television show *Hawaii Five-0* (1968–1980), actors Jack Lord and James MacArthur led a group of Asian American detectives to solve crimes in the aloha state. Actors Kam Fong and Zulu, among others, played the silent background roles, rushing off when orders were given. Steve McGarrett (Lord) and Danny Williams (MacArthur) did all the talking and thinking while their subordinates did the running around. After the criminals were captured, the Asian American detectives received none of the credit or glory for making the arrest—that was saved for the white men in charge. "Book 'em, Danno" were the famous last words at the end of each *Hawaii Five-0* episode. In the series *Midnight Caller* (1988–1991), actor Dennis Dun played Billy Po, the assistant to the show's lead star, Jack Killian (Gary Cole), a radio talk-show host who solved crimes in his spare time. Although Dun is a talented and established stage actor, and his character was much more developed than the standard Asian detective sidekick, his role was clearly the helper to the hero.

The teen-oriented show *21 Jump Street* (1987–1990) featured four hip undercover officers, among them Dustin Nguyen, who played the character H. T. Ioki. The dashing and handsome Nguyen quickly became the hearthrob of thousands of teenage girls, but the studio highlighted lead actors Johnny Depp, and later Richard Grieco, to carry the show. Both Depp and Grieco quickly moved on to bigger and better acting roles, while Nguyen faded out of the show. Nguyen did reemerge in the made-for-television movie *Earth Angel* (1991), but he played a stereotypical nerdy Asian American honor student who worked as a pet shop cleanup boy. The movie was a breakthrough of sorts because Nguyen's

character, Peter Joy, did win the affections of a popular all-American girl (Rainbow Harvest), but only after he helped her with her homework and was beaten up by the school bully. Television did not know what to do with an atypical Asian American male except to relegate him to a typical Asian American role.²⁹

Except for the one role in *Earth Angel*, Asian American males have been basically asexual characters. Even the most famous Asian American on television, Lt. Sulu (George Takei) in the original *Star Trek* series (1966–1969), was a sexless character. While all the primary male members on the starship *Enterprise* had intergalactic encounters with women—human and alien—Lt. Sulu was always left alone. On the other hand, Hamamoto found several examples of Asian American women who were sexually involved with white men. An early example of this is a 1966 episode of the long-running western program *Gunsmoke* (1955–1975) entitled “Gunfighter, R.I.P.” In it gunfighter Joe Bascome (Darren McGavin) is seriously wounded helping to protect a Chinese laundryman, Ching Fa (H. T. Tsaing), and his daughter, Ching Lee (France Nuyen), from harassing thugs. The father is killed, but his daughter takes the gunfighter to her home and nurses him back to health. They fall in love and the gunfighter stays to help out the family business. Before too long, however, he is discovered and is reminded that he has already been paid to kill Matt Dillon (James Arness), the marshal of Dodge City. Bascome does not want his Chinese lover to know about his notorious past as a gunfighter, so he verbally abuses her and pretends to reject her in hopes she will forget him. The episode concludes when Ching Lee finds \$500 left for her by Bascome. She realizes he loves her after all, and she goes to find him. Ching Lee manages to find Bascome but is shot trying to protect him and dies at the end of the show.³⁰

Hamamoto also describes a 1979 episode from the series *How the West Was Won* (1978–1979) entitled “China Girl.” The rather twisted storyline focuses on a family who sails from China to settle in the United States in 1869. During the long voyage, the daughter, Li Sin, played by Rosalind Chao, is raped by the ship’s captain and becomes pregnant. Rather than expressing anger and horror at her debasement, Li Sin is instead rather pleased with the idea that her child is half-white and will be an American citizen when it is born. The story then shows the conflict between Li Sin who wants to keep the child and raise it as an American, and her evil Chinese father, who wants the child killed. In the end, Li Sin marries a Chinese man who agrees to adopt the child as his own, and the family moves to Montana to live happily ever after. “In both *Gunsmoke* and *How the West Was Won*, the theme of Asian female sexual possession by the white male Westerner was clearly articulated,” Hamamoto writes. “Whether for the purposes of sexual gratification, as in the instance of ‘Gunfighter R.I.P.’ or to exert power and assert authority, as seen in the rape of Li Sin by the ship’s captain in ‘China Girl,’ white males are afforded such license as part of their social endowment as the master race.”³¹

At the same time, the Asian woman’s sexual prowess and uncontrollable attractiveness to white males is often quite blatant, as witnessed in the made-for-television movie epic *Tai-Pan* (1986), based on the book by James Michener and produced by movie mogul Dino de Laurentis. In this miniseries, Joan

Chen plays the China-doll harlot to a British sea trader, played by Brian Brown. Chen also played a similar sexually insatiable role in a 1989 episode from the show *Wiseguy* (1987–1990). In that episode Chen portrays a labor organizer who transforms from a teary-eyed political idealist into a kinky sex kitten while seducing the show’s lead character, an undercover FBI agent, played by Ken Wahl.³²

Asian American women have more recently played wider variety of television roles than Asian American men. For example, on the hospital drama *St. Elsewhere* (1982–1988), France Nuyen played surgeon Dr. Paulette Keim, and Kim Miyori played a doctor named Wendy Armstrong. Joan Chen was a regular on *Twin Peaks* (1990–1991), playing the character Jocelyn “Josie” Packard. It is interesting to note that there have also been Asian American actresses on television who are married to white men. For example, in the last year of the hit program *M*A*S*H* (1972–1983), an Asian character finally was featured. It was a woman, Soon-Lee (Rosalind Chao), who eventually married the cross-dressing corporal Max Klinger (Jamie Farr). Their marriage continued into a post-*M*A*S*H* spinoff, *AfterM*A*S*H* (1983–1984). Chao was also a regular on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994) and its spinoff *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993–1999). In these shows, Chao plays botanist Keiko Ishikawa, wife of Transporter Chief Miles O’Brien (Colm Meaney). Stand-up comic Margaret Cho starred in her own short-lived situation comedy, *All-American Girl* (1994). In the hit comedy series *Friends* (1995–2000), Lauren Tom had a temporary recurring role as the girlfriend of one of the show’s main characters. And Ming-Na played a sharp-talking gallery owner, social butterfly, and love interest in the show *The Single Guy* (1995–1997). Ming-Na is also Dr. “Deb” Chen in the popular series *ER* (1994–2004) and stars on her own short-lived show, *Inconceivable* (2005), where she also plays a medical doctor. Actress Kelly Hu has played a police detective in *Martial Law*, *Nash Bridges*, and *CSI: NY* (2004–present). Another actress, Lindsay Price, who is half-Korean American, had regular roles on *Beverly Hills 90210* (1990–2000) during the last two years of the show and in the short-lived program *Coupling* (2003). Lauren Tom has a regular role in the new comedy show *DAG* (2000–present) and on *Barbershop* (2005–present), and Tia Carrere played an archaeology professor who searches the globe for artifacts and adventure on *Relic Hunter* (1999–2002). The most notable Asian American woman is Lucy Liu, who played the contentious and cool lawyer Ling Woo, on *Ally McBeal* (1997–2002).

Television Highlights and Lowlights for Asian Americans

The television breakthrough for Asian Americans was not a series, but the prime-time made-for-television movie *Farewell to Manzanar* (1976). The movie, based on the book co-written by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and her husband, James Houston, was about the experiences of a Japanese American family after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. The movie followed the Wakatsuki family into the internment camp at Manzanar, focusing on the destruction and

divisions wrought by this event. The father, Ko Wakatsuki (Yuki Shimoda), was temporarily separated from his family and was unfairly detained by government agents who accused him of being subversive and disloyal to the United States. Wakatsuki was eventually allowed to rejoin his family in Manzanar, but was a broken man who drank bootleg sake to forget his humiliation and misery. In this way *Farewell to Manzanar* did not shy away from showing the hardships created by the forceful relocation of more than 110,000 Japanese Americans. The movie also showed the controversy that erupted within the camps over the War Relocation Authority's (WRA) questionnaire asking respondents to state their loyalty to the United States. Specifically, question 27 of the WRA questionnaire asked Japanese Americans if they would be willing to serve in the United States armed services whenever ordered, and question 28 asked them to forswear any form of allegiance to the Japanese emperor. There was a group of Japanese American dissidents who either refused to answer both questions or responded "no" to both for political reasons. In the movie, however, Ko Wakatsuki pleads to fellow internees to answer "yes" to both answers, arguing that life was still better in the United States than in Japan despite their present situation. Wakatsuki's two sons Richard (James Saito) and Teddy (Clyde Kusatsu) both answer "yes-yes" to the two questions and quickly enlist in the U.S. Army. An interesting subplot in the movie is a love affair between Richard Wakatsuki and a white nurse (Gretchen Corbett). This was the first instance of a consensual Asian American male-white female sexual liaison, but it was short-lived because Richard was soon killed serving with the famous 442nd Regimental Combat Team in Europe. *Farewell to Manzanar* was criticized by some Asian American activists who found that the story glorified assimilationist ideals, made internment seem like an uncharacteristic accident of U.S. history, and did not focus enough on the dominant role of anti-Japanese racism in the creation of the wartime relocation policy.³³ Nonetheless, *Farewell to Manzanar* received favorable reviews in the mainstream press and provided a showcase for some superb performances, especially by Nobu McCarthy, who was the movie's narrator and played the role of the mother, Misa Wakatsuki.

Despite the success and attention given to *Farewell to Manzanar*, it was nearly twenty years before a major prime-time event with a largely Asian American cast would again be on television. In the fall 1994 season, ABC premiered the situation comedy *All-American Girl*, starring comedienne Margaret Cho. The show was produced by Disney Studios and was loosely based on Cho's stand-up comedy material focusing on her Korean American family living in San Francisco. Cho and the veteran Asian American cast, which included a mother (Jodi Long), father (Clyde Kusatsu), grandmother (Amy Hill), older brother (Tony Award-winning actor B. D. Wong), and younger brother (J. B. Quon), created a great deal of excitement among Asian Americans who wanted to see the show succeed. "For there to be an all-Asian family in prime time was not even conceivable to the networks a few years ago," gushed co-star B. D. Wong during an Asian Pacific Heritage Month event at Stanford University. "When I grew up and watched TV, I saw no Asians. . . . We weren't thought of as Americans, but as exotics. The existence of this show is really major and an

indication of the change in sensibilities to how we're viewed as people."³⁴ Along with the excitement also came pressure and extremely high expectations. Because only two of the show's writers were Asian Americans, there was tremendous concern whether or not *All-American Girl* would perpetuate or shatter many of the stereotypes about Asians. Many Asian American groups scrutinized the pilot, read scripts, and attended tapings for weeks before the show even reached the airwaves. Aside from the external pressures, there were also internal problems with *All-American Girl*. The original pilot for the show was so bad that critics dubbed it "The Joy Less Club," and Disney sent it back for revisions. The premiere program that was aired on September 14, 1994, was actually the show's second segment, and it received only lukewarm reviews.³⁵

There was also a great deal of disagreement about the show among Asian Americans themselves. Organized Asian American media advocacy groups, such as MANAA, praised the program primarily because it highlighted and validated the existence of Americans of Asian ancestry. "It's basically an affirmation of our existence," said Guy Aoki, president of MANAA. "That's so important, because we've usually been invisible. We've waited so long for an Asian American sitcom."³⁶ MANAA later honored Cho and the producers of *All-American Girl* at its second annual Media Achievement Awards banquet in late 1994. Asian American viewers, however, were much less enamored. The first major criticism of the show was the poor quality of writing that produced a situation comedy indistinguishable from anything else on television. "*All-American Girl* is a disappointment and commits the biggest show-business sin: it isn't funny," wrote columnist William Wong. "That it is very much in the mold of other TV comedies starring white and black actors means it is banal entertainment, a specialty of commercial television. If Asian Americans were hoping for a TV show that genuinely reflects Asian cultural sensibilities, they'll have to wait for some future show."³⁷

Another major criticism was the show's treatment of Asian American men. While the spunky Cho character was a definite change from the meek and exotic Asian woman so often seen in the media, many were aghast that the show perpetuated the negative images of Asian American males. "My main criticism, frankly, was the way Asian men were portrayed," said Deann Borshay Liem, the executive director of the National Asian American Telecommunications Association.³⁸ Neither the father nor the older brother was very developed as characters. In several episodes Cho's attraction to white males over Asian American males was the central theme. In the opening program, for example, the mother tries to dissuade Cho from dating a white auto mechanic by introducing her to two Asian American men: one was a wimpy-looking graduate student from MIT and the other an accountant with a speech impediment. In a subsequent episode, Cho becomes interested in a handsome Asian American male, but in the end rejects him because she is too "American," while he is too "Asian." Still another source of criticism came directly from many in the Korean American community. They complained that the cast (except for Cho) wasn't Korean, the mother's accent is more Chinese than Korean, and when the Korean language was spoken it was so badly garbled that native-Korean speakers couldn't understand it. "I felt sort of awkward watching it,"

explained Wes Kim, a Korean American from Chicago. "It's sort of strange to see this Hollywood conception of what a Korean family is supposed to be like."³⁹ At best, Korean Americans seemed moderately enthused about the show. Professor Elaine Kim also expressed "misgivings" about *All-American Girl*, but hoped it might improve with time.⁴⁰

By midseason, however, *All-American Girl* went from bad to worse. The show's producer and writers were fired, and major changes were made. The changes was to move the Cho character out of the family house and into an apartment with roommates. The experiment was intended to target a younger audience of viewers but, if successful, would have reduced roles for the rest of the family members. If the experiment didn't work, there was concern the show would be on its way out completely. MANAA and other Asian American groups organized a furious letter-writing campaign to the studio and the network calling for *All-American Girl* to be renewed for another season. These last-ditch efforts proved unsuccessful and the show was canceled after just one season.

At the same time so much attention was paid to *All-American Girl*, the syndicated miniseries *Vanishing Son* (1994) premiered on the Fox Television network. *Vanishing Son* featured Russell Wong as Jian-Wa Chang, a human rights activist forced to flee Mainland China with his brother after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre because of their political beliefs. But once in the United States, the brother is killed and Chang is framed for the murder of two federal agents. The show focuses on Chang trying to clear himself while evading capture and deportation by the U.S. government. *Vanishing Son* was somewhat like a modern-day "Kung-Fu, except the Jian-Wa character was written to be intense, virile, and sexual. This was a major leap for Asian American men in the media, who have been relegated to less than appealing assistant roles up to this point. Being a representative of the Asian community, I'm mindful of the dialogue and care what kind of image is put out there—the quality and integrity," Wong explains. "Jian-Wa's got a lot of energy and sex appeal. He's a passionate guy. It would be unrealistic not to show it."⁴¹

The miniseries gathered very positive reviews along with a small but dedicated following, and *Vanishing Son* was turned into a midseason weekly series in 1995. While the weekly series was met with great anticipation and high expectations just like *All-American Girl*, two major questions were also raised. The first question was whether or not a strong Asian male character in a serious role would be acceptable to a large mainstream audience. The second question was whether *Vanishing Son* could smoothly adjust from a well-crafted and well-planned miniseries to the rigorous pace of a weekly series and maintain its production quality and audience appeal. This would be difficult for any show, especially since the per-episode budget for a weekly program was 30 percent less than the per-episode costs for the original miniseries.⁴² Despite the production company's best efforts to keep the show together, it soon became clear that the weekly series could not maintain either the quality or audience it gained from the miniseries. *Vanishing Son* was quietly dropped from the network's program list.

The rapid rise and fall of *All-American Girl* and *Vanishing Son* indicates that Asian Americans still lack a solid presence in the television mainstream.

According to a report by the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC), Asian American representation on TV peaked at 2.3 percent in 1994. This figure fell to 1.9 percent in 1998. This reduction took place despite the high profile programs featuring Sammo Hung and Lucy Liu. Since August 1999 NAPALC has led the Asian Pacific American Media Coalition, a group of nineteen organizations, in a campaign against the lack of diversity in television programming. The Coalition joined forces with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the national Latino Media Council, and American Indians in Film and Television after the fall 1999 schedule of the four major television networks revealed a virtually all-white slate of new programming. After months of confrontation and negotiation, the Coalition eagerly awaited the fall 2000 lineup of programs. While there was some improvement, the Coalition was very disappointed with the overall results. Of the thirty new shows, seven Asian Americans were cast and all had only minor supporting roles. In addition, CBS announced it would be canceling *Martial Law* after the 2000 season.⁴³

The most recent analysis of Asian Americans on television from NAPALC, titled "Asian Pacific Americans in Prime Time: Lights, Camera, and No Action" (2005), shows 2.5 percent Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) representation on television—only slightly more than the representation a decade ago. In total, there were eighteen APIA actors on prime-time television (see Table 6-1 on p. 216). There were several other key findings from the report:

- Out of 113 prime-time programs, only thirteen featured at least one recurring Asian American, Pacific Islander, or multiracial Asian American/Pacific Islander character. Only three programs on television in fall 2004 had more than one APIA character (*ER*, *Hawaii*, and *Lost*).
- Of the thirteen television programs, APIA actors were featured far less than non-APIA actors. White actors had 83.3 percent of the screen time on these programs, while APIA characters consistently had the lowest screen time. It is interesting to note that the multiracial APIA actors, some of whom played white characters, received significantly more screen time than non-multiracial APIA actors.
- In this study, male APIA actors (11) outnumbered female APIA actors (7).
- There were a number of television programs that were located in cities such as Honolulu, San Francisco, Queens (New York), Seattle, and New York City that have large APIA populations, but had no regular APIA cast member. For example, the programs *Half and Half* on UPN and *Charmed* on WB were set in San Francisco but had no APIA cast members. There were seven television programs set in Los Angeles that had no regular APIA cast member. Two shows set in Honolulu, *Hawaii* on NBC and *North Shore* on FOX, had relatively high APIA representation on the cast (27 percent), although APIA's represent 63 percent of the city's population.
- The characterizations of APIA's on television are not as stereotypical and limited as in the past. Of the eighteen APIA characters on television, five were in the medical field (two doctors, one medical examiner, one

Table 6-1 Names and Ethnicities of Actors and Characters in the Fall 2004 Prime-time Television Lineup

Actor/Show	Character	Actor Ethnicity	Character Ethnicity
Rhona Mitra/ <i>Boston Legal</i>	Tara Wilson	Multiracial APIA	White
Ravi Kapoor/ <i>Crossing Jordan</i>	"Bug"	South Asian	South Asian
Linda Park/ <i>Enterprise</i> (Will be cancelled at the end of the 2004-05 season.)	Hoshi Sato	Korean	Japanese
Ming-Na/ <i>ER</i>	Jing-Mei/"Deb" Chen	Chinese	Chinese
Parminder Nagra/ <i>ER</i>	Neela Rasgotra	South Asian	South Asian
Keiko Agena/ <i>Gilmore Girls</i>	Lane Kim	APIA	Korean
Aya Sumika/ <i>Hawaii</i> (Cancelled October 2004)	Linh Tamiya	Multiracial APIA	APIA
Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa/ <i>Hawaii</i> (Cancelled October 2004)	Terry Harada	Japanese	Japanese
Peter Navy Tuiasosopo/ <i>Hawaii</i> (Cancelled October 2004)	Kaleo	Samoan	Pacific Islander
B. D. Wong/ <i>Law & Order</i>	George Huang	Chinese	Chinese
Daniel Dae Kim/ <i>Lost</i>	Jin	Korean	Korean
Naveen Andrews/ <i>Lost</i>	Sayid	South Asian	Iraqi
Yunjin Kim/ <i>Lost</i>	Sun	Korean	Korean
Bobby Lee/ <i>MADtv</i>	(various)	Korean	Korean
Jason Momoa/ <i>North Shore</i>	Frankie Seau	Multiracial APIA	Ambiguous
Mark-Paul Gosselaar/ <i>NYPD Blue</i>	John Clark, Jr.	Multiracial APIA	White
Kristin Kreuk/ <i>Smallville</i>	Lana Lang	Multiracial APIA	White
Anthony Ruiviar/ <i>Third Watch</i>	Carlos Nieto	Multiracial APIA	Ambiguous

Source: National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, "Asian Pacific Americans in Prime Time: Lights, Camera, No Action" (2005), Table 4, p. 11 at http://www.advancingequality.org/files/NAPALC_report_final.pdf

forensic psychologist, and one paramedic), and three were in law enforcement (one captain and two officers). There was one linguistic specialist, one bartender/nightclub owner, one "brainy student," and two whose occupation is unknown because they are survivors of a plane crash forced to live on a remote island (*Lost*).⁴⁴

The challenges of racist, gendered, and stereotypical images facing Asian American men and women described in this chapter are not unique to

the movies or television sitcoms and dramas. Indeed, they carry over onto the stage as well.

ASIAN AMERICANS IN THE THEATER

Compared with movies and television, Asian Americans have been practically invisible in mainstream theater. Nonetheless, Asian American actors and playwrights have made remarkable strides in a relatively short time both in large Broadway productions as well as in small local theater houses across the nation. According to James S. Moy, author of *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America* (1993), among the earliest depictions of Chinese in America were in circus performances as exotics, comic relief, or sideshow freaks. During the intense anti-Chinese period in the late nineteenth century, decidedly negative portrayals of the Chinese were seen in theatrical works such as *Ah Sin!* (1877), written by Mark Twain and Bret Harte, and *The Chinese Must Go* (1879), written by Henry Grimm. Whites frequently played the Chinese characters in these theatrical productions. This continued throughout the first half of the twentieth century. For example, whites were cast in all the main roles in Eugene O'Neill's play about the adventures of Marco Polo in China, *Marco Millions* (1927). It wasn't until the late 1950s that the first big Broadway play with a large Asian American cast was produced. This was *Flower Drum Song* (1958), which served as the basis for the movie musical by the same name. It took nearly twenty years before another Asian-themed musical, *Pacific Overtures* (1976), was brought to the Broadway stage. *Pacific Overtures* made a successful run in New York and later toured across the United States.⁴⁵

These mainstream theatrical breakthroughs were few and far in-between, and by the mid-1970s Asian American actors and writers became understandably impatient. As a result, four independent full-time Asian American theater groups were formed: The Asian American Theater Company (San Francisco), The Pan Asian Repertory Theater (New York), The Northwest Asian American Theater (Seattle), and The East-West Players (Los Angeles). Many Asian American performers and writers working in theater and Hollywood today received their early training in one or more of these groups. Their emergence in the previously closed world of theater has had a major impact. The controversies surrounding two of the most highly acclaimed plays involving Asian Americans is evidence of this fact. The two plays, *M. Butterfly* (1988) and *Miss Saigon* (1990), caused an unparalleled firestorm among many Asian Americans both in and out of the theater community.

M. Butterfly won the prestigious Tony Award for best play in 1988 and was the runaway theater event of the season. Another Tony Award went to the play's star, B. D. Wong, for "Best Featured Actor." With all this attention, playwright David Henry Hwang suddenly became the toast of Broadway. *M. Butterfly* was based on the true story of a French diplomat who carried on a twenty-year love affair with a person he thought was a female Chinese opera singer, who instead turned out to be a male Chinese government spy. The title of the play was drawn

from Puccini's famous opera, *Madame Butterfly* (1904), about a tragic love story between Pinkerton, an American naval officer stationed in Japan, and Cho-Cho-San, a local Japanese woman. Pinkerton returns to the United States shortly after initiating the affair and leaving Cho-Cho-San pregnant with his child. While he is away, she pines for his return and rejects all other Japanese suitors to remain faithful for her lover's eventual return. Pinkerton does return to Japan three years later, but this time with his white wife. Pinkerton's mission was not to reunite with Cho-Cho-San but to retrieve the child he had abandoned three years earlier. His traumatic arrival and unceremonious rejection is such a humiliating blow to Cho-Cho-San that she commits ritualistic suicide. The opera *Madame Butterfly* articulates the white male fantasy stereotype about dominance over the submissive Asian woman. It is also a metaphor of the traditional colonial and neocolonial attitude demonstrating Western superiority over the East. Playwright David Henry Hwang, who wrote a number of plays produced by several local Asian American theater companies, was well aware of these themes and in *M. Butterfly* sought to subvert the imagery in no uncertain terms.

Early in the play, the French diplomat, Gallimard (John Lithgow), tells the Chinese opera singer/male spy, Song Liling (B. D. Wong), how much he enjoyed the beauty of love and the purity of sacrifice seen in Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly*. Song chides the diplomat, telling him, "It's one of your favorite fantasies, isn't it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man." Gallimard is taken aback by the blunt remark and does not know how to respond. Song presses the point and asks the diplomat to reverse the roles. What if a blond homecoming queen falls madly in love with a Japanese businessman who treats her with contempt? What if the Japanese businessman leaves for three years, and the homecoming queen spends the entire time praying for his return, only to kill herself when she learns he has remarried? "Now, I believe you would consider this girl to be a deranged idiot, correct?" states Song flatly. "But because it's an Oriental who kills herself for a Westerner—Ah!—you find it beautiful."⁴⁶ This was one of many twists in the *M. Butterfly* story line that differ from *Madame Butterfly*. Another comes at the end of the play when Gallimard discovers Song's true identity. This time it is Gallimard who is crushed and humiliated, and it is he who eventually commits suicide. Just before his death, the diplomat cries out in anguish, "Tonight, I've finally learned to tell fantasy from reality. And, knowing the difference, I choose fantasy."⁴⁷

Despite Hwang's complex intentions and clever juxtapositions, the play generated both praise and scorn from many Asian American viewers. The positive and negative reviews generally seemed to fall along gender lines. A forum held at the 1989 National Conference of the Association for Asian American Studies in New York City displayed these divergent perspectives. Chalsa Loo, professor of psychology at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, stated that if Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* reinforces the white male fantasy of superior race power and domination, Hwang's play *M. Butterfly* shows that perpetuation of this white male fantasy will eventually serve as the vehicle for his own destruction. Loo lauded the play as a "revenge fantasy" for Asian American women: "Hwang touched a fantasy and desire for Asian American women to throw the

sexist, racist stereotype back in his face."⁴⁸ Others, like Williamson Chang, professor of law also at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, were clearly upset with *M. Butterfly*. Chang argued that although the play may have challenged some stereotypes, it also perpetuated many others. "Asians, particularly Asian women, are portrayed as cunning, shrewd, manipulative, and deceptive," he said. "The plot of 'M. Butterfly' is much like that of Pearl Harbor—Asians succeed through deception." Chang also complained that the Song Liling character was yet another media insult to Asian men whose image has historically been invisible and emasculated. "Asian males had a lot to lose," he emphasized. "Was this 'he-woman' Song going to be representative of us in years to come? Will colleagues at the office look at you differently when you show up on Monday morning?" Chang concluded his talk by firmly stating: "Give me Bruce Lee or give me death."⁴⁹ At the end of this forum, David Henry Hwang spoke. He stated that he wanted *M. Butterfly* to create confusion among many people and he wanted them to confront a multitude of stereotypes. When asked by an audience member if he was taking a chance that people might get the wrong message, or perceive a message he did not intend, Hwang responded: "(Y)ou try and reach the greatest number of people you can with whatever you feel is important to say, and if people choose to misinterpret that work, then that's that. But at least they're being exposed to it which is better than if they had gone to something which only reinforced their reactionary thinking."⁵⁰

The debate over *M. Butterfly* did not settle before issues of the oppression of Asian women, the renewal of the *Madame Butterfly* fantasy, and the invisibility of Asian American males were again raised on Broadway with the musical extravaganza *Miss Saigon*. The production created an even bigger stir among Asian Americans, and the criticisms were far more unified and heated. In 1990, Broadway was buzzing about the planned arrival of the hit musical from London, *Miss Saigon*. The musical was expected to be a smash in New York and then stop at several other cities as part of its U.S. tour. The plot for *Miss Saigon* was simple and familiar: A Vietnamese prostitute (Kim) falls in love with a white American soldier (Chris). She becomes pregnant, but the two are separated after the fall of Saigon. Kim faithfully waits for Chris to return and take her and their child away. Chris returns to Southeast Asia three years later with his white wife (Ellen) to look for his abandoned child. Kim kills herself after finding out that Chris has remarried.

The publicity around the *Miss Saigon* tour and its reuse of the *Madame Butterfly* scenario created tremendous protest by Asian American media activists, who vowed to organize demonstrations wherever the musical is performed. Even more complaints were heard when it was announced that the prominent role of the Vietnamese pimp (Engineer) was going to be performed by a white actor. This role belonged to Jonathan Pryce who played the part in London using heavy makeup to make him "look Asian." David Henry Hwang and B. D. Wong, among many others, bitterly criticized the use of a scotch tape Asian, or a white man in "yellow face," as an insult to every Asian American performer whose choices for roles are already severely limited. As pressure mounted, the Actor's Equity Union tried to bar Pryce from playing the character, but the union quickly backed down

when *Miss Saigon* producer, Cameron Mackintosh, claimed his right of artistic freedom and also threatened to cancel the show's U.S. tour.

The controversy escalated even further and Asian American activists were stung by accusations that they were trying to censor the arts. According to B. D. Wong, nothing could be further from the truth. "I resent being labeled a person who somehow thought that artistic freedom was not important," he said in a magazine interview.⁵¹ Although the Actor's Equity Union reversed its decision and allowed Jonathan Pryce to play the role of Engineer, Wong and other Asian American artists felt their high-profile protests were worth the effort for a number of reasons. First, it brought attention to the limited number of prominent roles for Asian American actors, and highlighted the blatant contradictions found in "color-blind" or "nontraditional" casting. In its ideal form, color-blind casting recognizes that there are relatively few roles written for actors and actresses of color to play on the mainstream stage. The informal policy of color-blind casting serves to encourage directors and producers to cast qualified Asian American actors in roles they ordinarily would not be allowed to play. In reality, however, color-blind casting has only helped Asian Americans land secondary roles as non-Asian characters but has also continued to allow whites to take major roles as Asian characters. "Parts playable by any actor are not open to people of color, but to white actors who move easily from role to role, ethnicity to ethnicity," wrote Dom Magwili, former director of the Asian American Theater Project of the Los Angeles Theater Center in a guest editorial published in the *Los Angeles Times*. He cited the casting of African American actor and singer Robert Guillaume as the Phantom in *Phantom of the Opera* to be an excellent, though rare, example of color-blind casting. Magwili then asks wryly: "How about the novel idea for 'Miss Saigon' that Asians play themselves? Not a chance."⁵²

Second, media activists also said their protests against *Miss Saigon* helped those both inside and outside the theater world to realize that the use of scotch tape Asians should be seen as unthinkable as casting a white actor in blackface. The musical *Miss Saigon* opened as planned in 1991, but Pryce performed without yellow face makeup. In addition, after Pryce left the show and *Miss Saigon* began its U.S. tour, an Asian American actor was eventually cast in his place. Third, and most important, was the fact that the Asian American performing community was willing this time to stand up and make noise, when in the past they had not. "It is no wonder that these artists become restless and active," wrote playwright Velina Hasu Houston, in another guest editorial published in the *Los Angeles Times*. "They have to be. They're mad and they won't be silent anymore."⁵³ George Takei also believes increased activism among Asian American writers and performers, along with greater participation and criticism by the Asian American audience, are two essential ingredients for change. "The other part of my soapbox to the community is that we need to be visible in the audiences as well. . . . (T)here's no reason why we shouldn't be supporting the arts."⁵⁴

The enormous success of *M. Butterfly* and the controversies surrounding *Miss Saigon* have brought greater attention to Asian Americans in the theater

world. Since the 1970s Asian American writers and performers had been working tirelessly, but in almost total obscurity. Today, many of their efforts have begun to bear fruit and this is exemplified by the quantity and quality of plays that have been produced in recent years. Among the more notable Asian Americans that have emerged in the theater is prolific Philip Kan Gotanda, who has written a number of plays including *Yankee Dawg You Die*, *Fish Head Soup*, *The Wash*, *Day Standing on Its Head*, and *The Ballad of Yachiyo*. Another prolific playwright is Velina Hasu Houston, whose works include *Asa Ga Kimishita* (Morning Has Broken), *American Dreams*, *Tea*, and *Basic Necessities*. Small venue one-person plays by Jude Narita ("Coming into Passion/Song for a Sansei" and "Stories Waiting to Be Told/The Wilderness Within"), Amy Hill ("Tokyo Bound" and "Beside Myself"), and Lane Nishikawa ("Life in the Fast Lane," "I'm on a Mission from Buddha," and "Mifune and Me") have inspired audiences in tours across the country.

Interest in Asian American themes in theater is also seen in David Henry Hwang's reworked version of the musical *Flower Drum Song*. The original *Flower Drum Song* opened on Broadway on December 1, 1958, and ran for six hundred performances, closing on May 7, 1960. As described earlier in this chapter, the Hollywood film version of the musical premiered in 1961. On October 17, 2002, the new *Flower Drum Song* opened at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, California, forty years after the original production. The revised musical became a hit and extended its original run for an additional six weeks. The following year the revival was being performed on Broadway. Hwang's initial interest in reworking *Flower Drum Song* was to challenge early Hollywood stereotypes about Asian Americans. "I began writing plays as a college student in the late 1970s," Hwang recalled for an article in the *New York Times*. "As part of this movement, we rather simplistically condemned virtually all portrayals of Asian Americans created by non-Asians. So I ended up protesting 'Flower Drum Song' as 'inauthentic,' though the show remained a guilty pleasure for many of us."⁵⁵ Much of the dialogue from the 1961 movie version was changed, as was some of the storyline. While the conflict over Chinese Americans assimilating into mainstream society in the United States is still a major theme, the characters confront their identity issues more assertively and grapple with their reality rather than passively being victims of the cultural clash.

The critical reviews of the new *Flower Drum Song* were generally good, although there were some critics who felt Hwang's work smacked of "political correctness" superseding "art." This prompted historian John Kuo Wei Tchen of New York University to accuse the most strident critics of Hwang as being stuck in time and ignorant of changes in Asian American sensibilities since the 1958 and 1961 versions of *Flower Drum Song*. Tchen argued that the best way to preserve and perpetuate the important essence of the original book and subsequent musicals of *Flower Drum Song*, requires shaking up, and shaking off, the social baggage of the past.⁵⁶ Hwang acknowledged this fact and admitted the research and script variations for the remake of *Flower Drum Song* became a personal catharsis for him. He wrote: "Perhaps the riddle of identity is not one that we are ever meant to answer definitively. Rather it is by asking the questions throughout our

lives, and over the course of generations, that we give meaning to our existence, and assert our common humanity."⁵⁷ The maturation of writers and performers, and the emergence of a more appreciative audience are hopeful signs for the future of Asian Americans on the theatrical stage. Asian American involvement in the theater is far more than mere entertainment; it is also a political act. Josephine Lee's groundbreaking book *Performing Asian America* (1999) considers how various Asian American playwrights bring together the issues of performance, race, and ethnicity that help inform our understanding of Asian American identity. "We can no longer assume that the canonical classics can be evaluated according to supposedly universal or objective aesthetic standards," Lee writes. "The old theories of genre, form, and response that erase racial difference and that separate art neatly into either political or aesthetic dimensions are inadequate to the demands of new works: to their immediate topical concerns, the complexity of their artistic presentation, the difficult questions of art and political representation they raise."⁵⁸

ASIAN AMERICANS IN SPORTS

The media and sports have become closely interconnected in our society. Sporting events have become a major part of media content and advertising. The commercialization of sports and the media has created a symbiotic relationship, as each has grown dependent on the other for their popularity and revenues. The emergence of Asian and Asian American athletes in high profile sports in the United States is a growing phenomenon.⁵⁹ While there has been a great deal of scholarly literature on race and sports, as well as on the media and sports, only recently has work been written on Asian Americans in sports.⁶⁰ Asian Americans in sports has not been considered an appropriate subject for scholarly inquiry due to the relatively few Asian Americans who participate in commercial sports. For example, African Americans represent about 13 percent of the U.S. population, but they are the vast majority of professional basketball players. African Americans are also highly prominent in football, while Latinos are increasingly prominent in baseball. Asian Americans have been stereotyped historically as hard working but not physically strong, as intelligent but not athletic.

This is all changing and changing rapidly. The most successful and well-known U.S.-born Asian American athletes include ice skaters Kristi Yamaguchi and Michelle Kwan; tennis pro Michael Chang; golf superstars Tiger Woods, Michelle Wei, and Christina Kim; and Olympic gold medal winners Amy Chow (gymnastics) and Apolo Ohno (speed skating). The first person of Asian descent in major league baseball was Japan-born pitcher Masanori Murakami, who played for the San Francisco Giants from 1964 to 1965. During the next several decades there were a few U.S.-born players of Asian descent including outfielder and first baseman Mike Lum (1967–1981), infielder Len Sakata (1977–1987), pitchers Atlee Hammaker (1981–1995) and Ron Darling (1983–1995), and outfielder Benny Agbayani (1998–2002). Wendell Kim was

never a major league player, but he has been a successful coach for the San Francisco Giants, the Boston Red Sox, the Montreal Expos, and the Chicago Cubs. Attention to Asian Americans in baseball really began in 1995 with the arrival of pitcher Hideo Nomo who left the Japanese major leagues and joined the Los Angeles Dodgers. Nomo, nicknamed "The Tornado" for his unusual delivery, possessed a blazing fastball along with a variety of other pitches. In his first season he struck out 236 batters in just 191 innings and posted an impressive 2.54 earned run average on his way to winning the National League Rookie of the Year award. At 6-foot-2 and 210 pounds, Nomo defied the image of the small-framed Asian and redefined the meaning of "power pitching."

Since that time professional baseball players from Asia have been well represented. Most of the Asian players in major league baseball are from Japan, although there are others from Korea, Taiwan, and one from Panama (Bruce Chen). Ichiro Suzuki of the Seattle Mariners is the best-known baseball player from Asia. Suzuki broke in to the major leagues in 2001 and was the first major league position player born in Japan. In his first season Suzuki led the American League in batting (.350) and earned both Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player awards. In 2004, Suzuki broke an 84-year-old record for most hits in a season with 262. In 2005 Suzuki became one of only five players in major league history to have 200 or more hits in five consecutive seasons. Suzuki was elected by fans to start in baseball's All-Star game four times and he has won three coveted "Golden Glove" awards for his solid defense and strong throwing arm in the outfield. Another Japan-born player is power-hitting outfielder Hideki Matsui, who was signed by the New York Yankees before the 2003 season. In three seasons with the Yankees Matsui has fulfilled the high expectations by averaging more than 100 runs batted in (RBIs) and 23 home runs per season.

A growing number Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans also have entered the ranks of professional football. Many will be surprised to learn about Filipino American quarterback Roman Gabriel, who played from 1962 to 1977. Gabriel was an all-pro four times (1968, 1969, 1970, and 1974) and was the league's most valuable player in 1969. A number of Pacific Islanders also have been quite successful in football. The most famous is all-pro linebacker Junior Seau, who was the number one draft choice of the San Diego Chargers in 1990. Seau is considered to be one of the best linebackers in the history of the game. Other Asian Americans have made inroads into the sport, such as offensive lineman Eugene Chung, a first-round draft pick with the New England Patriots in 1992. Linebacker Dat Nguyen of the Dallas Cowboys started his National Football League (NFL) career in 1999 after having starred in college at Texas A&M. The son of Vietnamese refugees, Nguyen has had to confront the perception of professional scouts that he is "undersize" to play football. Nonetheless, at only 5-foot-11 and 238 pounds, Nguyen became the starting middle linebacker in his second season with the Cowboys. Nguyen was later selected defensive team captain for his work ethic and leadership skills. In 2004, University of Hawaii quarterback Timmy Chang capped a career setting records for most passing yards (17,072), attempts (2,346), completions (1,388) and total offense (16,910). In addition, Chang threw 117 touchdowns,

which is the second most of any major college quarterback. Despite his impressive statistics, Chang was not well regarded by professional scouts because he is undersize (6-foot-2 and 195 pounds) and did not play in a pro-style offense in college. He was not drafted by any NFL team, although he was signed as a free-agent by the Arizona Cardinals. Chang was cut before he was signed as a and was later signed by the Detroit Lions. Chang is considering a career with the Canadian Football League or the Arena League, both of which play offensive styles better suited for his skills and college experience.⁶¹

The first and only Asian American coach in the NFL is Tennessee Titans' offensive coordinator, Norm Chow, who joined the team in 2005 after a long and successful career as an assistant coach at Brigham Young University (BYU), North Carolina State, and the University of Southern California (USC). Chow won the 2002 "Broyles Award" as the nation's top assistant coach and was also named the 2002 NCAA Division I-A "Offensive Coordinator of the Year" by *American Football Monthly*. Chow has made no secret of his desire to become a head coach of a Division I-A football team, and to be the first Asian American ever to hold such a position. "There are not many of us that are in this profession," admitted Chow. "As a young person you always looked up and admired and tried to follow someone. If we're doing something that others aspire to and want to do and can maybe follow through with, than it's all worthwhile." Chow has seen the "glass ceiling" in action in his football-coaching career. After spending twenty-seven years as an assistant coach at BYU, Chow saw there was no opportunity for advancement. What finally motivated Chow to leave was an incident when BYU's vice president used a racial slur during a public address. "This was not a minor incident," Chow explained. "It made me realize how important it was to work in the proper environment. I went home and told my wife it was time to go. Chow spent one year coaching at North Carolina State (2000) and then moved on to become the offensive coordinator for USC, where he flourished. The USC Trojans won two national championships while Chow was in charge of the offense, and his name finally was mentioned as a head-coaching candidate. Chow was one of the top candidates for the head-coaching position at Stanford University in 2004, but he was not chosen. At the age of 58, Chow knew his opportunities for becoming the first Asian American head coach of a major college football team were fading. He then decided to leave college coaching and was hired as the offensive coordinator by the Tennessee Titans.⁶²

It was believed that an Asian would never stand out in the National Basketball Association (NBA). This is why there was phenomenal attention and excitement when the Houston Rockets made Yao Ming their first pick in the 2002 NBA draft. At 7-foot-5 and 295 pounds, Yao was only 21, but was already known as one of the top amateur basketball players in the world. The official NBA scouting report about Yao was glowing: "At 7-5 has very good agility and athleticism. Can knock down jumpshots all the way out to NBA 3 point range with consistency. . . . Runs the floor with fluidity, and good quickness. Has good aggressiveness, loves to dunk, and does so with authority. Has the motivation to

become better, and has expressed a strong interest in playing in the USA against the best in the world."⁶³ Yao was not the first player from China to play in the NBA. Centers Wang Zhizhi (Miami Heat) and Mengke Bateer (Denver Nuggets) came before Yao in 2001, but they were seen more as novelties that have not made much of a mark on the game or the fans. However, "Yaomania" started as soon as he was drafted and he has become larger than life in more ways than one. In China, Yao has become a star who has transcended borders. In Houston the Rockets play to sellout crowds of fans just wanting to watch Yao play. Throughout the NBA, teams market special "Asian American" game-day specials whenever the Rockets come to town. In Houston and on the road, the number of Asian faces in the crowd of NBA games has increased precipitously. On top of everything else, Yao has proved to be a very good player. As a rookie in 2002-2003, Yao averaged a respectable 13.5 points a game and led the Rockets in both rebounds and block shots per game. He earned unanimous All-Rookie First Team honors and was voted by fans to be the starting center in the 2003 NBA All-Star game. His statistics have improved every year since. Yao averaged 17.5 points per game in 2003-2004 and 18.3 points per game in 2004-2005. Yao has been voted to the All-Star game every year he has been in the league and in 2005 he received the most All-Star fan votes (2,588,278) of any player in NBA history.

Yao's entrance into the NBA and the media spotlight were not without controversy. On December 16, 2002, Shaquille O'Neal, then-Los Angeles Lakers superstar center, taunted Yao in a national radio interview and spouted off gibberish that was supposed to be mock Chinese language: "Go tell Yao Ming 'Ching-chong-yang-wah-ah-soh. . .'" The comment got some laughs but greatly offended many Asian American listeners. Irvin Tang heard the interview and was so incensed he began a campaign calling for O'Neal to apologize. "Forgive my bitterness," Tang wrote in an *AsianWeek* article. "I grew up in Texas, facing those 'ching-chong' taunts daily while teachers averted their ears. . . . I am calling Shaq out. Come on down to Chinatown, Shaq. You disrespected Asian Pacific America, and we will break you down. Perhaps when you and the Lakers come to Houston on Jan. 17 to play Yao Ming and the Rockets, the APA community will have a press conference waiting for you. Perhaps there, before a national audience, you can apologize to Yao Ming."⁶⁴ As pressure from Asian American groups began to mount, Shaquille O'Neal came out with a statement: "To say I'm a racist against Asians is crazy. I'm an idiot prankster. I said a joke. It was a 70-30 joke. Seventy percent of the people thought it was funny. Thirty didn't. I don't have to have a response to (charges of racism) because the people who know me know I'm not. . . . But if I offended anybody, I apologize."⁶⁵ On January 17, 2003, O'Neal and the Lakers arrived in Houston to play Yao and the Rockets, and the atmosphere in the area was electric. O'Neal offered a short comment upon his arrival: "All I am going to say is Yao Ming is my brother. All Asian people are my brothers. . . . I'm disappointed in the media making a big deal about my words."⁶⁶ O'Neal whispered something in Yao's ear before the opening tip-off. The Rockets won the hard-fought game.

108-104 in overtime. Tackling sealed the game with a slam dunk and the crowd went wild.

Professional golf is one sport where both U.S.-born and foreign-born Asian men and women have come to dominate. The most recognizable player is Tiger Woods, whose mother is from Thailand. Woods turned pro in 1996 at the age of 20, dropping out of school at Stanford University. As soon as he turned pro, he signed endorsement contracts worth \$40 million from Nike and \$20 million from Titleist, among others. He has since won numerous major tournaments and championships including the Masters (1997, 2001, 2002, and 2005), the U.S. Open (2000 and 2002), the British Open (2000 and 2005), and the PGA Championship (1999 and 2000). In 2004, Woods became the first golfer to earn \$40 million in prize money. Another well-known golfer is Vijay Singh, who is Asian Indian from Fiji. He has three major championship victories, the Masters (2000) and the PGA Championship (1998 and 2004), and he was ranked the number one golfer in the world in 2004. In the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) foreign-born Asians are making a strong impact as well. Though many are not household names, five out of the top ten money-earners on the 2005 LPGA tour were Asian women, and eleven Asian women were in the top thirty (see Table 6-2). By far the most well-known Asian American female golfer is Hawaii-born Michelle Wie, who announced she was turning pro on October 5, 2005, just after her sixteenth birthday. Wei had competed in many men's and women's tournaments, but was unable to claim any prize money because of her amateur status. Wie first gained notoriety at 13 when she won the U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links. Wie was just 14 when she shot a 68 at the Sony Open, the lowest score ever by a female competing on a men's tour. On the women's circuit she would have earned over \$640,000 on the 2005 LPGA Tour had she been a pro.

It was the conspicuousness of women golfers from Asia that created an early backlash, much of which was rooted in some of the same contributing factors to anti-Asian sentiment described in Chapter 5. In an October 2003 question-and-answer session with *Golf Magazine*, veteran LPGA player Jan Stephenson told writer Peter Kessler: "This is probably going to get me in trouble, but the Asians are killing our tour. Absolutely killing it. Their lack of emotion, their refusal to speak English when they can speak English. . . . Our tour is predominantly international and the majority of them are Asian. They've taken over." Stephenson, an Australian, also remarked that women Asian golfers are taking "American money" and if she were the LPGA commissioner she would put a quota on Asian players.⁶⁷ Stephenson apologized a day later for comments, but a flurry of letters was sent to WorldGolf.com, with many supporting Stephenson's position and right to speak out:

In regards to Stephenson's remarks, I could not agree more. I belong to a Private Country Club where competition and friendship are normal. Unfortunately, the Asian members do not want to be a part of the club competitions or social events. It is like two [separate] clubs with one group being very active in the club and the Asians refuse to be a part of

Table 6-2 LPGA Top Money Winners as of November 28, 2005

1	Annika Sorenstam	
2	Paula Creamer	\$2,588,240
3	Cristie Kerr	\$1,531,780
4	Lorena Ochoa	\$1,360,941
5	Jeong Jang	\$1,201,786
6	Natalie Gulbis	\$1,131,986
7	Meena Lee	\$1,010,154
8	Hee-Won Han	\$870,182
9	Gloria Park	\$856,364
10	Catriona Matthew	\$842,349
11	Candie Kung	\$776,924
12	Marisa Baena	\$753,959
13	Birdie Kim	\$744,679
14	Soo-Yun Kang	\$715,006
15	Lorie Kane	\$710,710
16	Heather Bowie	\$698,763
17	Wendy Ward	\$677,425
18	Pat Hurst	\$675,129
19	Christina Kim	\$634,389
20	Rosie Jones	\$621,149
21	Carin Koch	\$615,499
22	Liselotte Neumann	\$612,036
23	Mi Hyun Kim	\$607,474
24	Juli Inkster	\$584,367
25	Michele Redman	\$579,240
26	Jennifer Rosales	\$540,167
27	Jennifer Rosales	\$514,279
28	Karrie Webb	\$500,268
29	Sophie Gustafson	\$484,839
30	Young Kim	\$470,926
	Karine Icher	\$451,981

Source: www.lpga.com.

that. We have tried to change that but were met with resistance. Out of 150 Asian members 6-10 are involved in the Clubs activities. Very sad.

Brian Baumgardner, via email

Sorry but I feel Jan Stephenson is right. The LPGA is an American tour. They should have the right to limit the percentage of international players.

Janet Moore, via email

I totally agree with Jan Stephenson, although I do enjoy watching excellent golf.

Frank Lisk, via email

Jan hit it on the head. Asians are taking the LPGA tour down. They do not relate to the fans [who] eventually will go away as I did.

Nick, via email

[H]ooray for Jan Stephenson. . . . She [has] done more for golf than the dykes and Asians, by far.

Ron Fogarty, via email

Jan just told the truth. Are we so racially divided that we cannot do this? The fact that this has become an issue proves failure is certain. Ignorance is always alleged but true ignorance is ignoring the truth of a matter. Jan didn't.

Lawrence Klotz, via email⁶⁸

Stephenson's comments hit a raw nerve among many LPGA fans and the feeling lingers. In an August 26, 2005, article in *Golf World*, "On Asians and Racism," writer Ron Sirak quoted an email message from a reader: "The plain and simple truth is Americans want to see Americans playing or Europeans [who] look like Americans. Most have nothing against Asians, they just don't want to watch events totally dominated by Asians. I see this as a BIG problem for the LPGA."⁶⁹ This explains why there haven't been any complaints about Swede Annika Sorenstam being the top ranked female golfer and highest money winner on the LPGA tour in recent years (2001–2005). The anti-Asian sentiment is sure to percolate even more now that Michelle Wie has joined the competition.

The recent success of Asian Americans in sports today should not overshadow the history of Asian American involvement in athletic competition. During the 1920s and 1930s there were about hundred Japanese American baseball teams throughout Hawaii and the states of California, Washington, Colorado, Utah, Nebraska, and Wyoming. Japanese American passion for baseball was threatened by the onset of World War II and Japanese internment, but it did not die. Organized baseball teams sprouted in internment camps and there were even games played with teams from different camps.⁷⁰ In 1939 and 1940 the first all-Chinese American professional basketball team, the Hong Wah Kues, was formed and played local teams across the nation. Like the Harlem Globetrotters basketball team, the Hong Wah Kues were a traveling novelty act that generated a great following. In fact, the Hong Wah Kues once played the Globetrotters, but lost.⁷¹ The first Asian American to win an Olympic gold medal for the United States was diver Dr. Sammy Lee. He was awarded the gold medal for the 10-meter platform at the 1948 London Olympics and another gold medal for the 10-meter springboard at the 1952 Helsinki games. Lee, a Korean American born in Fresno, California, was a student athlete at the University of Southern California School of Medicine and earned his medical degree in 1947. Following his success at the Olympics, Lee continued his medical career and coached the U.S. diving teams in the 1960 and 1964 Olympics.⁷² In recent years a number of athletes of Asian decent have competed for the United States in both the Summer and Winter Olympics, and have won metals in various individual and team sports. In the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Hawaiian-born Bryan Clay won the Silver Medal in the decathlon. The decathlon is a two-day competition in involving the following ten events: 100-meter dash, long jump, shot put, high jump, 400-meter dash, 110-meter hurdles, discus throw,

pole vault, javelin throw, and 1500-meter run. Because this competition requires a combination of strength, speed, and stamina, decathletes are generally considered to be the "world's greatest athletes."⁷³

Theories on Asian Americans and Sports

To examine the emergence of Asian Americans as sports media stars we must ask the question, "Why has it taken Asian Americans so long to emerge in major sports?" Three explanations have been used—genetic, cultural, and social. The common explanation for the overrepresentation of African Americans in certain sports and the underrepresentation of Asian Americans is that African Americans are naturally better athletes, while Asian Americans are not as naturally gifted. This biological determinism explanation assumes innate physical differences exist within artificially created racial categories and fails to recognize that African Americans, like Asian Americans, exhibit a wide range of physical builds and other physiological features. While big and tall might be desirable for most professional athletes, these physical attributes alone do not determine success. For example, 5-foot-3 basketball player Muggsy Bogues was the number one draft pick of the Washington Bullets in 1987. He is 16 inches shorter and about 80 pounds lighter than the average NBA player today, but has had a long and successful career in basketball. Second baseman Joe Morgan played professional baseball for twenty-two years and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1990. Morgan was just 5-foot-7 and 150 pounds, yet he once led the National League in slugging percentage and has 268 career home runs. He was also awarded as the National League Most Valuable Player in 1975 and 1976. At 5-foot-8, National Football League all-pro cornerback Darrell Green is considered "undersized" for the game. Green nonetheless played football for nineteen seasons (1983–2002) and intercepted 54 passes during his long career. At the same time many Asian American athletes are more than adequate in size and weight compared to others in their respective sports. Roman Gabriel stood at 6-foot-4 and weighed 235 pounds in his prime and was considered the first "big" quarterback of the modern era. At 6-foot-5 and 300 pounds, Eugene Chung measures up pretty well with other offensive linemen. Baseball slugger Hideki Matsui's nickname is "Godzilla" for being 6-foot-2 and weighing 230 pounds. Even more impressive is major league first baseman Hee-Seop Choi who is 6-foot-5 and weighs 240 pounds. China-born basketball players Yao Ming and Haixia Zheng (WNBA) are above the competition in their leagues. In sum, whatever differences there are among African Americans and Asian Americans in sports cannot simply be explained by genetic advantage. The genetic argument is never used to explain why skiers from Switzerland and other Scandinavian countries consistently win world championships compared to skiers from other countries.⁷⁴

With this in mind, another explanation for the overrepresentation of African Americans in sports is their positive emphasis on sports as life chances within African American subculture. Both male and female athletes achieve a level of status and recognition, but only in certain high-profile sports. African

Americans are virtually absent in a number of sports including bicycling, rodeo, auto racing, swimming, bowling, skiing, kayaking, etc. In addition, we find great variances between African and African American athletes. In track events, Africans excel in long distance running, while African American participation in distance running (particularly among males) is not nearly as pronounced. Chapter 3 discussed Asian American emphasis on education over other avenues for social and economic upward mobility. In Asia, baseball is very popular and this may explain why there are more overseas Asian players in professional baseball compared to U.S.-born Asians. Since football is not played in Asia, only U.S.-born Asians play that game.

While the pseudo-cultural argument may have some explanatory power, it must be related to some of the social structure constraints that affect both African Americans and Asian Americans. Noted sports sociologist Harry Edwards is keenly aware of socioeconomic discrimination against African Americans, particularly males, and how it influences occupational choices and aspirations. "In high-prestige occupational positions outside of the sports realm, black role models are in all but an insignificant few," Edwards writes. "Whites, on the other hand, because they have visible alternative role models and greater potential access to alternative high-prestige positions, distribute their talents over a broader range of endeavors. Thus the concentration of highly gifted whites in sports is proportionately less than the number of blacks."⁷⁶ This argument can help to explain why relatively few Asian Americans participate in sports, but can also be extended to point out insidious discrimination that can affect even the most successful Asian American athletes. U.S. figure skating champion Kristi Yamaguchi's capture of a gold medal during the 1992 Winter Olympics is an interesting case in point. Many observers of her spectacular performances at the Olympics assumed she would reap huge benefits in the form of major endorsement contracts. However, Yamaguchi was never able to cash in on the endorsements. It was her misfortune to compete in the Olympics during a period of intense anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States, and to win a gold medal exactly on the fiftieth anniversary of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's signing of Executive Order 9066 (February 19). The executive order authorized the mass removal of more than 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry into internment camps. This historical coincidence was an uncanny reminder of the persistent image of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners. This despite the fact that Yamaguchi's family has lived in the United States for generations, and even though Yamaguchi gave a rousing free-skate performance to the music of "Yankee Doodle Dandy" while dressed in a red, white, and blue costume.⁷⁷

The March 9, 1992, issue of *BusinessWeek* confirmed corporate sponsors' unease with her Japanese heritage in an article entitled, "To Marketers, Kristi Yamaguchi Isn't as Good as Gold."⁷⁸ Advertisers simply didn't know what to do with Yamaguchi. The Olympic skater who really brought home the gold was third place skater, Nancy Kerrigan, whose endorsement contracts far exceeded Yamaguchi's. A 1993 *People Magazine* article succinctly described the popular sentiment of the time. "Kristi Yamaguchi may have won the Olympic gold last year, but bronze-medal winner Nancy Kerrigan got the gasps for her Grace Kelly

gleam. . . . Pal Paul Wylie, though, an Olympic Silver medalist, cuts right to her charm: "Nancy's the girl next door."⁷⁹ Yamaguchi did not quite fit the ideal wholesome fresh-faced "All American" girl-next-door type sponsors looked for to sell their products. Ironically, one of her earliest and most lucrative contracts was with an optical company that promised to change one's looks and self-image with colored contact lenses. Yamaguchi has never publicly complained about her endorsement situation and has earned good money as a professional ice skater. Nonetheless, many agree that her ability to profit even more handsomely from her hard work and achievements was considerably diminished primarily because of conflicting images of her by others.

The Yamaguchi-Kerrigan example was no fluke. After Tara Lipinski beat Michelle Kwan for the 1998 Olympic gold medal in women's figure skating, MSNBC flashed the Internet headline: "American Beats Kwan." The message was clear: Lipinski is an American, while Kwan is a foreigner.⁸⁰ Similar treatment has been given to U.S. tennis star Michael Chang, whose most lucrative advertising contracts were in Asia and Australia, not in the United States. Chang was featured in advertising campaigns with Proctor & Gamble and Eveready Energizer batteries that were shown only in Asia, and he was purported to be the highest paid pitchman in Hong Kong. It is interesting to note that Tiger Woods' multiracial background has not affected his endorsement prowess. Indeed, his perceived "blackness" has given him the status as an "American" rather than a foreigner, and he has successfully captured loyal fans in both the United States and Asia.⁸¹ Tiger Woods notwithstanding, the overall perception is that Asian Americans have simply not been accorded the media attention or advertisement dollars relative to other athletes at or near the top of their respective sports. According to media researchers Charles R. Taylor and Barbara B. Stern (1997), there is a pattern in media advertisement to include Asian Americans, but most likely in background roles. "Asian Americans are victims of tokenism, for they are the minority most likely to be depicted as anonymous figures in the background," the authors write. "Their presence as token faces in a crowd has negative consequences for both first-generation immigrants and the U.S.-born."⁸² While it can be argued that Asian Americans have avoided sports because they have other career options, there are relatively few role models to emulate, and those who have excelled in sports have not been treated well in the media. But this, too, seems to be changing, at least for those athletes advertisers deem most deserving of top dollar for their endorsements. After turning pro Michelle Wie signed endorsement contracts making her the highest-paid female golfer, surpassing the endorsement earnings of Annika Sorenstam.⁸³

In addition, the more successful and high profile Asian Americans in sports may help to change people's perceptions and serve as inspiration. For non-Asian Americans, seeing and perhaps admiring Asian American sports heroes may, over time, provide a more positive image of Asian Americans. Seeing Asian Americans in sports may serve to replace the "foreign" image. Anthropologist Mark Grey (1992) found that because Southeast Asian refugees in a Kansas City High school did not actively participate in sports, they were perceived as not wanting to be "true Americans."⁸⁴ Studies have found that assimilation may occur more readily

when members of a team come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, while athletic participation exclusively with people of the same ethnic group serves to inhibit assimilation.⁸⁵ On the other hand, in a study of Japanese American basketball leagues Haruo Nogawa and Sandra J. Suttie (1984) found mixed, but ultimately positive, results. In comparing fifty Japanese American basketball players to thirty-six non-players, the researchers did not find significant differences in assimilation to mainstream society, but did find an improved sense of ethnic solidarity and self-image among the athletes.⁸⁶ Although the conclusions in these studies are contradictory, they both point to the importance of ethnic participation for Asian Americans. Other studies of Korean American, Japanese American, and Chinese American youth found they were more likely to have lower scores on physical self-esteem measures.⁸⁷ Thus, it is all the more encouraging to see a new generation of up-and-coming Asian Americans in sports who are not household names as yet, but may well be on their way.

CONCLUSION

This chapter shows how stereotypes about Asians and Asian Americans have made their way into various formats of media. These stereotypes and negative images have historic roots and reflect the racialized and gendered attitudes in the mainstream society. This chapter focuses on the broad trends of how the popular media thinks of and sees Asians and Asian Americans, and how Asian Americans see themselves. These images are constantly in flux and they can change rapidly. An understanding of the context for how and why Asian Americans have been portrayed in the media serves to explain why there is a need for constant vigilance. Asian Americans, of course, are not merely victims of media ignorance and manipulation. They continue to struggle against stereotypical and negative images and have worked to recapture and recreate their own self-images and identities. This chapter shows that media depictions of Asian Americans in film, television, theater, and sports are an important part of the highly complex process of identity formation. Chapter 7 focuses on other important elements that work to influence and help create identity.

NOTES

1. See: http://www.icebox.com/icebox/shows/show_54/show_frameset.html.
2. See: <http://www.williamhung.net>.
3. Emil Guillermo, "The William Hung Joke," *AsianWeek*, April 15, 2005.
4. Quoted in Emil Guillermo, "Hung As Buckwheat," Special to SF Gate.com, April 20, 2005, at <http://www.sfgate.com>.
5. See comments at <http://www.harlemmlee.com>. Also see a contrasting early interview with Lee at <http://www.aarising.com/aprofiler/harlemm.htm>.
6. Quoted in Erin Chan, "A Loser's Success and a Winner's Failure," *Detroit Free Press*, May 7, 2004.
7. Russell Leong (ed.) *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1991); Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999); Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the*

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8. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
 9. Cited in Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), p. 105.
 10. Kidotj Farquhar and Mary L. Doi, "Bruce Lee vs. Fu Manchu: Kung Fu Films and Asian American Stereotypes in America," *Bridge: An Asian American Perspective* 6:3 (Fall 1978): 23-40.
 11. *Ibid.*
 12. Elaine Kim, "Asian Americans and American Popular Culture," *Dictionary of Asian American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 99-114.
 13. Renee Tajima, "Moving the Image: Asian American Independent Filmmaking 1970-1980," in Russell Leong (ed.) *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1991), pp. 10-33.
 14. "Chan Complains of Limited Roles," *AsianWeek*, October 7, 2004.
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