

WHAT WE EXPERIENCE | A MAN'S WORLD



Artist Reflection:

Gabriella Ignacio

It seems not too long ago that I first created a cover for the magazine. It has now been a full year since our debut, and I thought it an appropriate time for a slight change in style.

For this issue, I wanted to create the cover to seem a bit softer while still maintaining the integrity of previous covers. Because the issue runs parallel to the one covering Asian-American women, I wanted to create a cover that was somewhat similar, using a collage-type drawing.

Although it is nearly impossible to fully encompass all Asian-American men in a single image, I enjoyed brainstorming different ways to depict the theme. I hope you enjoy, and happy one year anniversary!



Letter from the Founders

Dear reader,

Welcome to our fifth issue! As Gabriella mentioned in her cover reflection, this publication marks as our first-year anniversary from when we published our first issue. As always, thank you for taking valuable time out of your day to read our magazine. We are so grateful for all your support and engagement.

If you are new to our magazine, our names are Jeenah Gwak and Hope Yu, and we are two high school seniors from the greater Seattle area. Our project began as one of our many ideas. As Asian adolescents living in American society, we have witnessed countless instances of discrimination and xenophobia against people of Asian descent within our communities. Despite living in a relatively Asian-dense region, we have been exposed to various forms of social injustice against Asian Americans, such as the lack of Asian representation in academic curricula and recent COVID-19 related events. These occurrences galvanized us to take action.

Taking into consideration our abilities, we decided that promoting awareness through written works would be the most appropriate for our course of action. Through our magazine, we seek to share the untold stories of Asian-American experiences surrounding racism and societal pressures that are often overlooked in society. We hope to educate and inspire you to take action.

Our magazine, *What We Experience*, is released quarterly, on the last Sundays of every March, June, September, and December, covering the experiences of various Asian identities. This fifth issue, titled “A Man’s World,” explores the experiences of various Asian-American males living in society, as well as the history, thoughts, and opinions of AAPI people who identify as male. Following the release of our March issue, which focused on the experiences of Asian-American women, our team received public feedback regarding interest in an issue about the experiences of Asian-American men. Thus, we decided that we would dedicate an entire issue to the history, achievements, and perspectives of Asian-American men.

Thank you for supporting us in our journey to advocate for the Asian-American community. We hope you enjoy our magazine and feel inspired to share it with others.

Sincerely,
Jeenah Gwak and Hope Yu

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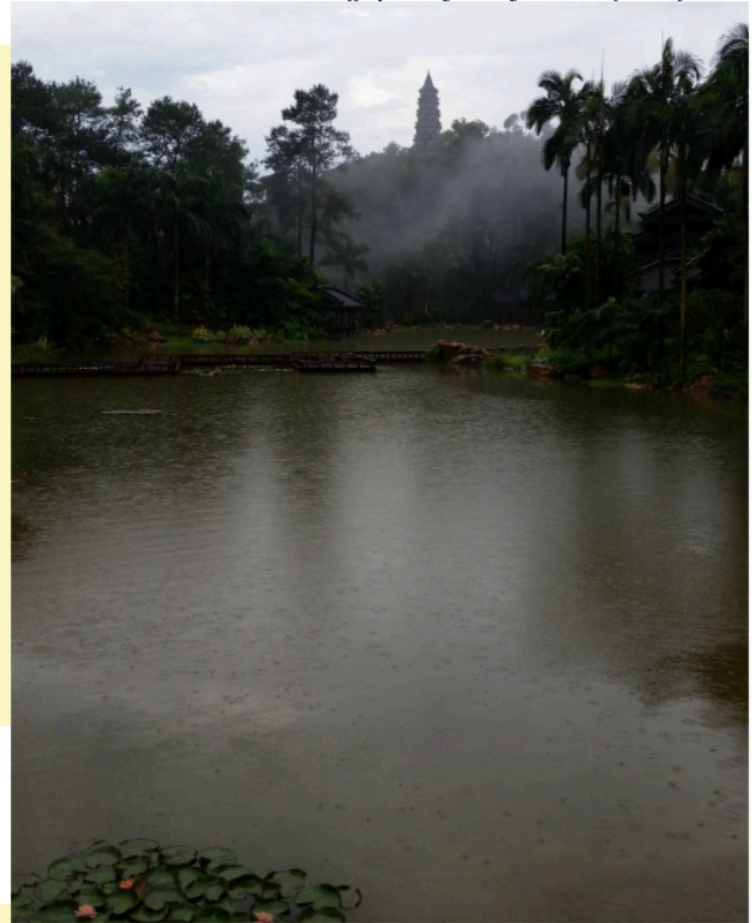
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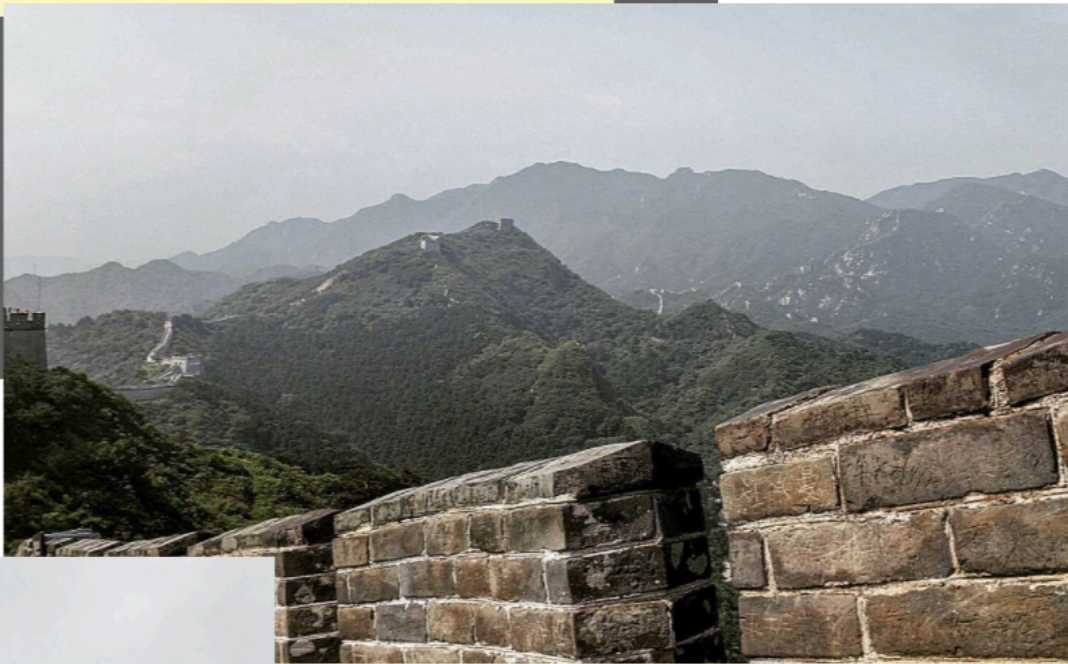
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HISTORY OF ASIAN-AMERICAN IMMIGRATION

BY ERIC MA

Illustration Courtesy of Saturday Evening Post

Throughout American history, Asian-Americans have faced various exclusions. Though the prevailing narrative of Asian-American immigration today revolves around Asian Americans being the model minority – the ideal immigrant because of their economic success – there also existed other views, from orientalism to the yellow peril, especially for Asian-American men.

Prior to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, Asian-American immigration experienced severe limitations. The first major wave of Asian immigration occurred in the 1850s with immigrants who were primarily male laborers, originating from China, Japan, Korea, India, Russia, and Philippines. Most of them, who were Asian-American men, worked on plantations with low pay; the plantation owners continued importing such laborers to keep wages low. The California Gold Rush of the 1850s led countless Asian immigrants to seek opportunities in the United States as they hoped to earn enough to send back to their families.

By the late 19th century, nativist hostility toward Asian men intensified. The long depression of 1873-1879 led to declining wages, business bankruptcies, and low employment rates. Many Americans attributed these economic contractions and lack of opportunities to Asian immigrants, blaming these immigrants for their

own failures.

Supporting the view of the nativists, Congress began enacting restrictive policies. Even earlier, the Supreme Court Case, *People v. Hall*, had already ruled that Chinese Americans, similar to African Americans, cannot testify in court. The Page Act of 1875, the first restrictive immigration law, furthered this exclusion. It barred all “undesirable” immigrants and effectively prevented Chinese women from immigrating. The act, named after Representative Horace F. Page, led to immigration regulation based on sexuality. The infamous Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, considered an extension of the Page Act, became the first and only law barring all members of any specific race from immigration to the United States. It suspended Chinese immigration for ten years and prevented naturalization of immigrants. However, while this act was challenged in court on a constitutional basis, they failed to overturn it. Though intended for only a ten year period, illegality of Chinese immigration became permanent in 1902.

In 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066. The order incarcerated Japanese Americans, most of whom were naturalized citizens who have lived in the United States for generations. The order forced over 120,000 people to relocate to one of the ten internment camps. Japanese American men were

perceived as a threat to American security; yet, some of them still chose to fight for the U.S., forming the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated Japanese American unit.

In 1944, *Korematsu v. United States* resulted in a decision in which the United State Supreme Court upheld the exclusion of Japanese Americans. This decision is widely criticized today and cited as one of the worst supreme court decisions.

Many called for the release of the incarceration and Japanese Americans were not allowed to return home until January 2, 1945. The reason for this has been speculated as an attempt to postpone the release until Roosevelt's reelection in November of 1944. Inmates were only given \$25 and a train ticket, though few found it useful — most had lost everything. Some could not leave the camp immediately, mostly elder or young Japanese Americans. They were later removed at the deadline of the camp's close date.

The aftermath of internment led to many exclusions, destruction, and loss. Japanese Americans grew increasingly depressed and suffered psychological injuries. They faced harm and violence as they returned to society. Many cases of violence committed against Japanese Americans went unnoticed in the courts.

Only in 1948 did Congress recognize the atrocities and passed the Japanese-American Claims Act. This act provided compensation loss. Yet with the destruction of tax records and time constraints, the bureaucratic process proved difficult for many applicants.

The Civil Right movements encouraged a generation of younger Japanese Americans to form the “redress movement,” which sought recognition of the wrongs done, apology, and reparations. Thirty-four years after Order 9066, President Gerald voiced the first official recognition of the injustice of Japanese American, calling it “a national mistake” and signed an official apology to the “loyal Americans.”

By the 1980s, Japanese Americans had achieved notable socioeconomic success and inspired the term “Model Minority,” which came to associate with Asian Americans. This coincided with the Civil Rights Movement. This image, however, proved derogatory, as Asian Americans came to view this image portrayed of them as a means to use them and the creation of a new racial social construct. Though some believed the Model Minority theory provided more benefits than harm to the Asian American community, the stereotype continues to produce damaging social and psychological impacts.

The history of Asian-American men in the United States is one of bias, exclusion, and segregation. But that does not have to be the future. With recent social movements and decades of work by activities, Asian-American men are beginning to receive the credit they deserve, uniquely situated in the history of the United States.

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A DIVE INTO PATRIARCHY IN ASIAN CULTURES:

WHAT GOES UNSAID

In the majority of cultures around the globe, including the United States, the influence of patriarchy is pervasive in all aspects of society. While certainly not as extensive as it has been throughout history, as male dominance is weakening, patriarchy remains prevalent in aspects often unconsidered. Defined by a system of society with men dominating in power and authority, Dr. Gerda Lerner believes that this form of social organization originated from the intertribal exchange practice of women for marriage in the Near East. Such exchanges led to early peoples viewing young women as a commodity, giving society “the notion that men had rights that women did not” (Collins). Along with these exchanges, women became war slaves, often sexually exploited. Essentially, the subordination of women and the treatment of women as property gave way to the development of class distinctions and gender inequality. Dr. Lerner views patriarchy to have been established through this historical process, developing from 3100 B.C. to 600 B.C.

This idea of patriarchy developed throughout time, especially with continuous colonization of cultures. Because Asian men are naturally built to be physically bigger in size and significantly stronger than Asian women, males had a much greater advantage in times where manual labor was necessary. Chinese emperors, for example, commanded Chinese male slaves to build the Great Wall by hand. Men all over Asia were instructed to manually construct statues and buildings. Korean men, similar to other Asian men, hiked to the woods every morning to chop down wood as they were the only figure in their family to have the strength and stamina to do so. Meanwhile, women stayed at home, cooking and taking care of children because they were assumed to have no talent or ability of any capacity. This physical difference inevitably led to men being considered most important for the family’s survival, which resulted in gender roles, the traditional and outdated concept rooted in modern society.

This idea of gender roles is closely related with patriarchy. The term “traditional gender roles” is often thrown around in discussions of gender identity in society. Most commonly believed to be established and learned through socialization (defined by Merriam Webster as “the process beginning during childhood by which individuals acquire the values, habits, and attitudes of a society”), traditional gender roles are in fact engraved into young minds throughout their childhood. Children in the majority of Asian households witness firsthand the implications of gender roles and the division of labor between the males and females through their parents. In accordance to the traditional division of labor, men are expected to have a profession and financially support their family, while women inhabit a domestic role in the household, taking care of the children. With this financial responsibility comes the presumed “control over women,” instilling fathers as primary authority figures, controlling women, children, and property. Relating back to the concept of patriarchy, this reinforces the institution of male privilege and dominance, which, in turn, implies female subordination.

The notion of gender roles, in Asia, was influenced heavily by Confucianism, an ancient Chinese belief system of philosophical and ethical teachings founded by Confucius in 551-479 BCE. Confucianism created a patriarchal society where women were powerless against their husbands and fathers. They were expected to be submissive in all aspects, respectful, and uneducated (likely to prevent defiance from women to their male counterparts). Confucius had even said that a good woman is an illiterate one. With this great extent of female subordination came an even greater extent of male superiority, and this way of life spread to other parts of Asia, such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, as Chinese missionaries visited neighboring countries. Such privilege and dominance is evident in societal perception of gender, as it is engrained to varying extents in the distinct cultures of Asian countries.

Traditional gender roles and patriarchy work together to deprive males and females alike of opportunities, not only in Asian cultures but in the majority of cultures around the globe. However, the notion of patriarchy and male dominance is most predominant in Asian cultures. Perhaps this is due to the birth of a boy being much more celebrated than the birth of a girl in Asia. Often, the birth of a girl is not even welcomed. In parts of India, for instance, women are forced to abort female fetuses, instilled by the widespread idea of sex selection during pregnancy. Daughters are often shunned; Juganti Prasad, a mother of three daughters in Machrihwa, India, recalls moments when her husband would get angry and ask her, “What am I going to do with three daughters?” She mentions one specific time when he talked about selling them off, coming to the conclusion that “girls are a curse” (Gentleman). This feeling of malice may be rooted in the costly dowry that comes with marriage. Village women admit “the mothers’ sense of resentment toward their newborn girls comes as a result of a hard financial calculation,” as they must finance their daughters’ weddings (Gentleman). On the other hand, grooms are traditionally given a minimum of 25,000 rupees for dowry. Fathers are willing to go to far extents — such as selling their house — to treat their ill sons. By early adolescence, boys are the only ones remaining in school.

Similarly, in China, the birth of sons has always been favored over the birth of daughters all throughout history, resulting in frequent sex-selective abortions. Especially with the one-child policy in place, couples often chose to have abortion once they found out they would be having a girl, wanting their single-allowed child to be a boy. Not only has this created a gender imbalance in such Asian countries, but this apparent preference of gender in Asian cultures has inevitably created a culture in which males are considered more important in society. Whether it be in academia, politics, or economy, males dominate in essentially every aspect of society.

These ideas, though outdated, remain rooted in the societies of Asian cultures, subtly or obviously incorporated into our daily lives. But patriarchy certainly exists outside of Asian cultures. In the United States, for example, male figures typically preside over females in positions of higher power. Politically, America has yet to elect a female president. In most parts of South America, men are paid higher wages than women on average, with women earning anywhere from 49 to 69% of men's wages.

Modern ideas and concepts deter the presence of patriarchy in most aspects of our lives. Yet, patriarchy inevitably remains present in essentially every aspect of society in Asia. This can be partly attributed to the mindset that former thoughts and philosophies are always right. But if this mindset doesn't shift, exactly when we will get past this outdated idea is uncertain.

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WEAVING THROUGH STEREOTYPES

BY ALLISON CHAN

While we often dismiss its significance, evidence of toxic masculinity can be found all over the world. We, for one, surround ourselves every day with media such as K-Pop, which people consider feminine. If one identifies as male and enjoys k-pop, he would be made fun of; others would describe him as “gay.” There also exists a common perception that boys should not wear makeup, attributing weirdness or weakness to the very action of doing so. There are many examples of toxic masculinity in our world besides those present in social media or friends and family.

The term toxic masculinity is defined as, “a set of attitudes and ways of behaving stereotypically associated with or expected of men, regarded as having a negative impact on men and on society as a whole” (Oxford English Dictionary). This specific term first originated in the men’s movement mythopoetic in the 1980s and 1990s. The movement itself was used as a form of manhood. However, it has now evolved into the term “boys will be boys” or “men will be men,” excusing inappropriate and disrespectful behavior with this term. People often use gender to separate certain things and people. For example, when boys are seen

enjoying something characterized as feminine, others will often try to correct their choices and identity. With all the gender roles set in place, it can be difficult to find one’s own identity.

FILM:

A handful of films depict Asian Americans as weak or feminine. With various film industries perpetuating the Model Minority Myth, its impact is profound. The Model Minority Myth paints stereotypes of the Asian community, expecting minority groups to achieve a high level of socioeconomic success. This portrayal casts a light on Asian Americans in a way that is often frowned upon. In addition to this inaccurate depiction, there are multiple stereotypes that film producers have been excusing throughout the years, one of which can be represented by what is commonly referred to as “yellowface,” which is Caucasians distorting their face with makeup to have what is believed to be “Asian features.” Movies, like *Madame Butterfly* (which first premiered in 1915), show how Americans truly perceive Asian Americans, from stereotyped facial features and “alien” actions. This media portrayal is just one of the many causes of Asian fetishization.

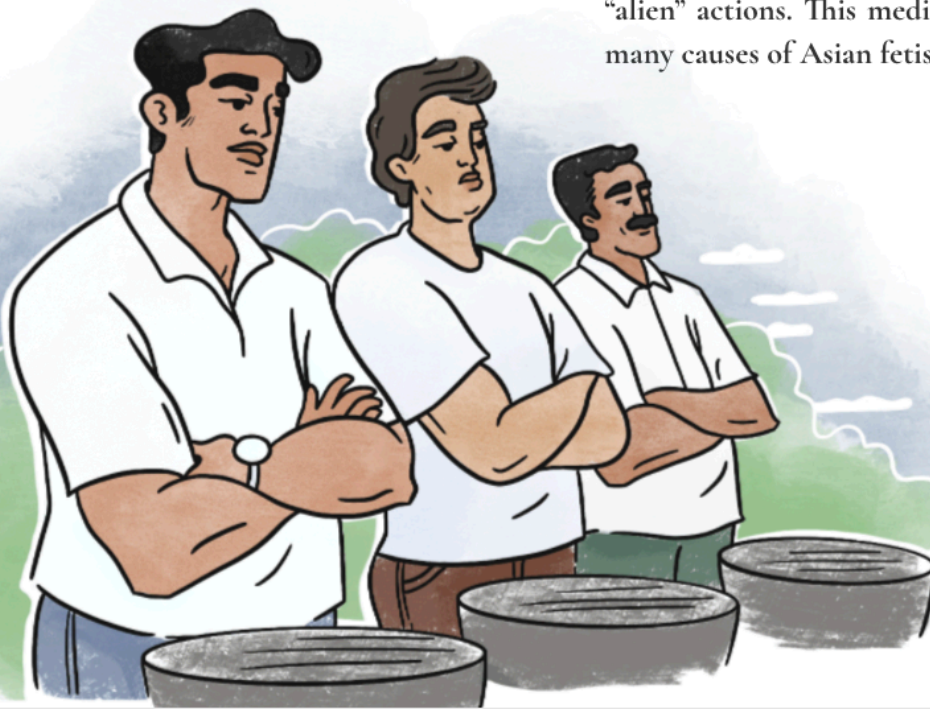


Illustration
Courtesy of
Yashica Bither
from *The Sheaf*

FAMILY:

Not only in public do Asian Americans deal with toxic masculinity, but they also experience this in their homes. Many parents use hurtful words without filtering and thinking about the impact that their words will have on the children. These parents, in doing so, create a mold to shape their children, creating unrealistic expectations for their children to fulfill without any leeway for the children to express themselves. Households stick to specific rules and traditional gender roles, teaching them to their children so that when their child grows up, they will only know one specific lifestyle. Some examples of rules that parents enforce include “young boys were meant to be strong,” “boys shouldn’t cry,” and “boys must use violence to get what they want.” Many parents seldom allow or give time for their young boys to express their feelings, rather constantly reinforcing their focus on high expectations and school, which, inevitably, can be stressful and can cause identity problems. Parents can also be the cause of identity problems for many young Asian American boys; they are taught growing up to be one certain way and to always follow the rules, but this does not support them in expressing their true selves or becoming who they really want to be, which may cause tension between family members.

Evidently, toxic masculinity is prevalent in the Asian American community and there is an urgent need to address it. We, society as a whole, must reconsider our words and our intentions.

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ART & NEW P

BY MEILAN UYENO



Movie poster for *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*

E R S P E C T I V E S

If you've ever watched any of the films *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon*, or *Life of Pi*, you've already seen some of the most famous movies directed by one of the few Asian- American filmmakers to receive an Academy Award. Over the past few decades, film producers and actors of Asian descent have become more integrated into their industry, bringing their talents to a much bigger American audience. Ang Lee is the longtime film producer of *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon* and *Life of Pi*. Most of his earlier films are Chinese-speaking, but Lee eventually transitioned to producing more English dialogue.

As a man of Taiwanese descent, Lee has made several films revolving around Asian-American culture that have reached international success. However, most "Asian-American" films produced around the country, especially in Hollywood, are catered towards a generic white audience. Producers are expected to portray their Asian characters in a stereotypical sense. Asian-American men first appeared in films, characterized as "nerds, donning glasses and an exaggerated accent, or as Kung Fu masters and killers" (Rajgopal 2010), and although it infuriated Asian film workers, this exclusive portrayal did not change for several decades, lingering to this day.

These common stereotypes leave little room for Asian creativity in the production industry, and many Asian male directors face social backlash for choosing to go into an artful work. The *New York Times* recognizes that Asian-American males are often expected to succeed in jobs of "intelligence," which includes the medical field or other STEM realms. Motivated by social media and stereotypical press, the public often discourages Asian-American men from pursuing more "delicate" careers. Novelist Alexander Chee often discusses the heavy pressure on Asian immigrant children to "make anything except art" (Chee). Actor Ken Jeong, for example, completed his medical residency through a medical center in New Orleans after being pressured, or "Koreaned," as he often refers to it. However, his true passion was for stand-up comedy and acting, and he eventually chose to pursue his career in theatrics despite the public shame and disappointment.

Similarly, Ang Lee grew up in Taiwan and followed the expected path of a young Asian male student. His father was the principal of his senior high school, and Lee was expected to excel academically and get a university education in the Republic of China. But he chose a different path. Although his father had assumed Lee would become a professor along with many of his other classmates, Lee found his passion in arts and drama. Unperturbed by his father's disappointment, he moved to the US where he completed his education in theater.

At the start of his career in performing arts, Lee found that many of the same criticisms he had received in Taiwan existed in the U.S. as well. The harsh judgement he faced for pursuing a career in film faded slightly in the 1990s when he had his first few major successes. Lee produced *Pushing Hands* and *The Wedding Banquet* which were both nominated for several awards and won praise from critics in Taiwan as well as America. As an Asian emigrant, Lee could portray his own experiences with racism and discrimination in America in his films. *Pushing Hands* illustrates the reality of the struggles Asian Americans faced in America at the time, even the most minute details, and *The Wedding Banquet* hones in on the hidden struggles of a bisexual Asian man.

*You are cordially invited to a wedding where everybody
wants to kiss the bride...except the groom.*



**The
WEDDING
BANQUET**

A little deception at the reception.

THE SARELLE GOLDWIN COMPANY PRESENTS A CENTRAL MOTION PICTURES CORPORATION PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH GOOD MACHINE
"THE WEDDING BANQUET" AN-LEI GAO SHENG LING MAI CHEN WYNON CHOW AND MITCHELL LICHTENSTEIN IN STORY
BY MAIRI AND THE SQUARES MUSIC BY STEVE ROSENZWEIG A FILM BY JING LEE
CASTING BY ANG LEE AND ANG LEE
PRODUCTION DESIGNER ANG LEE
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ANG LEE AND ANG LEE
PRODUCED BY ANG LEE
WRITTEN BY ANG LEE
DIRECTED BY ANG LEE

Young Hollywood
A FILM BY ANG LEE

Most films on the subject of Asian experiences “hyperbolize the struggles” that Asian immigrants face, and critics often call this stereotypical portrayal “East meets West.” Lee was one of the first big time screenwriters to bring authentic Asian-American experiences on screen, and later on he directed some of his more well-known films that reached worldwide success.

Although Ang Lee is one of the more well-known names in the realm of male Asian-American film producers, there are several others who have followed a similar path. Many may know Justin Lin either for his ever famous *Fast and Furious* franchise or for *Star Trek Beyond*. Like Lee, Lin was born in Asia, and migrated to the United States. Lin spent most of his childhood in California, and received an education through the University of California, San Diego before transferring out to pursue his passion in film and production. Lin first featured the film *Shopping for Fangs* while still in school before writing and directing his own documentary on Japanese Americans in basketball leagues.

Lin continued writing and directing films about Asian Americans, and his content reaches international audiences today.

In regards to representation in the film industry, New York based Asian-American actress Ann Hu recognizes that America “is really overlooking the well of stories... waiting to be discovered, waiting to be told from the Asian-American experience” (Hu). Male film directors are overlooked because they are held to an unfair “Asian standard,” but they have endless stories and new perspectives to share.

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Lana Nguyen Lana Nguyen is a writer and filmmaker currently pursuing a BFA in Film Production at USC. Her love for film stems from the belief that empathetic and humanistic stories can help enact cultural change. "2021 Movies Have Asian American Men in Heroic, Attractive Leading Men Roles - Correcting History of Discrimination, Emasculation, and Racism - Hollywood Insider." Hollywood Insider - News Entertainment & Culture, 1 May 2021, www.hollywoodinsider.com/asian-american-men-heroes-movies-2021/.

EDITORS' COMMENTARY:

Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings



The movie *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* is based on the Shang-Chi comics. However, these earlier stories were not well researched with culturally appropriate details. Instead, they were blatantly prescribed to the racist ideology of the time. Although the original Fu Manchu stories, comics, and radio excerpts were popular in the early 20th century, they had no affiliation with Marvel. In the mid 1900s, writers from Marvel (Steve Engleheart, Jim Starlin) acquired the rights to Fu Manchu and added the character of Shang-Chi as his kid (these two sentences serves as a brief history of a topic that spans from 1913 to present day). This Fu Manchu character could be considered the origin of all the evil and racist portrayals of Asian characters in later media. Evidently, the writers of this recent Shang-Chi adoption needed to create a universe that was both respectful of culture and an appropriate representation of Asian Americans in the 21st century.

The film begins with an introduction to the “legend of the ten rings” with a montage of Wenwu clips leading until today's era. It then cuts to a much older Shang-Chi living in San Francisco as a hotel valet with his Chinese-American friend Katy. We see the familial dynamics between Katy — the type of friend your parents compare you to — and her parents, and late night karaoke. After an attack on a bus, Shaun, who reveals his real name Shang, goes with Katy to his sisters underground fighting ring in Macau and is once again attacked. Eventually arriving at their father's fortress — once their family home — they learn that their father (Wenwu) has been seeing visions of their currently deceased mother and plans to attack her village, Ta Lo, in order to get the illusion of her back. Shang, Katy, and a small entourage escape Wenwu's clutches and get to the village first.

In Ta Lo, we meet many traditional Chinese animals from mythology. Both sides prepare for a battle against one another, but become wary of the creature that lies beyond the veil that is calling to Wenwu as his dead wife and has a long history of soul sucking. The final scene focuses on both the fight between father and son, Shang-Chi and Wenwu, and the fight between good and evil, Dweller-in-Darkness versus The Great Protector. Good trumps evil, they honor the dead, and Shang and Katy return to San Francisco. They meet Wong (Dr. Strange!) and the film ends, promising a future return.

[HOPE YU]

This issue's timing perfectly coincided with the release of *Shang-Chi*. About halfway through August, Jeenah and I began to discuss what we were going to review. Although we went through many different options, I kept remembering that there was going to be a new Marvel movie and I was pretty sure it had a Asian male lead. Once confirmed, we dropped any other plans and bought tickets. In contrast to movies such as *Avengers: Endgame* or other giant big name Marvel movies, I felt as if I had heard very little about Shang-Chi until perhaps days before its release. That feeling could be because of this pandemic era of living but in my mind, I, along with many others, was nervous. People manage to find faults in every big screen Asian movie from the *Joy Luck Club* and *Mulan* to *Crazy Rich Asians* and *Minari*. Although I personally enjoyed each one of these movies to different extents, when movies are released,

they are often placed under a microscope. A superhero movie about anyone who isn't White provides the perfect opportunity to inaccurately portray the Asian-American experience. Thankfully, this wasn't the case with Shang-Chi.

The film was everything I expected but somehow even better with the little details. The first scene that caught my eye was not the karaoke scene, not the mother's constant disappointment with Katy, but the fact that they lived in San Francisco. I remember smiling and thinking, yeah this fits. From then on, I knew that the movie was going to be good, but more importantly, done well. The fighting was exquisite and I truly enjoyed the balance between hardcore hand-to-hand combat styles and the cool weaponry with flashes of bright powers. But my favorite style of fighting, by far, was how the people of Ta Lo — specifically Jiang Li (mother) and Jiang Nan (aunt) — were able to use the leaves to work with their movements. I got goosebumps during the creek scene, in the both times I saw the movie.

If there isn't going to be a second movie, then I would be disappointed with the lack of focus on the sister's storyline and relationship with her father. However, I'm excited for what is to come.

[JEENAH GWAK]

I walked into the movie theater not exactly knowing what to expect. Though I had heard rave reviews of how good the film was, I had no prior background knowledge on the plot structure, setting, and specific characters. I was aware that Simu Liu played Shang-Chi and Awkwafina also starred in the movie. But I knew I would love the rest of the film when Shang-Chi and Katy were first introduced at their valet jobs. Everyone understandably expected the guy coming out of the BMW iX3 to be the main character, "Shaun," but a random Asian guy walked out of the vehicle only to hand the keys to Shaun to park. Five minutes in, and the movie had already made me laugh.

I loved everything about the movie. From the conversation at Katy's family's dinner table to Katy making fun of Shang-Chi for changing his name to Shaun, I could not help but keep my eyes on the screen at all times. Normally, at movie theaters, I'm often distracted by my phone. I honestly haven't been so engaged in a movie before. I felt a tingly sensation all throughout the movie, perhaps thrilled by the Asian representation so long awaited. And from what I could tell, there was going to be a sequel. It was just what I needed that day.

Our conclusion is simply this: please go see *Shang-Chi* if you get the chance. If you already have, we suggest you watch it again. It is truly worth your time.

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Asian Men in American Film History: Yesterday & Tomorrow

by Kaila Karns

Chang & Eng Bunker



Sessue Hayakawa

In the American entertainment industry today, there are still many things that need to be worked on as far as having adequate Asian representation. But where did these stereotypes and type casting problems begin? Where do we go from here, considering how present-day Hollywood still struggles in casting Asian-American men in a way that doesn't negatively impact the AAPI community?

Initially, representation for Asians in the United States consisted of Chang and Eng Bunker, conjoined twin brothers that were popularized in the 1830s as a "freak show, the Siamese twins." This gave birth to the one of the earliest negative stereotypes: that Asian-American men were "exotic" creatures to be studied, which dehumanized the Asian men [1]. Interestingly, in their post-show years, they were used as a civil war metaphor in American news media, due one siding with the Confederacy and the other with the Union. Thanks to the *New York Tribune*, the "Unified Brothers" became "a symbol to the American Union and the promise that it offered to its citizens." Chang proposed that his "union" with Eng was to be "dissolved," while "Dr. Lincoln" [President Lincoln] reasoned that a separation surgery would be "dangerous for both parties." They lived one of the longest life spans ever recorded of conjoined twins, and passed away in January 1974. Since then, they have been mostly erased from American history, and only featured once very briefly in American film through "The Greatest Showman" (2017).

Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa was credited as the first Asian leading man in Hollywood. As one of the most popular actors in the silent film era, he was the first person of Asian descent to achieve stardom in U.S. His "broodingly handsome" looks and typecasting of him as a sexually appealing villainous character led to him becoming a heartthrob among American women during a time rife with anti-Asian discrimination. Later he became the first male sex symbol in Hollywood, to the dismay of White men. Born in Chiba, Japan as Kintaro Hayakawa, he moved to the United States to follow his father's new dream for him to become a banker, eventually

traveling to Los Angeles where he worked a number of odd jobs to make ends meet, with one of those as an actor in Japanese American theater shows. Around this time is when he changed his name to Sessue (Sesshū) Hayakawa as his stage name. A theatrical performance Sessue was involved in for impressed another member of the troupe (Tsuru Aoki) so much that she got film producer Thomas H. Ince to come see the play. Eventually this led to Jesse L. Lasky offering Hayakawa a contract, which he accepted, making him part of Famous Players-Lasky studios, now known as Paramount Pictures [4].

Hayakawa's second film was a massive success and kicked off his popularity with women in the country. According to Stephen Gong, director of San Francisco's Center for Asian-American Media, "It caused a sensation. A film with all those taboos of race and sex — it made him a movie star. And his most rabid fan base was white women." [5] Unfortunately, it gave him the opposite effect in Japan, where audiences felt that his performances only added to the anti-Japanese sentiment of the time. After Hayakawa established himself as an American superstar, the press's portrayal of him as a national and racial shame lessened by a noticeable degree and Japanese media started publicizing Hayakawa's cinematic achievements instead, even when he was still considered "too Americanized." This aided Sessue in becoming popular among Asians as a relatable figure in media, regardless of their ethnic origin — making a case for how representation matters and one of the earliest moments for "Asian American comradery" [6]. Following those films, Hayakawa became a popular leading man for romantic dramas. He was often requested for roles, but tired of constantly being typecast, Hayakawa opted to create his own film studio. Thus, Haworth Pictures Corporation was formed. During the first three years of its formation, Hayakawa himself produced 23 films and had earned a whopping \$2 million by the year 1920. Hayakawa produced, starred in, and aided in the overall design, writing, editing, and directing of the films from his studio. Critics adored Hayakawa's understated, Zen-influenced acting style. He sought to bring "muga," the "absence of doing," to his films, in direct contrast to the then-popular doubled down on poses and broad gestures [7]. By the early 1920s, Hayakawa's notoriety and fame in the country rivaled that of Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin [4].

Hayakawa left Hollywood in 1922, due to both financial

hardship of the 1920s, and the dangers posed by anti-Japanese sentiment in the US at that time. He felt threatened by the Robertson-Cole Pictures Corporation, that had also been accused of supporting anti-Japanese legislation for insurance money after the collapse of an unsafe earthquake sequence on the set of a film leading to him sue the studio [8]. He then visited Japan with his wife for the first time since he had come to the U.S. From 1924 to 1930, Sessue starred in films throughout Europe, all to critical acclaim. Audiences abroad enthusiastically embraced him which made his acting debut abroad a critical and financial success. He became known as one of the "wonderful actors" of America in much of Europe and was also the first non-White actor to achieve international stardom [4].

Upon his return to the U.S. to star in a musical, Hayakawa moved to New York City to open a Zen temple in the Upper West Side. Eventually, he returned to Hollywood to co-star alongside fellow Asian-American actress Anna May Wong in *Daughter of the Dragon*, in the year of 1931. However, this was his first film with spoken sound; his Japanese accent did not go over well with western audiences in spite of his past success [9]. Following World War I, he starred in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* in 1957. The film won the Academy Award for Best Picture and Hayakawa earned a nomination for the Best Supporting Actor, a first for Asian actors in this category. He was also nominated for a Golden Globe for the role, of which Sessue referred to as the highlight of his career. Following this, Hayakawa retired from acting. He then dedicated himself to Zen Buddhism and became an ordained Zen master of his own temple before passing away in 1973 [10]. While many of his early films were lost, most of his later works are widely available today, and posthumously he was given a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame [11].

Throughout Hayakawa's career, many segments of the American society were filled with feelings of anti-Japanese sentiment, partly from nationalism rising from World War I and the Japanese involvement in World War II. This left Hayakawa constantly typecast as a villain or forbidden lover and unable to play parts that would be given to white actors. Hayakawa once stated that "Such roles are not true to our Japanese nature... They are false and give people a wrong idea of us. I wish to make a characterization which shall reveal us as we really are." In 1949, he lamented that his "one ambition," was "to play a hero." [8] In 1930, the Production Code came into effect which forbade portrayals of miscegenation in film. This

meant that unless Hayakawa's co-star was an Asian actress, he would not be able to portray any kind of romance with her, something that many felt happened as a result of White men's disdain towards Sessue's popularity with White women. And due to naturalization and miscegenation laws of the time, Hayakawa was unable to become a U.S. citizen or marry someone of another race, but was widely considered to be no less Asian-American [12]. His legacy however, is massively important to the Asian American community. Karla Rae Fuller, a media professor, wrote in 2010 that "what is even more remarkable about Hayakawa's precedent-setting career in Hollywood as an Asian American is the fact that he is virtually ignored in film history as well as star studies... Furthermore, the fact that he reached such a rare level of success whereby he could form and run his own production company makes his omission from the narrative of Hollywood history even more egregious." [13]

Another prominent figure in Asian-American film history was Keye Luke, a Chinese-American actor who was also a founding member of the Screen Actors Guild. He was the first Chinese American to be signed by RKO, Universal Pictures, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and was one of the most prominent Asian actors of American cinema in the mid-20th century [14]. Before becoming an actor, Luke was a local artist in Seattle, then later Hollywood, where he worked on several of the notable murals inside Grauman's Chinese Theatre. He also did some of the original artwork in the pressbook for *King Kong* in 1933. Through his studio art work, he was recruited for his earliest movie roles [15]. Luke made his film debut in 1934, and one year later his first and recurring role as Lee Chan, in *Charlie Chan in Paris*, a British-American crime drama, and continued in this role for until 1938. When it was later rebooted, he ended up taking over the role of Charlie Chan himself, becoming the first actor of Chinese descent to play the role [16]. Lee was depicted in a good light without racial stereotypes as an Asian actor during this time (which was uncommon). He continued to work consistently in Hollywood, as he was the first Asian American in a superhero film, as Kato (the hero's assistant) in the original *Green Hornet*, in 1946, and even being cast in a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical in 1958, called *Flower Drum Song*, directed by Gene Kelly. Other notable works of his include roles on *Kung Fu*, *General Hospital*, *The Golden Girls*, and *Star Trek* [15]. Luke passed away in 1991 and his legacy continues beyond death. His work in multiple genres helped to set the foundation for future

Asian Americans to not be casted in racially-stereotypical roles, paving the way to better representation of Asian-American actors on-screen. This, in turn, improved the treatment of Asian-American men in society, as media often reflected the public — and vice versa.

Another significant figure is Bruce Lee, a renowned Asian-American actor and martial artist. As the son of a famous Cantonese opera star Lee Hoi-chuen, Lee was born in the Chinatown area of San Francisco on November 27, 1940, and was raised in Kowloon, Hong Kong [18]. He was introduced to the film industry by his father and appeared in several films as a child actor — the earliest as a baby carried on set in the film *Golden Gate Girl* [19]. His early martial arts experience included Wing Chun trained under Yip Man, which happened after much resistance due to him being a quarter German, as Wing Chun traditionally is not taught to "foreigners," even though he wasn't one. Lee moved to the United States at the age of 18, competing in the Long Beach International Karate Championships of 1964 in California. It was his appearance in this championship that led to television producer William Dozier's keen interest in Lee's work [20]. Thanks to this chance encounter, Lee booked the role of Kato in the rebooted TV series *The Green Hornet*. He also guest starred in three crossover episodes of *Batman* as the same character. *The Green Hornet* introduced Bruce Lee to an American audience, and became the first popular American show presenting Asian-style martial arts. From the late 1960s to early 1970s, he was responsible for advising fight choreography in a number of films. Eventually, this led to Lee wanting to write his own show titled *The Warrior*, with a predominantly Asian-led cast with Asian martial arts, but this would not reach actualization until 2019. In *The Pierre Berton Show* interview, Lee stated he understood Warner Brothers' attitudes towards casting in the series. "They think that business-wise it is a risk," he commented, "If the situation were reversed, and an American star were to come to Hong Kong, and I was the man with the money, I would have my own concerns as to whether the acceptance would be there." [21] In spite of this setback, his films would elevate the traditional martial arts film to a new level of popularity and acclaim, sparking a surge of interest in China and Chinese martial arts in the West, and dramatically changing martial arts and its films on an internationally [22]. Tragically, however, at age 32 in 1973, Lee passed away due to an allergic reaction [23]. In his short lifetime, he had become a world icon based upon his

portrayal of Chinese nationalism in his films. Among Asian Americans, he was a star for defying stereotypes associated with the emasculated Asian male. He was widely considered to be the most influential martial artist of all time, as he bridged some of the racial gap between East Asia and the West. In addition, he is credited with changing the way Asians were presented in American films and was largely responsible for launching the Kung Fu Craze of the 1970s into the 1990s [24].

With all the Asian American male actors who followed in the wake of these actors and their successes, even more room for growth rose to pave way for for Asian American men in Hollywood, from Phillip Ahn who starred alongside Sessue Hayakawa and Anna May Wong (in early Hollywood films as the first Korean-American actor in the U.S. who pushed better relations for Koreans in America), to George Takei (for his work through his Broadway show *Allegiance* that spoke of true events he faced as a Japanese American held in internment camps) and Jackie Chan (who was greatly inspired by Bruce Lee, brought about his own slapstick comedic twist and became one of the most popular action film stars of all time). Chan paved the way for actor BD Wong's foray into the genre; Wong was told as a child that "Asian people can't do comedy" [25] because Asians can't be funny. Another actor would come to break another stereotype, leading to further chain reactions [26].

So where does that leave us today? Well, it's complicated. While there have been great strides in Asian-American male representation in Hollywood, there have also been backwards missteps. There still exists the issue of racism against Asian Americans. It can be cited in a recent study done by USC that even with the Asian American population increasing over time, there have been 1,300 top-grossing movies from 2007 to 2019 for AAPI representation in on-screen and behind-the-camera roles and in executive ranks in Hollywood film companies. The study also reviewed the top 100 movies of 2019 for an analysis of how AAPI characters were portrayed, including the prevailing tropes and stereotypes of their depiction. Unfortunately, only "44 of the 1,300 films reviewed featured AAPI lead or co-lead characters driving the story," with "nearly 40% of the films reviewed had no AAPI representation at all." [27] "People often ask me whether representations of Asian Americans are improving," sociologist Nancy Wang Yuen, one of the report's lead

authors, stated. "Unfortunately, when representation looks like tokenism, Hollywood is doing the bare minimum for inclusion." It almost feels as though we've gone backwards, and many feel that this is in response to seeing how well Asian Americans do in American films [28]. But as they say, history repeats itself. And there is a start to a parallel happening today with the rise of Asian men in American media to the dismay of Caucasian men.

With BTS, a Korean all male idol group gaining in popularity, breaking records, and winning hearts across the country with their sincere lyrics and good intentions, one cannot help but notice the parallels of their impact to Sessue Hayakawa. With the rise of Asian martial arts in films yet again, specifically with Simu Liu's casting in the newly released *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (Marvel's first Asian-led superhero film), many are discussing how Tony Leung, who was cast as Liu's opposite in the film, is stealing the show — similar to how Bruce Lee's character Kato stole the show in *The Green Hornet* ' years ago (while of course also praising Liu for the lead). Perhaps this means that times are changing yet again — with how loud the Asian-American community can be now thanks to the rise of the internet and the ability to rise in Hollywood via Youtube — maybe things will charge ahead more strongly than before. *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* has opened to stellar reviews, shattering box office records, and has been raved about by Asian-American viewers, who feel that for once they have been represented in a good way and that Liu's performance in the film was helpful in reducing the stereotypes of masculine Asian men in society. [29] Liu's words from an interview with Digital Spy, touches on this, he feels we "should be uplifting each other and sticking together, but more than that, it's not difficult to see that Asian men and Asian women both suffer from the same problem, which is that our experiences have been defined by a predominantly white gaze, and so we each experience the consequences of that and they're different." He continues, "My hope — as Asian men begin to talk about masculinity, talk about the ways that they've been emasculated, and talk about our goals or how we want to develop the discourse — is that we can redefine what 'masculinity' really even means."

There is still much to be done. But knowing the history still runs parallel to how things are for Asians in Hollywood today, hopefully people can be more aware that there needs to be a greater push for better

representation in films for Asian-American men. Society is reflected in media — representation matters. It can help the improvement of the Asian-American experience overall to see more accurate depictions of ourselves in the media we consume, and vice versa.

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the nuances of experience

"One core memory I have is ...begging to my mother to buy me Lunchables instead of packing me the Korean food that was brought because of the comments and looks I received at lunch...It was only up until high school where I was able to find the confidence in myself and understand what it means to have my identity and to be proud of who I am. It is important to know what is of value to your life." (Kwon)

I was a little worried about this issue. Not because of the content, I knew and trusted the team to come up with interesting and relevant topics, but because I didn't want to sound like a broken record player. Although there is nothing wrong with restating a point, I worried that if I stuck to the same rhetoric as usual, other details and aspects of people's existences would be forgotten and erased. You have all heard by now the "don't assume Asian people are good at math, the model minority myth is bad, and more representation is necessary " arguments. Please note that while these are all entirely accurate blanket statements, there is so much that people don't mention just because it requires a bit more patience to uncover.

This article was originally titled "A Cross-Comparison of Experience." However, I realized that I disliked the use of the term "comparison" in this context. In my

mind, it gave off a sort of negative connotation, and a sense of discrimination Olympics. I wanted this piece to focus on sharing and understanding rather than ranking. Thus the title "The Nuances of Experience" was born. In retrospect, I have come to like the small differences in everyone's lives and ways of thinking. In school, we spend so much time approaching the 'big picture' and how it changes over time for different subjects, but the details of these big pictures are what make them interesting.

Throughout the last weeks of August and early September, I interviewed five Asian American and Pacific Islander male-identifying teens that I knew from around Seattle. The questions I posed were simple and left the interviewees to their own imaginations. Their names are Andrew Nakamoto (GHS senior, Japanese/European), Delano Cordova (FHS senior, Filipino), Paul Kwon (USC freshman,

Korean), Arnav Gannamani (SHS junior, Indian), and Baker Wong (GHS senior, Chinese).

“Left and right I would hear ‘small eyes,’ ‘what’s that smell?’ and comments that made me question myself. At a young age I didn’t have the confidence in myself to fight this back, I was pushed around. It came to the point where I would rather go along with it rather than to explain and argue as it would lead to further problems.” (Kwon)

Beauty standards are fickle things. They are not straight standards; instead, they contradict and weave through one another until you can’t tell what or who you’re supposed to look like. Each individual carries their own beauty standards, unique to their culture and how they were raised. Kwon shares what it was like as he “grew up with a mindset that I had to have a certain look and follow a set guideline to feel a sense of belonging. [He] would want to dress a certain way and have a certain style that everyone would try to wear.” Nakamoto touches on how beauty standards change based on place of origin, citing how, “most Asian Americans feel a little bit caught between Asian beauty standards and American ones (how feminine a guy should look is the main one).” He, however, feels like he can escape a lot of that pressure, “being a guy and having a chill family. It really only ever crosses my mind when I’m visiting my extended family — I’ll change the way I dress to fit in more.”

Wong brings up a point about the more nuanced ways society confirms physical expectations, “Clothing stores are another societal pressure. The smallest pant size in most clothing stores is a 30 inch inseam. I have a friend who is 5’ 10” and who fits this inseam. Many clothing stores don’t tailor to shorter guys and many of my Asian male friends.” These stores are designed to market towards tall, European-like built people but that leaves out many other possible body shapes and sizes. Although Cordova does “not feel any pressure to look any type of way other than presentable.” He remembers how he “would feel out of place if I came to school wearing off-brand clothes that were hand me downs or thrifted at goodwill or Salvation Army. I used to feel as if people would look down on me... because my family could not afford the newest and coolest fashion or me.” Similarly, Gannamani states, “I do

not feel insecure about my physical appearance, but I know many of my friends feel as though they have to work twice as hard to appear “desirable” to the general public.”

“Yeah, I feel societal pressures to be tall and muscular partly due to the media. In most action movies, men have a very similar tall muscular build. Movies about high schoolers usually portray the idea of the jock and the nerd. While nerds are considered intellectual, they are also shown unfit and undesirable. Jocks were portrayed as the opposite, not intellectual but very fit and desirable. Because of this representation, nerd is often used as an insult.” (Wong)

When it comes to the media, their responses were mixed. Gannamani mentions the “bittersweet stereotypes” that people of South Asian descent and within his community, have to deal with. He shares that “On the one hand, there are the indirectly bad ones, such as ‘all Indians are smart and all Indians are good at school’ ...these are seemingly compliments, however... they cause a lot of stress from trying to conform to these societal beliefs. Additionally, there are... bad stereotypes. These are the ones that are widespread. ‘All Indians smell, all Indians worship cows, and all Indians are non-athletic.’” This can certainly be blamed on the education system, but the media has certainly played a large role. From shows portraying the “bumbling Indian actor” to definitely-not-Indian Ashton Kutcher’s racist impersonation of a Bollywood director for a Popchips ad (3), it’s easy to see how these stereotypes are kept alive.

Kwon mentions what it felt like as, “a little kid watching superhero movies, listening to the radio, in the world of media I never truly felt I was able to connect with others and feel a genuine representation of me.” Although nowadays with “groups such as BTS, representation of who I am and my community has continued to grow.” (Kwon)

On the flip side, Wong can “think of only two television shows and three movies that are out that feature Asian Americans. Music wise, I can only think of non-American Asian pop stars.” Over recent years, the Hallyu wave and media from mainly East-Asian countries has increased in popularity within the US and across the world (4); although this is not bad,

there is much less to show for Asian-Americans specifically. Gannamani notes that, “It feels almost as if no progress has been made, since any South-Asian character with darker skin is always the ‘butt of the joke’ or the nerdy comedic relief, while the characters with lighter skin are the villains, often called ‘terrorists.’” While there are a few shows I can think of that feature East-Asian main characters (excluding those with white people in brown face), they are pushed to the wayside or spun for comedic relief.

Somewhere in the middle of these perspectives is Nakamoto. He states, “mixed representation is a little weird in the sense that there’s a lot of different levels at which I can feel represented. I can always identify with the straight white dude, but I really enjoy seeing Asian men in media. On the mixed side of things, there is some representation — Keanu Reeves and Chloe Bennet are my favorites — but not as much as I’d like... the most encouraging thing for me personally has been seeing more male Asian leads, who I definitely identify with more than white leads.” Having the opportunity to directly identify with a specific mixed race character doesn’t occur often for people of mixed heritage. Instead, we pick and choose what parts of ourselves we can find in the characters presented. Not to mention the controversy surrounding the casting of mixed people as characters of a single ethnicity such as in *Crazy Rich Asians* (2). Although many argue whether or not these mixed actors should get to play full Asian roles, it seems like creating roles specifically for people of mixed heritage may be a better way to work through the disagreements.

“Some things that people may assume about me are that I am a musically inclined individual that loves to play love songs on his guitar. Maybe even cook his family’s secret adobo recipe for the girl who has my heart. Though some aspects of these statements are true, they are not because I am Filipino, but because of my aspirations to become who I want to be.” (Cordova)

Although none of my questions were directly about language ability, both Nakamoto and Wong mentioned the ways in which language contributes to potentially damaging external assumptions based on perceived ethnicity. Wong mentions the expectations

that fall on his shoulders when others make such assumptions, “I feel the expectation to prove that I’m American enough to non-asians and Asian enough to asian people. This mostly is because I don’t speak Mandarin or Cantonese.” There is not exactly a clear definition for what it means to be “American” or “Americanized.” From some perspectives, if you reside in the United States, then — regardless of the language you speak or your religion — you’re American. To others, you must adopt a certain “American ideology” before qualifying as “American”. These American qualities generally include speaking English without trouble or accent. In a specific environment, acting a certain way to compensate for, say, a lack of language ability plays to this “American” versus other culture categorization. However, while personal language ability does play a large role in this, there are also external stereotypes to contend with. Nakamoto states, “It’s pretty common for most groups to assume I speak an Asian language.” Although I can’t directly say that these groups are making this assumption because he is Asian, that certainly is one factor. For many, they have grown up thinking that if they see a person who looks like they belong to a certain racial group or culture, then that person speaks the language denoted by their appearance. This linguistic prejudice can generally contribute to hiring practices, perceived level of intelligence, and other aspects of life that involve speaking (1).

When I asked about representation both in the education system and media, the results were almost the same. The general consensus was that much is lacking. In school, “The system spends a month rehashing the Civil War for the third time in two years and then spends one week discussing Indian history. The worst part is, the curriculum only focuses on the religious aspects, not the actual history of the country.” (Gannamani) and Wong remembers how he “spent two days total learning about the history of Asian American. The majority of those two days were about Japanese internment.” Nakamoto shares, “I often have to explain... how my family has 4 generations in Hawaii. Most of the coverage of Japanese Americans is just in the context of executive order 9066 and the 442nd.” He notes, “What often gets passed over is miscegenation laws. The demographic growth of mixed-race people in America is also super interesting, but that kind of

stuff is pretty modern to be covered in a curriculum like APUSH.” In general, there has been much recent critique over school curriculum and many argue that the Asian-American history currently taught is focused on only a few milestones (6).

Instead of relying on the education system, many turn to their own families and support systems to learn about their own heritage and the history that interlace with it. Wong remembers the day he, “participated in a Taiwanese get-together at a park that celebrates Tatalas, traditional Taiwanese boats. I learned more about the history of Taiwanese people in that short two-hour celebration, that I’ve ever learned about Taiwanese people at school.” No matter the effort given by a singular teacher, learning from people who are truly from that culture brings a new level of understanding of their histories and customs. Similarly, Cordova’s grandmother was a historian of Filipino history. He mentions, “Being from this family, I have learned about as much of my Filipino-American heritage and other Asian-American history as people who have taken college courses on Asian American History. Having this sense of self gave me pride and courage to correct and inform teachers and colleagues that had no idea about my history and the history of various other Asian Americans.” Cordova’s grandfather wrote a book titled “Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans” and he also mentions the growth Filipino people have had in industries such as “music, acting, TV... sports.” (5) Both of these examples stuck with me and made me ponder how someone of any other race would get to learn about these specific histories without actively researching or being a part of the community, especially if that person did not attend college or some sort of higher education.

“Everyone should work towards finding their own identity and being confident with who you are no matter how difficult it may be to stand your ground.”
(Kwon)

Having the opportunity to read and consider the experiences of each of these individuals has been an enjoyable and educational experience. The purpose of this article was to simply share the interviewees thoughts and experiences on topics that others may have not cared enough about. I hope this can help you, as the reader, confirm or gain appreciation for the words and thoughts of young AAPI men.

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The Juxtaposition Between Trans and Cis Men

BY ASHLEY CHEN

Within the discussions of sexism, the role of trans individuals remains unclear. On one hand, due to the fact that trans women are viewed as threats to womanhood and belief that they lack experience with sexism, TERFs gatekeep discussions of womanhood and sexism from trans women, while trans men are often treated like cis men in these discussions. On the other hand, discussions of toxic masculinity (stemming from being raised as a cis man) aren't related to by trans men or women. Although trans women often understand toxic masculinity, they feel disconnected from the identification of oneself as "masculine." Lastly, constructs of gender affect non-binary people in very unique ways though they are often erased from discussions of gender issues. In modern day society, the discussion of trans individuals to be incorporated with gender appears to be impossible. This interview attempts to highlight issues a trans man faces from both the gender constructs created by society and their identity as a trans individual.

Hi! What's your name and pronouns?

I'm Saturn, and my pronouns are he/they!

How do you identify within queerness?

I currently identify as an asexual trans man!

What has the process of transitioning been like?

There are two aspects of transition – social and physical – and although I'm currently unable to physically transition due to transphobic parents, social transition has been a very interesting process. I'm very fortunate to be surrounded by a lot of supportive and trans individuals, so socially transitioning has been very positive overall. However, it has had a few notable negative effects that I think, unexpectedly, reflect many experiences cis Asian men have as well – for example, aggressive fetishization, unwarranted sexualization, and infantilization, all of which are arguably not unique to the experiences of trans men; rather, they're issues many cis Asian men face that've been intensified by being trans. Other issues unique to being trans include worsened physical dysphoria and transphobia.

Do your transphobic parents impact your social transition in any way?

Yes. Due to fear of my parents finding out, I'm unable to fully socially transition to many adults and to my school or come out to less accepting allies or transmeds (individuals who believe transitioning/dysphoria is needed for an individual to be trans).

Why and how are issues that cis Asian men face intensified by being trans?

Personally, I believe that this is due to the fact that emasculation is one of the largest causes that many issues, such as infantilization and fetishization, cis Asian men face. So, for obvious reasons, that viewpoint is worsened by being perceived (unwillingly) as feminine. However, that's not to say all types of infantilization, fetishization, or sexualization experienced by trans men are experienced by cis men in any degree. There are many unique struggles that cis men do not have.

What are some struggles you face as a trans man that differ from those of cis men?

The most obvious answer that comes to mind is dysphoria. Personally, dysphoria is an intense sense of hatred or "wrongness" felt about the way I'm perceived, both socially and physically. Social dysphoria is caused

most often by the use of incorrect pronouns, known as “misgendering,” or my previous name, which I’ll call my deadname. Physical dysphoria is caused by body parts or the way I look. For example, my voice, hair, and most famously represented, genitals. Dysphoria, for myself and many other trans individuals, provides an inroad to worsening or causing mental health issues. Most interestingly, dysphoria is classified as a mental health issue, one for which many individuals can’t seek a treatment for. Trans individuals overall are often unable to physically transition – although I can’t because of my parents, trans youths across AMERICA are unable to transition due to state laws that forbid medical transition, and trans individuals in conservative states often find it impossible to seek surgeons or receive prescriptions for testosterone. Another obvious issue is transphobia, which prevents trans men from transitioning and feeling comfortable being out to the people around them. Although less common against trans men than women, violence is still an ever-present threat. Other issues include sexualization, especially from gay cis men, misogyny/sexism (and with that, difficulty finding a place in discussions of sexism and gender issues), a disproportionate rate of sexual violence, increased risk of mental health issues, the self-imposed beauty standard, and misrepresentation in media. This is only speaking from personal experience – individuals in countries that outlaw transgenderism face persecution and worse.

If you’re comfortable sharing, what does dysphoria feel like emotionally?

Dysphoria behaves differently in every individual. Personally, in day-to-day life, my dysphoria manifests as a total disconnect with my physical body – this is fueled by DPDR and the fact that I won’t be able to transition in the foreseeable future. However, during bad “episodes” of dysphoria, when aware of my physical body, dysphoria is best described as expecting one experience and getting another, wildly different one (online, I read the description: “it’s like waking up with an extra arm across your chest”). The effects of this vary from person to person – for me, it causes feelings of panic, sadness, or emptiness – my worst breakdowns have manifested in suicidal ideation and the like. Social dysphoria is very similar, like

a separation between what you are and how other people see you.

Why do you believe many conservative states are unwilling to accept trans folks? Why are they transphobic?

Transphobia is often caused by a combination of personal beliefs, self-perceived moral superiority, and an inability to change or learn new things. However, often, people are uneducated rather than unwilling to be educated; there’s an important difference.

What are some examples of misrepresentation in the media and its effects?

In the media, trans men are often depicted in an infantilizing and very frustrating manner. More importantly, the media perpetuates unsafe methods of dealing with dysphoria – the most famous trope, binding with bandages, is immensely harmful in practice and can cause permanent damage that makes it impossible to get top surgery.

What places have you discovered that allow open convos about sexism and gender issues that have helped you?

Trans and certain queer/feminist communities – for example, my friends!

How has being asexual affected your relationship with queerness?

Personally, my relationship with queerness comes more from being trans. Even so, the term asexual is seen in from many different perspectives in the queer community – as someone who identifies as panromantic as well (i.e. I can still be in a gay relationship), I face less issues than many ace people. Although most commonly found in 2013-2017 Tumblr, “ace discourse,” or debate over the validity of asexuality and whether ace individuals can identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community despite “not facing as much discrimination” (their words, not mine!) is still common and very harmful. The a-spec community as a whole (individuals that identify under the ace and aro umbrella terms) often come under a lot of fire from other queers.



Daggers, Knots, and Other Crises

BY HANNAH D.

It all started when my elementary school poster board spiraled into an identity crisis. I had self-consciously dragged myself to my teacher's desk, cheeks red, and mumbled to ask if I could split my project in half. "Why would you do that?" she had asked. It was a presentation in front of the class about our families' origins and an explanation of our culture, including traditional food, clothing, and language. The glitter glue and construction paper was easy enough, but what had stumped me was which country's culture to cover. I explained my dilemma but she winced, shook her head, and told me, "Just pick one."

Except I could not. My heritage was non-negotiable. As I wandered back to my seat, my 10-year-old self stared back at the rubric and was forced to decide which flag I wanted to celebrate more. While other students proudly exclaimed their roots in Sweden or how their grandmother moved from Mexico, I felt trapped. Genetically? More of my bloodline hails from China, a country I have never set foot in. Culturally? I am more Filipino in cuisine, habits, and speech patterns. Yet, I was born and raised in the United States, where I learned about its history and was immersed in the environment as second-generation immigrants usually are.

I sat there, cramming hundreds of stories into a shoe that just did not fit. I was over-simplifying myself and was using my native language to do so. I identify as Filipino-Chinese-American and use hyphens to

distinguish each aspect of my heritage. Something so grammatically instinctual should not carry such a heavy, historical context.

In the 1910s, President Theodore Roosevelt publicly stated that "There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism... a hyphenated American is not an American at all." He believed that citizens having multiple cultural identities was an "absolutely certain way of bringing [America] to ruin" and it would lead to "a tangle of squabbling nationalities, an intricate knot..." President Woodrow Wilson agreed with the sentiment and stated that "any man who carries a hyphen about with him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of the Republic."

Both presidents publically echoed the sentiments of my teacher: just pick one. Be a fully-fledged star-spangled patriot without ties to your culture or be connected to your roots while being isolated as a foreigner. By forcing people to conform into tidy categories, identities are made easy and straightforward. *In a world yearning for optimal efficiency, people tend to water down complexity for the sake of time. This is where the umbrella term "hyphenated American" comes in.

The term dates from the late 19th and early 20th century during the height of a mass immigration to the United States. It was used to "[condemn] those who identified as anything other than American,



THE HYPHENATED AMERICAN - Cartoon by J. S. Pughe published in "Puck" magazine, 9 August 1899

putting into play questions of American allegiance" (The Politics of the Hyphen). In other words, it was a blanket to smother and generalize any intricacies in a person's background. It was used bitterly in order to shame and ridicule incoming immigrants of all different descent.

For their historical context, some choose to eliminate the hyphen in their joint nationality because they feel that "hyphens serve to divide even as they are meant to connect. Their use in racial and ethnic identifiers can connote an otherness, a sense that people of color are somehow not full citizens or fully American" (Fuhrmann). It can often leave individuals feeling too American for their Asian roots and vice versa. However, others choose to view the hyphens differently. Personally, as an individual with not one but two hyphens in her identity, the intermingled sense of not having one without the other reminds me of my favorite ice cream flavor. Even if you pluck the chocolate chips from the cone, bit by bit, you will inevitably still taste the remnants of mint. Dump the ice cream from the cone and you'll still find traces of where the chocolate and mint melted into the waffle. What Roosevelt dubbed a "tangle" or a "knot" is my tapestry of traditions, histories, and narratives.

Ultimately, it depends on each person, their story, and their choices. In terms of APA and MLA grammar, there is no hyphen between "Asian" and "American." Our magazine chooses to hyphenate "Asian-American" as an adjective and eliminate the hyphen when describing the people.

In this issue, *What We Experience* is covering the triumphs and hardships of Asian-American men and their unique experiences. For these AAPI men, gender identity intertwining with ethnicity and life forms individual challenges and experiences. A study found that Asian-American men typically earn 8% less than their White counterparts, and Brian Keum, a professor of social welfare who specializes male body image and mental health, found that there is a common stereotype of Asian-American men being "less attractive, less manly, falling short of the White hegemonic masculinity ideal in the United States." This stereotype is so prevalent that it may hinder one's dating life. Grace Kao, a sociology professor at Yale University, researched racism in romantic settings and found that dating "statistics show a clear hierarchy based on race that leaves Asian men on the bottom rung." These assumptions were likely a result of the "Yellow Peril" era where many Asian-American men worked "feminine" jobs and were depicted as ugly with stereotypical features. They are often sustained by modern-day biased media portrayals.

By ignoring the interconnected racism Asian-American men endure, it perpetuates the assumption of a simple, clear-cut identity. It is especially crucial since mental health stigma is particularly high surrounding both men and Asian Americans due to convoluted views of masculinity and the Model Minority Myth. Avoiding conversations altogether may compel an individual to speak out and correct how their identities are misinterpreted and seen.

As I settle down at my desk to write this article, I think of my 10-year-old self hunched over a blank sheet of paper, clumsily attempting to dismember my identity into neat, digestible portions for my peers. I remember tearing and gluing, cramming myself into what they wanted me to be: simple.

Embracing diversity as a society is a challenging, uphill climb that we are all just beginning to comprehend. But it all starts when we acknowledge each other's tapestries. It starts with knowing that when sewn together, our identities are stronger than simple.

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DAYS OF DISCONTENT

BY ERIC MA

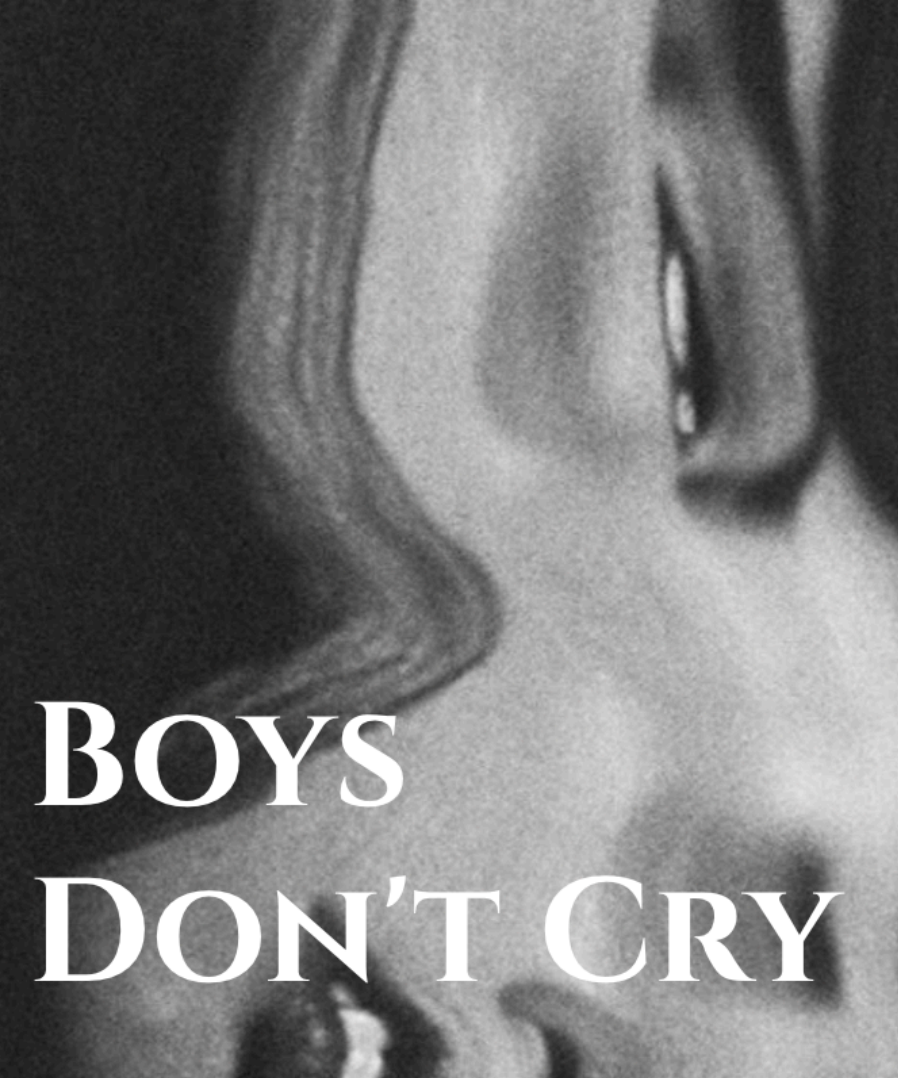
even the cherry tree lies dormant
it hides before my eyes without color

winter months of discontent, so ugly
that I almost mistook it for a fact
that life without beauty
fills our hearts with disdain and reside
forever in place of yearning

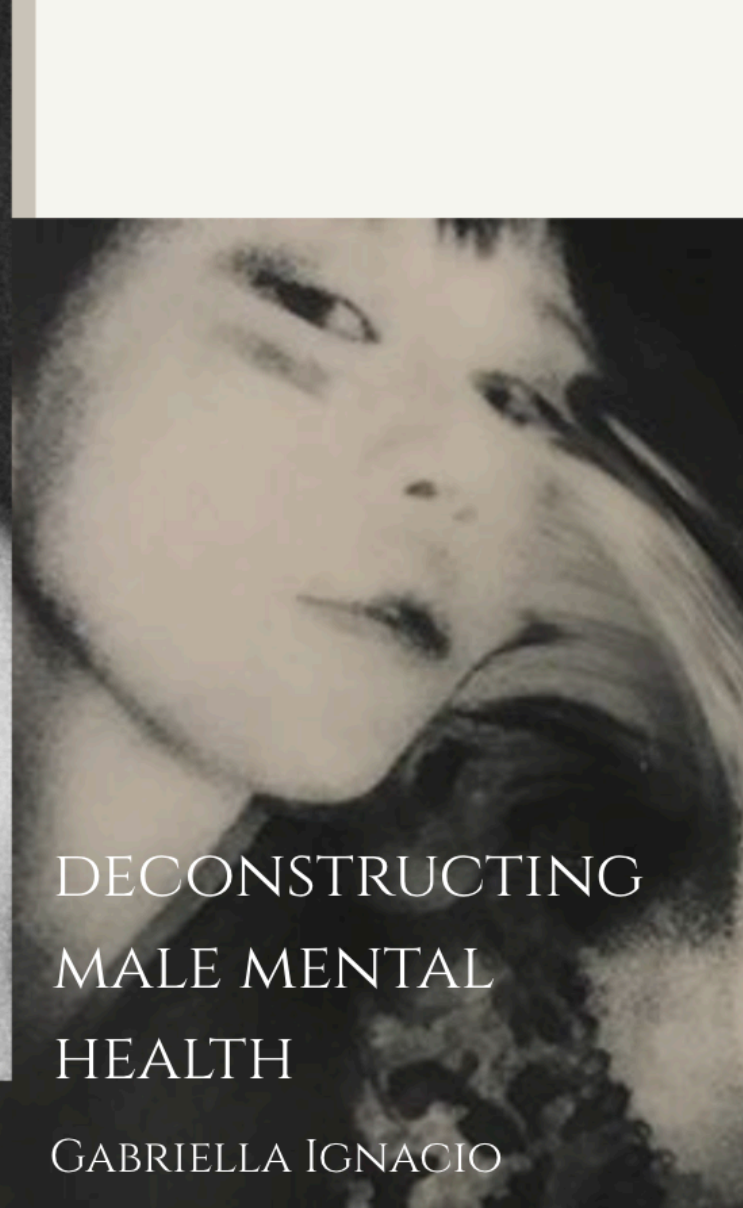
leaves will leave
eyes brimming with tears

to lament alone in a bare garden
the poor soul that fails to know
the pleasure in colorless times
when given a vision
of fairer days, so unforgiving is our longing

"Beauty – captivating yet transient – deeply resonates as soon as one experiences the taste of it. The slightest exposure to it is enough to completely occupy one's mind, to keep one constantly yearning for this unquenchable quality. The beauty of equality is one of the least extinguishable, yet the most blissful type of beauty one can taste. Many, especially Asian-American men, who have tasted the beauty of equality, find it to be a nearly impossible piece of hope that they can't let go of."



BOYS DON'T CRY



DECONSTRUCTING MALE MENTAL HEALTH

GABRIELLA IGNACIO

You've probably heard of the saying "boys don't cry" or "be a man" when referring to the emotions and vulnerability of young men. These terms are commonly used as a way to toughen boys up, but in reality, it subconsciously teaches them to suppress genuine feelings. By the time they reach adulthood, men can be emotionally stunted and are often incapable of harnessing a full emotional capacity. Due to the underlying need to hide weakness, men are also less likely to access mental health treatment. Although this likelihood applies to all races, researchers have found that Asian men, in particular, use mental health services much less than other demographics. The stigma against mental health is especially prevalent in Asian cultures, and for Asian-American men, it is rooted in stereotypes, cultural messages, and personal ideologies. These factors create a skewed perception of masculinity and contribute to damaging effects on individual well-being.

An important consideration when addressing Asian mental health is the existence of stereotypes, specifically in the context of American society. Throughout history, stereotypes, such as the model minority myth and yellow peril, have greatly impacted people's perception of Asian Americans.

The model minority myth can be defined as "the notion that Asian-Americans achieve universal and unparalleled academic and occupational success" (Kiang). Arguably the most prominent Asian stereotype, the myth originated in the mid-60s and was popularized by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

Though the act repealed Asian immigration restrictions, it only allowed individuals with certain backgrounds into the country. Aside from the relatives of those already in the U.S., priority was given to Asian professionals such as doctors, engineers, and scientists. As a result, there was a large influx of highly-educated immigrants, and it is now the descendants of these immigrants that constitute a large part of the current Asian-American population. Because Asian Americans have great feats and accomplishments, stereotypes, more specifically the model minority myth, still exist to this day.

Despite the myth having positive connotations, it negatively affects how Asian Americans are viewed as a whole. For instance, a study conducted by Hartford psychology students found that the model minority myth is linked to “the misperception of Asian-Americans’ mental health status” and “the invisibility or neglect of [their] mental health needs” (Cheng). While the generalization of being a “model minority” incites people to perceive Asian Americans positively, they fail to recognize Asians as a diverse group of individuals. This supposedly “positive” stereotype creates unrealistic expectations, which, in turn, proves damaging on the mental health of Asians, specifically Asian-American men. Because of this, there is a major disregard for Asian mental health.

The impact of Asian stereotypes also extends to mainstream media, and is especially notable in movies/television. In terms of masculinity, Asian-American men are often portrayed as nerdy, unattractive, and unable to express romantic desire. On the other hand, they are also hyper-masculinized due to tropes such as yellow peril¹ and the glamorization of martial arts. An appropriate example of these cliches can be found in the movie *Gran Torino* (2008). Played by Clint Eastwood, the protagonist of the story is shown to heroically “save” his Hmong neighbors from local Hmong gangsters. Throughout the film, he repeatedly comes to the rescue of a young man named Thao Vang Lor, and eventually gets the gang thrown in jail.

Compared to the violent, aggressive portrayal of the gang, Vang Lor is shown to be quiet, reserved, and effeminate. Through the contrasting representations of Asian men, this movie unintentionally depicts two of the most common Asian stereotypes. As researcher Jackson Yang puts it, “[Thao Vang Lor] is the epitome of the nerdy, quiet Asian-American man, whilst the gangsters are the epitome of yellow peril.”



Screenshot from Gran Torino, 2008.

Since Asians make up only a small percentage of the US, films like *Gran Torino* are able to manipulate the public perception of Asian-Americans. “Growing up in an area with very few Asians, people’s perceptions of me were hyper-informed by what they saw on TV,” says Kian Fan, a 30-year-old Chinese-American actor. “I always knew people saw me differently, but it wasn’t until my classmates started calling me ‘Jackie Chan’ or asking if I could do karate that I realized it was because of my race.”

This experience is not unique; rather, it is an issue that impacts many Asian-American men. Similar to the story recalled by Fan, these encounters are particularly common with youth, as racially motivated remarks are often heard within a school environment. While some say these comments are harmless, they can be incredibly demoralizing to young boys. The televised portrayal of Asian men is radically different to real life, and it forces Asian-American boys to misconstrue how they should appear or function in society. Even at a young age, these standards can take an emotional toll and severely affect mental health.

Despite their negative consequences, the media and film industry is slowly inching into a more just future. There is now greater representation of Asian Americans in the industry, with increased numbers of Asian-American actors, producers, and directors. Additionally, movies with well-rounded, complex Asian leads have been receiving more awards and critical acclaim. Nonetheless, it is important to realize that there is much progress to be made. Fan touches on this subject by mentioning how, “Even though there are a lot of positive changes happening, when I look at the roles and opportunities available to me, I realize that it is sadly not as big of a change as a lot of people like to say it is.” At a glance, American media appears to be more inclusive, but stereotypes and clichés are still common on a local scale. Media-led misconceptions can be harmful, so we should strive to create Asian roles that are more diverse. By doing so, it has the potential to shift society’s limited perception of Asian Americans while also improving their emotional health.

Mental health pressures are not only apparent in American society; in fact, some of its biggest influences come from family and culture. In Asian families, masculinity often encompasses the expectation of success and independence. For the most part, Asian parents expect their sons to solve problems, pursue higher education, and achieve unrealistic success in life. For instance, many parents have their children translate and fill out legal papers. Others push their children to lucrative career options like doctors or lawyers. While there are exceptions to this type of parenting, it is still necessary to acknowledge its prevalence. “My own parents are pretty lenient, and I can usually talk to them if I need anything,” reflects a student, “But a lot of people I know experience the complete opposite, and you can tell that it affects them mentally. I’ve had several friends suffer from depression, and a part of it definitely had to do with the stress they got from their household.” Though it depends on the situation, many Asian-American men struggle to live up to the expectations of their parents. Failure to achieve these desires can greatly

affect their mental health, and may cause stress, anxiety, or other related disorders.

Another common family dynamic is intergenerational conflicts between Asian parents and their children. While parents typically want their children to maintain their Asian origins, kids usually prefer adapting to American culture. The opposing preference of kids vs parents can cause a rift in relationships and increased stress in the home. Another interviewed student elaborates on this idea, mentioning how, “Going to my predominantly white school then coming home to my Asian family was difficult growing up. It’s hard to balance because you’re expected to adhere to both cultures, but if you prioritize one then you lose the other. You end up having to choose.” This decision is challenging, but it proves to be especially distressing for Asian-American sons. In many cases, Asian cultures treat men as a dominant figure, and expect sons to carry on the legacy and name of their family. For this reason, Asian families typically frown upon their sons becoming westernized, even despite their desires to embrace American lifestyles. The added layer of pressure can have negative effects on mental state, and men often express the burden that comes with cultural gender norms. In general, both family and culture influence the mindset of Asian-American men; because of this, it is essential to realize that mental health can be greatly transformed by a person’s home.

Overall, Asian-American men face many roadblocks when it comes to mental health. In a society where they are constantly put in a box, it is no surprise that they are hesitant to seek help. In order to move forward, we should continue to make mental health services more accessible, produce steps to overcome stereotypes, and open up new conversations surrounding the topic. By uniting as a community, we can redefine what it means to be an Asian-American man.

‘Yellow peril is a racist ideology that represents Asians – specifically those of Chinese and Japanese descent – as a danger, especially to the Western World.

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Photo Credits to Xi Huang



오갑잡흔 일요로 일스 월칠 년원 양건 올

호나를 가지고 보거든
공심같이 심겨 동포 형이들
부속 사업에는지 하라느니라
한오이일에 발의인은 임경슈
리용을 김주환 권자형 고
리취연 리상지 현종리 김가
회계장은 안경슈씨가 되고
관용씨가 되고 위원은 김가진
및 리취연 권자형 현종리 리
애사가 되고 간사원은 송인
의석 정현철 평한규 오세창
박승효 홍우관 애사가 되
조그만 모조금 낸사들은 인
리완용 백원 김가진 심원 리
추한 삼선원 권자형 삼선원
삼선원 교영희 이삼원 리취
공탁 오성원 리상지 심원 김
근호 이삼원 남궁지 심원 조
합이 오필 심원이더라
할에 열심을 본왔는 사드들이
에 심지어 막바리구
돈 낸사들의 일흔
또 목록에 써서 우선
성리요 만일 돈이 홀이 있
면 크게 서약을 모호고 서약
글을 식일출노 의문지
지 조선 독립을

M.D.

36

"As illustrated by parts of *The Independent* covering "Philip Jaisohn" and "M.D.," two titles that define his American identity, Seo's native identity was always embedded within him wherever he went and whoever he served. I specifically chose to depict Jaisohn's identity through a collage because his life consists of pieces radically different from each other. Yet, when these pieces are glued together, a cohesive theme appears behind the collage: his dedication and affection for his native country."

*"He loved his native land, Korea;
shook it from its slumbers, roused
the young and thundered at the
old. In exile, he embraced his
adopted country, served it with
true devotion, healed the sick,
and advanced science. But, he
never forgot his native soil,
spared no effort for her freedom.
And, to the end of his life, he
remained a dedicated champion of
the cause of humanity
everywhere."*

*- Chong-Sik Lee, PhD, past
chairman of Philip Jaisohn
Memorial Foundation*

"Seo Jae-Pil" is a name that almost any educated Korean would immediately recognize and admire. Having attended a public elementary school in Korea, I have always been aware of this name as well. However, I only learned about the existence and significance of his alternate name, Philip Jaisohn, a couple weeks prior to beginning this collage. After years of learning about Seo's accomplishments in Korean textbooks and documentaries, I never expected to read about Jaisohn's life on English-covered Wikipedia pages and memorial articles. Despite this initial confusion, I was instantly intrigued by the American facet of his identity that I never knew about. The collage, as well as the following paragraphs, illustrate how I came to revise my understanding of Jaisohn from a mere Korean historical figure to an eternally inspiring Asian-American that I aspire to become like.

Seo Jae-Pil was a political activist of the Korean Independence Movement (1910-1945), a campaign initiated to obtain independence from Japanese colonial rule that devastated countless Korean lives for over three decades. As a dedicated leader and an intellectual, he founded *The Independent*, the first Korean newspaper to be written entirely in Hangul (the Korean alphabet). In the early 1900s Korea, most published works were written in the Chinese script,

which only the elite scholars could comprehend. By publishing the writing in the national language, one that all ordinary citizens could understand, Seo ensured the spread of democratic ideals and other important information to a wider population.

However, due to a failed coup against the Korean government, Seo was exiled and sent to the States. Despite these circumstances, Seo contributed greatly to the American society as the first Korean to ever become a naturalized U.S. citizen. Under his anglicized name Philip Jaisohn (an inverted form of his Korean name “Seo Jae-Pil”), he was a successful businessman and an intelligent physician. As a graduate of the George Washington University Medical School (1889-1892) and a medical researcher at the University of Pennsylvania (1899-1903), he became the first Korean to earn an American medical degree. He dedicated the last few decades of his life to serving numerous American lives as a pathologist and publishing scientific articles to expand medical knowledge.

Despite the decades Jaishon spent living in and serving America, he never dismissed the political movement back in his motherland country. In fact, he established an entrepreneurship so that he could use all its profits for funding the Independence Movement. He also strived to raise awareness of the independence campaign by leading 200 other Koreans in a march to the Philadelphia Independence Hall.

Evidently, Jaisohn did not let the geographical barrier hinder his loyalty and affection for his motherland country. He carried his profound devotion to Korea overseas and embedded his American life into it. Even amidst his political activities for the sake of Korea, he never failed to wholeheartedly serve America, which is why I greatly admire Jaisohn not exactly as a Korean, nor an American, but as an Asian-American. He initiated crucial political and medical advancements for both his motherland and foreign countries. Such binational devotion defines Jaisohn to

be one of the pioneering men to epitomize what it truly means to be “Asian-American.”

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