

Beyond Asian American Stereotypes: Keye Luke's Dichotomous Representation in *Phantom of Chinatown*

Yi Li, Northern Illinois University, USA

Introduction

“Devil and angel, the Chinese is a sexual joke, glorifying white power.... is not so much a threat as he is a frivolous offense to white manhood” (Chin 95). Western cinema and literature until the late 1920s tended to depict Chinese people as the alienated who resisted assimilation into mainstream American culture, and the “Oriental villain” became a well-established and familiar figure. As Sue Fawn Chung notes, “Chinese laundrymen, laborers, miners, houseboys, opium smokers, idolaters, criminals, and tong men were portrayed as cruel, cunning, or diabolically ingenious” (535). The most famous of them was Dr. Fu Manchu—the villain of many Sax Rohmer novels from 1913 to 1959—whom Eugene Franklin Wong describes as embodying “the epitome of Chinese treachery and cunning” (58).

Oriental mystery has certain connotations and elaborations surrounding it for American culture. For Rohmer, the mystery of the land comes from the nature of its inhabitants who were “silent subtle peoples”, reflecting their “true Oriental stealth” and the “guile of the East” (226). Another connotation surrounding mystery was uncertainty, and from uncertainty the danger of the unknown. This was Rohmer’s nightmares of “strange, Oriental horrors that lay hidden behind the mist of the East” (67). The mysterious image of the Orient was also, at times, an exotic attraction of sensual allure for Western audience. An early example of a Caucasian actor in Hollywood “Yellowface” came in *Broken Blossoms* (1919), in which D.W. Griffith cast Richard Barthelmess as a kindly young Chinese aristocrat who shelters an abused girl (Lillian Gish). Demonic (and, many would say, racist) portrayals of a classic Chinese villain were delivered by heavily made-up Warner Oland and Boris Karloff in the 1930s and 1940s Fu Manchu films. Although such cross-racial casting has since fallen into disrepute, German-born Luise Rainer won an Oscar for her impersonation of a Chinese peasant in *The Good Earth* (1937), and Marlon Brando received favorable contemporary reviews for playing a cheeky Japanese interpreter in *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956).

Despite the explicit racial insensitivity and stereotypes criticized by many Asian American and media scholars, one should not dismiss the contribution that this genre made to the career development of Asian American actors, such as Anna May Wong, Philip Ahn and Keye Luke. With the cover of *Look* magazine as well as many articles and features on her that appeared throughout her career, Wong secured attention of Western public with her modernized performance of American cultural citizenship constructed by hybrid Asian American practices and her working experience in Europe. Unlike Wong, Ahn reached his career peak with anti-Japanese roles in wartime Hollywood as expressions of the struggle for Korean independence and Korean diasporic cinema.

The Asian detective proved to be a popular hero with Hollywood film-going audiences during the 1930s and 1940s. It is ironic that Oriental detective films failed to achieve success and popularity when a real “Oriental” actor played Chan, as in *The Chinese Parrot* (1927). The genre remained the domain of white actors who impersonated slant-eyed, heavily accented masters of murder mysteries in what Eugene Franklin Wong calls a “racist cosmetology” (137) and mocks the fetishistic attention to caricature of Asian eyes. The popularization of the Charlie Chan series beginning with *Charlie Chan Carries On* in the early 1930s, however, marked a turning point in Hollywood’s sinophobic representations. With the Swedish immigrant actor Warner Oland in the lead role, the series began to gather steam and succeed at the box office. Despite white actors’ “Yellowface” impersonations of Chan’s exaggerated and contrived Confucian mannerisms, the Chinese detective hero, as Norman K. Denzin argues, “neutralized previous negative images of the Asian-American, and offered to Asian-Americans (and Americans) a particular Americanized version of who they were and who they should be” (89). Likewise, *Daughter of Shanghai* (1937) captures the rebound of yellowphilia’s predilection for good, likable Orientals against the backboard of a yellow-phobia assembled against illegal immigrants. Eugene Franklin Wong highlights that “the combination of Ahn and Wong provided an extraordinarily interesting filmic attempt to develop Asian American characters” (136).

In contrast to Wong and Ahn who successfully adapted to the shifting instances of Oriental recognition in Western society with clear definition of their own identities, Keye Luke portrayed Asian American roles with ambiguity and flexibility. He was born in China and immigrated to the United States and settled down in Seattle with his family as a child. He became a naturalized US citizen in 1944. Luke is most recognized in playing “Number One Son” in Charlie Chan films throughout the 1930s and 1940s. He is also remembered for portraying Kato in the original Green Hornet film shorts of the 1940s and Master Po on the 1970s television series *Kung Fu*. His career can be characterized by his ability of depicting diverse roles of Chinese American laundrymen, domestic servants, mystics and soldiers. The wide range of the roles he portrayed bring about diversity in Luke’s performances; however, it confuses Luke’s definition of his own identity with frequently shifting representations.

This paper will investigate the historical and social characteristics of the Orientals and Asian Diasporas that result in Luke’s representation exemplified with images of Anna May Wong and Philip Ahn. Like 20th Century-Fox, another Charlie Chan studio, Monogram provided an alternative Oriental sleuth, James Lee Wong. Boris Karloff played Mr. Wong in the first five Wong films from *Mr. Wong, Detective* (1938) to *Doomed to Die* (1940). Keye Luke was cast as the lead role, Jimmy Wong in the last entry in the series, *Phantom of China* (1940). The paper will focus on this film and analyze Luke’s representation of shift between his Chinese ethnicity and American cultural citizenship.

Orientalism and Images of the Chinese American

Scholars in Asian American studies’ fields have taken up Edward Said’s theoretical mode to examine the origin and maintenance of American Orientalism. Constituting the back drop of these studies are the intertwined histories of colonization and modernization and their effects. These histories, as Gerald Sim summarizes, present the main depictions of all the native people including Asians to Africans, and Latinos as all of these races and cultures have been enforced at one point or another in the history to participate in the world order of Western industrial

capitalism as workers and slaves, which are not taken as or not taken as normal human beings (aliens non-eligible for citizenship and marginal citizens). The Orientalist scholars did not distinguish among the countries of the region. The focus was on language and literature and the study in the area of philology where the already written texts and other works were translated as a means of studying the culture.

The term “Oriental” was used to define the Middle East, Near East, and Far East built on Said’s explanation standing in strong opposition to those definitions and explanations of Western Europe: “On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things” (Said 49). Said traces this paradigmatic view back to the classical period and argues that it is preserved by imaginative pressure, societies, traditions, civilizations and traditional forms which are ideologically repeated and congenital. Orientalism was powerfully normalized through its incorporation into scientific, geographic and philosophic disciplines. Therefore, Said also establishes a relationship of Orientalism with arts and science to Western command of the Orient. His theory establishes a link to an inter-textual consideration, if ideological addresses to their political and economic cause, European colonial and regal power. Britain, France, and the United States were set aside by Said, because of their political, economic, and authority over military. In his book he speaks about the word “power” which does not simply states to unevenness of cultural or social wealth leaning in their favor, subsequently more of a power which comes exactly from substantial articulation of imperialism; as Gerald Sim specifies, “The strength of Western cultural discourse that Said notes emphasizes the part of colonialism that materially and physically oppresses” (241).

It is consequential to reflect the distinctive characteristics of an Orientalist Western gaze concentrated on East Asia while recognizing the history of shared oppression. The Oriental as a racial class is never disengaged from battles over race, ethnicity, sexuality, sexual orientation and national personality. In Robert G. Lee’s *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*, he contends that “common understanding” (4) give mainstream tradition, the practical judgment skills of “real” Americans, the ability and power to describe race. The “common understanding” of the Oriental as racialized alien originates in the domain of mainstream culture, where struggles over who can turn into a “real American” and where the classifications, representations, refinements, and markers of race are characterized. Regarding the dynamics of race and class, Lee recognizes six depictions of the Oriental: “the pollutant, the coolie, the deviant, the yellow peril, the model minority, and the gook” (8). He indicates that each of these representations was constructed in a specific racial paradigm and historical moment, marked by a shift in class relations accompanied by cultural crisis. With discussion of different stereotypes of the Oriental, Lee emphasizes that the six images, despite their contradictions, not only “coexist but also become mutually reinforcing at critical junctures” because these stereotypes are not only the singular exhibitions of the representations, but as well as recorded talks of race preserved in the historical backdrop of American social emergencies.

The complexity and mobility of the Oriental concept generates an ideological power that allows the racial stereotype to change and reproduce. Lee’s interpretation of the Oriental speaks to Anna May Wong’s three acting-role transitions: from sexually notorious Chinese women, to high society women of equivocal sexual trustworthiness and dubious national fidelity, lastly to her incarnation in the late 1930s as privileged one, sexually reputable Chinese

American women. Her cinematic career emerged at particularly significant historical juncture. Early twentieth-century American Orientalism created a tremendous demand for films with Asian themes and locales. Developing on Europe's long-standing interest with the Orient, through which it utilized the Orient as a mirror for its own particular cravings and aspirations, American Orientalism geographically moved its interest to East Asia, China specifically, as prove by Wong's career experience.

Within the 1920s racial context, Wong's options as a Chinese American actress were limited. "Yellowface", the playing of Asian roles by white actors made up to look Asian, was pervasive until the late 1950s. In the 1920s European American women dominated the main positive Chinese roles, consigning Wong to the tragic or evil orientalist ones. A main example is *The Toll of the Sea* (1922), which revised a standout amongst the most orientalist of all tropes that of *Madame Butterfly*, predicated on the altered signifier of Eastern/female and Western/male stands in for the elements of American dominion in Asia. Wong's character, Lotus Flower, has a child with an American ship's chief (Allen), under the figment that he will convey her to America. Nonetheless, Allen connects with to a white American lady; he takes Wong and his child away to America, and, toward the end of the film, she, still in China, commits suicide. The film's end extends the metaphor to colonial relations, as Nick Browne notes, "The colonial metaphors and tropes—substitute baby for laboring bodies or raw goods that the colonizers ship to the metropole and elsewhere—are rife" (246). Under the regimes of imperialism, white women gained status at the expense of women of color. Hollywood Orientalism and "Yellowface" ameliorated racial anxieties when Asian American bodies were banned.

In her *A Feeling of Belong: Asian American Women's Public Culture, 1930-1960*, Shirley Jennifer Lim distinguishes three noteworthy chronicled movements that laid the basis for Anna May Wong's Chinese American roles by moving the way that Orientals were depicted on the screen. Chinese Americans protested the representation of themselves as "Fu Manchus" in the early 1930s and their liberal force drove malicious Orientals from the screen. Secondly, paradoxically assisted by the 1934 Hays Code, which not only prohibited interracial sexual relations but also forbade ethnic typecasting, Chinese American on-screen characters of the period perceived their parts enhancing in the mid-1930s. Luke identified this decisive moment and initiates his roles transformed in the mid-1930s: "It seems I was always cast as a good guy and only 2 or 3 Oriental parts as nasty since 1934" (Lim 61). Thirdly, and more important, the Sino-Japanese War, triggered in 1931 by Japan's invasion, brought about great sympathy for China and Chinese Americans. Orientals became ethnic-specific so that in films, Chinese American gained an identity distinct from that of the Japanese. The transforming status of China enhanced the worth of Wong's representations of Chinese nationalism. In the 1932 film *Shanghai Express*, Wong depicts a nationalist faithful to the Chinese country, though in *Daughter of Dragon* a year prior, she portrayed a lady who has no national devotions however remains fidelity to her father. During Wong's journey in Europe, she acquired the credentials that embraced her to modernity. She gained upper-class social skills and constructed an identity surpassing Western stereotypes of Asian culture by mediating the international politics of the global film industry. By the late 1930s, Wong started depicting elite and respectable roles. Her British-curved privileged tones anticipated vocal power while playing characters, for example, that of a surgeon in *King of Chinatown* (1939). The European audience and

Eurocentrism inherent in United States racism, as Karen J. Leong highlighted, should be considered when looking at Wong's interpretation of American modernity because her European-inflected cosmopolitanism influenced American fascination with racialized otherness.

Characteristics of Asian Diasporas

Film and media studies generally engage with the concept of Orientalism as a theoretical analysis of Eurocentric representation of cultural or ethnic "others." Diaspora, unlike immigration, is a collective experience and a dispersal of the "others". The collectivity maintains its sense of peoplehood through networks of travel, communication, economic exchange, and cultural interaction that crisscross national borders. Such "lateral axes" of affiliation, as James Clifford calls them, offset and pull against the "axis of origin and return"(22) by grounding one's sense of identity in the dispersed community that exists in the present, rather than in the homeland that exists primarily in memory. Diasporic culture expresses the set of ties that connect a diasporic subject to his or her hostland. In contrast to immigrant discourse, which emphasizes assimilation, diasporic discourse emphasizes what Clifford indicates a process of "selective accommodation" through which a member of diaspora engages with "the economic, political, social, and cultural life of the host country in which he or she resides" (Klein 30). This complex bond to the hostland pulls against both the ties to the homeland and to the diasporic community, thus orienting diasporic culture along yet a third axis. Christina Klein argues, "The 'here' matters as much as the 'there', and the ability to understand the "other" is as valued as the sense of attachment to an aboriginal 'self'"(30). This process of selective accommodation undermines notions of purity and authenticity, insofar as it always entails cross-cultural dialogue to one degree or another. The entanglement with the host land, as Clifford calls it, makes clear that works of diasporic culture are shaped not only by the experience of loss but also by the opening up of new avenues for creativity, exchange, and self-invention.

Most diaspora scholars concentrate on three key features of diaspora. First, after dispersal, there must be a minimum of two destinations. The word "diaspora" implies a scattering, rather than a transfer from the homeland to a single destination; and shares a root with words like "spread" and "disperse" (Tölölyan 6). Second, there must be some relationship and bond to an actual or imagined homeland that provide foundation from which diasporan identity may develop. In HyeSeung Chung's *Hollywood Asian*, Philip Ahn is defined as a representative who successfully negotiated his Korean diasporic identity in the broad context of American film industry and transnational Korean media. The legacy of Ahn in Korean and Korean American studies often focus on two aspects: he was the first actor of Korean descent to become a Hollywood ethnic actor; and he was the eldest son of celebrated national leader Ch'ang-ho Ahn who led the first wave of Korean immigrants.

Third, self-awareness preserves the group's identity. Kim D. Butler emphasizes that consciously maintained and constructed identity has been pivotal to a diasporan community's survival as a social and cultural unit. Thus, while all diasporas can be "imagined communities" defined by Benedict Anderson, only communities imagined in certain ways are diasporas. Butler and Anderson's accentuation of consciousness directly speaks to Shirley Jennifer Lim's research on Chi Alpha Delta, the oldest Japanese American women's cultural interest sorority

founded in Los Angeles during the 1920s. Lim indicates their struggle claiming Americanness by performing modern mainstream culture and demonstrating ethnic pride to those outside the Japanese American community. Members of the sorority mediated their public performances by living like American middle-class women but preserving racial and group identity in order to maintain political mobilization and get emotional support from other Asian American communities.

Members of Chi Alpha Delta adopted hybridity and established a tension between a modern Western image and a “primitive” or “decadent” Asian identity is associated with Kim D. Butler’s interpretation of diasporic identity. He adds a fourth basic feature of diaspora, involving the temporal-historical and social dimension which echoes Robert G. Lee’s emphasis on the dynamics of racial images of Asians in American culture. He points out that nationality is a constantly shifting and contested terrain that “organizes the ideological struggle over hierarchies and inequalities” (6). Once produced in discourses engaging with class, gender and sexuality, the Oriental becomes a participant in the construction and reconstruction of those identities. Philip Ahn’s negotiation between his archetypal screen roles (Japanese villains, Chinese educators, etc) with his off-screen identity as the son of an icon in the pantheon of Korean nationalists mobilizes him as a transnational and cross-ethnic signifier. In *Daughter of Shanghai* (1937), Philip Ahn and Anna May Wong dismantled Oriental stereotypes by playing, respectively, a Chinese American FBI agent and a detective who jointly solve a murder case and emerge as a romantic couple in the final scene. As Hollywood realigned its modes of representation with the public consensus of the “yellow peril” in the wake of Pearl Harbor and the subsequent U.S. involvement in World War II, Ahn played many Japanese impersonator characters. American studies scholar Thomas Doherty notes that Ahn “sacrificed ethnic pride to contribute to the war effort as moral-enhancing Japanese villains” (144).

In contrast to Ahn’s cross-ethnic Japanese roles, both Charlie Chan and Mr. Wong can be viewed as positive representations of Chinese masculinity as they are given a role as legends yet they are additionally regularly viewed by pundits as the substitution of one generalization for another. Taking after the yellow peril-motivated belittling of the Chinese in American society come up with another generalization “the model minority”—which alluded to foreigners who absorbed into standard society. As Sue Fawn Chung clarifies, with Japan’s undeclared war on China all through the 1930s, “the Chinese were seen no more as the oppressors, yet now as the abused, looking for the guide of American” (540-41). This was reflected in movies at the time with the grinning, persevering laborer and other more positive depictions of Chinese characters, including Charlie Chan and Mr. Wong, who fitted all that much into this new origination of the “model minority”. Interpreting Keye Luke’s non-stereotyped representation in *Phantom of Chinatown* (1940) reveals the complexities that are embedded in Mr. Wong as a culturally constructed figure in the context of Americanized Orientalism and Chinese diasporic culture.

Keye Luke’s Dichotomous Representation in *Phantom of Chinatown*

Phantom of Chinatown (1940) begins with Dr. John Benton’s presentation about his archaeological expedition in the Mongolian Desert. During the speech, he drinks from the water bottle on his address table, crumples and passes on. Benton’s last words “Eternal Fire” are the main intimation his Chinese American student

Jimmy Wong and Captain Street of the police division need to deal with. Win Lee, Benton's secretary, uncovers the specialist's withering words allude to a parchment which tells the area of rich oil stores. Wong and Street then start the quest for the executioner among Benton's partners. Another individual from the undertaking group, camera man Charles Fraser, is assaulted in his home, and is discovered harmed by Wong and Street. They are both ignorant of that Mason faked his own demise at the tomb, and that he and Benton's steward, Jonas, want to lay their hands on all relics found in the tomb. Further, they trace Jonas' dead body in a box, and it is considered that he has been harmed, then wounded. The two beginner sleuths figure out how to get an article distributed in the paper, saying Jonas is debilitated with yellow fever in a healing center, to draw the executioner there. Wong wears a wire and mimics Mason at the clinic. Mason himself turns up at the hospital, and also Fraser. Later it shows that Fraser murdered Benton and Jonas to keep the mystery of the oil store to him. The first parchment has now been obliterated by Fraser; however there is still a photograph of it cleared out. After Fraser is detained, the photograph is given to the Chinese government with the goal that they can attempt to discover the oil reserve.

The oriental detective has offered a mass of contradictory features that generated a most remarkable and outstanding screen personality. As it has been discussed that the detective has to exhibit an overall behavioral restraint, Luke's facial expression can be broken down into two main characters: inscrutable and impassive expressions in response of extremely emotional situations and even towards threats to detective himself and secondly, deferential and capitulating smile. The impassive expressions of detective's facial cast suggest wither unflappable levelheadedness or cliché in the character to show oriental mystique. The illustration of central dichotomy in this archetype can be provided by a split between traditionally cryptic and heroic identities. The smile, broad and polite with prominently displaying teeth, portrays the detective as amusing, shrewd and amiable. These expressions make him appear as capitulate even though we know that his hunches will be pursued by him in the case.

The phenomenon of analyzing his character has raised a question related to behavior when archetype of character becomes the archetype of the race. The split between potential to objected and accepted is apparent in his character of Oriental detective. Though the paradigms of model minority and yellow perils do not exist as polar opposites but instead forms a relationship that moves in either direction. He was steeped into Orientalism but learned the Western culture that challenged the white supremacy and galvanized the superiority of Europe. He has shown to operate the colonial enclaves of Chinatown within the white homeland. The serial of Monogram was signified by casting Boris Karloff, a veteran actor as a main role of James Wong, a Chinese detective. The series was not able to measure up to the predecessors who used to produce costly films, but it offered a leading performance that utilized minimum cues in order to indicate the Oriental detective's interpretations like characteristic costuming including silky black hair, three piece suit and boutonniere and specifically deferential style of acting. Karloff's Mr. Wong was primarily relied on association to previous screen roles, the codified dressing patterns and manner in which he interacts to other characters in the play. The qualities of this Chinese detective tend to be more static and obvious as assisted by the fellow artists including a girl and the police detective. After Karloff, the new low budget film series cast a Chinese-American actor, Luke in order to replace Karloff from the leading role of Chinese detective, Mr. Wong that turned out to be the sixth and last film of the series.

The character of Wong has been the most exceptional figure in the history of Western culture. However, in contrast to Oriental detective type, the individual abilities, disposition and attributes are not depicted as a result of specific racial and cultural heritage. In *Phantom of Chinatown*, the detective does not show Oriental professional. However the role, particularly performed by Asian actor, masquerades as Karloff. Several other Oriental detectives and agents have been acknowledged as individual presence. It establishes the Oriental detectives to be the exceptional characters while signifying the anomaly of the figures. He seems to function within the ancestral vacuum. The character of Mr. Wong appears to be at the periphery of social life of Chinese American. It encounters with other Chinese in a professional capacity by utilizing a professional difference always. All other Chinese characters assist him as communal resources in order to aid him in accomplishing his objectives in the case. His household life has not been depicted extravagantly yet he has been employed to live in America as Asian servant. Mr. Wong has been appeared to be a member of both minorities of Chinese culture as well as more privileged class.

The racial and gendered meanings of representing Asian American men are embedded in the construction of manhood and power of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity, as Raewyn Connell defines, "is the configuration of gender practice which embodies.... the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the domination of men and the subordination of women" (77). The high-contrast lighting apply in the first half hour of the film to cover part of Mr. Wong's face or body emphasizes Captain Street as the hegemonic masculine figure who overpowers the leading role because of his masculinity defines "white, middle class, early middle aged, heterosexual men... that sets the standards for other men, against which other men are measured" (Kimmel 124). Accordingly, representation of Mr. Wong, the Chinese man, is excluded from being a part of Captain Street's group who describes him "some Wong fellow"; although he finds the clue and inspires the police's investigation. This alienation fuels re-imagination and re-construction of a homogenous patriarchal identity to protect Asian American's own networks of power. Mr. Wong is aware of Captain Street's suspicion and disrespect after offering his deduction in the police station; while Street is completely ignorant of Mr. Wong's vigilance and sends two policemen to follow him and Win Len. "Be careful! You are going to be followed", Mr. Wong reminds Len when she gets into her car and cautiously observes Street from distance while talking. The high-key lighting is transferred to emphasize Mr. Wong's smug smile, leaving a view of Street's shadow, embodies Luke's re-achievement of masculinity and power allowed by the white men's impotence.

The representation of re-masculinization is also portrayed when Mr. Wong and Captain Street try to chase the criminal in Fraser's house. "Well, you are right, they found poison in that glass", Street confirms Mr. Wong's deduction and reluctantly invites him to participate in the investigation. The awkward and contrived smile on Street's face suggests his unwillingness and fear of the "Chinese fellow" gaining his power of voice. Before the camera itself passes under a doorway into another room, it first shows two characters positioned under it. In this first doorway sub-shot, we see the space referenced by Street's off-screen movement, but we do not (the camera does not) enter that space. The camera remains almost motionless (there is a slight pan left as Mr. Wong changes position) as the three talk about the mysterious criminal, but then begins to track backwards, towards frame left, to show the path taken as Street leads Fraser toward frame left, saying "Where's the film of expedition?" Transitions between the rooms in the apartment are marked by characters walking under or positioned under doorways, thresholds to each

room. The constant movements of the camera and the sound of them rattling around the house insinuate the shifting power. This scene manifests Captain Street—the white, hegemonic masculine figure relinquishes his authority.

Luke's character is a notable exception in the pattern of the famous detective. Yet when any scene of quarrel appears in the film, the film is strictly positioned into a comic tone. Though he has performed as thoroughly an Americanized Chinese detective he is depicted as inept for the detective role. He has been portrayed as a curious figure, though as frequently mentioned, does not render to affirm culturally or provide traditional continuity. Additionally, in all the depictions, Mr. Wong seems to be a supporting character rather than a leading one. However, most complete performativity depiction in the film has been shown by the character safely embodied by the British actor, played by Street. As a whole, the friends, family, and communal contacts for the Oriental detective have been omitted or codified. The role of Luke depicts the Oriental detective as radically associated with the cultural community and rituals. These activities have not only been crucially holding the detective's character in isolation from the culture as solitary activities but also the repetition and selection of activities that reveal the attributable pattern of stereotypes in Western culture for the Chinese population.

Observations, tenacity and resourcefulness are the qualities of the oriental detective that have been characteristically embodied in the non-Western cultural and racial heritage. They have been presented in particularly in cultural ways of perception and state of mind. Western officials lack these characteristics when they request Mr. Wong's help in solving the case. Therefore, his capabilities are placed within the limits of specialized knowledge. Oriental detectives should be prevented from direct competition with his colleagues that are of Western origin, through setting apart certain racial attributes. Luke, as an oriental detective, is very slow, closely observant, methodical and a receptor in contrast to the white policemen who are inclined to show impatience with hastiness and quickness for drawing early conclusions. The archetype is able to act more as a marvel and less as a superior competitor in terms of his Western counterparts as he is armed with his specific traits of culture.

Mr. Wong's extraordinary abilities as an oriental detective that distinguishes him from his counterparts of Western counterparts ultimately result in demonstrative admiration and respect from the other characters in the movie. Instead of antagonistic conflicts, the detective's explicit resistance is more frequently expressed as mockery. He also continuously faces the bemused reactions of the other main characters when proposing a course of action to solve the case. At first glimpse, the amusing trivialization of Mr. Wong's knowledge of and abilities may have been used to substantially temper the reactions to such remarks. Indeed, the detective's indulgence of the offensive would appear deliberately absurd. It is particularly important to consider why such character is indispensable within these narratives, as these characters articulate prevalent stereotypic beliefs through their arguable and careless attitudes. Mr. Wong has provided both a mouthpiece for the biases as well as ways to refute them through his acting. In portraying a more heroic Oriental archetype, he has provided a delicate balancing act between the comic buffoon and a routine including such perspectives.

Luke's character expresses formality through courtesy and politeness towards the others. In this manner, Mr. Wong is alleged to exhibit an unusual but pleasantly nostalgic demeanor, as if his courtesy is somehow disseminated in the hustle and bustle of social interactions in America society. The Oriental detective archetype is

characterized as respectful and courtly within social interactions and reliably courteous to the characters around him. The character is portrayed as distressed due to a murder mystery, as demonstrated by the frustration of the police captain, who seems baffled by the witnesses' emotional turmoil, as displayed through their raised voices and sometimes hysterical conduct. Mr. Wong's emotions are subdued and restrained, even in the presence of physical threats and emotional investment. The civility, formality, and restraint clearly evident in Luke's character provide essential components for his social contacts with other white characters. In order to view the detective as positive, these attributes must be interpreted with different meanings, and these characteristics allow him to force his actions and emotions with fewer of the characters around him.

All of the previous detective series include romantic subplots between two Caucasian characters, but generally the Oriental detectives are not involved with the opposite sex, including Mr. Wong in this film. He has this characteristic in common with the character of Charlie Chan, in that the detective is rarely found alone with female characters. This approach indicates a random approach towards Orientalizing the character, as if the reliability of using an ethnically Chinese actor has no applicability to an Oriental enactment, which can potentially draw attention to the degree of pretense required to establish the detective's portrayal. In this example, we have a genuine actor of Asian origin being signified as a pretender to a thoroughly impersonated enactment by Luke. For example, when Captain Street finds it difficult to interrogate a Chinese laundryman who is arrested for hiding the suspects, Luke has a brief discussion in Chinese with him in a threatening tone and passes information to Street. The laundryman seems to ignore Luke's threat and feels less nervous to tell the truth after his approach. At this point, the plot is a narrative to satisfaction, yet an Asian actor—the Oriental comes face to face with the Hollywood adjusted ego.

The change of name from "James" to "Jimmy" in *Phantom of Chinatown* conveys that the director was aiming to make Luke's character more easy-going and American in personality. Unlike Mr. Wong in the previous movies, who is a foreigner in the country and assisted by the countrymen to solve the crime, Jimmy openly announces a claim to his American identity. As an example, when it is revealed that the Scroll of Eternal Fire locates the precise position of a major oil accumulation somewhere in China, Jimmy describes the difficulties of his Chinese American personality to Win Len alongside Captain Street, in a manner that Karloff's Wong never does, when Jimmy expressed that his sympathies naturally lie with his heritage but in the end he is an American; hence, he could not allow either country to suffer from the risks of the secret. The declaration is the standpoint in qualifying Jimmy Wong as a detective whose identity is as an Asian American, instead of being a yellow-face, Oriental gumshoe. Unlike Karloff's portrayal, Luke is comfortable trading mockery with Captain Street, who is played by the same actor in both the versions. Although Karloff establishes himself as being called Mr. Wong, Luke is introduced as James Lee Wong and is always called by the name "Jimmy." Luke's portrayal of "Jimmy" speaks to his depiction of the "Number One Son" in the Charlie Chan films. In terms of Chinese Confucian traditions, the eldest son in the family takes responsibilities and plays the role of the father. Jimmy is the first person Dr. Benton's daughter approaches for help. She introduces Jimmy as "my father's student and our close friend", holds his hand and cries desperately until Jimmy comforts and promises her to solve the crime. It is interesting to address that Luke breaks down the stereotypical Asian man as the predator of white women through portrayal of a traditional Chinese brother.

With its elusively menacing hints, the name *Phantom of Chinatown* is intended to invoke a wide variety of Orientalist images. Chinatowns have been associated with corruption and immorality for a long time in widespread American culture. Jimmy Wong, as portrayed by Luke, has an agenda, unlike his predecessor. Throughout the film, his character is surrounded by ambiguities, especially relating to his motives, allegiances, and even his means of employment—mysteries that the film will gradually reveal but not fully expose as the narrative unfolds. He mimics the characteristics of the hard-boiled detectives of his era, who stood somewhere on the borderline between felons and cops. He is also not very cooperative towards his white structures that question him. Upon Captain Street asking him what he does for a living, Mr. Wong replies with “research” and maintains the mystery throughout the film, playing close to the vest. Luke’s character is also somewhat mischievous towards his white police structure. Luke’s character not only shakes off a policeman who is following him at one point but also aids Win Len, a prime suspect, in escaping from police surveillance. Luke’s character challenges his white companions at all points, unlike his predecessors. The character’s effective challenge to white power serves as but one illustration of the film’s attempt at cultural clarification.

Luke’s portrayal of Mr. Wong seems to be prepared to burst out of the stereotypes that the audiences have previously been accustomed to. He is not assimilated by a comic character; however, his expressions somehow give a comic sense to his character. His language is plain and contains no humor, but his behavior is rather ambiguous and does not give insight into his character’s motives. He has no particular accent to emphasize his descent, but his appearance is there to represent his heritage. He is Chinese by origin and American by identity. He is the hero—the clever, sharp, and handsome protagonist of the film. It is also imperative that he gets the heroine of the film, Lotus Long, in the end. In the midst of two facets of the old fashions of China and modernized America, he has also transformed himself between the changing generations of pigeonholes. One such instance is when he picks up the telephone and talks to an elder from China, who is a characteristic headman wearing silk robes with a white Fu Manchu. He talks in aphorisms and with admiration toward Mr. Wong. Apparently, the Chinese man is involved in a network named “Friends of China” that has crucial information. This is all quite general, but then he hangs up on the Chinese man and goes on to lead Captain Street in his search for the killer.

However, the movie contains certain stereotypes while dismissing the others. Both of the Mr. Wongs’ portrayals have appointed a coolie houseboy, strengthening their comparative position. This establishes that, if Chinese men are to become equal to the White males, they must keep houseboys of Chinese origin to declare their status within society. The original figure of Mr. Wong possesses distinguishable and distinctive styles of speech, with a thick accent. This feature has also helped in classifying the character as part of non-Western culture, which provides the character with a distinctive trait leading to the ridicule and mockery of these characters. However, Mr. Wong’s accent in the film series seems to be derived from any other non-Western source, rather than the character who portrays this—Boris Karloff. In one scene, Luke’s portrayal of Mr. Wong addresses his houseboy as “Fooley,” to which the boy protests that his name is “Fu.” Wong disregards the notion and tells him that his name is “Fooley” in America, while teasing and correcting his Chinese accent: “Calm down, Fooley, and speak English!”

Language and voice are frequently adopted as the markers of power and American-born status in literature and media. Demonstrating the significance of accent to claiming modernity, the contrast in speaking voices was

apparent in *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931) that starred Anna May Wong and Sessue Hayakawa, a Japanese actor whose career reached a peak during the 1920s. Wong's clear and expressive diction rendered all her lines intelligible, whereas Hayakawa's thick accent made him difficult to comprehend. In the talking era, Hayakawa's voice overshadowed the memorable facial gestures that served him so well in the silent era. Additionally, in all the conversational sequences in the film *King of Chinatown* (1939), Bob Lee (Philip Ahn) and Mary Ling (Wong) speak polished, educated, American English, and Mr. Ling, the traditional Chinese physician herbalist, speaks grammatical English with a slight Mandarin intonation. Wong's deployment of educated American English with British undertones, cultivated during her journey in London, complicates Renee Tajima's assertion that "Asian women in American cinema are interchangeable in appearance and name, and are joined together by the common language of non-language—that is, uninterpretable chattering, pidgin English, giggling, or silence" (309). Through their voice, dress, and actions, both Wong and Ahn show distinct characteristics that are upper class and American. Their class position is reinforced by comparisons with others in the movie.

Afterwards, when the houseboy has captured the intruder, Luke applauds him and, then at that very moment, instructs him to make them tea, proclaiming his status. This exhibits how the Chinese hero with the same roots as the houseboy is inclined towards disrespecting him, just as much as White people would. Luke's portrayal seems like that of a middleman, rather than being the main hero. He often seems led by other characters and is often shown following other people around. At first, he seems skeptical of all other characters and it is impossible to guess where his allegiances lie. Not much is known about his character initially; hence, the audience feels as though his motives could be tainted, as he repeatedly mocks Captain Street. He is just a student in this movie, which shows how he has developed from Jimmy into becoming Mr. Wong. Jimmy was a young and enthusiastic lad who does not confine himself to finding the killer but also gets into a physical altercation with him. He seems quite comfortable with being doubted by Captain Street. This may be representative of the fact that his ethnicity had often put him in similar positions before.

Mr. Wong is well-aware of the racial expectations of his fellow Whites, but he explains to them that although his country of origin is China, he could not possibly allow anything bad to happen to America because that is where he truly belongs. When finds out Len is involved in this case, Mr. Wong forces her to tell the truth, "You'd better tell us what you know; naturally my sympathy is following my heritage, but after all, I am American." He declares that he considers his American identity over his own. This is also exhibited in his action of showing disrespect towards his fellow Chinese. He behaves like an American in body and soul. Unlike his predecessor, Mr. Wong seems quite impressed with Len and pursues her by helping her, although he never expresses his feelings to her. They are bought together with the help of Captain Street, which could depict how Luke's character is not a classical hero but a hard-boiled detective who has extensive exposure to the harsh realities of life and tries to find a balance between his Chinese heritage and American citizenship to advance himself.

Conclusion

The duality of Chinese and American identities is portrayed efficiently in *Phantom of Chinatown* as Luke's Mr. Wong is unwavering to the fact that he is indeed American citizen regardless of his Chinese heritage. Unlike

Anna May Wong who deploys hybridity, which is the integration of Asian and Western cultural traits, Luke distinguishes the binary between the modernized (America) and the primitive (China). It is crucial to recognize a stereotype as “an exaggerated form of representation and the burden of dismantling stereotypes rests with those who perpetuate them” (Chan 68). Luke’s indirect experience of China—simultaneous intimacy with and alienation from China infuses his non-stereotypical and dichotomous representations of Chinese diasporic culture and American modernity.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991. Print.
- Brown, Nick. “The Undoing of the Other Woman: Madame Butterfly in the Discourse of American Orientalism.” *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U.S. Cinema*. Ed. Daniel Bernardi. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1996. 227-256. Print.
- Butler, Kim D. “Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse.” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*. 10.2 (2001): 189-219. Print.
- Chan, Jachinson. *Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee*. New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Chin, Frank. *Bulletproof Buddhists and Other Essays*. Honolulu: Hawaii UP, 1998. Print.
- Chung, Sue Fawn. “From Fu Manchu, Evil Genius, to James Lee Wong, Popular Hero: A Study of the Chinese-American in Popular Periodical Fiction from 1920 to 1940.” *Journal of Popular Culture*. 10.3 (1976): 534-547. Print.
- Chung, HyeSeung. *Hollywood Asian: Philip Ahn and the Politics of Cross-Ethnic Performance*, Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2006. Print.
- Chung, Sue Fawn. “From Fu Manchu, Evil Genius, to James Lee Wong, Popular Hero: A Study of the Chinese-American in Popular Periodical Fiction from 1920 to 1940.” *Journal of Popular Culture*. 10.3 (1976): 534-547. Print.
- Clifford, James. “Diasporas.” *Cultural Anthropology*. 9.3 (1994): 302-338. Print.

Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*. California: U of California, 1995. Print.

Daughter of Shanghai. Dir. Robert Florey. Perf. Anna May Wong and Philip Ahn. Paramount Pictures, 1937. Film.

Denzin, Norman K. *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur's Gaze*. London: SAGE, 1995. Print.

Doherty, Thomas. *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II*. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. Print.

Kimmel, Michael. "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity." *Theorizing Masculinities*. Eds. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. 213-231. 1994. Print.

King of Chinatown. Dir. Nick Grinde. Perf. Anna May Wong and Philip Ahn. Paramount Pictures, 1939. Film.

Klein, Christina. "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Diasporic Reading." *Cinema Journal*. 43.4 (2004): 18-42. Print.

Lee, Robert G. *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1999. Print.

Leong, Karen J. *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism*. Berkeley, CA: U of California, 2005. Print.

Lim, Shirley Jennifer. *A Feeling of Belonging: Asian American Women's Public Culture, 1930—1960*. New York: New York UP, 2006. Print.

Phantom of Chinatown. Dir. Phil Rosen. Perf. Keye Luke. Monogram Pictures, 1940. Film.

Rohmer, Sax. *The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu*. London: Methuen, 1913. Print.

---. *The Return of Dr. Fu Manchu*. New York: Pyramid Books, 1916. Print.

---. *Fire Tongue*. New York: A. L. Burt, 1922. Print.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003. Print.

Sim, Gerald. "Said's Marxism: Orientalism's Relationship to Film Studies and Race." *Discourse*. 34.2-3 (2012): 240-262. Print.

Tajima, Renee. "Lotus Blossoms Don't Bleed: Images of Asian Women." *Making Waves: An Anthropology of Writing by and about Asian American Women*. Eds. Diane Wong and Emily Cachapero. Boston: Beacon P. 318-326. 1989. Print.

The Toll of the Sea. Dir. Chester M. Franklin. Perf. Anna May Wong. Metro Pictures. 1922. Film.

Tölölyan, Khachig. "The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*. 1.1 (1997): 3-7. Print.

Wong, Eugene Franklin. *On Visual Media Racism: Asians in the American Motion Pictures*. New York: Arno P, 1978. Print.