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‘Play Up the Asianness’:

A history of East and Southeast Asian stereotypes in Western comedy and how contemporary ESEA stand-up comedians engage with them

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Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Research in Drama

PhD Drama

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Submitted September 2022

Word count: 91,642

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Shaun May for guiding me with patience, sensitivity, and insightfulness, and Dr Oliver Double for supporting both my research and teaching for so many years. I would also like to thank my examiners, Dr Sophie Quirk and Dr Broderick Chow for their invaluable feedback and consideration in discussing my research with me. Thank you to Jayne Thompson, Dr Roanna Mitchell, and Dr Margherita Laera from the School of Arts for their kindness and providing me with so many opportunities. I could not have done this without the University of Kent's generous funding through the Vice Chancellor's Scholarship.

I am extremely grateful to the performers who kindly contributed interviews and stories to my research, particularly Phil Wang, Evelyn Mok, and Ken Cheng who also contributed to my MA dissertation.

Lastly, I cannot thank my parents and the following people enough for their support: Fergus Macdonald, Rita Chirapiwat, Richard Yuill, Alessandra Hồng Duyên Zavagno, Minna Jeffery, Jimena Meza Mitcher, and Rosemary Foster, who lent me their ears, time, and perspective.

Abstract

This thesis aims to analyse how East Asian stand-up comedians address their race to Western audiences, particularly focusing on the use and impact of stereotypes. The first half of the research (chapters 1 to 3) is dedicated to the history of East Asian stereotypes from 1848 (when large-scale immigration from East Asia to the West first occurred) to present day, creating a genealogy of them and the circumstances that led to them. Each chapter culminates in a case study of how contemporary comedy perpetuated and interacted with those stereotypes, and what this can reveal about perceptions of East Asian people at the time. The purpose of these chapters is to understand the implications of these stereotypes without validating or dismissing them.

The second half of the research is split into three case studies: Margaret Cho, Ali Wong, and Phil Wang. These case studies were chosen as they are representative of a range of identities and shifts in popular culture, while also all directly addressing the impact of East Asian stereotypes on their work in varying ways. These case studies draw from performed material, interviews, and writing to provide an in-depth analysis of the ways in which East Asian stand-up comedians navigate and negotiate with public/audience perceptions of their character based on their ethnicity

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Introduction

It is often said that stereotypes have a ‘kernel of truth’ to them (Blum 2004). This is logical and understandable; where would these ideas of people and groups come from if not from some form of the truth? However, this can be a harmful approach to analysing stereotypes. To go into research expecting genuine commonalities in groups of millions of people that are unique to that group is dangerously close to justifying and dignifying those stereotypes. The ‘kernel of truth’ theory is a blanket simplification of how stereotypes arise, and is often used insidiously to put blame on the victims of stereotyping for others’ misunderstandings. This research will gather and trace stereotypes of East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) people in the West, analysing situations that led to understandings of groups that then became stereotypes; this happened often and can usually be directly traced to a specific set of circumstances. There are undoubtedly stereotypes which come from truthful places, such as characteristics possessed by all humans that happen to be seen as particularly positive/negative when presented in a particular group of people, or factual aspects of a culture that are viewed through the exaggeration of unfamiliar observers. However, this is not to suggest that every ESEA stereotype has a kernel of truth in it. In fact, many of them will show how misinterpreted these situations were, leading to false understandings and therefore inaccurate stereotypes.

In doing this, this thesis aims to analyse how stereotypes interact with and are created by circumstances, without negating the powerful impact that they have had on their targets. The methodology used in this research aims to be Foucauldian in tracing the genealogy of ESEA stereotypes in the West by examining the various production of ‘truths,’ here meaning the power structures and oppression that created societal norms and precedents through which these

stereotypes arose (Foucault 1978, pp. 96-100). Acknowledging both the power structures and methods through which societal perceptions are continued will allow for analyses which examine how they interact with racial stereotypes and comedy, rather than merely how the stereotypes function within the society they arose within. As Coopman (2013, p. 3) articulates regarding genealogies and their origins in Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1978), 'genealogy articulates strange singularities by fashioning concepts that make visible linkages, assemblages, and networks, particularly with an eye to their overall coherence… to help us see how that coherence was contingently composed, since a history of such a thing as sexuality surely show us that any coherence sexuality may still have for us is not an inevitable imposition so much as something that we construct for, or deploy on, ourselves.' That is to say, there is not a predetermined trajectory to unearth but instead a network of material which together create a more coherent understanding. This network is made up of 'many specific 'little' causes, operating independently of one another, with no overall outcome in view' and therefore a genealogy rejects 'grand teleological narratives' and instead charts 'complex developments which 'unwittingly contributed' to the history (Gutting 2019, p. 44.) The approach used will draw from Foucauldian ideas in that it will examine the way in which power and public perception pervade every interaction that includes ESEA people and culture, not only in large political events but in small, casual jokes and dialogue. As Foucault (1997, pp. 139-140) wrote, creating a genealogy 'depends on a vast accumulation of course material' and observing phenomena in 'the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history—in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engage in different roles.'

As such, comedy, which draws from such places, provides these 'different scenes' in which the development of stereotypes can be examined. In doing this, I hope to highlight not

only how racial perceptions arise but how they have been perpetuated even to this day, particularly through humour. Humour, as Mintz (1985, p. 71) writes, 'is a vitally important social and cultural phenomenon… the student of a culture and society cannot find a more revealing index to its values, attitudes, dispositions, and concerns, and that [relatively] undervalued genre of standup comedy… is the most interesting of all manifestations of humour in the popular culture.' The focus of this thesis is therefore to examine the way in which comedy has reflected these cultural values when interacting with ESEA people, and how—in stand-up comedy today—we can discover the nuances of how this history still impacts ESEA people and performers. The works of comedy in this thesis will be entirely in the English Language. This is in order to ensure that I have a full understanding of the original intentions, meaning, and nuance of the works in order to provide the most efficient analyses possible.

This impact is not limited to direct and negative racist portrayals and references to ESEA people and culture. Some of the most pervasive stereotypes of ESEA people are ostensibly "positive" and subtle ones, in which ESEA people are understood to inherently possess qualities such as studiousness, obedience, and respect. As will be expanded upon in this thesis, stereotypes such as the 'model minority' have implications of discrimination as much as racist vaudeville and cartoon caricatures do, particularly as a tool of oppression to discourage unrest when faced with persecution.

This is especially true when examining the great binary gender disparity between racial stereotypes. Though there are many that have been broadly applied to all ESEA people, it becomes clear when examining the trajectory of these stereotypes that the treatment and perception of ESEA men and women vastly differs, largely due to the circumstances through which Western communities first encountered large groups of each demographic. The present-day outcome of these origins is that there is still a huge variation in how the West

understands and interacts with ESEA men and women, and this is particularly reflected in comedy. This can especially be seen when ESEA stand-ups begin performing to larger audiences, as they are faced with a long history of stereotypes that often interfere with their perceived ability to be on stage and perform comedy. These performers must therefore navigate a minefield of stereotypes aimed at them from the moment they appear before the audience.

This thesis is split into two sections: the historical roots of stereotypes, and their impact on comedians today. The first section (chapters 1 to 3) traces the roots of ESEA stereotypes from 1848 when large-scale immigration from ESEA to the West first occurred and follows the changes they underwent through historical events to 1979. The reason for this extended lead-up to the analysis of ESEA stand-up comedians in present day is that there has thus far not been a substantial amount of academic writing on ESEA stereotypes in comedy. In order to analyse ESEA comedians in the present day there must first be a base understanding of what preconceptions, stereotypes, and implications they are immediately faced with by virtue of being on stage and ESEA. The Foucauldian approach to research is particularly important here in charting the changes—and often lack of changes—that have occurred in Western perceptions of ESEA ('truths') and how they occurred (the production of said 'truths') as well as how they permeated comedy across this time. The first half of the research therefore aims to establish the history of how ESEA people and culture have been represented in comedy and why, before it can move on to an in-depth analysis of modern stand-up comedy. This segment additionally attempts to create an analysis of stereotypes without naturalising them or diminishing their lasting impact; by this I mean to prevent the dismissal of stereotypes as acceptable or unimportant and highlight their impact without giving them any more power.

The focus of each of the historical chapters is how events and circumstances created shifts in Western understanding of ESEA people and cultures, rather than an analysis of the

historical events themselves. There are sections in which large periods of history are only briefly touched upon in order to maintain focus on the shifts in public and cultural perceptions. These sections bring together archival interviews, public opinion polls, and contemporary media to form a picture of what people felt towards and thought of ESEA people at the time, and how they expressed those sentiments in public spaces. Chapter 1 particularly draws on testimonies compiled to present to the Senate of California regarding the impact of Chinese immigration on communities, in which a range of people were interviewed on their opinion regarding the topic. This is supplemented with excerpts of writing from the time, such as work from Mark Twain and Sax Rohmer's character of Fu Manchu. These works illustrate the attitudes of Western communities on interacting with large numbers of ESEA people for the first time, as well as highlight the differences in how men and women were first perceived. Chapter 2 includes media but largely focuses on legislation that reflected the attitudes towards ESEA people and statistical data regarding the way in which they were treated. This data helps to chart the impact of WWI and WWII on the way in which ESEA people were treated and how this period saw the fear of 'Yellow Peril' change nationalities depending on the main conflicts at the time. Chapter 3 largely utilises newspaper articles reacting to major events as they unfolded to follow the trajectory of new perceptions of ESEA people, and how older stereotypes reemerged in new contexts. Additionally, public opinion polls are incorporated to illustrate more precisely how people felt about the conflicts in ESEA that the West became involved in, and the shifting attitudes towards this involvement. Overall, there is a focus on these primary sources to chart the changing (and returning) stereotypes of ESEA people at the time. There are few secondary sources here, especially where analyses of historical events are concerned as they often do not interact with stereotypes. Secondary sources are largely only incorporated when primary sources have been unavailable or when existing analyses of the resources have already

articulated the implications of the material that I have also found. For example, Moon (2005) is heavily utilised in the Chapter 1 case study as it is one of the only pieces of academic writing that I have found on the presence of ESEA performers in US vaudeville, and provides details on primary sources that are not available to me as well as the social impact that they had.

Each chapter concludes with a case study, analysing comedic media from each period that encapsulates the public perceptions of ESEA. The choices for these case studies may at first appear disjointed; none of them are stand-up comedy material, as they are a vaudeville sketch script, a comparison of George Formby songs with a Bugs Bunny short film, and an episode of the television series *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983). However, my reasons behind these choices are simple: firstly, stand-up as it is recognised today did not exist across most of the time which these chapters cover, and in the period where stand-up was forming there are no recordings (to my knowledge) which include substantial references to ESEA people or culture. Secondly, each of these case studies is a format of comedy which is representative of their respective time periods; vaudeville was one of the most popular and accessible forms of comedy available during the first time period (1848-1914), comedy songs and cartoons in the second (1914-1945), and television/sitcoms in the third (1945-1979). I believe that each of these case studies effectively captures the style, structure, and references of comedy in those periods. They all allow for in-depth analyses of the implications, preconceptions, and impact of racial stereotypes and how they have been reflected and perpetuated through comedy. The case studies of the historical segments of the research will focus primarily on comedy performances and how the stereotypes of that era were expressed and experimented with via comedic structures.

It is important here to note that this research inevitably has its limitations. As an area of research with little existing writing but with many key academics addressing the history of ESEA

identity in the West and how it is performed (e.g. Shimizu, Yeh and Thorpe), and the impact of race on comedy (Weaver), the aim of this thesis is to create a groundwork for future, more in-depth research. Consequently, there are key areas which are not expanded upon here as I was not able to give them due consideration within this piece of writing and do not wish to do a disservice to.

For example, the focus on white, Western representations of ESEA people aims to highlight widely held perceptions of ESEA communities and how they permeate and are perpetuated by popular culture. However, this means there is a lack of attention given to pieces of performance outside of stand-up comedy by ESEA people except where those have impacted wider white, Western perceptions. There is mention of the Asian American Civil Right movement and the subsequent rise in ESEA-led performance practices, as well as how these interact with the later case studies, but this is an area which is not expanded upon greatly in order to maintain the focus of the research. The first sections on historical contexts and representations are also Sino-centric, as a history of trade and indentured labourers from China created a pretext for Western understanding that was further informed by a largely Chinese influx of free labourers. The focus on Chinese history and people in these sections is at the expense of experiences settling from other countries, as well as the long and complex history of British and American colonialism and its impact on ESEA immigration to the West. While there is mention of other groups and their experiences, this focus is maintained in order to capture the broader and more widespread perceptions of the time. My intention is for the research in this thesis to provide a basis for more nuanced and in-depth writing regarding the areas which have been excluded here.

The second section of the thesis is formed of three case studies, which span 1980 to the beginning of 2022: Margaret Cho (active from 1982), Ali Wong (active from 2005), and Phil

Wang (active from 2010). These three comedians have been chosen not only as they are the most prominent in their field at the time of writing, but in order to incorporate a range of perspectives and identities within ESEA stand-up comedians. Margaret Cho is an essential figure, as she was the first ESEA stand-up comedian to become successful at a national (USA) and international level, and was therefore the first time many audiences saw an ESEA person performing comedy, particularly comedy that addressed being ESEA from their own perspective. Cho is also a queer woman, and often incorporates these aspects of her identity as well as being Korean American into her material. Ali Wong is similarly one of the early ESEA stand-up comedians to rise to prominence, reaching global renown around the same time that many other aspects of ESEA culture were emerging in Western popular culture such as *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), K-Pop, and *Fresh Off The Boat* (2015-2020). Wong's most renowned and accessible performances (*Baby Cobra* (2016) and *Hard Knock Wife* (2018)) were filmed while she was heavily pregnant, and her material incorporates gender roles, sexuality, and race as well as being Asian American. Phil Wang is a more recent comedian, often discussing being a mixed race man (British Malaysian) in Britain while also discussing masculinity, philosophy/morality, and growing up both in Malaysia and the UK. These case studies offer an insight into how widespread the impact of long-standing stereotypes of ESEA people and culture still is for comedians today, while also charting the changes that have occurred even just in the last two decades.[1]

These case studies closely analyse excerpts from these comedians' work, their personas onstage, and the topics that they discuss in order to examine the impact that the

[1] I am conscious that these case studies, while aiming to cover a range of identities and experiences, only includes cisgender performers. In recent years, ESEA performers who identify as non-binary and transgender as well as those who perform drag have emerged with material that often addresses the highly gendered, binary stereotypes that have long existed about ESEA people. In particular, Patti Harrison, Jes Tom, Jujubee, and ShayShay have all created comedic work.

history of stereotypes and their use in comedy—laid out in chapters 1 to 3—has to this day. The excerpts used have been chosen as they are reflective of the specific style and approach that these comedians employ. The Foucauldian approach is also applied here in the unpacking of how interactions on every level, from personal to political, interacts with the perpetuation of power while also reflecting on existing power structures.

The title of this thesis is taken from an interview with Phil Wang, where he is discussing his decision to selectively 'play up' his Chinese and Malaysian heritage in order to celebrate being the first ESEA comedian on the popular comedy panel show *Taskmaster* (2015 to present day) (Appendix F). I have chosen this quote as I believe it encapsulates several key elements of this thesis. Firstly, that there is an idea of what 'Asianness' is that is not the same as how an ESEA person/comedian would naturally behave or present themselves. This ambiguous quality of 'Asianness' is something that is constantly changing, and this thesis aims to trace the patterns of public understanding of 'Asianness' across the last two centuries. The performance of 'Asianness' also linked closely with the recurring idea of mimicry and its use by performers across the entire time period covered in this thesis. Drawing from Homi Bhabha's (1984) concept of mimicry, there is a wealth of interesting performances which utilise the ambivalence of performing stereotype and the interplay between reinforcing and subverting the structures of power which uphold those stereotypes. Secondly, the quote suggests that, as a comedian can 'play up' to their 'Asianness,' there is space for them not to do so. This is a reflection on the latter half of what this thesis covers, which is how contemporary ESEA stand-up comedians engage with the history of racial stereotyping and how it affects them. The idea that they could choose not to perform in a manner directly linked to their ethnicity is certainly a very recent one, and its development as ESEA representation in popular media has grown is reflected in the case studies spanning chapters 4 to 6. I use the term 'engage' here and in the title to indicate

that the comedians are incorporating ESEA stereotypes into their material in their own styles, and have control over the manner in which they utilise them. However, this is not to suggest that there is an option for them to completely ignore and not engage with those stereotypes; I believe that the research and interviews conducted very clearly show that ESEA stereotypes are still impactful for ESEA performers, regardless of how blatantly they feel that is. The fact that invoking certain imagery, language, and names can still be understood by audiences as references to ESEA stereotypes, even if those audiences do not believe that they are true, is indicative of this.

Application of Theories of Humour

The three main theories of humour (superiority, relief, and incongruity) are frequently mentioned in this thesis. For clarity, I will briefly expand upon these here. Superiority theory proposes that people laugh because they are made to feel that they are better than someone else; this could be the person making the joke, a hypothetical person in the joke, or even a past version of the person laughing and in aspects moral, psychological, or physical. While this theory was first articulated by Plato, this thesis particularly draws from Bergson's (2005, p. 66) idea of laughter as a social deterrent. Bergson suggests that people laugh in order to signal that the person or behaviour they are laughing at is unwanted in society, and by laughing at it they are more socially acceptable and aware than the target of the joke. It additionally encourages the person being laughed at to conform. Bergson's hypothesis also applies to the other theories of humour, but at its core relies on a superiority/inferiority dynamic.[2] Closely linked is Mintz's (1985, p. 74) notion of the comedian as a *'negative exemplar*,' embodying the opposite of 'the

[2] Bergson's theory additionally discusses 'mechanical inelasticity' as a quality which is laughed at, meaning humans who display a lack of flexibility or cannot adapt to situations are the target of humour (Bergson 2005, p. 5). This quality does appear in the case studies for chapter 1 and 3, particularly in *The C**n and the Ch*nk*, but are not the focus of the application of Bergson's ideas to this analysis.

expectation of normal behavior' in order to provoke laughter. These theories are particularly crucial in this thesis as the changes in which behaviours and demographics were made the target of these jokes is revealing of what the social standards were at the time.

Relief theory suggests that laughter is created when the energy that is usually channelled into tension is released because the cause of tension is removed. While I refer to Freud's understanding of this theory, which is that people hold tension while repressing socially unacceptable thoughts that are released when jokes allow them to laugh at those thoughts, the validity of this has been challenged within empirical psychology (Critchley 2002, p. 75). However, following Wittgenstein's interpretation of Freud, I believe it is still productive to understand it as a metaphorical description rather than any empirical occurrences within the human body (Cioffi 1998, p. 277). The sense of relief after someone has joked about something that was an unspoken source of tension is a familiar one that Freud appears to be describing. This theory is relevant to this thesis in that there are moments of tension (both existing and constructed by the comedian) in which racial implications are drawn on and then either subverted or directly addressed in a way which allows the audience to laugh and release that tension. This is particularly revealing of how strong an understanding the audience (and by extension the culture they live in) has between demographics and their associated stereotypes.

Incongruity theory, which has origins in Aristotle's and Kant's writings, asserts that laughter arises from unexpected or contradictory elements being combined, such as the traditional 'set-up' and 'punchline' joke structure where an expectation is created and then subverted. However, it is also widely seen in less structured gags that nonetheless either create or rely on existing assumptions that it then overturns. This theory is also revealing of social standards and references, as the premise reveals what is inferred or expected of demographics that can then be subverted. In particular, Weaver (2010, pp. 149-153) argues that 'anti-racist

reverse discourse' is utilised by comedians who are ethnic minorities in the cultures they perform in. This is the idea that comedians can take existing racist ideas and references and use them to instead make racism the target of humour. Similarly to Bergson, this idea does not solely relate to one theory of humour, but where Bergson's notion of laughter as a social deterrent largely relied on a superiority/inferiority relationship, Weaver's anti-racist reverse discourse relies on there being an existing association that can be subverted.

The theories of humour are utilised in the case studies where they enhance the analysis by revealing the implications within comic structuring. However, they are not heavily incorporated into the analysis as my aim is to highlight how socio-political change and public perception are reflected in contemporary media, rather than dissect the workings of comedy. In chapters 3 to 6, they are incorporated when they provide further insight into the analysis of the impact of stereotypes on the performers and material, but are not the main focus of these sections. The theories of humour are a tool in my analysis rather than a core focus of it.

A Note on Terminology

There are three elements to the term ESEA that need clarification at this point. Firstly, something that has recently come to be more widely discussed and acknowledged in various circles is the acknowledgement of Southeast Asia as its own separate area that faces a unique set of prejudice in that the people from it are largely mistaken for East Asians while they feel that their experiences are very much different and based in their identity as Southeast Asian. The British East Asians in the Theatre and Screen industry group (BEATS) have recently updated their title to British East & South East Asians in the Theatre and Screen industry in order for Southeast Asian members 'to feel welcome and represented in the advocacy [they] do.

This has always been the case, but this is another way to show it, share it, and mean it' (BEATS 2020). My current stance on this is that the term 'East Asia' covers both East and Southeast Asia, and Southeast Asia is included in East Asia, but that ESEA provides a specificity and clarity that merely saying 'East Asia' does not. The term 'East Asia' is not considered outdated or offensive, and many of the ESEA comedians who I interviewed refer to themselves as 'East Asian,' but the term ESEA offers more clarity and representation. BEATS seem to corroborate this with their message—that they have always gone hand in hand but there needs to be an acknowledgement of the difference. This thesis covers East Asia in its entirety, including Southeast Asia, and the latter half of the research will further delve into these differences, which is why Southeast Asia has been included in this title. The term ESEA (East and Southeast Asia[n]) has been used to replace 'East Asia' in order to be more inclusive and provide visibility for a group that is already underrepresented. Geographically, I mean for this term to cover all ASEAN countries (in alphabetical order: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) as well as China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, and Taiwan.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that this thesis places more focus on East Asia than Southeast Asia, with the exception of chapter 3 when discussing the Vietnam War and the impact of soldiers in Southeast Asia on how women were treated and perceived, and that Ali Wong and Phil Wang both consider themselves in some ways Southeast Asian. However, Ali Wong's identity is very strongly rooted in her Asian American identity as well as the fact that she is half-Chinese, half-Vietnamese, while Phil Wang refers to himself more as Chinese-Malaysian (having grown up in Malaysia but his family being of Chinese descent) rather than Malaysian. The reasoning behind this greater focus on East Asia is that, culturally, the influence of East Asia has informed perceptions of both East and Southeast Asian people in the West, and they

are often grouped together in homogenised stereotypes, cultural understanding, and assumed characteristics. This is due to a mixture of circumstances, from a longer history of cultural exchange to a greater number of East Asian population than Southeast Asian in the West. There is also undoubtedly colourism which gives East Asian people more privilege in both ESEA and the West and contributes to their greater influence, as is discussed in later chapters.

With these elements in mind, my decision to continue using the term ESEA instead of East Asian is this: firstly, that there are enough sections of this research devoted to Southeast Asia that I cannot comfortably remove the distinction from the term only to add it back in for those sections. Secondly, most of the historical references to East Asia would have included Southeast Asians as well, and to include them while writing from my current perspective affords some visibility to the groups within the homogenised.

The final point regarding this terminology is to acknowledge that the term ESEA is an incredibly UK-based term. To describe oneself as ESEA here is somewhat equivalent to the term ‘Asian American’ in the USA, but with a different history (particularly in terms of ‘Asian American’ origins in the Civil Rights Movement as expanded upon in chapter 3) and with a specificity that excludes South Asia due to the difference in the cultural understanding of ‘Asian.’ (In the UK, ‘Asian’ is widely understood to mean South Asian, whereas in the USA it refers to ESEA.) I have decided to use a UK-centric term partially due to my own positioning as a Southeast Asian academic based in the UK; it is a term that is often applied to me and therefore there is a sense of being comfortable in utilising it. The term ‘Asian,’ as it is understood differently in many places, creates a lack of clarity for me while the term ESEA is descriptive which prevents misunderstanding. Lastly, the term ESEA is applicable to people who are East and Southeast Asian whether based in ESEA or in the West, which the term ‘Asian American’ is not.

Chapter 1: The Rise of Yellow Peril and ESEA Immigration to the US and UK, 1848-1914

Pre-existing Notions

The exposure of Western, English-speaking cultures to ESEA people on a large scale began in 1848, at the start of the California Gold Rush in the USA and with the influx of a number of Chinese seamen being left in London during this period. It must be acknowledged that multiple ESEA groups were present in the West, in particular the Philippines which became a colony of the USA during this period as well as Korean and Japanese immigrants which will be expanded upon later in this chapter. Additionally there was a history of indentured labourers working in both the USA and UK due to the countries' respective histories of colonialism, which will also be addressed further in this section. However, this chapter will be focusing specifically on Chinese immigrants during this time period, as the most exposure that white Americans and Britons had to ESEA culture came from Chinese culture and peoples, therefore shaping their perception of ESEA to be Sino-centric. This was also largely due to China being a major trading partner with Western countries, exporting goods such as silk, tea, and porcelain around the world. Western merchants also frequented the ports of China and interacted with the culture there, bringing back stories of what they saw and the people they encountered. Through this, the Western world had already established certain perceptions of China prior to the arrival of the Gold Rush immigrants.

The West had an established trade relationship with China, importing goods that were widely considered luxuries. The exoticism of materials such as intricately patterned fabrics and delicate porcelain made them incredibly valuable, partially due to them being considered ‘curiosities,’ but also because ‘physical distance from the place of production enhanced their value’ (Berg 2004, pp. 96, 99). The association between those seen socially using, wearing, or consuming these products further cemented their place in high society (ibid). This reverence for Chinese goods played a large part in creating an image of China as a country full of riches, culture, and opulence prior to any interaction with Chinese immigrants. In England this idealised version of China was further reinforced by a number of prominent Chinese visitors to the UK prior to 1848; the first recorded Chinese person to visit England was Shen Fuzong, a Catholic Chinese man who was part of a ‘propaganda tour’ of Europe to promote the interests of the Jesuits’ China missions’ (Benton and Gomez 2008, p.23). Shen was received by James II, Louis XIV, and many intellectuals on this tour, making him a prominent and well respected guest in the countries he visited. While in England, he worked in Oxford to aid in cataloguing the Bodleian Library’s Chinese collection, offering insight into the Chinese language (ibid). Many of the early encounters of Chinese people in England were of a similar nature with Chinese philosophers and artists, creating an ‘idealised’ image of China (ibid, pp. 23-24). While the interest in China eventually waned when India came to the forefront of cultural awareness in the late eighteenth century, there still existed a history of cultural exchange with the higher classes of China in the UK. The West’s understanding of China was further developed by the Qing dynasty’s attitude towards the West.

China had long been attempting to isolate itself from the Western world in order to preserve its culture, but the greatest motivation for this was that the ruling Qing dynasty feared that exposure to Western culture would bring about revolution and pressure to change. Since its

establishment in the mid seventeenth century, the Qing dynasty had attempted to reduce trade with other countries and emigration, even imposing a death sentence on anyone who fled the country and anyone who aided them (Chang 2003, pp. 10-12). By the nineteenth century, the impact of this had a devastating effect on China's status as a powerful nation. Other countries had seen industrial revolutions and technological advancements that China had isolated itself from, making it fall behind. This made itself most apparent during the First Opium War (1839-1842) when the British Royal Navy defeated the Qing Empire, seizing Hong Kong and other key ports in the Treaty of Nanking (1842) as reparations for the illegal opium Chinese authorities had seized from foreign smugglers. From this, the West additionally perceived China as being an inferior power, and by association that Chinese people were weaker willed and submissive.

Further instability for China came from the huge disparity between its working and upper classes; eighty to ninety percent of its population were peasants living in poverty while its elite Manchu class were living decadent lives above the law (Chang 2003, pp. 12-14). From these wildly differing lifestyles came two extreme views of China by the West: one, that it was a prosperous, culturally wealthy country and, two, that it was an impoverished, struggling nation of squalid people. These perceptions shaped the ways in which Chinese immigrants were integrated—and not—into American society upon their arrival, and the disparity was particularly seen in the different ways in which male and female immigrants were treated.

Outside of these perceptions of China as a country, there was also an existing perception of ESEA people through the stereotypes associated with indentured workers. Though these stereotypes were applied to people from many different backgrounds, particularly South Asian, Caribbean, and South American, 'the majority of [them] were shipped from China' (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2023). These labourers were often taken against their

will and forced to live in unsuitable conditions, particularly brought to perform manual labour in European colonies and the USA for extremely low wages (ibid; Gandhi 2013). The term ‘coolie’ was often used as a slur against these people, and came with connotations of being low status, uneducated, and willing to work for much less money. This last characteristic in particular carried over when indentured labour began to be replaced with immigrants in the Gold Rush in the USA, and the term ‘coolie’ continued to be applied to them though they were no longer indentured labourers. In Europe, indentured labourers continued to perform work until 1920, particularly in their colonies. The perception of these people working for lower wages will be expanded upon further in this chapter, but largely represents the roots of two opposing views of ESEA people: that they are easily taken advantage of due to their willingness to work for less, and/or that they are maliciously undermining white labourers by taking their jobs by asking for less pay.

First Impressions

The arrival of Chinese immigrants brought about a shift in Western perceptions of ESEA peoples as they now lived and worked alongside each other. The circumstances of this first wave of immigrants brought about the beginning of many stereotypes that still exist today, with its roots very closely linked with how the Chinese immigrants attempted to integrate themselves into society and how the US responded. This section will be split between male and female immigrants as their experiences were vastly different, with different catalysts for emigrating and following different trajectories across this period of time[3]. In the first section, the lives of and

[3] This is not to say that this thesis wants to reiterate or reinforce the idea of binary genders. It is undeniable that the experiences of Chinese immigrants were hugely impacted by what gender they were and the West’s expectations of those genders. The clearest way to lay out these experiences is therefore to look at the differences by gender, where male and female were the predominant genders involved.

reaction to Chinese men will be explored through the example of an excerpt of Mark Twain's book *Roughing It* in which he describes Chinese locals through his white, Western perspective. The second section will use testimonies regarding local attitudes towards ESEA immigrants, collected from a range of California residents for *Chinese Immigration: The Social, Moral, and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration* (Shay 1876) to examine Chinese women's place in American society.

Men 1848-1882

The wave of emigration from China in the US was almost entirely male during this period; in 1850 there were only two Chinese women in California with a male to female ratio of 39,450 Chinese men per 100 Chinese women (Hirata 1979, p. 5). Indeed, the ratio of men to women remained at least 10 to 1 until the 1920s (ibid). This immigration of Chinese men was directly triggered by the discovery of gold in California, but this was not the only motivation for leaving China at the time. Male children were highly favoured in China due to their potential to undertake more manual labour, often being sent away from their families to work and send money home (Hirata 1979, p. 4). This became especially important during times of war and famine, and the promise of wealth pushed many to travel further than ever before to obtain it—all the way to *Gum Saan* (Gold Mountain), the name many used when referring to the USA.

Upon arriving in the USA, most of these men worked in the mines until they had saved enough to return home, as many had wives and children to return to. Families were almost never brought overseas with the labourers, as they felt that there was too great a potential for danger. Their wives were also usually overseeing domestic and ceremonial duties back home in their place that meant they were unable to emigrate as a family unit (Tong 2000, p. xvi).

However, many were successful in finding long term employment that kept them in the USA, or merely did not have family to return to.

This basis for Western understanding of ESEA communities was similarly echoed in the UK. The first large-scale immigration of Chinese labourers in the UK began slightly earlier, at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the East India Company began recruiting Chinese seamen to replace the English labourers who had left to join the Royal Navy (Benton and Gomez 2008, p. 24). While many Chinese workers had come and gone when their ships had stopped by English ports prior to this period, by 1848 many ship owners during this period abandoned their crew in London. Combined with a number of workers who had left their ships, there was now a growing community of Chinese labourers unable to leave and therefore seeking work in London, creating a very similar environment to California in 1848.

This overwhelming ratio of ESEA men to women in both the US and UK is the basis for one of the long-standing stereotypes of ESEA men that still exists today, which is the idea that they are inherently asexual. Western communities saw large numbers of ESEA men with no female companions, likely not knowing or understanding that many had wives and families in China, and the perception was therefore that ESEA men were either uninterested in or unable to form romantic or sexual relationships. This contributed to the feminised view of ESEA men which formed due to several factors as expanded upon below.

The two countries saw the Chinese communities grow in major port cities, where settled immigrants began filtering into the job market as well as setting up their own businesses, accommodation, and areas for leisure. In the USA this was done in large areas, incorporating residential and business buildings to build their own towns; in London the immigrants were extremely concentrated, packed into only a few streets such that accommodation was not incorporated into the business areas they used (Benton and Gomez 2008, p. 25). Despite these

differences, these areas became what we now recognise as ‘Chinatowns,’ where Westerners could observe and experience Chinese lifestyles and culture. Due to the concentration of Chinese people into such small spaces within Western society, it is very likely that the caricature of Chinese culture was influenced by the way in which these Chinatowns and the people in them adapted to the resources available in a new cultural and literal landscape.

In order to more closely analyse the way in which Chinese men were viewed by Western communities, I will use an excerpt from American author Mark Twain’s book *Roughing It*, published in 1872, to structure my analysis. Though this extract focuses primarily on Chinese men in the USA, the stereotypes that originated here were also present in the UK, arising from the similar circumstances the Chinese immigrants were in. The locals’ attitude towards the Chinese labourers who remained in their cities can be seen in this extract, in which Twain details his observations of the Chinese labourers on the West Coast of the USA:

> *‘Of course there was a large Chinese population in Virginia[4]—it is the case with every town and city on the Pacific coast. They are a harmless race when white men either let them alone or treat them no worse than dogs; in fact they are almost entirely harmless anyhow, for they seldom think of resenting the vilest insults or the cruelest injuries. They are quiet, peaceable, tractable, free from drunkenness, and they are as industrious as the day is long. A disorderly Chinaman is rare, and a lazy one does not exist.’*

From this section of the extract we can see the emergence of a stereotype that is still held against ESEA peoples today; that of the ‘Model Minority,’ The idea of the ‘Model Minority’ is that there is a specific ‘type’ of immigrant that should be ‘allowed’ into white communities/countries (Chow 2017). Those immigrants need to be a ‘productive’ (in a capitalist understanding) member of society, usually through holding a job or being highly skilled, as well

[4] Though Virginia is a state on the East Coast of the USA, I believe Twain is referring here to Virginia City in Nevada, which is on the West Coast. Twain wrote for the Virginia City-based newspaper *Territorial Enterprise* from 1862 to 1865.

as subservient. This subservience can vary from being law-abiding to tolerating abuse. The logic behind the need for this subservience stemmed from the idea that it was a privilege to be accepted into Western society, one that was worth tolerating injustices for. This in turn came from the belief that white, Western society was more advanced, beneficial, and enjoyable than any other. With ESEA immigrants, it has usually been believed that remaining in ESEA would mean living under a primitive rule of either backwards dynasties, communism[5], or generally intolerable living conditions, therefore the immigrants should be thankful to even be allowed into Western countries. The term 'model minority' itself did not become popularised until the late 1960s when the African American and Asian American Civil Rights Movements began. The term has a history of being used as a way to pit minority groups against each other, in particular attempting to promote anti-Blackness by comparing Black communities to supposedly hard working and tolerant ESEA communities. While my use of the term predates its political use, it is important to note that its roots stretch this far back, particularly as this chapter utilises a case study which focuses greatly on the comparison of Black and ESEA stereotypes at the time.

Chinese people were seen as 'model minorities' due to their willingness to work, even for lower pay in worse conditions. This willingness came from their circumstances—most of them were only there to work, and only for short periods of time, which made them appear extremely work-oriented to the local communities. However, even when these circumstances changed, the idea of the 'model minority' persisted and adapted; it was a stereotype that would be periodically 'recast' depending on the political atmosphere and when it would be useful (Chow 2017). For example, Chow (ibid) outlines how it has often been used to compare the racism experienced by different ethnicities, pointing out that if Asian immigrants 'overcame' racism through hard work to become model citizens then other ethnicities experiencing racism have not been trying

[5] This is expanded upon in chapter 3.

hard enough to ‘overcome’ the racism aimed at them. Many of the qualities that have been associated with ESEA peoples have existed since immigration began, but the attitude towards these qualities have changed according to the political climate surrounding them. This can be seen in the ‘model minority’ stereotype as well as many of the following ones.

‘So long as a Chinaman has strength to use his hands he needs no support from anybody; white men often complain of want of work, but a Chinaman offers no such complaint; he always manages to find something to do. He is a great convenience to everybody—even to the worst class of white men, for he bears the most of their sins, suffering fines for their petty thefts, imprisonment for their robberies, and death for their murders. Any white man can swear a Chinaman’s life away in the courts, but no Chinaman can testify against a white man. Ours is the “land of the free”—nobody denies that—nobody challenges it. [Maybe it is because we won’t let other people testify.] As I write, news comes that in broad daylight in San Francisco, some boys have stoned an inoffensive Chinaman to death, and that although a large crowd witnessed the shameful deed, no one interfered…’

Chinese and ESEA people were seen to be very easily taken advantage of for several reasons; firstly, because they were ‘model minorities’ they would tolerate abuse in exchange for being allowed to remain in the country. Secondly, they were seen as vulnerable due to their lack of rights, as seen in the quote above—‘no Chinaman can testify against a white man.’ This amplified many of the stereotypes that emerged regarding ESEA peoples; inability or unwillingness to fight back manifested in the belief that ESEA men were physically weak as well, despite them carrying out the same physical tasks (if not more, as they were paid less therefore secured more work) as their white counterparts.

‘The chief employment of Chinamen in towns is to wash clothing… The house servants, cooks, etc., in California and Nevada, were chiefly Chinamen. There were few white servants and no Chinawomen so employed. Chinamen make good house servants, being quick, obedient, patient, quick to learn and tirelessly industrious. They do not need to be taught a thing twice, as a general thing. They are imitative. If a Chinaman were to see his master break up a centre table, in a passion, and kindle a fire with it, that Chinaman would be likely to resort to the furniture for fuel forever afterward.’

As seen in this excerpt, one of the main occupations that Chinese men had in the US was domestic work. This further contributed to the perception of Chinese men as emasculated, as they were seen to be doing work typically carried out by women: cooking and cleaning for households. It also solidified the belief that Chinese men were inferior to white men, as they were willing to do work that was seen as below white men (Wong 2013, p. 280). Chinese men gravitated towards this work as there were more vacancies due to white men being reluctant to carry out domestic jobs. There was especially demand for laundry services near mines, as labourers without families or spouses 'were willing to pay relatively high prices' for their clothes to be washed (Wang 2013, p. 59). This is interesting to note as the difference between the 'masculine' hard labour of mining and the 'feminine' domestic labour of laundry can be seen in small areas and communities, creating a particularly clear contrast and likely acting to further reinforce stereotypes. After the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, when being a labourer did not grant access into the country, opening businesses from their existing skill sets gave them 'merchant status' that allowed them to obtain visas (Wang 2004, p. 58). Their ability to cook and clean grew from an employable trait to the basis for restaurants and hand-laundry/laundromats being set up, which became 'perhaps the two occupations that are most associated with Chinese immigrants' (Wong 2013, p. 280).

It is worth noting at this point that ESEA men stood at an interesting intersection between gender and ethnicity in American society. Their 'feminine' characteristics and occupational associations were seen not as a choice or identifying characteristic of its own but rather as a 'lack' of masculinity, and they existed in structures of power which 'prevented them from participating in heterosexual institutions and practices such as marriage and sex' (Shimizu 2012, pp. 5-8). However, they were also never seen as fully feminine in that they were still seen

as a threat to white women and were very much excluded from the hypersexual stereotypes of ESEA women at the time, as will be expanded upon in the following section (ibid.) Lee (1999, pp. 83-88) writes regarding 'the Oriental (male or female) [as] an alternative (albeit a tabooed one) to the social order represented by the racially exclusive, presumptively heterosexual, nuclear family… Oriental sexuality was constructed as ambiguous, inscrutable, and hermaphroditic' due to this unique, intersectional position. Lee goes on to describe Chinese people as embodying a 'third sex' because of this. In particular, Lee argues that Chinese men were disruptive in their perceived potential to undermine the traditional white household through their proximity to white women (in domestic labour settings) as well as through the lack of Chinese women in their communities, which threatened to lead to miscegenation (ibid). This ambiguous space fed into the constantly changing perception of supposedly ESEA traits at different points through history, such as the alternating victimisation and villainisation of ESEA people.

'All Chinamen can read, write and cipher with easy facility—pity but all our petted voters could. In California they rent little patches of ground and do a deal of gardening. They will raise surprising crops of vegetables on a sand pile. They waste nothing. What is rubbish to a Christian, a Chinaman carefully preserves and makes useful in one way or another. He gathers up all the old oyster and sardine cans that white people throw away, and procures marketable tin and solder from them by melting. He gathers up old bones and turns them into manure. In California he gets a living out of old mining claims that white men have abandoned as exhausted and worthless—and then the officers come down on him once a month with an exorbitant swindle to which the legislature has given the broad, general name of "foreign" mining tax, but it is usually inflicted on no foreigners but Chinamen. This swindle has in some cases been repeated once or twice on the same victim in the course of the same month—but the public treasury was no additionally enriched by it, probably.'

As Chinese immigrants settled and communities became larger, anti-Asian sentiment also began to grow in the form of a movement of 'nativists' who opposed immigration in the interests of 'native' Americans. This sentiment was often realised through white members of the

community taking advantage of the ‘model minority’s’ lack of rights, such as the ‘exorbitant swindle’ described by Twain where authorities took money from Asian labourers who had no grounds to refuse. The ‘nativist’ movement grew in the late 1860s and 1870s when unemployment became a more pressing issue, using ESEA people as a scapegoat for the economic issues that ensued. This led to ‘organized labor, tobacco, shoe, and woolen manufacturers [barring] Chinese employment in the 1880s… Chinese were compelled to confine themselves to “feminized” jobs such as cooks, laundrymen, and domestic servants’ (Wang 2004, p. 60). This again contributed to the perception that ESEA men were domestic and feminine, as they were some of the only areas of employment which they were able to find jobs in.

‘Chinamen hold their dead in great reverence—they worship their departed ancestors, in fact. Hence, in China, a man’s front yard, back yard, or any other part of his premises, is made his family burying ground, in order that he may visit the graves at any and all times. Therefore that huge empire is one mighty cemetery; it is ridged and wringled from its centre to its circumference with graves—and inasmuch as every foot of ground must be made to do its utmost, in China, lest the swarming population suffer for food, the very graves are cultivated and yield a harvest, custom holding this to be no dishonor to the dead. Since the departed are held in such worshipful reverence, a Chinaman cannot bear that any indignity be offered the places where they sleep. Mr. Burlingame said that herein lay China’s bitter opposition to railroads; a road could not be built anywhere in the empire without disturbing the graves of their ancestors or friends.’

The idea of ESEA people as deeply spiritual and traditional people is a very prominent stereotype that came from a combination of the observed behaviours above to the philosophical and intellectual exchanges that occurred prior to immigration as aforementioned. This stereotype in itself may not seem derogatory or harmful, but Edward Said’s (2003) interpretation of Orientalism suggests otherwise. Said argues that the West created its identity through

positioning itself as the opposite of the 'Orient',[6] which was the 'other'; that the characteristics of the 'Orient' were the negative counterpart to those of the West. For example, the 'Orient' was primitive while the West was modern and advancing. The idea of spirituality and tradition was seen as an element of the barbarism of the 'Orient,' as they were seen as signifiers of lack of progress and modern thinking. This idea of Orientalism additionally reinforced the feminised, asexual view of ESEA men, as they were seen to be the opposite of Western masculinity: physical strength, sexuality/virility, and aggression. This preconception due to Orientalism combined with the lack of visible female companions, traditionally feminine jobs, and the inability to fight back when oppressed cemented these ideas into the Western public consciousness as the main characteristics of ESEA men.

The perceptions of ESEA people from this excerpt are ones that are still prevalent today in addressing and representing ESEA people across the West, and the way in which they have been utilised has varied greatly throughout the last century. At the time of writing, it is clear that Twain does not perceive the traits which he writes about as a threat, but rather as interesting quirks that are, if anything, beneficial in being model work ethics and providing services to the white community.

However, as I will argue in the following sections, over the next two decades these traits would become hugely negative aspects of how ESEA people were seen in white communities. The drive to find paid work and willingness to do so for lower wages in degrading jobs that began as both admirable and beneficially exploitable for white businesses was seen as a much more sinister and manipulative trait that was intended to undermine white labourers seeking employment. These labourers continued to be referred to as 'coolies' and were utilised by the media as a threat of what could happen if 'white labour' was not prioritised over 'coolieism'; the

[6] I use 'Orient' in quotations to signify its outdated homogenisation of everything East of Europe while recognising its importance as a term to Said's interpretation of Orientalism.

supposed consequences included ‘the white workingman’s family’ being disintegrated and most jobs being filled by Chinese workers (Lee 1999, pp. 51-55). In order to justify the misgivings about ESEA immigrants, many of their other traits were spun into malicious stereotypes. For example, the fact that there was a huge disparity in numbers between ESEA men and women stoked fears that they were not only going to take over the economy but also start preying on white women and cause domestic disruptions. The domesticity and femininity of their jobs were seen as a ploy to conceal more nefarious aspects of their personalities, bringing about a wave of fear of ‘Yellow Peril’—that the perceived inferiority of ESEA men was disguising plots to take over the Western world with the backwards, spiritual ways of the East. Spirituality and herbal medicine is still to this day seen as barbaric and a sign of backwardness as it is considered the opposite of modern Western medicine due to the long history of Orientalism. Additionally, the history of the Opium Wars led to the perception that Chinese men were perpetually taking drugs, selling them, or nonconsensually giving them to unsuspecting people, in particular white women. This particular element of Chinese history and stereotyping is further expanded upon later in this chapter, but is closely linked to the more malicious perceptions of ESEA men and how white communities thought they might carry out their misdeeds.

Women 1848-1882

Female immigrants had a very different experience of the USA, beginning from their reasons for leaving China and impacting the stereotypes held against them by the West. Female children in China, unlike male children who were raised to lead their families, were seen as less valuable as they were perceived as having less paid labour potential and would not be eligible

to inherit due to patriarchal structures (Hirata 1979, pp. 4-5). As a result, they were often killed in their infancy and those who survived were sold in times of hardship, particularly to work as prostitutes[7] as this was the only paid employment available to them, especially once they were sent overseas (ibid.) It was very rare for women to be sent overseas by their families, even if they had husbands who were working abroad to send money home. This was due to the violence that Chinese people faced in the USA as mentioned previously, as well as the harsher living conditions that were considered unsuitable for women (Chan 1991, p. 96). Chinese women instead stayed at home carrying out domestic and ceremonial duties on behalf of their husbands, raising children if they had any, and taking care of their parents and in-laws when needed.

As a result of these circumstances, many of the interactions that the USA had with Chinese women were with women who had been sold to traffickers and were working as prostitutes. There were also cases of Chinese women travelling to California to earn more for their prostitution work who would, like the men, send money home to their families[8]. As the labourers largely left their wives in China, the US population who encountered them perceived them as having no female companionship; this led to many perceiving the great number of

[7] I hesitate to use the term 'prostitute.' In modern vernacular it is a largely debated term, seen by many as old fashioned and derogatory due to the implications of salaciousness and lack of agenda on women's part. The term 'sex worker' is often used in its place to recognise that sexual labour in exchange for payment is a form of manual work. However, with the examples that I will be using in this chapter, there is almost no agency for the women involved; many were trafficked, and almost all of them kept in conditions of hardship due to lack of options available for them in the West and the structures of power surrounding them. I have decided to continue using the term 'prostitute' for both this section and for the rest of the historical context chapters for two reasons. Firstly, the term reflects the circumstances and perceptions surrounding primary sources created at the time. Secondly, many sources directly use the term themselves and, as this section will be heavily utilising and analysing excerpts of them, for consistency I will also use the term.

[8] Hirata (1979, p. 6) notes that white Californians encouraged the import of Chinese prostitutes to 'lessen the threat they perceived to white womanhood,' as they thought the presence of Chinese women would sexually satisfy the Chinese men enough that they would not pursue white women. This is revealing in two ways; firstly, it shows the perception of ESEA men as sexually threatening to white women despite their asexual stereotypes. Secondly, it shows that ESEA women were only understood through the men they were associated with, with no agenda or agency of their own.

Chinese men who had no visible relationships to women as a threat to white women who might fall prey to their desires. It additionally led to the stereotype of ESEA women being incredibly sexualised, as they were understood through the Chinese female population at the time who were predominantly prostitutes due to restrictions on gaining other kinds of employment. The perception that they were more sexually available, especially in regards to being 'gold diggers,' likely began here as well, due to their main occupation being the exchange of sexual favours for money.

The way in which Chinese prostitutes operated was, as Hirata (1979) argues, one of the last remnants of slavery in the US following its abolishment[9]. While most businesses evolved to utilise 'the capitalist mode of production,' many elements of slavery were still used with minority groups, especially Chinese prostitutes who functioned under 'semifeudal organization' while white brothels had 'a relationship of employer and wageworker' (Hirata 1979, p.3). This greatly contributed to the perception of Chinese women as inferior to white women, which was furthered by the lack of other occupations Chinese women could hold. Chinese women immigrating to the US were additionally much more vulnerable to exploitation, which contributed to their perception as being submissive. A great number of Chinese prostitutes were brought to the USA against their will, with brothels in the USA sending agents to China to bring more over (ibid, p. 9). When the USA began imposing stricter immigration policies, particularly the Page Law in 1875, this subjected women to corrupt officials who needed to be 'convinced' to let them into the country (ibid, p. 11).

The Page Law itself reflected the discrimination Chinese women faced, being an act of racial exclusion that preceded even the Chinese Exclusion Act. Even prior to this, a committee

[9]While I appreciate that Hirata is making a point regarding the severity of conditions Chinese prostitutes faced, especially compared to their white counterparts, I have to adamantly disagree with this statement. Slavery remained in many ways throughout the USA, particularly through the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution in 1865 which allowed slavery for prisoners as punishment for their crimes.

in California in 1854 deemed the women they found in Chinatown to be prostitutes and therefore worked to shut down Chinese brothels, despite there being many other brothels and groups of prostitutes of many ethnicities (Chan 1991, p. 97). In 1866, 'An Act for the Suppression of Chinese Houses of Ill Fame' in California further discriminated against Chinese women, limiting where they were geographically allowed to stay and invalidating any leases to brothels, and then again in 1870 where a bond was required by the owners of vessels for Chinese women aboard to enter the country. An incident involving twenty-two Chinese women thought to be 'coming for "immoral purposes"' in 1874, in which the company running the ship refused to pay the bond and which involved the serving of three writs of *habeas corpora*, ended with the act being deemed unconstitutional, as it deprived the women of their rights (Chan 1991, pp. 101-104.) Despite this, the impression it left was still widely circulated and the stereotypes surrounding Chinese women grew. Then, in 1875 the Page Law was passed which essentially undid the removal of the act. Though, as Hirata (1979, p. 10) points out, there is no way of knowing how immediately effective the law was, it undoubtedly subjected Chinese women to great scrutiny, made it more expensive to enter the country, and made them even more vulnerable to US officials. The effects of the Page Law can be seen in censuses of San Francisco at the time, which counted 1,452 prostitutes out of 2,022 Chinese women in 1870 and 444 prostitutes out of 2,052 Chinese women in 1880, as well as 722 Chinese children in Chinatown in 1885, only 87 of which were children to prostitutes (Chan 1991, p. 107). Though these figures are likely skewed by the police's attempts to 'condemn and publicize the most negative aspects of Chinatown,' it is clear that there was a large decrease in the percentage of the Chinese female population who were prostitutes (ibid). This was further pushed by a 'police crackdown on Chinese prostitution in San Francisco in the mid 1870s [which] made the traffic in women unprofitable' as well as the 1882 Exclusion Act (ibid, p. 106). Despite this huge

decrease in Chinese prostitutes and rise in Chinese women raising families, there was no change in the perception of ESEA women as sexualised, submissive people.

To further analyse the perception of ESEA women during this time, I will be using excerpts from *Chinese Immigration: The Social, Moral, and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration* (Shay 1876) and the numerous testimonies it documented, as well at the government's rulings on issues regarding Chinese immigration. As with the Twain excerpt, this source is focused on Chinese women in the USA but is reflective of stereotypes that became prominent in the UK as well, though largely at a later date as female Chinese immigrants were not as present in the UK at this time. Before moving on to my analyses of the excerpts, it is worth noting several things. Firstly, the title of this document (*The Social, Moral and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration*) sets up what is a large focus of the questions asked of attestants: morality. Many of the attestants are asked whether they believe that Chinese immigrants have a positive or negative impact on the moral standing of their communities; this is largely framed through the lens of Christianity, which will be explored later in this section. There are no parameters established as to what the government is considering 'moral' and 'immoral' throughout the document, and as a result many of the answers given are greatly subjective or personal and have little to no proof supporting their views. Additionally, where evidence is provided there is almost no evaluation regarding its legitimacy, either by the attestant reporting the evidence or the committee.

Secondly, the committee is said to have the purpose of inquiring 'as to the probable result of Chinese immigration upon the country if such immigration be not discouraged [and] as to the means of exclusion, if such committee should be of the opinion that the presence of the Chinese element in our midst is detrimental to the interests of the country' (Shay 1976, p. 3). This intent shows an inherent bias held by the committee, who were clearly acting at a point

where discouraging immigration had already been seriously considered and ideas regarding how this should be done were being discussed. Additionally, the impact of Chinese immigration is already viewed negatively, as seen through the language of 'detrimental to the interests of the country,' before the committee began its proceedings. These elements would likely have created a negative confirmation bias for the committee, as they would probably already be looking for evidence that immigration should be discouraged. With these foundations, the testimonies can be analysed with knowledge of the structures of power and bias surrounding them.

One of the early testimonies is from Reverend A. W. Loomis, who had experience of living in China as a missionary. The Reverend is asked what the 'moral condition' is in China, with the implication that the committee are wondering whether the immorality of the immigrants is inherent in their culture. The Reverend answers that 'the system of morality taught in China is equal to any that we find anywhere,' and further notes that 'these Chinawomen that you see on the streets here were brought for the accommodation of white people, not for the accommodation of Chinese; and if you pass along the streets where they are to be found, you will see that they are visited not so much by Chinese as by others—sailors and low people. The women are in a condition of servitude' (Appendix A, I.) Rev. Loomis continues to detail how Chinese prostitutes in the USA are slaves to the people who own them, being bought and sold and under heavy surveillance to prevent them from escaping. Rev. Loomis additionally mentions that if one manages to escape, the owners 'will trump up a case, have the woman arrested, and bring people to swear what they want. In this way they manage to get possession of her again' (ibid). The testimony continues with questions of domestic life in China, with Loomis observing that men in China have a wife who is the mistress of the household and may have multiple concubines, but that they all acknowledge the wife's authority. He does not endorse this tradition but reiterates that they are a moral society.

This testimony shows that the attitude towards Chinese women was seen entirely through the lens of the men that they were associated with. As wives they were seen as having 'virtue and faithfulness' to their husbands, and otherwise they were seen as slaves to be bought as prostitutes or mistresses. There is a sense that Western society had no context in which they saw a Chinese woman who had agency or independence. The committee asks extensively about what happens to the women who are prostitutes; the answers reveal the neglect and abuse that they suffer and are unable to escape from, partially due to the use of law enforcement by 'owners' to detain any escaping women. The testimony interestingly seems to berate the men who use law enforcement to keep the women in their custody rather than the system which allows them to do it; it appears that they are not suggesting that this loophole be dealt with by adjusting the policing system but rather berating the Chinese men for maliciously using the police. It is also interesting to note that most of the patrons of brothels are white men, rather than Chinese immigrants. This is perhaps one of the bases for the stereotype of ESEA men as asexual, as the assumption of how much they would engage with Chinese prostitutes was not met (likely because many had wives in China), and of ESEA women being sexualised and submissive, as they were only ever seen as providing sexual services (either as a wife or prostitute) and unable to refuse to.

In regards to Lee's (1999) assertion that Chinese people at this time represented a 'third sex' in their lack of conformity to heteronormative, white values, it is clear that Chinese women were also not classified within traditional masculinity or femininity. Where Chinese men represented a third sex through their proximity to domesticity and feminine traits as well as being perceived as a threat, Chinese women were placed here through their association with sexuality. Lee (ibid, p. 89) argues that the Victorian idea of a 'True Woman' was 'the moral center of the chaste and obedient social order.' Chinese women, as they were largely seen as

prostitutes, were perceived through an ‘image of female sexuality, uninhibited albeit coerced, [which] threatened to undermine the image of the passionless True Woman’ (ibid). As a result, their faults were ‘sensationalized in newspaper accounts, magazine articles, and official inquiries’ such as this one for the California government, painting them as ‘a conduit of disease and social decay’ (ibid). This particular element of disease and social corruption is something that recurs throughout these testimonies.

Another Reverend, Rev. Otis Gibson, also gives a testimony that highlights the perception of all ESEA women as submissive, sexualised people. Rev. Gibson is asked ‘Do you know upon what terms the Chinese are imported into this country?’ to which he answers ‘They come free. I think all Chinamen come free, except the women’ (Appendix A, II.). It is notable that he does not expand on this exception until asked to, implying that he does not find it noteworthy or particularly unusual. This statement shows the clear contrast between the experiences and perceptions of Chinese men and women at the time, that one could be considered completely ‘free’ while the other is unquestionably enslaved. Rev. Gibson goes on to describe how he considers the Chinese people that immigrated to be the ‘lowest class of people’ who are illiterate, ignorant, and unclean (ibid). He also notes that there is ‘very little domestic life here, almost none at all,’ referring to the lack of families or spouses brought over with the immigrants (ibid). The combination of Chinese men being considered the ‘lowest class of people’ with the lack of visible domestic life encapsulates the circumstances which caused the perception of Chinese men as asexual and feminine, while simultaneously predatorial towards white women. Perhaps surprisingly, Rev. Gibson states that he believes the presence of Chinese immigrants is beneficial to their community as they have allowed a greater number of white men to work, but is also concerned that if the percentage of immigrants increased:

'Unless our existing laws are executed with more honesty than they are now, I think it would be unfortunate. I think we have sufficient law, if executed honestly, to check a great deal of it. That has been my experience. I mingle with the Chinese in their quarters a great deal, and I know that this Chinese gambling is simply a matter of buying the privilege to violate the law. The same is true regarding the women. There is a percentage of the profits that goes to persons other than the Chinese, for the purpose of carrying on prostitution.'
(Appendix A, II).

This seems to again imply again that law enforcement are used to keep prostitutes from freedom; however the statement that 'there is a percentage of the profits that goes to persons other than the Chinese, for the purpose of carrying on prostitution' seems to suggest that law enforcement are in fact being bribed. The use of law enforcement to keep women in servitude is brought up in a manner which implicates the morality of the Chinese as causing unrest rather than the morality of the policemen accepting bribes.This testimony reinforces the perception of ESEA women as submissive and sexualised, as practically all encounters between Western communities and ESEA women had been with prostitutes who were brought against their will and working as prostitutes.

The testimony of Dr J. C. Shorb provides further insight into the gendered stereotypes of Chinese immigrants, as well as an example of the 'evidence' used to justify them. Dr Shorb is largely interested in the presence of Chinese prostitutes, which he states is 'very bad—exceedingly so' for the white population (Appendix A, III.) His main reason for stating this is that 'The presence of Chinese women here has made prostitution excessively cheap, and it has given these boys an opportunity to gratify themselves at very slight cost. They get syphilis and gonorrhoea cheaper in that way than any way I know of' (ibid). The Doctor further notes that the boys, ranging in age from 'twelve years up to eighteen and nineteen,' then spread syphilis 'generously' to the white community through the white women they have sexual encounters with (ibid). The committee asks him if he is certain that the cases are coming from Chinese

prostitutes, to which he answers ‘Yes; some of my worst cases in boys have come from Chinese prostitutes’ (ibid). There is no questioning from either the committee or the doctor as to whether the boys he was treating were lying about where they contracted the disease; the possibility that they are blaming an easy and anonymous target rather than naming white women in their communities is not even suggested.

It appears that there was a strong sense of blame felt towards Chinese women at the time for the actions of white men and boys in the community. The ‘evil’ that they brought to the ‘Christian civilization’ was that they existed as prostitutes and charged lower rates, showcasing the perception of ESEA women as being sexually alluring and causing men to succumb to temptation. The actions of the white boys, who sought out prostitutes and proceeded to spread venereal diseases amongst white communities, is not seen as reprehensible or portrayed as negative in any way, other than as a display of the negative impact of the existence of Chinese women in a Western city. The doctor himself says that he has no ‘definite idea’ of the impact that these women have, only taking the word of young men and their claims that ‘most of [the diseases are] contracted from Chinese women.’ Dr Shorb concludes, when asked whether ‘Chinese immigration tends to the advancement of Christian civilization,’ that ‘I do not see how any sensible man can reach a conclusion of that kind. No man with any knowledge of the facts can do so’ (ibid).

A testament which further puts the blame of white men’s actions on Chinese prostitutes is David C. Woods, Superintendent of the Industrial School. Woods says that Chinese immigration ‘has a very bad effect’ on the boys growing up in the area (Appendix A, VII.) He recounts that almost a third of the boys in his school have contracted venereal diseases, and that they ‘attribute that to the presence of Chinese prostitutes in this city… I question them, and they say they got it in Chinatown’ (ibid). The boys admit to initiating the encounters with the

Chinese women by going into Chinatown to seek out prostitutes, but the women are still blamed for their actions and the consequences of those actions. Furthermore, there is again no question asked by the committee or superintendent whether the boys are lying about where they contracted the disease.

Two testimonies from Chinese immigrants Ah Chung and Ah Gow further shine light on the circumstances Chinese women found themselves in. The two men detail how Chinese women were whipped by the men keeping them imprisoned, and when they were ill or unable to work they would be abandoned on the streets (Appendix A, IV. and V.) Furthermore, both men say that they and other men they know were threatened with murder for testifying in court regarding the Chinese prostitutes they were holding; both recall ‘paper [being] put up offering money to kill Chinamen’ who testified (ibid). Ah Gow recounts an occasion where law enforcement put him in jail for ‘[bothering] the women and the gamblers by coming into Court against them’ (ibid). This is one of only a few instances where someone directly accuses the local authorities of being bribed into protecting the interests of the men who trafficked prostitutes, though many talk around it and imply the same. He continues that ‘the gamblers, [pay the police] five dollars a week; each woman, four bits; lotteries, eight dollars a month,’ specifying how much the police were getting paid (ibid).

These two testimonies show the extent to which Chinese women were kept from their freedom. Not only were they physically confined with horrific conditions, but the local authorities who were meant to be protecting the population were working against them. Additionally, any men who were able to help them were discouraged from doing so with threats of murder, with those who continued to try to help being killed. There seems to have been a system of organised crime in which the police were involved.

Further addressing the possibility of police involvement in prostitution rings and trafficking, the Chief of Police of the City and County of San Francisco H. H. Ellis also gave testimony. Ellis is directly asked if he is aware of the money being offered for the murder of Chinese men who give testimonies, to which he replies 'Yes, sir. I have had such notices taken down and interpreted' (Appendix A, VI.); no further questions are asked regarding his opinion or experience on the matter. However, Ellis claims that '[Chinese people's] testimony is so unreliable that they cannot be believed' when asked about law enforcement encounters with Chinese communities and immigrants (ibid). The committee had not mentioned that any testimonies were being taken from Chinese immigrants, nor had they asked him about this element of law enforcement. This suggests that Ellis possibly knew that members of the Chinese community were going to testify and reveal that officers were being bribed to help carry out possible organised crime and keep women in prostitution, potentially causing him to mention how untrustworthy their testimonies are. When later asked whether Chinese testimonies were trusted when carrying out law enforcement, he reiterates '[officers] look upon their testimony with great suspicion. As a class their testimony is unreliable' (ibid). He even outright acknowledges that 'when [Chinese prostitutes] escape they are brought back by force, or arrested for some alleged offense,' admitting that the police have aided traffickers in keeping women in prostitution when they have tried to escape (ibid); again, after this statement there is no further questioning into the revelation.

Regardless of his intent in bringing up unreliable testimonies, Ellis reveals multiple areas of bias which he—and therefore the police force he ran—had against Chinese immigrants. He claims that the Chinese population are 'very foul and filthy,' 'unreliable,' and 'injurious,' as well as claiming that 'I think almost the entire population' were criminals (ibid). The extent to which he considers the Chinese population a threat to the white communities is so great that he

expresses the belief that ‘to suppress these vices would require a police force so great that the city could not stand the expense’ (ibid). Ellis also mentions that he considers ‘the prostitution question as the worst feature of [the presence of the Chinese]’ (ibid). This is very revealing in that women made up less than 10% of the Chinese population until the 1920s (Hirata 1979, p. 5). This perception that the incredibly small portion of the Chinese population could have the most negative impact shows that the perceived moral faults of women were considered much graver than any men’s.

Perhaps the most nuanced and revealing testimony collected by the committee is that of Lem Schaum, a longtime Chinese resident of California who joined a Christian mission in Sacramento. Schaum offers a unique perspective on issues of how Chinese women are treated and the racism experienced by the Chinese community while also being influenced by a sense of having himself assimilated well and gaining superiority over most Chinese immigrants through his Christianity (Appendix A, VIII). Schaum first offers an insight into the refuge that Chinese prostitutes could seek, which was available in the ‘Chinese woman’s home[s]’ run by Rev. Dr. Gibson and Rev. Dr. Loomis, neither of whom mentioned this aspect of their engagement with the Chinese community in their testimonies (ibid). These homes, according to Schaum, protected and cared for women who had escaped prostitution and prevented them from being arrested for false accusations that would return them to their ‘owners’ (ibid). From there, the women would either find safer employment or ‘find a respectable Chinaman to marry’ (ibid). Schaum acknowledges the oppression that these women faced, agreeing that he had heard of cases where ‘Chinamen [cut] them all to pieces with knives for running away… torture them… buy and sell [them]... and hold them in slavery’ (ibid). However, he disagrees with the previous testimonies that the women were left to die on the streets if they fell ill, saying that to his knowledge ‘I have not heard anything of that kind; but when they are sick, and expect they

are going to die, they are taken care of' (ibid). This is interesting to note, as the testimonies which suggested that this was common practice came from people who very strongly wanted to express how harmful and dangerous they felt the Chinese population were, especially portraying the men as particularly predatory. There is no denying that the women faced horrific conditions, abuse, and oppression but the specificity of this detail suggests that some embellishment of testimonies may have occurred to more strongly argue against allowing Chinese immigration.

Schaum further argues to the committee—who ask him a number of leading questions such as 'They live very cheaply, don't they?'—that the characteristics they take issue with are not solely the fault of the Chinese immigrants themselves (ibid). The committee asks him 'As a general rule, [the Chinese] don't learn much good after they come here, do they? Don't they learn the vices of the country?' clearly seeking a response that is negative towards Chinese immigrants (ibid). However, Schaum points out 'That is your own fault' (ibid). He explains that Chinese immigrants cannot 'take a walk up and down the street' without being 'struck down' by a white person, giving them no chance to assimilate and interact peacefully with the community by learning the language or culture (ibid). He additionally points out that the reason Chinese immigrants must live 'cheaply' such as by sharing small quarters with multiple people, which is very much looked down upon, is because 'their wages, we notice, come down every day. A short time ago Chinamen got thirty-six dollars a month working on the railroad. What do they get now? Twenty-six dollars per month—one dollar a day' (ibid). Schaum concludes by agreeing with the committee that 'this immigration must be stopped,' not only because he believes it does not benefit the American communities, but because he sees that the Chinese immigrants are being taken advantage of and should be prevented from entering these situations.

It is worth noting that Schaum's testimony is much longer than that of the other Chinese immigrants. Schaum is likely benefitting from being more outwardly assimilated; he is a devout Christian, working with respected members of the community and showing that he is attempting to convert more immigrants, and is also fluent in English in a way that the other two were not. Being well spoken is undoubtedly a large factor in the time and consideration he is given by the panel, but the benefits of Christianity are great and will be further explored in the following section.

From these testimonies, a clear image of the perception and treatment of Chinese women in the USA at the time emerges. They were treated largely as property of the men who trafficked them, with law enforcement aiding in keeping them from escaping. Anyone who tried to help them escape was threatened with violence and murder, largely preventing anyone from trying to take further action. They were additionally seen as immoral, unclean, and dangerously seductive; this was a result of their living and working conditions, the sexual context through which many interacted with them, and the association of the Chinatown residence with illegal drugs and gambling.

A note on Christianity

As seen in the testimonies collected for the 1876 committee, Christianity was utilised as a method of gauging how 'civilised' and 'moral' immigrant communities were. This was not a new phenomenon; the use of missionaries spreading Christianity has historically been used to drive the colonialism of Western countries. Christianity, and its absence in foreign countries, was often considered a sign of whether or not a community was 'civilised' or whether they were

‘savages,’ inferior to the white Western communities sending missionaries. As Johnston (2003, p. 13) writes, Christian missionaries ‘sought to transform indigenous communities into imperial archetypes of civility and modernity by remodelling the individual, the community, and the state through western, Christian philosophies,’ Though Johnston is writing specifically about British missionary activity, this analysis of the link between Christian missionary and colonial pursuits by the West is widely applicable. It is undeniably a source for the US attitudes towards immigrants and their faiths, particularly as British imperialism played a large part in the colonisation of North America. Martin (2010, p. 2) elaborates that some scholars argue that ‘Christian conversion was the interior analogue and affective accomplice of more visible forms of domination and displacement of indigeneity, and in some ways, the more destructive form of assault against Native people, which continues even today.’

This idea of Christianity also led to the prevalence of Christian beliefs being considered the ‘right,’ ‘moral’ path for people to follow; if people did not believe in and follow Christianity’s teachings then they were not moral or worthy of joining a community. As touched upon earlier, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (2003) outlines how the West considered themselves to be the opposite of the East, priding and shaping themselves on being counter to the characteristics they perceived in Eastern culture. Religion is an example of this, with the Western view that Confucianism and other belief systems in the East were ‘spiritual,’ traditional to a fault and therefore backwards in contrast to the modern, advanced Christian beliefs of the West. The expectation of conformity that was found in colonial activity also applied to immigrants and other ‘outsiders’ attempting to assimilate inside the US; this is evident in the testimonies above.

The role of Christianity in supposed justifications of exclusion and discrimination against ESEA and other minority groups is one that continues throughout history, and will reappear in this research. It is therefore worth noting at this point that it has a complex history and is

interwoven into the structures of society that this research will be examining. While this will in no way be a comprehensive analysis of how Christianity has or will shape various elements of Western society and understandings of race, it is an important part of the way stereotypes form and how they are shaped. To draw again from the Foucauldian approach to analysing the power and circumstances which shape perceptions of ESEA people, Christianity must be acknowledged as a method through which ‘truths’ were created and perpetuated.

Sexual Stereotypes

In this early period of encounters between ESEA and Western cultures, some of the strongest and most enduring stereotypes which arose were those regarding the sexuality of ESEA people. These stereotypes were heavily gendered, reflecting the vast differences between the Western experience of men and women as previously outlined. Though many of the roots of these have already been detailed, it is worth noting precisely how they fed into sexual stereotypes as this is such a prevalent area of prejudice and stereotypes throughout history and in the present day.

The fear of miscegenation was one that pervaded US society at the time; laws against interracial relationships were established across the country, specifically against white with Black and Asian miscegenation (Wu Clark 2012, pp. 100). These laws and the Page Law, which supported the assumption that all ESEA women were prostitutes, show that the prejudices and sexual stereotypes held by Western communities were not merely social but legally reinforced. The Page Law itself was one of the first ever racially discriminatory policies to be implemented in the West, revealing just how prevalent the mistrust and hatred towards ESEA women was.

ESEA women became seen through the lens of two stereotypes, the ‘Lotus Blossom Baby (a.k.a. China Doll, Geisha Girl, shy Pollynesian Beauty)’ and the ‘Dragon Lady (Fu Manchu’s various female relations, prostitutes, devious madames)’ while men were seen as either ‘rapists’ such as Fu Manchu or ‘love-struck losers,’ sometimes referred to as Charlie Chan (Tajima 1989, p. 312). As Wu Clark (2012, p. 101) explains, this ‘binary’ understanding of ESEA people arose from the conflicting ideas of the dangerous, malicious yellow peril threatening the way of Western society versus the model minority who works hard within the Western way of life, obedient and earning their place in society by contributing to it and never complaining. Lotus Blossoms and Charlie Chans were the product of ESEA people being viewed as feeble, subservient, and obedient people who were at the mercy of white people and their needs. For women, this view particularly came from the lack of female Chinese immigrants at the time, and those who the West did encounter were largely there against their will and subject to oppression from the men who brought them there. For men, the large disparity in numbers between male and female immigrants created the perception that they were unable to find female partners, either because they were ‘losers’ or because they had no sexual drive. Additionally, Chinese men typically carried out labour for lower wages and often performed what were seen as feminine domestic work, such as laundry and cooking. These circumstances created the perception that they were submissive because they accepted lower pay, and effeminate because they performed feminine work that was ‘below’ the masculine hard labour that most white men did. Dragon Ladies and Fu Manchus were created through the perception that ESEA people were manipulative, preying on white communities and taking advantage of those around them to carry out their treacherous plans. As seen previously in the testimonies regarding prostitutes in Chinatown and the spread of syphilis, there was a perception that ESEA women were seductresses that lured white men to Chinatown to take their money and give

them diseases through their uncleanliness, contrasting greatly with the meek Lotus Blossom stereotype.

Following the testimonies taken for the 1876 committee determining 'the social, moral, and political effect of Chinese immigration,' a police officer named James R. Rogers reported back to the committee his findings regarding characteristics of the Chinese community in San Francisco (Shay 186, pp. 151-152). In it, he wrote of his findings regarding relations between white women and Chinese men:

> *'The department of police, in enforcing the law with regard to this matter, have found white women and Chinamen side by side under the effects of this drug—a humiliating sight to any one who has anything left of manhood.'*
> (Shay 186, pp. 151-152)

This idea that Chinese men were preying on white women and tricking them through the use of drugs can clearly be seen here; the report shows that Chinese men were considered so undesirable and asexual that there was no way a white women who was sound of mind could consider a relationship with one unless under the influence or taken advantage of. The mere idea of a woman choosing a Chinese man over a white man is considered 'humiliating… to any one who has anything left of manhood.' This shows the sense of superiority white men felt over ESEA men in sexual potential, masculinity, and morality in not resorting to drugs to seduce white women. As Jun (2006, p. 1052) writes:

> *'The overwhelmingly male composition of the Chinese immigrant community, secured through exclusionary legislation prohibiting the immigration of Chinese women, was central to the discourse of moral panic in areas surrounding Chinatown ghettos. Images of Chinese men as depraved opium addicts and lascivious sexual predators of innocent young white girls dominated an American Orientalist discourse that constituted Chinatown and its residents as alien contaminations of the white national body.'*

It is interesting to note that this was the perception of ESEA men when in reality most of the men who came to the USA were married and had families to return to[10], and most sexual encounters between white and ESEA people seemed to be between white men and ESEA female prostitutes. The idea of Chinese men being 'contaminations' that spread through the white communities is additionally ironic because, according to testimony, white men were spreading venereal disease through white communities by regularly visiting prostitutes.

Chinatowns

Chinatowns had grown both in the USA and UK, as well as across Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. These grew as a result of increased numbers of Chinese seamen who began building communities and settling down. As the places where these communities grew were predominantly by the docks, there were many recurring features of Chinatowns and Chinese areas; in addition to the usual restaurants, boarding/residentials buildings, and shops there were also gambling houses and brothels. Amenda (2014) describes the characteristics of many of these docks and there is a clear pattern of the kinds of institutions that were established in those areas, which many Chinese seamen settled in. There was a strong sense of suspicion towards Chinese communities, likely to be exacerbated by the perception that these communities were linked to these institutions because of this pattern. Stories from the USA and London additionally travelled, spreading rumours of drug dens, crime, and sexual depravity. Amenda (2014, p. 71) observes that 'opium allegedly played a pivotal role

[10] This is not to imply that no extramarital affairs took place, or that having a spouse is any indication of abstinence or morality. However, the view that ESEA men were sexual predators actively seeking to seduce or drug young white women is at odds with what the white Christian community would have inherently believed a hard working, married man would be if he was white. It appears as though this aspect of the narrative—that most Chinese men who immigrated there were married—was purposefully excluded from the public perception of ESEA men.

for understanding the contacts between European women and Chinese migrants, because in the fevered imaginations of many racists Chinese men would hypnotize white women to break them and make them sexually submissive (for racists it seems there could be no other explanation for white women choosing to be with Chinese men)[11].' This suspicion spread across Europe as the sailors did and were realised through the actions of local residents and authorities. In Hamburg, police 'carefully monitored the movements of "coloured seamen" and were determined to prevent any Chinese settlement in the city' (Amenda 2014, p. 66). In several countries there were such intense fears of a 'Chinese criminal underworld' that the Chinese immigrants were accused of digging tunnels beneath various cities to facilitate smuggling, though police investigations yielded no evidence of such activities (ibid).[12]

These spaces were often very densely populated. A particularly prominent characteristic was the use of living quarters by many more occupants than intended or usually allowed (Appendix A, VIII). This linked very closely to the idea of cheapness, being stingy with money, and attempting to take advantage of monetary transactions. This stereotype which is still largely prevalent today likely began through the White communities' experiences with Chinatowns where they saw the large number of occupants per accommodation space and concluded that the people living like this must be 'cheap' people. However, as Lem Schaum, a Chinese resident in San Francisco in 1876, says of his own experience, the reason the Chinese community had to live like this was because the White businesses and employers were underpaying them,

[11] Many Chinese seamen married local women when they settled down in various European countries, running businesses together. Amenda (2014, pp. 67-71) notes that outside of London and the USA there was much less hostility to these relationships in Europe, who were less '[obsessed] with race, sexuality, crime and drugs'] but rather understood that 'for [women], living with a Chinese man was not only a matter of love but sometimes a significant economic opportunity to help run a business with their partners.'

[12] There is a lot to be said regarding the fact that the use of opium was seen as a dangerous, exotic practice that the Chinese were renowned for, when it was in fact the Western powers who had fuelled the opium trade and smuggling in China against the wishes of those in power. It is perhaps the most apt reflection of Western communities creating situations that allowed them to view ESEA culture and people in a negative light.

decreasing their wages and taking advantage of their reliance on the work to provide for their families (Appendix A, VIII).

These cramped living quarters also contributed to the perception that Chinatowns and their occupants were unsanitary, disease ridden, and unhealthy. As Jun (2006, pp. 1051-1052) writes:

> *'In his study of disease and racial classification in San Francisco's Chinatown, Nayan Shah points out how journalists, politicians, and health officials worked in tandem to produce "a way of knowing" Chinatown as an alien space of filth, disease, and contamination. As Shah argues, "the cartography of Chinatown that was developed in government investigations, newspaper reports, and travelogues, both established 'knowledge' of the Chinese race and aided in the making and remaking of Chinatown." Hence, white public health officials "scientifically" corroborated the dominant press's sensational descriptions of Chinatown as "ankle-deep in loathsome slush, with ceilings dripping with percolations of other nastiness above, [and] with walls slimy with the clamminess of Asiatic disease.'"*

On the other hand, Chinatowns became a spectacle for Western cities, where locals could experience the 'exotic' lives and cultures of 'the Orient.' Residents could become tourists in their own cities, with tours leading them through the Chinatowns with stops at various businesses (Amenda 2014, p. 73). Places such as restaurants, marketplaces, theatres, and other leisure/performance spaces were popular with locals who were willing to spend money for these experiences (Moon 2015, p. 113). At the turn of the century, there was a shift in attitude by the West which felt that the chaos of modern life was perhaps too disconnected, and many questioned whether the 'simple' and 'primitive' ways of the Chinese was in fact an example of how life was meant to be led (Moon 2015, p. 114). While more malicious stereotypes were still present, there was a greater sense of curiosity and wonder at ESEA culture rather than violent rejection of it. The Chinese communities took advantage of this interest and found that turning their spaces into tourist attractions made a great profit for them (ibid). However, the heightening of Chinese cultural characteristics came at the price of authenticity, where many of the

experiences were now artificial and catered specifically to what would draw in larger white audiences (ibid). In turn, the Western perception of Chinese culture became largely based on these exaggerated encounters. The exoticised, ‘othered’ representation was being accepted by both the Chinese businesses and their white customers.

This change from repulsion to curiosity was reflected in popular culture, as representations of Chinese people became more prominent in more nuanced ways. As Moon (2015, p. 114) points out, the conflicts seen in performances involving Chinese characters moved away from the simple inferior John Chinese and the superior white character to comparisons between Chinese and African American characters. Moon (ibid) writes that ‘Songs containing Chinese and African American subjects helped reconfirm the racial inferiority of both groups, with one striking difference: in comparison to the Chinese, African Americans were presented as American, which opened the door slightly for African American inclusion. African American songwriters and performers also inherited Chinese stereotypes in much the same way that they had come into blackface ones. Yet because of the positioning of the Chinese as alien, the deployment of the Chinese/African American motif by African Americans reaffirmed the association of African American traditions with American identity and elevated African Americans' social position in much the same way that that of the Irish before them had been elevated.’ This dynamic between white, African American, and ESEA communities is a complex one that will be expanded upon in the case study at the end of this chapter.

1882-1914: The rise of ‘Yellow Peril’

‘Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat-green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science past and present, with all the resources, if you will, of a wealthy government—which, however, already has denied all knowledge of his existence. Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man.’
(Rohmer [1913] 2008, np.)

Lee (2007, p. 553) writes that this point in time where Canada, the US, and Britain were all facing outbreaks of violence and change in policy was the point at which ‘Yellow Peril’ became the issue at the forefront of the ‘white men’s countries’’ concerns. What was once the local threat of losing jobs and mixing cultures was now an international threat to the white, Western way of life. This was not a particularly new phenomenon, which became popularised in the late 19th century when Japan defeated China in the 1895 Sino-Japanese War, a surprise victory which stunned the West and painted Japan as a new, growing threat. This war marked the emergence of Japan as a technologically advanced, industrial power that could threaten not only China and the rest of Asia, but ‘would also propel the “invasion” of white markets and severely thwart Europe’s and America’s economic dominance in the world’ (Lee 2015, p. 131). The term ‘Yellow Peril’ itself came from a painting commissioned by Kaiser Wilhelm II that year titled *Die Gelber Gefahr*, or ‘The Yellow Peril,’ which depicted European countries as women in armour with archangel Michael pointing at an ominous Buddha rising from flames and smoke in the distance, warning them of the approaching danger (Figure 1). This perception of ESEA as a growing, invasive threat gained momentum again as immigration numbers came to the forefront

of international concerns. As Lee (2015, p. 131) writes, 'the peril of immigration [was] the most dangerous… the permanent settlement of Japanese in the white world, and especially of North and South America, threatened "our very race-existence, the well-springs of being, the sacred heritage of our children."'

Figure 1: A painting commissioned by Kaiser Wilhelm II titled* The Yellow Peril *(Keevak 2019).

By 1882 the general attitude of the West towards ESEA people and the communities they had built in the USA, UK, Australia, and South Africa was one of reproach and anger. All of these countries had seen an increase in unemployment and the diligence and willingness to work for lower wages that had initially been seen as a sign of good work ethics was now

perceived as a manipulative measure to undermine ‘white labour.’ The term ‘white labour’ itself became a well known phrase in the 1890s as the discussion around ‘Chinese labour’ became an increasingly debated issue, particularly in Britain where no official policy was in place to prevent immigration in the same manner that the USA was imposing the Chinese Exclusion Act (Auerbach 2009, p. 15). Many felt that restrictions were necessary in order to prevent ‘Chinese labour’ from entirely overtaking the workforce and leaving white labourers unemployed; this sentiment was felt by both those who wanted to protect white labourers’ interests and those who wanted to ensure that Chinese labourers were given fair consideration (ibid).

As a result of the rise in anti-Chinese sentiment, the USA and Canada saw an equal rise in violence against Chinese communities. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was one of the first racially discriminatory immigration laws to exist, causing Chinese immigrants to be some of the first ‘victims of state-sanctioned violence, expulsion, and incarceration’ (Lee 2007, p. 538). Rather than mollify the ‘nativist’ sentiments, it instead gave grounds for further action against Chinese people. The existence of a policy that validated existing antagonistic feelings towards Chinese communities created a more open reproach towards them, leading to acts of violence against Asian people and businesses (ibid).

Another repercussion of the Chinese Exclusion Act was that Chinese immigrants began arriving in Canada (and to a lesser extent Mexico), either to find work there instead or to cross the border illegally from those countries (Lee 2007, p. 543). Communities of ESEA immigrants had already begun growing in Canada and Mexico by the end of the 19th century, many migrating from the USA as employment opportunities arose. However, with the Chinese Exclusion Act in place the numbers in those countries began growing and tensions began rising in Canada as white communities feared their economies would be impacted negatively by the immigrants the way the US believed they had been.

In addition to this, the Chinese Exclusion Act brought with it an influx of Japanese and Korean immigrants, who were not subject to the restrictions that the Chinese now were. This influx also occurred in Canada, as the progression of immigration that had occurred originally with the Chinese were now taking place with a new wave of ESEA immigrants (Lee 2007, p. 543). This culminated in a number of policies and riots in 1907 from both countries in an attempt to reduce the number of immigrants.

At this point it must be noted that ESEA women were now a notable part of the ESEA workforce, many immigrating with their husbands or being reunited with spouses who had already immigrated and settled down in the West. Women were seen working alongside men on plantations and in factories as well as doing domestic work such as laundry and cooking (Lee 2015, pp. 115-117). ESEA labour was no longer as heavily gendered, though there were still more women performing domestic tasks and men working in hard manual labour (ibid).

The USA in 1907 implemented immigration restrictions that prevented any Japanese or Korean immigrants from entering the country via Hawai'i, the most common route for them, which caused such a large influx of Japanese immigration to Canada that the government 'launched a major investigation' (Daniels and Graham 2001, p. 8; Lee 2007, p. 543). 1907 also saw the Pacific Coast riots, which took place across the USA and Canada's western coast. These riots were a reaction to the great increase in Asian immigrants, including South Asian who had begun immigrating at the start of the 20th century (Lee 2007, p. 542). It began with Japanese businesses being targeted in San Francisco, escalating and spreading over the following months to violent attacks on people in Asian communities and driving many to flee their cities (ibid, p. 551). In September, tens of thousands of people formed.

'['An anti-Asian parade'] attacked almost every building occupied by Chinese immigrants and several dozen in the Japanese quarter. Each riot had different and unique origins. In San Francisco, a school board order to segregate Japanese students emboldened anti-Japanese

activists. In Bellingham, South Asian immigrants were allegedly hired to take the place of white workers at a local lumber plant. In Vancouver, exclusionists became alarmed over a sudden increase in Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian immigration that seemed to plague the city that summer. Yet, like the different national campaigns to restrict Chinese immigration, the 1907 riots along the Pacific Coast were not isolated events. Both the causes of the race riots and their long-term consequences were part of an intricate web of cross-border and transnational processes, linkages, and alliances.'
(Lee 2007, p. 551).

From Lee's analysis of the root of the various riots, it can be seen that there is no evidence of Asian-initiated action that triggered the violence but instead Western actions against perceived threats from the Asian communities that emboldened various responses. The stereotypes which had arisen from the initial wave of immigration seems to have been weaponised against the ESEA community in order to invigorate 'nativist' movements. A similar shift in perception had been occurring in Britain at the same time, with the British Brothers' League who pushed for racist policies (Price 2019).

Britain had, until 1905, been adamant that they would not close their borders as their belief in freedom of movement was very closely linked to free trade (ibid). Additionally, the 'tradition of extending asylum to the politically and religiously persecuted' was one that was proudly upheld and prevented any policy interfering with open borders thus far (ibid). However, with attitudes changing against Chinese immigrants and growing anger at the number of immigrants securing jobs for lower wages at ports, the pressure became overwhelming and the government introduced the Aliens Act. The act only allowed immigrants who had already secured employment to enter the country, which almost none of them could, but allowed for those seeking asylum to enter. The act also gave the government power to remove any undesirable immigrants, including those who were financially unable to support themselves and whoever they were bringing into the country with them, and stated that any British woman who married an immigrant would lose her citizenship and be subject to the act's restrictions.

As with the USA and Canada, policy that reaffirmed racist beliefs emboldened anti-Chinese groups and from 1905 onwards violent riots and attacks became more frequent. This escalated multiple times to the point where officials needed to step in and the government had to discuss policy that would satisfy the violent protesters. In 1908, an English language test was introduced as an additional barrier for immigrants working on ships, with the argument that English language was a necessary part of health and safety in labour intensive jobs, but it was largely used to discriminate against Chinese immigrants (Price 2019)[13]. In the same year, Churchill (as a Cabinet member) addressed the growing anti-immigration sentiment felt by labourers in Parliament (ibid). Violence reached its peak in 1911 when employers hired Chinese labourers to replace their employees during a strike, resulting in the strikers destroying Chinese accommodation and businesses (ibid). As with the USA, these riots were based more on perception of ESEA immigrants than any actions taken by the immigrants themselves. As Price (2019) points out, the pay disparity between British and immigrants labourers did not actually vastly differ. One company wrote to the union that was striking to say 'the wages are practically the same as with Europeans. We would, however, be quite prepared to pay considerably higher wages to Chinese than we would to Britishers. They are much more sober, steady and their work much more efficient… the foreigner is the better man' (ibid).

In the USA and Canada following the riots, both separately began negotiating with Japan to limit immigration which became known as the Gentlemen's Agreements. The USA agreed not to implement any policies banning Japanese immigration in exchange for Japan not issuing any passports that would allow travel to the US except in circumstances of returning immigrants or uniting relations to immigrants. Canada reached a similar agreement, with a wider range of

[13] It is worth noting that this became ineffective when sailors realised that British seamen were exempt and therefore circumnavigated the test by claiming to be from different East Asian colonies and therefore classed as British (Price 2019).

possible exceptions such as agricultural workers and workers with government approved contracts (Lee 2007, p. 553).

To combat the global fear regarding ‘Yellow Peril,’ Theodore Roosevelt created the ‘Great White Fleet; a parade of sixteen battleships around the Pacific to ‘promote a “White Pacific,” where white supremacy would be maintained in the face of an ascendant Japan’ (Lee 2007, 554). Roosevelt made it clear that the fleet was in solidarity with the white populations of Canada, Britain, and Australia, and their colonies, writing that ‘There should be no immigration in mass of Orientals to the countries where the English-speaking peoples now form and will form the population of the future’ (ibid). It is interesting (but unsurprising) to note that this makes clear for perhaps the first time officially the perception of colonies, including those in Asia, as part of the ‘white men’s countries’ where white interests would be prioritised, despite being the minority. These colonies would play a very important part in Western history in the following decades as World War I and World War II saw shifts in how ESEA was perceived.

A Case Study of ESEA Representation in Vaudeville Performances 1848-1914: *The C**n and the Ch*nk* (1912)

Background

By the end of the nineteenth century, the precedent for seeing ESEA people in the context of a performance had been set: they were either human oddities or caricatures performed in yellowface. Human oddities at the time were often people with physical disabilities and deformities, foreigners, or both. Garland-Thompson (1997, p. 63) argues that ‘the two main

types of people presented as freaks were “normal” non-Westerners and “abnormal” Westerners… the most successful freaks melded both bodily and cultural difference.’ Famous examples include the ‘Siamese Twins,’ Chang and Eng Bunker who ‘were probably the most famous freaks, notorious for their merged extraordinary bodies and mysterious foreignness’, and Afong Moy, the female Chinese singer who wore elaborate costumes to entice crowds (ibid). Fu Manchu was additionally a popular reference point for Western audiences. The character, created by Sax Rohmer embodied many of the ESEA stereotypes that had arisen by this point. He was motivated by the destruction of the Western World, reflecting the Yellow Peril fears that were spreading, but was also seen to be a menace towards white women as he kidnapped and manipulated them[14]. These performances and characters were framed through the white perceptions of ESEA people as backwards, submissive or malicious, and uncivilised people and therefore heavily emphasised (or fabricated) the characteristics which suited these stereotypes.

The only format through which ESEA performers were seen on their own terms was through Chinese acrobatic and musical troupes that sometimes toured, though they were largely still billed as human curiosities (Moon 2015, p. 57). These performances provided greater context for Chinese culture which Americans had previously only seen through the immigrants they encountered, leading to stereotypes of more detailed areas such as clothing, music, and characteristics. Musical themes and vocal cadences were lifted and exaggerated from these acts, especially when used in mockery and parody. The still-infamous ‘Oriental Riff’[15] is thought to have originated around this time, specifically seen for the first time in *The Grand Chinese Spectacle of Aladdin*, a musical stage production in 1847 (Chow 2014). It was a product of

[14] The character of Fu Manchu and his associated characteristics was expanded upon on pages 42-45.
[15] This riff can be found throughout pop culture, such as in Carl Douglas’s song *Kung Fu Fighting* (1974), the *Siamese Cat Song* in Disney’s animated film *Aristocats* (1970), and in the video game *Super Mario Land* (1989).

imitating the Chinese music that audiences were hearing, but without any real roots in Chinese music or its characteristics other than the pentatonic scale, which was often used in other cultures and was not inherently Chinese (ibid). It is worth noting that audiences probably would not have distinguished greatly between 'other cultures' and would have grouped them in with Chinese culture anyways. This can be seen by the many instances of shows set in China involving Aladdin, an Arabian character, and the merging of any cultures which were seen as 'other.' Said's (2003) ideas of Orientalism highlight how anything east of Europe was considered 'the Orient' and were seen as one homogenous group of people and cultures that were all 'other' to the west. This will be an important factor in the analysis of the script below. As Chinese populations grew, performances saw larger audiences of immigrants as well as amateur performers, which led to the creation of many permanent performance spaces. This included 'restaurants, brothels, gambling halls, and theaters' which Americans would visit out of curiosity and excitement (Moon 2015, p. 57).

Vaudeville was a very popular form of entertainment at the turn of the century, catering largely towards white, middle class men but expanding to appeal to a wider audience such as women and family/child-friendly shows in the twentieth century (Moon 2015, p. 143). It was a national industry, organised through 'comprehensive networks of booking offices and established theaters [which] took on the important tasks of promotion, ticket vending, production… deciding which jokes, songs, and acts would "go over" and which would not' (McLean Jr. 1965). A standard evening they organised would feature 'seven to ten acts appearing on the bill in a set order and dominated by a headliner… vaudeville emerged as one of the most popular entertainment venues in the United States by the end of the nineteenth century' (Moon 2015, p. 143). As the rise in Chinese and ESEA immigrants became more widely discussed, it was inevitably reflected in the content of vaudeville theatre. Many acts

incorporated Chinese impressions and characters into their material, fortifying the stereotypes that had begun arising. Eventually, Chinese immigrants such as the Chung Hwa Comedy Four and Rose Moy and her husband Joe Chang began performing in vaudeville shows as well, though with great difficulty as racial prejudice proved a great barrier to being allowed on stage.

Many of the stereotypes they faced directly impacted their perceived ability to perform. For example, the stereotypes of Chinese people struggling with pronunciation and of Chinese music being discordant meant that many believed Chinese performers could not sing or understand 'sophisticated' Western music (Moon 2015, p. 144). These characteristics were particularly prominent as examples of 'reasons' that ESEA immigrants were inherently un-American and could not assimilate; an aspect of them being prevented from settling down and being accepted was that they were not allowed to integrate into popular culture, such as participating in vaudeville. Immigration laws additionally meant that performers who were invited to perform in other countries had great difficulty re-entering the country, putting them at a distinct disadvantage and making success difficult. In order to gain respect as performers, many performed the same kinds of material that white performers did, such as blacking up, singing well known songs in English, and doing impressions of different races/nationalities including conforming to stereotypes of themselves (Moon 2015, pp. 145-146).

Moon argues that Chinese performers were able to subvert stereotypes through their presence onstage and through their acts but most of their acts seem to either do this by being racist towards other races or play into the existing stereotypes. Their presence on stage did subvert stereotypes in that Chinese people in entertainment was very unusual and they were often able to sing/speak in ways that were not stereotypical. However, as Moon (2015, p. 151) points out:

'With one exception, Chinese and Chinese Americans did not use the baggy blouses and short pants that were common among yellowface impersonators. Instead, they chose either formal wear, like tuxedos or ball gowns, or elaborate Chinese costumes designed to be colorful and attractive rather than authentic.'

As with Chinatowns and catering to tourists, Chinese performers found that it was more profitable to adapt the cultural aspects of performances to appeal more to white audiences, including taking Chinese costumes out of their original contexts to be presented in place of their everyday clothing. In doing so, the performers were not subverting stereotypes but instead pandering to the existing ones of Chinese people being decadent in their living standards, traditional rather than modern by wearing inconvenient costumes as daily wear, and othering themselves from Western culture by being vividly different in appearance.

There is an element of mimicry that should also be addressed within these performances. Bhabha's (1984) concept of mimicry is that, when a colonial or oppressed group perform their oppressor's ideas of how they should behave or present themselves, there is an 'ambivalence' which creates a 'double articulation' of both reiterating those representations as well as subverting them. As Shimizu (2007, p. 63) describes it in relation to performances of stereotypes by ESEA performers, stereotyping 'not only represents trauma but also acts as sites for wrestling with power, resistance, and redemption.' As such, these Chinese performers who played up to stereotypes in front of white audiences can be seen to be embracing this ambivalence which allows their work to be perceived as both reiterating and subverting the stereotypes levelled against them.

This was even more apparent with female performers. Female performers faced aggressive sexual stereotypes in a way that male performers did not, as their appearance was seen as inherently hypersexual whereas men faced more subtle sexual stereotypes. Additionally, as Lee (1999, p. 90) points out, 'The Chinese prostitute could not be made a

subject of popular entertainment in the nineteenth century because such publicity would unveil the complex homosocial exchange between Chinese men and white men that made possible the profitable exchange of Chinese women's bodies as a commodity.' By this, Lee refers to the fact that desire for Chinese women was 'a shared sexual desire', suggesting an equality between Chinese men and white men, which would have crossed the racial and sexual boundaries created at the time. As white men were perceived to embody traditional masculine characteristics and Chinese men were portrayed as lacking these and embodying a 'third sex' rather than falling into heteronormative, binary categorisation, to suggest that they shared any traits or desires was not tenable on stage. As such, there was much less representation of ESEA women on stage at the time, and the material chosen for this case study reflects this. The chosen script does not involve or reference Chinese women at all, and while there is a multitude of ESEA women's experiences and portrayals during this period, they were not commonly reflected on stage and as such the case study does not engage with them. However, chapter 3 expands upon the history of ESEA women's representation in performance more.

This is not to say that female ESEA performers and characters did not exist. Performer Rose Eleanor Jue, who went by the stage name of Princess Jue Quon Tai, is an example of a performer who played into the exoticism of ESEA imagery and the curiosity white audiences had for its culture (ibid). She utilised 'several elaborate costumes during her act, which included a special backdrop to add exoticism and novelty' to her acts (ibid). Her sister Alice Jewel, more widely known as So Tai Jue, was similarly a vaudeville performer who was known as the 'Voice of the Orient' and performed with Harry Haw, known as Honourable Wu (Cho and CHSSC 2013, p. 21). It can be seen in all three of these performers' choices that they took steps to exoticise their acts. Firstly, they all adopted less Western names for their acts[16]. Secondly, the use of

[16] It is common practice to this day for ESEA immigrants with names that Western communities deem 'difficult to pronounce' to anglicise their names; it may be the case that these performers previously had

exciting and prestigious names, such as the titles of Princess and Honourable that in reality they had no connection to. Princess Jue Quon Tai had a backstory that she had been a ‘‘foreign princess’ who had run away from her fourth-ranked mandarin father while attending the San Francisco World Exposition’ (Moon 2015, p. 151). These names and stories created intrigue and reinforced the idea of the mysticism of ESEA.

Moon argues that Princess Jue Quon Tai’s act was ‘a caricature of a caricature,’ mocking the over the top way in which white performers mimicked Chinese culture and characteristics by further exaggerating them (2015, p. 153). However, the idea that exaggerating a stereotype further makes it a parody of itself seems indistinguishable from merely leaning into a stereotype and playing it up for the audience. In the same way that Black performers could perform blackface, this seems to be a case of ESEA performers performing yellowface; an exaggeration of their racial characteristics using the lens of the white community. Were audiences looking for that level of nuance and commentary in a performance, or would they not have been more focused on the intrigue and spectacle of the performance? Would they have known enough about Chinese culture and been aware of their own Western framing of ESEA culture to know that something was being parodied or would they have taken things at face value? We have no way of discerning the intention or the reception here. However, this is not to say that these ESEA performers did not have this intention. There may have been ESEA members of the audience, or white audience members who had lived in ESEA, who may have seen the nuance and found humour in the mocking of racist portrayals rather than the racism itself. Bhabha’s (1984) concept of mimicry is useful here in that it allows for the ambivalence of the performers’ use of stereotypes used against them to exist, acknowledging the pattern of discrimination while

less Western names, then anglicised to assimilate, and then changed again to make their stage names more appealing. Regardless, it shows an embellishment of their ‘exotic’ characteristics for the purpose of entertainment.

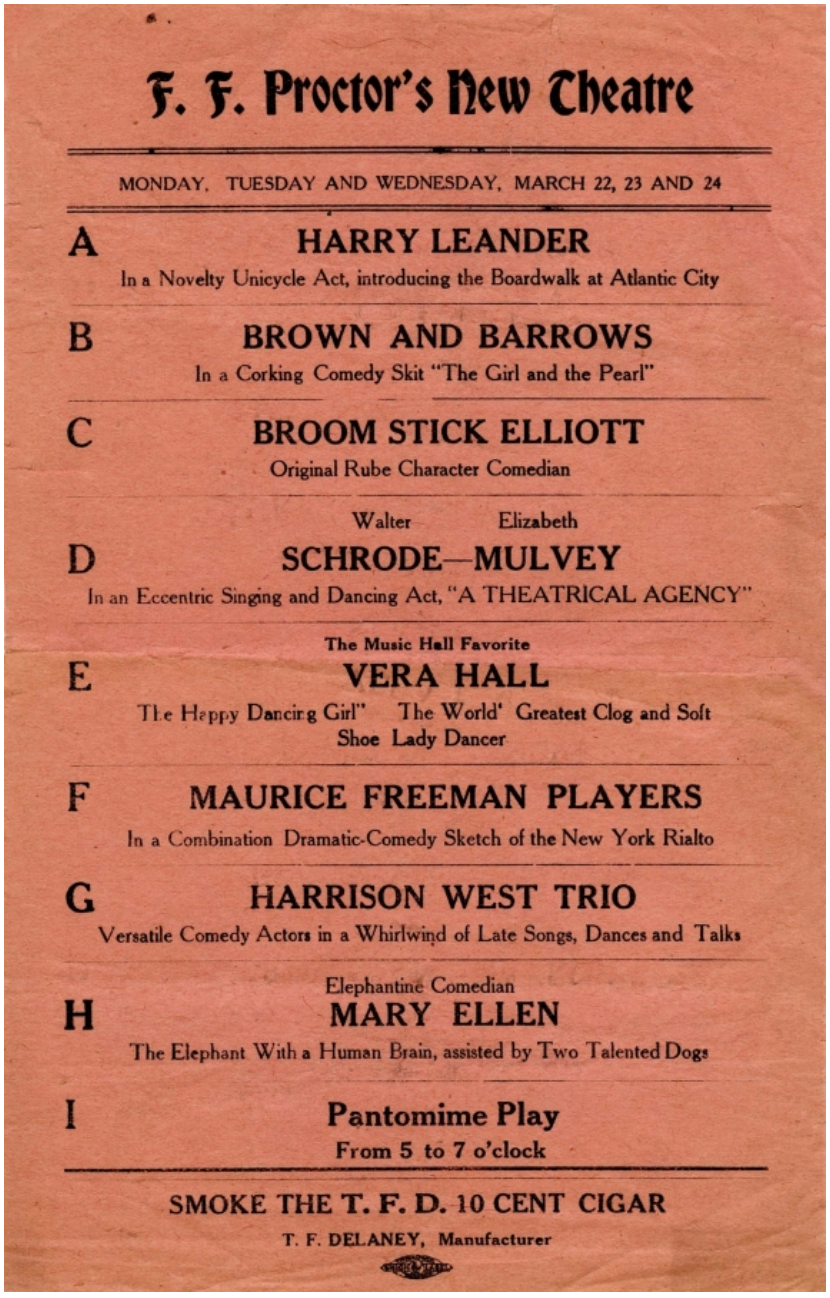
also allowing for the potential for subversion and rejection of those stereotypes. There are many comedians who have successfully found audiences in multiple demographics for differing reasons, and it is possible that some of these ESEA performers could have been providing multiple levels of humour for their varying audience members. The perception of different races was complex, and the script analysed below provides many examples of this in action.

The case study for this section will be of a variety act performed by two African American performers: *The C**n and the Ch*nk*[17]. This case study encapsulates the complex perceptions of different races by white Americans. The version of the skit that will be used is a script that was originally performed by African American comedy duo Cook and Stevens, adapted by many other performers such as Catlin and Kelly, of which no scripts exist. However, publishers Dick and Fitzgerald reproduced the skit and 'probably wrote a version of "The Coon and the Chink" for their white clientele' (Moon 2015, p. 141).

It is unclear whether the title *The C**n and the Ch*nk* was one that was adopted for printing or whether this was the original sketch's title. The reason it could be argued that this was a printing title only is because the title of the sketch appears to give away much of the humour and punchlines involved in the script; as almost all of the gags are based on the dynamic caused by the perceived differences between Black and ESEA people, this title on a billing could spoil the punchline for the audience. Based on billings of acts in vaudeville at this

[17] The censoring here of the terms C**n and Ch*nk is to recognise several characteristics of these words. Firstly, that they are now seen as highly offensive and derogatory terms for homogenised ethnic groups by the West. Secondly, they both have highly problematic origins. According to the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, the term c**n came from 'raccoon' and was used to refer to the stereotype of 'lazy, easily frightened, chronically idle, inarticulate, buffoon' (Pilgrim 2012). The term ch*nk began as a reference to the stereotype of ESEA people having small eyes but later evolving to be used as a derogatory term and to signify the 'othering' and homogenisation of ESEA people (such as calling Chinese takeaways 'ch*nkies' in Britain, and the fact that the term is often used by perpetrators of racist violence). Both of these origins serve to perpetuate harmful stereotypes as well as attack members of those communities. Thirdly, these are not words that I would be comfortable verbalising and therefore am not comfortable writing unaltered. If they are in quotations unaltered, I have left them that way as I do not wish to impose my position on the words onto other writers.

time, the titles of comedy acts were usually designed to entice audiences without giving away exactly what the act would comprise of. The billing shown in Figure 2 exemplifies the kinds of titles and formatting acts would be given.



F. F. Proctor's New Theatre

MONDAY, TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 23 AND 24

A
HARRY LEANDER
In a Novelty Unicycle Act, introducing the Boardwalk at Atlantic City

B
BROWN AND BARROWS
In a Corking Comedy Skit "The Girl and the Pearl"

C
BROOM STICK ELLIOTT
Original Rube Character Comedian

D
Walter Elizabeth
SCHRODE—MULVEY
In an Eccentric Singing and Dancing Act, "A THEATRICAL AGENCY"

E
The Music Hall Favorite
VERA HALL
The Happy Dancing Girl" The World' Greatest Clog and Soft Shoe Lady Dancer

F
MAURICE FREEMAN PLAYERS
In a Combination Dramatic-Comedy Sketch of the New York Rialto

G
HARRISON WEST TRIO
Versatile Comedy Actors in a Whirlwind of Late Songs, Dances and Talks

H
Elephantine Comedian
MARY ELLEN
The Elephant With a Human Brain, assisted by Two Talented Dogs

I
Pantomime Play
From 5 to 7 o'clock

SMOKE THE T. F. D. 10 CENT CIGAR
T. F. DELANEY, Manufacturer

Figure 2: 'F. F. Proctor's New Theatre lineup of performances with descriptions for March 22-24' (American Vaudeville Museum Collection).

The five acts that are classed as 'comedy' all give very little away regarding what their act is, what the jokes will be, and what kind of characters are involved. It perhaps makes more sense that the title is very descriptive and indicates what kind of humour will be found within if the title is aimed at performers looking for a script to perform.

It is also unclear whether Dick and Fitzgerald adapted the dialogue or script in a way that became more appealing to white audiences and performers, or whether the mere act of publishing it themselves made it more appealing. It is possible, as with the above example of Princess Jue Quon Tai, that the performance had different kinds of appeal for different audiences; that performing it to a Black or ESEA audience would provide satire of the Western view of their racial groups and that to a white audience it would be humorous due to its mockery of Black and ESEA people. Additionally, it may have held very different meaning when performed by Black performers compared to white performers. It is especially worth considering the difference that it would have made to a Black audience compared to an ESEA audience, particularly with the complex power dynamics in play during this period in regards to racial perceptions.

As Moon (2015, p. 131) points out, African American residents were often seen as more "American" than ESEA people. The arrival of ESEA immigrants brought the complexities of national and racial identity to light as there were now questions regarding what made a person or community more "American" than others. The perception of Christianity as a sign of morality and assimilation made African American people who were Christian appear more American than ESEA people to many, as well as the perception that ESEA people could not speak English very well (ibid). Additionally, African Americans were considered more assimilated as 'slavery

had erased any connection to a specific homeland but also… African American culture was an important way to delineate the United States from European nations' (ibid). This argument was used by African American people to justify their position as 'more American,' with articles in a San Francisco African American newspaper citing that African American children should not have to attend schools with ESEA and Native American children who were 'heathens' in 1867 (Moon 2015, p. 133). African American press additionally reinforced the stereotypes of Chinatown as 'embodiments of pre-modern, alien difference,' with almost every mention of Chinese people being related to crimes such as opium, prostitution, and murder (Jun 2006, p. 1052). This frequency of negative mentions of Chinese immigrants was great despite many of them having never encountered Chinese immigrants as Black and Chinese populations were concentrated in very different geographical areas (ibid). However, others considered ESEA people, particularly Japanese immigrants, more 'white' than 'negro' due to their 'model minority' qualities such as having nuclear families and being hard working (Shenk 2005, pp. 119-120).

These various perceptions of African American people, Chinese immigrants, and the typical white American person were expressed through performances of blackface and yellowface by members of all three communities. These performances allowed performers to have some control over how they were seen, and how they saw themselves in comparison to other racial groups. Moon argues that ESEA performers used their performances (even those of yellowface) to subvert stereotypes that rejected the idea that ESEA people could be successful performers; similarly, African American performers used blackface in sketches involving yellowface to emphasise the differences between Black and ESEA people in a way that elevated their status and argued that they were more "American" than ESEA people.This included using the dynamic between blackfaced and yellowfaced characters to show that 'African Americans [allied] themselves with whites by marking the Chinese as different from the

white norm, as they themselves had been marked. These characterizations, however, focused on both racial inferiority and the foreignness and inability of the Chinese to assimilate' (Moon 2015, p. 133).

Jun (2006, pp. 1047-1049) argues that the inclusion of Chinese immigrants in American society largely leaned towards acceptance of the Black population over the Chinese. In a testimony in 1877, Reverend Blakeslee claimed that 'slavery "did wonderfully elevate the slave and prepare him for citizenships" with the "one exception" that "it legally denied human rights to the slave"' (Jun 2006, p. 1050). When the two races were being compared the narrative was often 'racial uplift, generating narratives of black moral, political, and cultural development, which in turn reified the Orientalist logic of the anti-Chinese movement' (ibid, p. 1048.)[18] All of this context must be noted before analysing the case study text, particularly in investigating the intentions that informed the humour of the piece.

Analysis of the Text

From the character descriptions it is already apparent how the two races are perceived by white audiences. C**n is 'ignorant and unpolished' while Ch*nk is 'very stupid and ignorant in

[18] This area of history involves many comparisons of the two racial groups' experiences with oppression. This research does not aim to pit them against each other, or to draw comparisons between them to determine who 'suffered more,' or who 'deserved better' than the other. Great pain and suffering was inflicted on both groups in many different ways which cannot be directly compared. The use of blackface and yellowface by performers with the intent to alienate the other group or to elevate their own is not something that this research is aiming to demonise or make a moral judgement on—the conditions faced and the turmoil regarding their positions in society may be somewhat clear in hindsight with research but the lived experiences of those people which impacted their decisions cannot be seen or understood from our current viewpoint. To focus on whether what they did was 'right' is also to possibly ignore that they were all attempting to humanise their communities to people who actively oppressed and dehumanised them. As Jun (2006, p. 1050) writes, 'Black Orientalism is a heterogeneous and historically viable discourse in which the contradictions of black citizenship engage with the logic of American Orientalism… [it] encompasses an entire range of black imaginings of Asia that are in fact negotiations with the limits and disappointments of black citizenship.'

disposition,' and these characteristics are central in the comedy of the piece. This gag operates through the 'superiority' of the audience, who laughs at their own elevated status over the inferiority of the subject of a joke; it can also be seen that much of the humour is derived from the audience's and C**n's superiority. The inferiority of Ch*nk to C**n is the main humorous dynamic utilised in the piece, as he is consistently misunderstanding or fooled by C**n. Ch*nk is shown to be inferior not only to C**n but also to the audience, and therefore the humour can be found in both the relationship depicted on stage and the audience's relationship to the characters. C**n is portrayed as taking advantage of Ch*nk's 'stupid and ignorant disposition' in order to obtain money from him. However, the perception of the status of C**n to the audience could vary depending on the demographic of the audience; to an audience who viewed both Black and ESEA people in a derogatory manner, it is likely that they would find reasons to feel superior to both of the characters and therefore to find the sketch to be humorous as they felt more intelligent that the character of Ch*nk but also more moral than C**n and his various attempts to trick Ch*nk. On the other hand, to an audience more sympathetic to Black characters than ESEA ones, it is possible that C**n's attempts to get money from Ch*nk could have been seen as cleverness and streetwise rather than immoral, particularly if they believed stereotypes of ESEA people being overly stingy and considered them less "American" than Black people. However, based on the derogatory descriptions of the characters it is fairly clear that this specific depiction was intended to be viewed by audiences who would comfortably consider themselves superior to both the character of C**n and Ch*nk, rather than sympathetic to any potential positive elements of their characterisation. Additionally, Bergson's (2005, p. 66) idea of laughter as a social indicator provides another element of analysis in this dynamic. Bergson (ibid) argued that laughter functions as a deterrent, where unsociable and immoral behaviour is laughed at therefore if a member of society does not want to be laughed at they

must not behave this way. In this sketch, the audience are likely laughing at what they find inappropriate behaviour to signal that they themselves do not behave this way and believe others should not either. As the publishers were known for catering to 'white clientele' this version of the script is most likely aimed at white audiences. However, the origin of this sketch as being created and performed by two African American performers means we cannot ignore that there may have been different understandings of the performance by different demographics, even if this particular version was published for a specific group and framed through that perspective. Additionally, the 'mimicry' element of the performance, when performed by African American performers in blackface as well as potential performances by ESEA performers, suggests that there was ambiguity in the attitude and intention behind reiterating stereotypes, whether that was enforcing or subverting those perceptions and the people who perpetuate them (Bhabha 1984).

The descriptions of costuming in the sketch reveal clues as to what visual cues were used by performers at the time to communicate racial stereotypes to audiences. C**n's costume is described as 'crushed,' 'carelessly tied,' and 'worn out' including 'long white cloth gloves' and an 'exaggerated high collar, and big soft… bow-tie.' The props also include 'a pair of ragged white socks' which are his. Ch*nk's costume includes a queue, which was a hairstyle often worn by Chinese men during the Qing dynasty where the head is mostly shaved except a section that is grown out long and braided to hang down the back, and what is described as 'typical Chinese coat, trousers and slippers.' This suggests a very strong understanding of what 'typical Chinese' clothes usually were already without needing to describe them. This is likely a product of the exaggerated Chinese/'Oriental' fashions and characteristics seen in Chinatowns and Chinese performers by white and African American audiences, who in turn interpreted them for their own adaptations. The props also include a 'bowl supposed to contain chop-suey and chop-sticks,' a

staple of Western interpretations of Chinese food and how they are eaten. What the descriptions of these clothes show is that the stereotypes of African American and ESEA people were clearly reflected in the way white people created and visualised characters from those backgrounds. The character of C**n visually embodies the stereotypes of African American people being 'lazy' and 'idle,' as they are described as not being well looked after or particularly presentable (Pilgrim 2012). C**n's costume of oversized, exaggerated clothes are likely referencing the costume of the racial caricature character of Zip C**n, who 'was a preposterous, citified dandy… easily recognized in his bright, loud, exaggerated clothes' (Lemons 1977, p. 102). Ch*nk's appearance reinforces his homogenous 'otherness' as well as the perception of ESEA people as valuing tradition over modernity through the use of a very peculiar and traditional hairstyle and the idea that all Chinese people's clothing are so uniform that there is a specific 'typical' outfit. Additionally, the use of a laundry as the setting of the scene reflects the stereotype of Chinese men performing domestic 'feminine' jobs and therefore emasculating them, when in fact they took these positions due to a combination of being unable to find work performing hard manual labour and being refused jobs due to racism.[19]

The opening interaction shows Ch*nk refusing to find C**n's laundry despite C**n needing his laundry for a ball. Ch*nk's persistent following of these rules ('No tickie—no laundry') until he is physically threatened by C**n reveal two stereotypes he is embodying. Firstly, that Chinese people are frugal to the point of being churlish, as he is unwilling to give C**n his laundry despite remembering who he is and which laundry is his ('You comie in Wednesday'). Secondly, that Chinese people are cowardly and self-serving as he immediately

[19] This trope is still found in popular media today. For example, Mr Washee Washee on *Family Guy* (first appearing in 2011), the Chinese human traffickers who disguise themselves as Chinese launderers in the film *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (1967) and its 2002 musical adaptation, and various media where characters visit laundries run by Chinese people (e.g. *American Psycho* (2000), season 1 episode 17 of *Elementary* (2013), *The Seven Year Itch* (1955)).

abandons his principles of not returning laundry without a ticket when C**n threatens him (‘(*rolling up fist*). Look here, John, you mention de word ticket to me again and I’m gwana wrap dis around yo’ roof, understand?’). The humour of this moment is the speed at which Ch*nk changes his tone once he is threatened. His insistence that he will not allow C**n to pick up his laundry without a ticket is set up through his repeated request for a ticket or else C**n will not get his laundry back. This sets up a standard that it appears he will not waiver on, and makes him appear like a righteous character. However, as soon as C**n starts to threaten physical violence, Ch*nk is shown as cowardly, as he says ‘Watie name?’ This immediate switch subverts the audience’s expectations as they have perceived him to have a strong stance against letting C**n get away with having no ticket. This gag works through incongruity, because the expectation that Ch*nk will stand his ground is subverted by how quickly he becomes submissive when fearing for his own safety. This in turn creates a sense of superiority in the audience, who can see that Ch*nk has inferior morals to them.

The phonetically written accents additionally give insight into what kind of inferiority the audience perceives the characters as embodying, as a person’s ability to speak English fluently was likely used to indicate whether or not they were considered intelligent. C**n’s speech is, for the most part, grammatically correct but very colloquial with simplified sounds (‘I told you I done lost de ticket,’ ‘I have an engagement for a ball to-night,’ ‘I don’t care nuthin’ bout *how* you find it—only *find* it.’) This reflects the discourse at the time where African American people were largely considered more “American” than Chinese immigrants, partially due to their ability to speak fluent English, but were still considered less intelligent or civilised than white citizens and therefore ‘less American.’ C**n’s language shows that he is more fluent than Ch*nk, but still uses very colloquial words and phrases which the audience could have perceived as less intelligent.

In contrast, Ch*nk's speech is extremely broken and involves the complete altering of many words, adding sounds ('watie name?', 'No tickie,' 'You gottie tickie?') and disregarding grammar ('You no leavie no watchie no laundry'—You didn't leave a watch in your laundry). This could be a reference to Pidgin English, which was derived from the English that Chinese traders would use with the British in the 19th century; the word 'Pidgin' supposedly came from the Chinese pronunciation of the word 'business.' The term 'no tickie—no laundry' is very close to the phrase 'no tickee, no washee,' which has the same meaning and is now widely recognised as a common phrase used to racially stereotype ESEA people (Mieder 1996). This phrase and its variants appear to have been coined around 1880 and became more popular in the 1930s according to Figure 3 below.

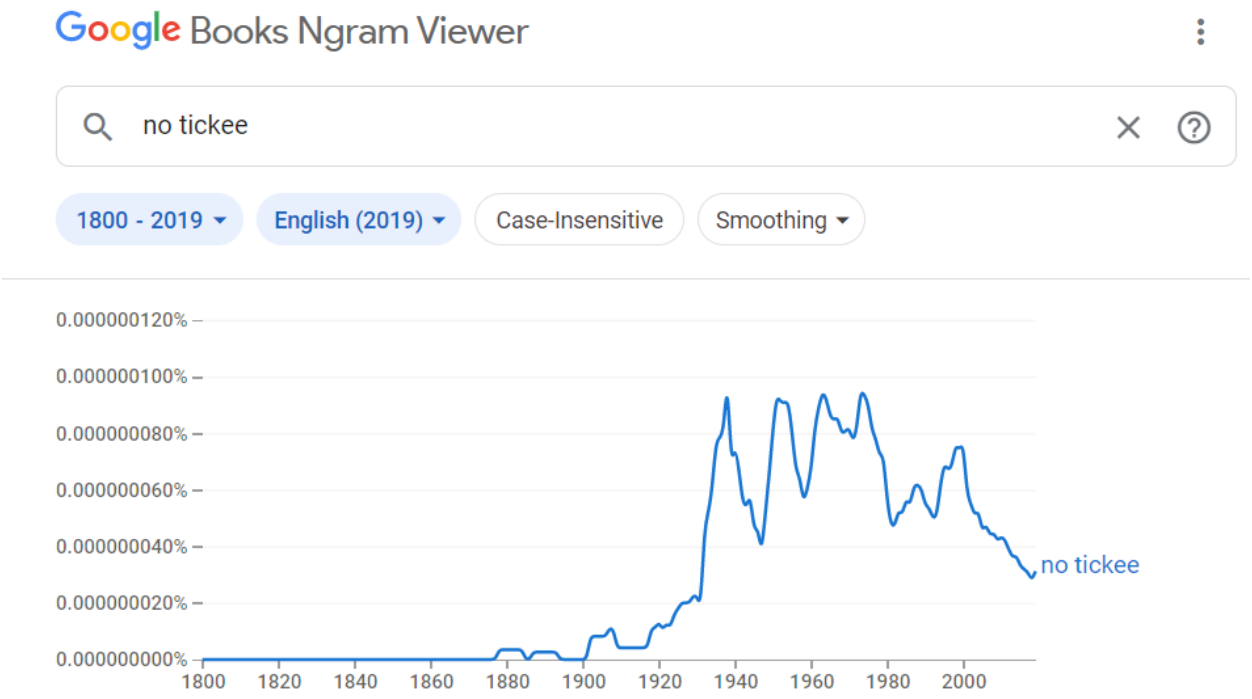


Figure 3: A Google Books Ngram Viewer diagram of occurrences of the phrase 'no tickee' in English books from 1800 to present day. The percentages on the y-axis shows the percentage of books in the sample containing the phrase. (Google Ngram Viewer 2020).

It is possible that its emergence was a result of its use in vaudeville sketches such as *The C**n and the Ch*nk*, as well as its appearance in other media such as Bret Harte's 1876 play *Two Men of Sandy Bar* in which the 'Chinese laundryman' character of Hop Sing repeatedly uses the word 'washee.'[20]

L's and R's are also swapped at points in the dialogue, a common stereotype for ESEA people mispronouncing English words, often framed as a racist example of ESEA people failing to assimilate. This is likely to have drawn laughter from the audience, who may have laughed at the superiority they perceived themselves as having over Ch*nk for his broken English, or at the incongruity of a character who is presented as quite righteous being seen as unintelligent, therefore undermining his status.

The use of swapped Ls and Rs derives from the fact that many ESEA languages do not have the same L and R sounds as English, but instead have letters in between those sounds and/or letters that are similar that when phonetically translated to English become merged (Fong 2019). This is not to say that this stereotype has any factual basis; the video in the Fong (2019) article very succinctly explains the variations of the L and R sounds found in English compared to in various ESEA languages, as well as the difficulties in picking up the nuances of these sounds to non-native speakers. Most notably for this research, the video points out that the idea that Ls and Rs would be switched by ESEA people is unfounded; most instances of

[20] Though widely recognised as offensive, this phrase still appears in modern popular culture, most notably in the 2006 Martin Scorsese film *The Departed*, in which Jack Nicholson's character says 'No tickee, no laundry' to illustrate that in order for an exchange to be made, both sides must bring what they agreed. The film is an adaptation of the film *Infernal Affairs* by Hong Kong directors Andrew Lau and Alan Mak. The adaptation involves Chinese gangs.

confusion with pronunciation result in one sound encompassing both due to the absence of the other sound in their native language (e.g. all Rs and Ls becoming L/all Rs and Ls becoming R), therefore it would not make sense to still use both letter separately but swapped (Fong 2019). The use of language in this script can therefore be seen as reinforcing an inaccurate stereotype of ESEA people in order to signal to the audience the character's otherness and lack of "American" characteristics.

Food is another element of the sketch used as a gag that covers multiple racial stereotypes. The stereotype that Chinese food is made from questionable ingredients and very strong seasoning is prevalent throughout the script, such as when Ch*nk asks C**n if 'You wantie some chop suey?' and C**n replies 'Dat depends entirely upon what de ingredients of de concoction am constituted of.' C**n distrusts the ingredients in the chop suey that Ch*nk is eating, reinforcing the stereotype of ESEA people eating strange/rancid foods using ingredients that are considered disgusting by Western culture such as century eggs, eating the meat from unconventional animals such as bats and dogs, and eating insects. Additionally, eating habits and cuisine were a crucial part of the formation of stereotypes against ESEA people. As Kim (2015, pp. 31-32) points out, the US government 'connected eating practices to the very vitality of the nation' by implying that certain eating habits were 'intrinsic to the American worker's "character."' Kim argues that there was a 'scrutiny of habitual behaviors, which helped to justify the exclusion acts' through the constant linking of habit and ritual to supposed characteristics. In an address regarding 'the Evils of Chinese Immigration,' the California State Senate warned the public of the threat that Chinese labourers placed on white labourers through highlighting the 'irreconcilability of "meat" and "rice"', with each clearly representing an ethnic group. It is clear that the link between stereotyping and dietary rituals is one that was established early on and was being utilised as shorthand in performance to suggest certain qualities to the audience.

In the next segment of dialogue, Ch*nk begins to answer C**n's question with 'Chicken and--' before C**n immediately interrupts with 'Chicken! Never mind de balance of de explanation—only waltz me to it.' The humour of this exchange is firstly that C**n and the audience have strong misgivings regarding how edible Ch*nk's food is, as it is seen as inferior to Western food for its repulsive characteristics. Then, the humour derives from the fact that C**n's love of chicken is so strong that it overrides the expectation set up by the initial reaction to the chop suey. This reaction to chicken is another racist stereotype that Black people love to eat chicken;[21] it is itself not a derogatory characteristic but is often used in a way to reinforce other more harmful stereotypes, such as in this section of the script. Much like the gag with Ch*nk refusing to serve C**n without a ticket and then changing his mind when threatened with physical violence, this gag establishes C**n's disdain for Chinese food so the audience laugh at their own superiority to the food, then shows C**n immediately changing his mind when he realises there is chicken in the dish. This functions through the incongruity of the audience's expectation (that C**n would not eat the chop suey) with his willingness to eat anything that has chicken in it. It also reiterates the supposed superiority of the audience, who laugh at their own standards being superior to C**n's because they would not eat the food. The stereotype of loving to eat chicken is here framed in a derogatory way, as it suggests that it is a weakness in character and judgement on C**n's part. C**n also mentions possum soup; hunting and eating possum was a recurring racial stereotype of Black people during this period (Lemons 1977, p. 102). This line of humour is further pushed when C**n 'reaches in pocket for flask and takes swallow of whiskey [sic],' which he explains is 'to wash down the chop suey.' He clearly dislikes

[21] This stereotype largely stems from chickens being 'cheap, easy to feed and a good source of meat' for many Southern Americans but especially for slaves (Demby 2013). This is not to say that the stereotype is 'accurate'—chicken was a staple food for many people and communities for the same reasons, and was in no way a defining feature of only African American cuisine. This is merely another example of innocuous and common characteristics being framed in a particular way to discriminate against a group of people.

the chop suey as he expresses ‘disgust’ as he does so. However, when Ch*nk offers to make more chop suey, C**n replies ‘No, suh, I resolves to manufacture de next dose myself. Where bouts you keep de chicken?’ Again, his established dislike of Chinese food is undermined by his enthusiasm for eating chicken as he is shown to be willing to eat more of it if he can have more chicken.

The use of food is further used to reflect racial stereotypes through the use of utensils and how the characters eat the chop suey. C**n asks Ch*nk ‘Got a spoon John?’ to which Ch*nk replies ‘You usie chop-stick.’ C**n then exclaims ‘What! You expect me to eat wif de tooth-picks?’ in disbelief. The use of chopsticks to eat food is seen here are being considered strange/absurd and unnecessarily difficult, stemming from the stereotype that ESEA people reject modernity (including technological advancements that improve ease and convenience, such as how the West view forks/spoons/knives) in favour of tradition (backwards, historic practices upheld for the sake of ‘honour’ or ‘ancestral ties’). The suggestion that anyone would use chopsticks rather than an ‘easier’ utensil is seen as ridiculous, as shown by the comparison to using ‘tooth-picks’ to eat, and is the source of the humour in this section of dialogue;[22] the insistence on using such a ‘difficult’ utensil is seen as a sign that Ch*nk is inferior to the audience in his backwardness. In addition to this, it is possible that the character of C**n is being laughed at, as his confusion regarding what chopsticks are and how to use them could be seen as a sign of inferiority; while the use of chopsticks was seen as silly, C**n’s lack of knowledge of what they are and their cultural significance could be seen as a sign of ignorance or lack of worldliness that white audiences, who have experienced Chinatown and its attractions, would be aware of.

[22] I use quotation marks about ‘easier’ because I do not want to make the assumption that utensils such as forks and knives and spoons are actually universally ‘easier’ to use, as this is a fairly Western-centric assumption to make.

There are additional uses of props in this section which could be further references to racial stereotypes, though they also function as gags based on incongruity. C**n finds a pair of false teeth and a hair pin in the chop suey, which on their own could be funny as their presence in the food is unexpected and could elicit surprised laughter. They could also be interpreted as referencing the stereotype of ESEA people being bucktoothed and feminine, with the teeth representing the bucktooth stereotype and the hair pin, which C**n says would be appropriate for his wife, representing Ch*nk's femininity. These gags, as with the final section of the sketch where C**n tries to convince Ch*nk to perform with him, likely lose their original comedic intent with time. The general gag of the closing dialogue could have been that C**n talks circles around Ch*nk to further confuse him, or that despite knowing nothing of the world of performing Ch*nk is offended that C**n's clearly imaginary manager thinks so little of him. There are likely more specific gags here that are not apparent to modern readers, such as references that audiences at the time would have picked up on and found amusing.

Conclusion

Between 1848 and 1914, the representation of ESEA people on stage and in Chinatowns played a large role in exposing the West to ESEA culture such as food, music, and performance styles. However, as these grew more popular and drew larger paying crowds, much of the content became exaggerated spectacle to cater to white audiences' interests. This happened alongside the growth of ESEA communities in the West, where stereotypes regarding the lifestyle and characteristics of ESEA people were developing and solidifying. As a result, on stage representation began to reflect and draw from real life perceptions, reinforcing them through characters often played by white or Black performers in yellowface caricaturing the

public's understanding of what constituted 'an ESEA person.' While ESEA performers often attempted to subvert these stereotypes by performing on stage and satirising the John Chinaman character, many also had to incorporate stereotypes through audio and visual cues in order to engage their audiences. The growth of the ESEA population among and alongside white, Western communities also created an ongoing debate regarding race and specifically citizenship. The introduction of ESEA people to the discourse surrounding the racial perceptions between white and Black residents complicated issues in that many took varying stances on who could be considered "American" enough to be part of the community.

It is clear from this script that the sociopolitical climate surrounding the West, racial discourse, and citizenship greatly impacted what was performed on stage. The skit touches on ideas of otherness and racial hierarchy through the use of humour and language, presenting the characters as representatives of their entire race and drawing from widely understood stereotypes. The character of Ch*nk embodies many established and emerging perceptions of ESEA men at the time; he is portrayed as alien through his strong ties to "Chinese" traditions (through a Western perspective/understanding), his broken speech, and his lack of strength both physically and morally. The character is the butt of the joke throughout the piece, clearly considered inferior to C**n and the audience. The character of C**n is slightly more ambiguous, as the target audience and race of the performers could greatly change the interpretation and presentation of the skit. This reflects the ambiguity of African American people's acceptance into white American society, which became a point of debate following the growth of ESEA communities and their populations. The idea of 'Americanness' was argued to cover both ethnic groups over the other, but never accepting of both.

Chapter 2: Assigning Yellow Peril a Nationality During the World Wars, 1914-1945

The World Wars were pivotal events that changed the power and perception of all countries involved. Each country in ESEA was involved in different ways and to varying degrees, and while they were all significant aspects of each historical event, this chapter will not detail these various factors that influenced the wars, countries' involvements, and their outcomes. It will instead focus solely on what circumstances influenced the perceptions that the West held of ESEA countries and peoples.

WWI

Prior to the start of World War I, China was seeing an influx of Western ideologies and politics; labourers and students returning from abroad coincided with the collapse of the Qing dynasty and establishment of the Republic of China to begin the internationalisation of China (Xu 2011, pp. 10-13). This sense of change and reinvention was also pushed by the humiliating loss to Japan in the Sino-Japanese War as well as the Opium Wars, which China was eager to recover from to join the political powers of the West and Japan. Japan, on the other hand, wanted to seize this opportunity to increase its territories in China. These factors all acted as motivation for their engagement in World War I.

At the beginning of the war in 1914, China saw their new Republic as too vulnerable to fight in a global arena and declared neutrality, while Japan declared itself one of the Allies.

However, China also recognised the opportunity that the war presented to 'change the international system and allow China to join the community of nations' (Xu 2011, p. 13). As a result, president Yuan Shikai decided to volunteer 50,000 troops to support the British army in Qingdao, a German-controlled area of China that Japan also had its sights set on taking over. British minister John Jordan turned down this offer, thinking Chinese support was unnecessary; the West's view of China was that it was militarily weak and inferior to them, as well as to Japan who had joined the Allies as an emerging power.

However, despite their history, China also sided with the Allies and Japan. China was determined to 'be part of the winning team to attend the peace conference on the best possible footing to represent its interests' (ibid). To support the Allied effort, China supplied labourers to replace soldiers fighting in the war, particularly in France and Britain; this was done discreetly through private companies in order to preserve China's neutral status. Japan aided the West by fighting German forces in the Pacific and taking control of German territories in the East. From this, the West[23] found itself allied with both the ESEA countries it saw the greatest number of immigrants from, benefiting greatly from their support in the war.

Despite this, little changed in the stereotypes of ESEA people by the West and WWI actually saw an increase in restrictive policies towards them. The 1914 Alien Restriction Act (Appendix C)—which followed on from the less restrictive 1905 Alien Restriction Act—gave the UK government the right to stop any 'aliens' from landing, embarking, or residing in the UK as well as the ability to deport, fine, and restrict the rights/movement of aliens. Throughout World War I, the Chinese Labour Corps was a crucial supporting workforce for Britain and other European countries. The Chinese Labour Corps were made up of 95,000 Chinese labourers who were recruited to perform non-combative work to make up for the British labourers who had

[23] The United States joined WWI in 1917 after having declared neutrality at the start, but supported the Allies (particularly the UK and France) by supplying weapons throughout.

been conscripted as well as support the frontline soldiers by performing work such as ‘handling stores, constructing rear lines of defence, making and repairing roads, etc.’ (Kennedy 2014; Fawcett 2000, p. 35). While the war ended in 1919, the CLC continued to work until 1920 in the clearing of the battlefields of debris and bodies (Kennedy 2014). Altogether, an estimated 20,000 Chinese labourers died in World War I. Despite this, members of the CLC were denied the right to settle in Britain following the end of the war in 1918, and ‘were literally painted out of a canvas recording all the nations who joined the war effort’ (Kennedy 2014). In the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, Chinese territories were given to Japan by the Allies despite promises to return them to China. Furthermore, the 1919 Aliens Restriction Act extended the power of the 1914 act, partially to prevent foreigners from taking jobs away from British citizens after the war. Throughout this period, it is clear that Britain and Europe greatly benefitted from Chinese labour but made no move to accommodate them. As Parker (1998, p. 73) writes, ‘The Chinese population of the interwar period was reduced in size by deportations and refusals of entry under the 1919 Aliens Act, the 1920 Dangerous Drugs Act, and the 1925 Special Restrictions (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order. After the First World War, the decline of the shipping trade, the enactment of restrictive immigration legislation, and xenophobic popular culture combined to limit the expansion of the Chinese community.’

The perception of ESEA people and communities within the UK saw greater negativity despite their support in WWI; the paranoia that foreign labourers were ‘stealing’ jobs from white communities by working for lower wages was exacerbated by the fact that people of colour had taken up the jobs of men who had been recruited during the war to support the work force. This increase in immigrant labourers in the UK was felt by many communities but particularly in South Wales, which resulted in the 1919 South Wales Race Riots (Evans 1980). This event was, as Evans (ibid, pp. 5-8) points out, a result of building paranoia and resentment,

particularly towards Chinese immigrants. A strike in 1911 preceded the 1919 riots, which focused on ‘’the yellow peril’ which was said to pour from the vast recesses of China. An afternoon of violence and pillage left every Chinese laundry in Cardiff smashed’ (ibid).[24] The local community felt that the hiring of Chinese seamen at a lower wage was a threat to their livelihood, and was bolstered by the perceived danger of opium dens run by Chinese residents (despite the fact that ‘the proceeds of the sale of confiscated opium were used to supplement the Cardiff Police Superannuation Fund’ (ibid)). Furthermore, the presence of foreign men in the absence of the white men in the communities that had been recruited for war led to an increase in relationships and marriages between men of colour and white women. Members of the community were quick to suggest that this was due to the men preying on the ‘respectable’ white women in a way that was ‘unnatural and a sure sign of depravity’ (ibid, p. 9). In February 1919, seamen in Cardiff and Newport refused to work on ships that had Chinese employees, with the Seamen’s Union campaigning ‘for preference for white and coloured British seamen over Chinese and aliens’ (ibid, p. 12). When the war ended, communities felt that ‘victory was to provide the opportunity to purify behaviour,’ calling for immigration to be restricted and immigrants deported (ibid, p. 9). This was particularly pushed due to the high unemployment rates (for labourers of all ethnicities) and housing shortages, which many felt the Chinese and other foreign labourers were responsible for despite white men being given preference and many people of colour being displaced due to the returning soldiers (ibid, p. 12). The presence of foreign men who had bought property using their earnings and savings and therefore appeared affluent exacerbated the anger felt towards them (ibid, p. 13). Throughout 1919 this anger manifested into outbreaks of violence against people of colour, with disturbances in

[24] The significance of Chinese laundries being targeted reflects the historic ties between Chinese labourers attempting to find work and being more successful in traditionally female jobs such as cleaning and laundry; Chinese laundries were a signifier of the perceived femininity and emasculation of Chinese men, which will be further explored in the case study of this chapter.

‘London, South Shields, Hull, Salford, Liverpool, and eventually Wales’ which ‘influenced the events in South Wales’ (Sutton 2020; Evans 1980, p. 13). On the 6th of June 1919 in Newport, ‘a coloured man was alleged to have made an offensive remark to a white woman and this led to an altercation’ that spiralled into fighting, destruction of property inhabited by people of colour, and attacks on Chinese laundries. Five days later, an incident in Barry led to four people being killed and riots spread across South Wales until the military were sent in to stop them on June 14. As a result of the riots, the government created a Repatriation Committee that repatriated approximately 200 people of colour (Evans 1980, p. 20).

During this time, there was a conflicting view of ESEA people that was being experienced by the west coast of the USA. For the first time, ESEA people were being differentiated by nationality rather than race; the overarching stereotypes of ESEA people and culture developed more nuance within countries, particularly Japan and China. The Japanese population that had grown to replace the dwindling Chinese communities following the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 were causing many to question whether all ESEA people could be classified as ‘Mongolian’ the way they had been up until WWI (ibid, pp. 119-122). The white communities in California saw the Japanese as very similar to themselves, with men travelling over with their nuclear families (making them appear much more masculine than the effeminate Chinese) as well as their tendency to convert to Christianity and learn English (ibid). While some felt that this meant the Japanese deserved to be classed as ‘white,’ many felt that this meant that Japanese men posed an even greater threat to white men than Chinese men had; the assimilable qualities of Japanese men meant that they were perceived as being more eligible partners for white women, as opposed to the perception that Chinese men were a threat because they were so ineligible that they would resort to forcefully taking white women as their partners. This led to much confusion when the government instructed states to ‘forward

Chinese, Japanese and American Indians, but no Negroes,' grouping them with 'white' rather than 'coloured' people as they only recognised a 'binary racial system' (ibid, p. 119). These newly nuanced perceptions of ESEA people and the confusion surrounding their categorisation unfortunately did not lead to any progression, but rather the reinforcement of fear and stereotyping. About a fifth of the armed forces in WWI had been immigrants and the Act of May 9, 1918 promised naturalisation for anyone who had fought during the war (Salyer 2004, p. 847). However, many were unable to receive this benefit as people felt the Act was only available to those of '"white" or of African descent,' even prior to this being validated legally (ibid.) This stemmed from the belief that ESEA people were 'unassimilable' as their ties to their countries and cultures were too strong; this belief led to federal courts and the Supreme Court ruling that 'there were two races in California—white and nonwhite—but that for the purposes of the law, Chinese, other Asians, and American Indians, who it found were obviously not white, should be placed in the same racial category as "Negroes"' (Shenk 2005, p. 119). Similarly to the UK, the USA utilised Chinese labour during World War I and failed to honour their work with rights or access.

At this point it is also important to note that a particular element of ESEA representation was beginning to grow, which was colourism within ESEA groups rather than only in comparison to other ethnic groups. Residents from the Philippines, which was at this point a colony of the USA, had a unique experience due to the countries' histories, and this included greater discrimination due to having darker skin. As Melendy (1974, pp. 538-540) writes, Filipinx people faced a multi-faceted attitude from white communities which was threefold: firstly, that there was a 'paternalistic' approach to the Philippines due to the 'white man's burden' that they felt they had towards their own colony. Secondly, that Filipinx people were seen as less civilised due to their lack of Christianity and supposedly primitive way of life compared to the West (which was a

view shared with other ESEA groups as well). Lastly, that due to their darker skin they were afforded fewer opportunities to access housing, services, and employment than other ESEA groups and were often forced into worse standards of living as a result. While Filipinx residents were 'denied fewer civil and property rights than the immigrants from China and Japan,' such as being classified as citizens and able to travel freely in the USA, they also encountered other forms of discrimination that lighter skinned ESEA people did not (ibid). This thread of colourism within anti-ESEA racism is something which will be expanded upon in later chapters, and it is important to acknowledge its roots during this period.

WWII

The Second World War saw the tension between the West and ESEA rise significantly. Where the policy up until this point had largely been aimed at controlling borders and protecting the rights and jobs of white citizens, WWII saw the introduction of actively malicious policies such as internment camps for Japanese Americans in the US. Additionally, fighting took place in Southeast Asia on a scale it had not previously, introducing many Western people to a greater variety of ESEA cultures. These undoubtedly had an impact upon the perception of ESEA people by the West.

Prior to WWII beginning, the differentiation between different ESEA people as explored above was becoming more prominent, particularly between China and Japan. The Republic of China was established in 1912 following the overthrowing of the Qing dynasty, throwing the country into a period of uncertainty and turmoil; the Sino-Soviet conflict in 1929 solidified the view that China was an inferior country to the West as they were easily defeated by the Soviets. On the other hand, since WWI Japan had become a member of the League of Nations, gained

territories following the Treaty of Versailles, and were seen as continuing to be an ally to the West. However, in 1931 the distinction in the West between the two countries became particularly crucial as conflict between them escalated.

Tensions had long existed between Japan and China, which were exacerbated by China's loss of territory to Japan after WWI. In 1931, seeing China's defeat in the Sino-Soviet conflict, Japanese agents took advantage of their weaker military by placing explosives on the Japanese-owned South Manchurian Railroad in China and blaming it on China to justify the invasion of Manchuria that followed. After this invasion, the territory was announced as the independent state of Manchukuo in 1932, which was in reality under the control of the Japanese government. The League of Nations refused to acknowledge this and Japan therefore left the League and continued to sever its ties to the West by leaving the Washington Naval Treaty in 1934 and signing the Anti-Comintern Pact with Nazi Germany in 1936. During WWII, Japan constantly fought over Chinese and Western-occupied territories, which resulted in the threat of an embargo from the West, particularly the US who supplied most of Japan's oil. Rather than accept the terms for lifting the embargo, Japan led invasions such as the 1937 Nanjing Massacre and the near-simultaneous attacks of 1941 on Pearl Harbour, Guam, the Philippines, Malaya, Hong Kong, and Thailand.[25] For the West, Japan was a continually growing threat and the attack on Pearl Harbour particularly altered the relationship between the US and Japan.

As a result, Japanese people living in the US faced intense discrimination. The US government began a policy of relocating and confining Japanese people residing in the West to concentration camps—about 120,000 with two-thirds of them being American citizens—justifying the move by claiming they were a threat to security.[26] Many white

[25] Again, the events of WWII are abbreviated here to focus on the major changes in Western perspectives of East Asian people.
[26] The government actually began planning for the mass incarceration of Japanese residents prior to the attack on Pearl Harbour, compiling lists of all 'enemy aliens' in preparation (Chan 2019, p. 211). However,

communities supported this move, not only because of the perceived threat of a Japanese attack from inside the country, but because they felt the economic success of Japanese people was undermining their own (Chan 2019, p. 212). In response to this, ESEA communities—particularly Chinese, Korean, and Filipino—faced greater discrimination as they were often mistaken for Japanese people, and therefore began to devise ways in which they could differentiate themselves from each other. Several organisations distributed cards and pins that identified the holder/wearer as Chinese and only sold them to customers who could speak a Chinese dialect (ibid). Interestingly, mainstream media also pushed the differentiation between Japanese and other ESEA people. Figure 4 provides an example of this; an article from Life Magazine titled *How to Tell J*ps from Chinese* urges readers to learn how to distinguish Chinese and Japanese people due to the high volume of 'innocent victims in cities all over the country [who] are many of the 75,000 U.S. Chinese, whose homeland is our stanch ally' (Life 1941, p. 81). The following section will closely analyse the artefact in Figure 4 in order to expand upon the nuances of discrimination and understanding of ESEA people in the West at this time.

the original plan was to incarcerate these people through '[arresting them] under warrant issued by a federal prosecutor, a preliminary hearing, and a determination by the Justice Department of each individual's loyalty' (ibid).

HOW TO TELL JAPS FROM THE CHINESE

ANGRY CITIZENS VICTIMIZE ALLIES WITH EMOTIONAL OUTBURST AT ENEMY

In the first discharge of emotions touched off by the Japanese assaults on their nation, U. S. citizens have been demonstrating a distressing ignorance on the delicate question of how to tell a Chinese from a Jap. Innocent victims in cities all over the country are many of the 75,000 U. S. Chinese, whose homeland is our stanch ally. So serious were the consequences threatened, that the Chinese consulates last week prepared to tag their nationals with identification buttons. To dispel some of this confusion, LIFE here adduces a rule-of-thumb from the anthropometric conformations that distinguish friendly Chinese from enemy alien Japs.

To physical anthropologists, devoted debunkers of race myths, the difference between Chinese and Japs is measurable in millimeters. Both are related to the Eskimo and North American Indian. The modern Jap is the descendant of Mongoloids who invaded the Japanese archipelago back in the mists of prehistory, and of the native aborigines who possessed the islands before them. Physical anthropology, in consequence, finds Japs and Chinese as closely related as Germans and English. It can, however, set apart the special types of each national group.

The typical Northern Chinese, represented by Ong Wen-hao, Chungking's Minister of Economic Affairs (*left, above*), is relatively tall and slenderly built. His complexion is parchment yellow, his face long and delicately boned, his nose more finely bridged. Representative of the Japanese people as a whole is Premier and General Hideki Tojo (*left, below*), who betrays aboriginal antecedents in a squat, long-torsoed build, a broader, more massively boned head and face, flat, often pug, nose, yellow-ocher skin and heavier beard. From this average type, aristocratic Japs, who claim kinship to the Imperial Household, diverge sharply. They are proud to approximate the patrician lines of the Northern Chinese.

ese public servant, Ong Wen-hao, is representative of th Chinese anthropological group with long, fine-boned and scant beard. Epicanthic fold of skin above eyelid ound in 85% of Chinese. Southern Chinese have round, broad faces, not as massively boned as the Japanese. Except that their skin is darker, this description fits Filipinos who are often mistaken for Japs. Chinese sometimes pass for Europeans; but Japs more often approach Western types.

ese warrior, General Hideki Tojo, current Premier, is tural, closer to type of humble Jap than highbred relaof Imperial Household. Typical are his heavy beard, ve cheek and jaw bones. Peasant Jap is squat Mongoloid, with flat, blob nose. An often sounder clue is facial expression, shaped by cultural, not anthropological, factors. Chinese wear rational calm of tolerant realists. Japs, like General Tojo, show humorless intensity of ruthless mystics.

Chinese journalist, Joe Chiang, found it necessary to advertise his nationality to gain admittance to White House press conference. Under Immigration Act of 1924, Japs and Chinese, as members of the "yellow race," are barred from immigration and naturalization.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Figure 4: An article in Life magazine informing readers on how to differentiate between Chinese and Japanese people based on their facial features (Life 1941, p. 81).

From this article, it is implied that there was a shift in the perception of Chinese people around this time. The article emphasises the fact that the Chinese were the US's allies, that they were 'innocent victims' of violence aimed at Japanese people, and even calls them 'friendly Chinese' in comparison to the 'enemy alien J*ps' (ibid). Notably, the figures used in the diagram are Ong Wen-hao, 'Chungking's Minister of Economic Affairs' and Japanese military General and Prime Minister Hideki Tojo, who oversaw the Japanese WWII effort including multiple war crimes; the article is creating a contrast of the 'typical' Chinese man versus Japanese man through their occupations.

The wording used to describe the two figures is also very telling of how they were perceived. For example, the typical Chinese face is described as 'fine-boned,' suggesting delicateness and refinement, while the typical Japanese face is called 'massively boned [with] massive cheek and jawbone,' suggesting a more brutal and imposing characteristic. This difference is reinforced in the description of a typical Chinese nose as merely having a 'higher bridge' whereas the typical Japanese person as a 'flat, blob nose;' this description is still greatly unflattering to the Japanese face while being merely descriptive of the Chinese one. It additionally suggests a phrenological inferiority of Japanese people[27]; in the phrenology handbook *Vaught's Practical Character Reader* (1902, p. 144), noses are said to represent the temperament, with its shape corresponding to the 'faculties' of the person's mind. This suggests that the unflattering description of Japanese noses indicates an undesirable mindset. The idea that Chinese people are wiser, calmer, and more thoughtful while Japanese people are more savage and blunt is also reflected in the description of their skin as having a 'parchment yellow

[27] Phrenology was often used to justify discrimination against people of colour by claiming that there was "scientific" evidence that people with the stereotypical features of different races had specific negative traits. For example, skull shape and size were often used to promote the supposed superiority of caucasian people while "proving" that groups such as African and Aboriginal people were incapable of intelligence.

complexion,' whereas Japanese skin is of an 'earthy yellow complexion.' The image is printed in black and white, and therefore there is no clear visual difference between their skin tones, much less the shade of "yellow" their complexion is. The choice of descriptive words is therefore telling in that they are purely subjective. The term 'parchment' is perhaps linking the Chinese people to being scholarly and wise; on the other hand, 'earthly' is more closely linked with being coarse, primitive, or even dirty. Though less of a clear connection, it is possible that the descriptions of 'never [having] rosy cheeks' for Chinese men and 'sometimes rosy cheeks' for Japanese men could also be tied to these stereotypes. Rosy cheeks can be associated with being flustered, angry, and short-tempered. The diagram could therefore be insinuating that these characteristics are 'sometimes' found in Japanese people, whereas Chinese people are calmer and 'tolerant' so never have 'rosy cheeks.'

Another key facial feature that the article touches on is the facial hair of the subjects. The Chinese man is labelled as having a 'scant beard,' despite the man pictured being clean shaven; this indicates that he is not trying to grow facial hair at all, let alone struggling to grow it. On the other hand, the Japanese man is labelled as having a 'heavy beard,' despite having just a mustache and no beard. This is perhaps meant to be a signifier of the effeminate characteristics of Chinese men that many Westerners believed was inherent; though typically a negative trait, it links to the contemporary portrayal of Chinese people as less threatening than Japanese people. The existing portrayal of ESEA men as asexual except in instances of being sexual predators appears to have been divided during this period between the nationalities: the Chinese men were effeminate (shown through the apparent inability to grow beards) and therefore were not threatening, while Japanese men were more brutish and masculine (shown through their 'heavy' beards) and therefore threatening.

The article states that another method of differentiating Chinese and Japanese people 'is facial expression, shaped by cultural, not anthropological, factors. Chinese wear rational calm of tolerant realists. Japs, like General Tojo, show humorless intensity of ruthless mystics' (ibid).[28] These descriptions paint Chinese people as much more passive, humble people as opposed to the aggressive and unforgiving nature of Japanese people. This extract also suggests that all Chinese and Japanese people have such mannerisms due to their cultural background rather than phrenology as the other sections do; this should perhaps suggest that American-born Japanese people would not inherit such qualities but instead the article re-emphasises that the Chinese are 'our stanch ally,' repeatedly condemning the attacks on Chinese people mistaken for Japanese without any condemnation of the intention to attack Japanese people. An interpretation of this article based on these facts is that it is not intended to warn white Americans about violent acts being performed indiscriminately against ESEA people, but rather a guide on how to more accurately violently attack Japanese people.

However, this is not to say that the article does not still include racism against Chinese people as well as Japanese people. For example, both groups are described as 'related to the Eskimo and North American Indian,' lending credibility to the homogenisation of both races and doing nothing to suggest that this is harmful stereotyping. Chinese people are also described as fitting the same description as Filipino people, who are the same 'except that their skin is darker' in a further generalisation of ESEA people. The arbitrary differences that the article attempts to point out are made even less clear by the variation between Northern and Southern Chinese people—one is 'long and fine-boned' while the other has 'round, broad faces'—and 'highbred'

[28] Humourlessness is an interesting form of 'othering' that can be seen in stereotypes of other groups and demographics. For example, the stereotype that people with autism 'lack a sense of humour, or at very least have an impaired sense of humour' (May 2017, p. 436), that women—especially feminists—have no sense of humour (Burnett 2014), or that various nationalities such as Japanese and German people are humourless (McPherson). This stereotype creates an environment in which the targeted group cannot protest the stereotype without them being accused of said humourlessness for not being able to 'take the joke.'

and ‘peasant’/’aboriginal’ Japanese—the former having ‘heavy beard, massive cheek and jaw bones’ and the latter being ‘squat Mongoloid, with flat, blob nose.’ With these differentiations of facial features, the article essentially just outlines that some ESEA people have slighter features while others have rounder features, with no difference; the language used to describe both nationalities is the key signifier of how readers are meant to feel fear towards the threatening Japanese people and sympathy for the inferior Chinese people. Additionally the description of Chinese people as having ‘more frequent epicanthic fold[s]’ and Japanese people as having ‘less frequent epicanthic fold[s]’ does very little to distinguish between the two nationalities as the article intends to do. However, by bringing epicanthic folds into the description, the article uses a feature that has a long history of being used in phrenology to justify ideas of racial superiority (Blakemore and Jennett 2001).[29] Its inclusion appears to be intended to provide a scientific flavour to the analysis of the typical Japanese and Chinese faces to give it more credibility.

Despite this discrimination towards both Chinese and Japanese people, it is still clear that Japanese people were treated far more harshly than any other ESEA nationality in the US. In a similar way to the presence of Chinese immigrants pushing public opinion towards being more accepting of African American people as citizens of the US by being more ‘alien’ than them, the anti-Japanese sentiment during WWII and particularly after the attack on Pearl Harbour threw a more positive light on Chinese communities’ role in American society in

[29] The epicanthic fold is particularly notable in that it has historically been used to equate ESEA people and people with Down’s syndrome as ‘inferior’ people; the term for Down’s syndrome was originally ‘mongolism’ in recognition of the frequent presence of the epicanthic fold in both groups of people. As Blakemore and Jennett (2001) write, John Langdon Haydon Down’s ‘comparison of European children born with a chromosomal disorder with the normal features of many Mongolians was both scientifically inaccurate as an analysis of the condition and a patronizing mischaracterization of Mongolians. Down argued that these children represented a degeneration of the superior (European) human type, stating that ‘A very large number of congenital idiots are typical Mongols.’ The racial theories used by Down and others have been decisively rejected by modern science, but it is only recently that the descriptions of Down's syndrome as ‘mongolism’ or ‘mongolian idiocy’ and persons with Down's syndrome as ‘mongols’ or ‘mongolian idiots’ have begun to fade from view.’

comparison. Chinese and white people were additionally able to benefit financially from the persecution of Japanese people, with opportunities arising from the removal of Japanese businesses and employees. Chinese businesses in particular grew to take over established Japanese businesses, such as the Japantown in Portland, Oregon being converted into a Chinatown and boycotts of Japanese brands leading to more customers being diverted to Chinese ones (Chan 2019, pp. 211-213). There was a call for Chinese people to replace all the removed Japanese employees in the food industry, with the *Chinese Press* pushing for Chinese contributions to the war effort through supporting food businesses. With a rise in films about and set in the Pacific, roles with ESEA characters were additionally rising in number, but with productions hesitant to work with Japanese actors, Chinese actors were often offered them (though many refused for fear of being mistaken for a Japanese person) (ibid, p. 214).

The Chinese media played a large role in supporting discrimination against Japanese people, portraying Japanese Americans as 'acting as a "fifth column" to aid Japan' from the inside and suggesting that they had a hand in the attack on Pearl Harbour (ibid, p. 214). Chan (2019) argues that the Chinese press purposely did not differentiate between Japanese and Japanese American people despite Chinese and Chinese American people often facing the exact same types of discrimination, such as perceptions that they were unassimilable and US policy that prevented them from owning land. American press additionally exacerbated the perception of Chinese people as victims of Japanese violence, particularly with the American coverage of the attack on Nanjing from reporters who were present to witness the massacre (ibid).

Korean and Filipino people in the US during this time had a slightly different experience to Chinese people. While all three nationalities were subject to discrimination due to being mistaken for Japanese people, Korean people were still seen as 'enemy aliens' due to the fact

that, as a result of their colonial past, Korean people were still Japanese subjects despite being against the Japanese occupation of their country (Chan 2019, p. 220). They similarly fought to be distinguished from Japanese people, and 'the Department of Justice removed restrictions on enemy aliens who were subjects of the Axis Powers, but this… excluded the vast majority of Korean Americans who lived in Hawaii' (ibid, pp. 220-221). In Hawaii, it was reasoned that Korean people were a threat to their security; as Chan (ibid) highlights, 'one official argued that, "Koreans as a class are… shrewd and unscrupulous opportunists who have been used as spies by the Japanese in the past"' and that there was a fear that Japanese people might disguise themselves as Korean to escape scrutiny. Even though Korean Americans contributed to the war effort much like the Chinese community did, they were accused again of being opportunists and pushing for Korean independence through their support (ibid). Many Filipino people also contributed to the war effort, with 260,000 Filipinos serving in the military and being recognised for their work. This difference in reception is likely due to Japan invading the Philippines shortly after attacking Pearl Harbour and Filipino people being perceived equally to Americans as victims of Japanese violence. Many Filipinos additionally enacted violence against people who they believed were Japanese due to their anti-Japanese sentiment (ibid, p. 222).

At the same time, war was being fought across ESEA, and the experiences of Western soldiers in these countries undoubtedly had an impact on how these countries and their people were perceived by the West. One of the most prominent changes that came from this period was the differentiation between different ESEA countries. While I previously expanded upon the villainisation of Japanese people compared to Chinese and other ESEA communities in the US, this section will focus on the perceptions of 'developed' and 'developing' ESEA countries. These terms are closely linked to the dichotomy from the 1800s of ESEA countries being opulent, philosophical, and powerful while simultaneously impoverished, uneducated, and devious. The

term ‘developed’ is used here to represent the former perception of certain ESEA countries, particularly as being more advanced, powerful, and ‘civilised’ in a way that the West understood them to be. The term ‘developing’ is used to signify the perception of other ESEA countries that fell under the latter description and were not as ‘developed’ compared to Western standards, particularly when it came to technological, scientific, and social advancement.

Perhaps one of the largest events during WWII that forced Western and ESEA soldiers together was the construction of the Burma Railway, a railway connecting Thailand to Burma (now Myanmar). Japanese forces required the railway to transport people and goods following their occupation of multiple Southeast Asian territories, as the routes via sea were deemed too dangerous. In order to build the railway, which involved incredibly dangerous terrain such as dense jungles, canyons, rivers, and mountains, Japan used the forced labour of over 60,000 Allied prisoners of war and 200,000 conscripted Asian civilians (Ray 2017). The railway is also known as ‘Death Railway’ as the conditions during construction caused the death of about 1 in 5 Allied POWs and about half of all Southeast Asian workers (Oom 2010, p. 180; Telegraph 2016).

Number of POWs at the Thai-Burma railway (including death toll)

Nationality	Total POWs	POWs on the Thailand-Burma Railway	Percentage	Deaths	Percentage
American	26,493	686	2.6	132	19.2
Australian	21,762	13,004	59.8	2,802	21.5
British	50,016	30,131	60.2	6,904	22.9
Canadian	1,691	–	–	–	–
Dutch	42,233	17,990	42.6	3,098	17.2
New Zealander	121	–	–	–	–
	142,316	61,811	43.4	12,936	20.9

Source: Jong, de, 1985:578; Beattie, 2005:52.

Figure 5: A table detailing the number of prisoners of war involved in the building of the Thai-Burma railway by nationality and the number of deaths. (Ooms 2010, p. 180).

While Allied POWs were usually kept away from Asian workers, the railway and the Pacific War undoubtedly brought Western men into contact with East—particularly Southeast—Asian people on a level they had likely never encountered before. This contributed to the difference in East and Southeast Asian nationalities as perceived by the West.

This differentiation likely formed during this time period, with soldiers and POWs drawing from their experiences fighting in the Pacific War. For example, the Japanese people that they encountered were what they had been told were a dangerous and cunning enemy who they had been dispatched to defeat. The Japanese people they encountered also ran the construction of the railway and were in positions of power. On the other hand, the Southeast Asian people that the soldiers encountered—mostly 'Tamils, Chinese and Malays from colonial Malaya; Burmans and other ethnic groups from what is now Myanmar; and Javanese from what is now Indonesia' as well as Thai locals—were all working alongside them in horrific conditions and dying at a higher rate than them (Fuller 2008). This understanding of which ESEA countries were more powerful and 'developed' has carried on into the present day. A particular element of this dichotomy has been the treatment of women in these situations.

Comfort women were women recruited (usually forcefully) by the Japanese military to provide sexual services for their men. Military brothels were established in areas Japan had occupied, largely to prevent soldiers from raping local women as this caused 'strong anti-Japanese sentiment' in these areas (Tanaka 2002, pp. 9-15). The women at these brothels were a mixture of Japanese, Korean, and local women in Southeast Asian countries as well as

China and Taiwan (ibid; Hongxi 2020, p. 28).[30] As a result of the system of comfort women in place, the main contact that Western men would have had with ESEA women was with prostitutes and victims of sexual slavery. The impact that this had was likely to reinforce the existing stereotypes of ESEA women being submissive, hypersexualised, and often in need of saving from cruel ESEA men who were controlling them. This stereotype existed due to the fact that most of the ESEA women who immigrated to the West in the initial wave of immigration were prostitutes and victims of trafficking, and here Western soldiers encountered them in a very similar set of circumstances. Despite these two major events influencing the perception of ESEA women, the hypersexualisation of them was not deterred by the dire circumstances in which these women were found. Depictions of ESEA women continued to present them as either weaponising their sexuality by seducing and manipulating unsuspecting men or using their sexuality to signify their gratitude or love to a white saviour. These stereotypes became known respectively as the Dragon Lady and the Lotus Blossom/China Doll stereotypes, and have endured since (Fuller 2010, p. 24). This will be expanded upon in the case study of the next chapter (pp 143-160).

[30] This is an extremely brief overview of the system of sexual slavery which Japan created across ESEA, as this section is more focused on the impact that these events had on the Western perception of ESEA women than on the details of this operation. The impact of this policy is immense and nuanced as it covers such a large geographical area and many different cultures. For further reading on the subject, see Yoshimi Yoshiaki's book *Comfort women: sexual slavery in the Japanese military during World War II* (2002) and Yuki Tanaka's book *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual slavery and prostitution during World War II and the US occupation* (2002).

A Case Study of Giving Yellow Peril a Nationality: George Formby's Mr Wu vs *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips* (1944)

The idea of ESEA people both embodying yellow peril threats and unassimilable inferior fools had existed since large immigrant populations had been in contact with white Western communities. However, the new context of the World Wars, particularly Japan and China's actions within them, added a new level of referenced and racial shorthands to depictions of ESEA people. As described above, the perception of ESEA people largely moved towards victimising Chinese and other ESEA people while vilifying Japanese people. In doing this, depictions of Chinese and Japanese characters in popular media began reflecting these changes. This case study will firstly examine the progression of Chinese then Japanese representation in popular media throughout the period of 1914-1945. These sections will then be contextualised through two examples of comedic representation to analyse how the use of humour provides greater context for the perception of ESEA people at the time. The examples used are George Formby's Mr Wu character from a series of songs released across the period of 1932-1940 and the short animated film *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips* (1944). The case study will conclude with a comparison of the two trajectories of representation and what they tell us about this period for ESEA representation.

Chinese Representation & Mr Wu

The most recognisable and enduring representation of Chinese people in popular media during this time period was the character of Fu Manchu. Fu Manchu was created by author Sax

Rohmer, first appearing in the 1913 novel *The Mystery of Fu Manchu*. Rohmer wrote 13 Fu Manchu novels, with 7 of them published between 1931 and 1941, and several more being written by other authors after his death. The character was hugely popular and additionally spawned multiple successful film adaptations including *The Mysterious Fu Manchu* (1929) and *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (1932). The character had largely been played by white actors and was a villainous Chinese man who utilised science, various henchmen, and animals to carry out his nefarious plots. The character represented Yellow Peril at its early peak; a combination of ancient tradition, wisdom, and the dream of world domination, Fu Manchu was what the West feared China could become. He thrived in the opium dens and seedy Limehouse settings and often used or preyed upon women in his schemes. However, the character was always ultimately foiled by the heroes of the story.

Rohmer interestingly specified in the first Fu Manchu book, published as *The Insidious Dr Fu Manchu* in the US, that the character did not belong to 'Young China'—defined as 'a new generation which veneers its Confucianism with Western polish… youthful and unbalanced reformers' nor to the 'older but no less ill-balanced provincial politicians' of Manchu, but 'a Third Party' (Rohmer 1913, np). Rohmer does not specify what this Third Party is, but the identification of a 'young' and 'old' group of Chinese people is reflective of the large political changes that were happening in China at the time. 'Young China' refers to the influx of Western-educated and culturally influenced Chinese students and labourers who brought new ideologies and politics with them when they returned to China, whereas 'old' China likely refers to the Qing dynasty and the traditions and values that ended with the fall of the dynasty. In acknowledging these existing groups, Rohmer places Fu Manchu and his particular qualities and motivations in a category that appears fictional and not intending to vilify all Chinese people, as Fu Manchu is the outlier rather than the majority. However, Rohmer still homogenises

Chinese people and often refers to Fu Manchu's 'Oriental' qualities and background in a way that suggests that he is a product of ESEA culture. For example, he calls Fu Manchu 'yellow peril incarnate in one man' and 'a Chinaman, with the incarnate essence of Eastern subtlety, with the most stupendous genius that the modern Orient has produced,' clearly associating the evilness of Fu Manchu with China and 'the Orient' (Rohmer 1913, np).

However, as the relationship between the West and China began shifting, there became less of an interest in characters that portrayed China as the root of yellow peril. There were no films with the character between 1940 (*Drums of Fu Manchu*) and 1965 (*The Face of Fu Manchu*), signifying a drop in demand for the character. This coincided with the great increase in anti-Japanese sentiment in the West, which created a greater sympathy for Chinese people and characters. More assimilated, sympathetic Chinese characters instead became more popular, particularly what Fuller (2010, p. 72) refers to as the Oriental Detective. This included characters such as Charlie Chan and Mr Wong, who both began as successful literary characters and went on to become popular film characters; in fact, Charlie Chan was a character in over forty films in the 1930s and 1940s alone. The characters were both Chinese but largely played by white actors[31] and were shown to be assimilated to American culture. Firstly, they were both detectives working for the West (Chan is a police detective and Wong works for the United States Treasury Department), a position that is largely considered respectable, a contributing part of maintaining the community, and requiring Western morals. Secondly, as Fuller (2010, pp. 77-79) argues, the characters were shown to be assimilated largely through their proximity to respected Western educational institutions; Mr Wong has attended Oxford University and

[31] Mr Wong was played by Boris Karloff in all except one film; Karloff famously also played Fu Manchu in *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (1932). Charlie Chan was initially played by several East Asian actors when the character was a supporting role, but was cast with Warner Oland in the first film with Chan as the leading character. Oland also famously played Fu Manchu, in the 1929 film *The Mysterious Dr Fu Manchu*. Following this, the character was played by multiple different white men.

Heidelberg University, and Charlie Chan's three children are shown to be raised and educated in the US through their speech and dialect. This is a particularly interesting way of indicating assimilation, as Dr Fu Manchu is also said to have been educated at multiple Western universities to earn him the title of Doctor. However, the difference in this portrayal of educational background is that Fu Manchu is shown to be using what he has learnt for evil, and additionally combines his knowledge from Western establishments with 'obscure arts and sciences which no university to-day can teach' (Rohmer 1913, np). On the other hand, Mr Wong and Charlie Chan are shown to dedicate their work and knowledge towards solving and preventing crime. This reframing of Chinese characters reflected a much more sympathetic view of Chinese people in the West. The character of Mr Wu and the progression of his portrayal in George Formby's comedy songs particularly reflects this change as it occurred.

The character of Mr Wu is very closely linked to Limehouse, which is mentioned in several of the songs' lyrics. This location is particularly interesting as it is also heavily associated with the character of Fu Manchu, who was often shown to have a headquarters and network of associates there. The area was known for catering to sailors from all over the world with various cheap lodgings, pubs, and entertainment, but the perception of the presence of Chinese residents was seen as much more sinister than other nationalities (Seed 2006, pp. 50-62). This was largely due to the perception that Chinese people were always in opium dens, brothels, and gambling establishments and therefore were all considered disreputable. This association was present in all Chinatowns and any areas such as Limehouse that were densely populated with Chinese people and businesses as expanded upon in chapter 1. Public perceptions were shaped by widely publicised cases of white people who visited Chinatown dying from overdoses, as well as hysteria over the supposed 'Chinese 'Moriarty'' that readers of Sax Rohmer's books believed to be based on fact (ibid, p. 70). Additionally, paranoia regarding

white women and even children being manipulated and seduced by the exoticism of Chinatown and engaging in relationships with Chinese men made headlines throughout the period (ibid). This was exacerbated by two film adaptations (both titled *Broken Blossoms* in 1919 and 1936) of Thomas Burke's short story *The Ch*nk and the Child* from his 1916 collection *Limehouse Nights*, in which a Chinese man forms an attachment and begins a relationship with a twelve-year-old white girl who is abused by her father figure (Burke 2020). This side of the perception of Limehouse facilitated the growing stereotype of Fu Manchu; the malicious and calculating embodiment of yellow peril and a great threat to white women.

However, on the other hand, there was also a strong association of Limehouse and its residents with more domestic businesses, particularly restaurants and laundries. In the 1911 census, 36 percent of Chinese men were shown to be working in laundries, second only to seamen (ibid, p. 73).[32] This perceived domesticity led to the stereotype of Chinese men not having traditionally masculine traits but were instead submissive, weak, and therefore unable to form romantic relationships with women. The character of Mr Wu falls into this stereotype, in opposition to but also in close proximity to Fu Manchu through the perception of Limehouse. Though they are greatly contrasting stereotypes, there was also a sense that the former could become the latter, as their frustration with being romantically unsuccessful could drive them to violence such as kidnapping or drugging women to force them into a relationship.

Up until the 1920s, businesses in the area were thriving through the dependence that Chinese sailors had on the services provided and the growing Chinese community (ibid). However, in the 1930s there was a decline in ships using the London Docks and subsequently the businesses relying on incoming sailors. Seed (ibid, p. 67) highlights how isolated Limehouse

[32] Seed (2006) makes multiple interesting points regarding the inaccuracies of the census around this time and its method of classifying "Chinese," but this data is still likely largely reflective of the general numbers at the time.

residents were, with a cafe owner in the area in 1931 saying that '[Anglo-Chinese] boys find work hard to get, and the girls drift about the streets ostracised by white girls of their own age. They, and not the white wives, are the broken blossoms,' referring to the many families of Chinese men and white women who resided in the area. It is clear that Limehouse was still considered by the white community to be unsavoury, unsanitary, and full of illegal activities. The perception of Limehouse is worth noting in this case study as the audiences of both Fu Manchu stories and Mr Wu songs would have understood the implication behind the setting of Limehouse. For Fu Manchu, the setting creates a world of exotic intrigue, illegal activity, and danger. For Mr Wu, it sets up the stereotypes of an effeminate, hapless Chinese man who resides in London but is very much an outsider to the audience of the songs.

The character of Mr Wu first appeared in the song *Chinese Laundry Blues* in 1932 (Genius 2021):

Now, Mr. Wu was a laundry man
In a shop with an old green door
He'll iron all day, your linen away
He really makes me sore
He's lost his heart to a Chinese girl
And his laundry's all gone wrong
All day he'll flirt and scorch your shirt
That's why I'm singing this song!

Oh, Mr. Wu, what shall I do?
I'm feeling kind of Limehouse Chinese Laundry Blues
This funny feeling keeps round me, stealing
Oh, won't you throw your sweetheart over do?
My vest's so short that it won't fit my little brother
And my new Sunday shirt has got a perforated rudder
Mr. Wu, what shall I do?
I'm feeling kind of Limehouse Chinese Laundry Blues

Now, Mr. Wu
He's got a naughty eye that flickers
You ought to see it wobble
When he's ironing ladies' blouses

Mr. Wu, what shall I do?
I'm feeling kind of Limehouse Chinese Laundry Blues

Now, Mr. Wu
He's got a laundry kind of tricky
He'll starch my shirts and collars
But he'll never touch my waistcoat
Mr. Wu, what shall I do?
I'm feeling kind of Limehouse Chinese Laundry Blues

In this song he is introduced as a comedically incapable character, both at his job and at pursuing romantic relationships; in the song he has 'lost his heart to a Chinese girl,' as well as having 'a naughty eye that flickers… when he's ironing ladies blouses,' signifying his lack of sexual prowess while also suggesting an inappropriate approach when pursuing women. The line is set up to end on a word rhyming with 'flickers,' likely leading the audience to think he is handling ladies' knickers rather than blouses. The unexpected change to 'blouses' which does not rhyme creates a comedic moment for the audience as well as emphasising the crudeness of the expected word by replacing it with something less offensive, which adds to the sense that Mr Wu is acting inappropriately. As a result of his wandering eyes, he fails at performing his job in the laundry, as seen in the line 'all day he'll flirt and scorch your shirt' as well as the descriptions of the damaged items of clothing that Formby's character receives back from Mr Wu. This gag format of replacing a word that is set up to rhyme to emphasise that the expected word would be a rude one is used again when Formby sings 'Now Mr Wu he's got a laundry kind of tricky, he'll starch my shirts and collars but he'll never touch my waistcoat.' The word waistcoat replaces a word that should rhyme with 'tricky,' possibly the word 'dicky.' The term dicky itself is inoffensive, another term for bow tie, but because this set-up suggests a rude word as the punchline, it is likely also being a euphemism for penis. It is unclear whether this is suggesting that Mr Wu is not heterosexual and has made sexual advances towards Formby's character that are being turned down or whether it is merely a comical play on words that makes the audience

laugh through the suggestion of the word 'dicky.' Though there is not a common stereotype at the time associating ESEA men with non-heterosexuality, this could be a product of the feminised perception of ESEA men which ostracises them from traditional, white masculinity and therefore heterosexuality.[33]

The comedy of the song is largely derived from the audience laughing at Formby's misfortune at having such an incapable man doing his laundry; the lyrics largely focus on all the various garments that have been mistreated and Formby's anger at Mr Wu. There is also perhaps a sense of the audience laughing because they feel superior to Formby. They can plainly see that Mr Wu is bad at his job but Formby continues to pay him to do his laundry; the audience are therefore superior to Formby because they would know better than to carry on as he has. This framing of the characters gives Mr Wu a more passive role in Formby's misfortune, as the comedy seems to be encouraging audiences to blame Formby for not changing laundries rather than Mr Wu for being bad at his job. This suggests two things. Firstly, that Mr Wu is not actively doing anything wrong. Secondly, that by embodying Chinese stereotypes Mr Wu is inherently incapable and bad at his job. This seems to signify the position of Chinese people in Western society at the time; still perceived as inferior to the communities they lived within but not an active threat.

The song does show Mr Wu doing what might now be considered predatory, in that he is said to constantly be watching women and unable to maintain a relationship with them. This suggests that he is undesirable to these women, which could be seen as either due to the perceived unattractiveness of ESEA men or due to his ineptitude. It is worth noting that in *When*

[33] The assumption of sexual preference and abilities based on this understanding is something that can be seen in modern comedy and stereotyping; the perception that ESEA men are effeminate has led to stereotypes of having small penises, being sexually submissive (especially in homosexual relationships), and therefore being undesirable to both men and women are still common references in comedy and pop culture (Phua 2007, p. 909).

I'm Cleaning Windows, one of Formby's most popular songs, he sings about the women—often in states of undress—that he spies on while cleaning their windows. The song frames this as mischievous but unharmful and somewhat expected behaviour, and audiences at the time would have likely understood it as such rather than as predatory or inappropriate. It is therefore likely that the same behaviour in Mr Wu is not meant to be seen as predatory or harmful either. However, the main difference in the way these behaviours are portrayed is that Formby's window cleaner character is never caught watching the women and it does not seem to impact his ability to clean windows, whereas Mr Wu is doing it obviously enough that at least Formby has caught him and it causes him to perform poorly when working. This difference makes the character of Mr Wu seem much more pitiful and hapless in comparison to Formby, and the audience are likely finding humour in how Mr Wu is failing at all aspects of his life that are described.

In the following song, *The Wedding of Mr Wu* (1933), Mr Wu marries 'his Chinese girl.' The song mainly finds humour in the idea of a wedding that is entirely built around the laundry aspect of the Mr Wu character, with the apparent aim of getting the audience to laugh at how ridiculous the laundry-themed wedding would be. Formby describes 'the little church' as being 'decorated with the washing off the backyard line' and suggests that 'the Chinese Laundry Blues will surely be the wedding march, there'll be collars, ties, and shirts and fronts and stockings full of starch.' Formby also brings in a recognisable Chinese stereotype, where the audience are encouraged to laugh at the perceived ridiculousness of the supposed Chinese tradition, when he says 'there'll be some chaps with chopsticks trying to eat a plate of peas.' The wedding is overall described as a farce, possibly building on the idea that Mr Wu could get married being laughable. This is expanded upon by the suggestion that his wife doesn't actually like him and is more powerful (either physically or within the relationship), making him appear more effeminate,

as he ends the song with the bride '[taking] him home and [breaking] a lovely tea-set on his head.'[34] However, in contrast with the previous song, there is no suggestion of lechery or threat from Mr Wu towards women in general or his wife; this is perhaps some progress in the removal of predatory stereotypes from Chinese people. The song does not suggest any active harm or danger posed by Mr Wu or his wife; instead, it is largely a range of existing Chinese stereotypes strung together under the premise of a Chinese couple getting married in a Western setting. The comedy of the song targets Chinese stereotypes and culture for being supposedly ridiculous, but without any suggestion of untoward behaviour by the Chinese characters.

The two following 1939 releases, *Mr Wu's A Window Cleaner Now* and *I'm the Husband of the Wife of Mr Wu*, similarly build on encouraging the audience to laugh at Mr Wu for his stereotypical characteristics, but include several interesting changes in approach. In the former song, Mr Wu is shown to be working as a window cleaner after leaving his laundry business, much to the frustration of his former clients who no longer have clean clothes. This is significant in that the laundry was accepted as the main occupation of Chinese people, especially men, and had become synonymous with Chinese immigrants. By having Mr Wu pursuing other occupations, there is a sense of possible assimilation through the undertaking of a position that was outside of the existing realm of possible Chinese occupations. Formby had previously released the highly successful song *When I'm Cleaning Windows* in which he sings about spying on people as a window cleaner; by now having Mr Wu in the same position, there is a sense of equality between the two men. This is not to suggest that they are depicted as equals; the comedy of the lyrics comes from the audience laughing at Mr Wu cluelessly using 'worn-out

[34] It is worth noting that the stereotype of an unhappy, aggressive or domineering wife and her 'henpecked husband' was common in comedy at the time (Weeks 2015). In light of this, the power dynamic of Mr Wu and his wife is not a racialised one but a common comedy trope. However, the context surrounding their power dynamic makes it racialised; the excessive references to Chinese culture and stereotypes throughout the song mean that the audience are presented the couple as having no other characteristics other than being Chinese. Therefore, when this power dynamic is introduced, it is likely that the effeminate portrayal of Mr Wu would have been closely linked to his ethnicity.

ladies' blouses' and lingerie to clean his windows, and his spying on women through windows is depicted as more lecherous than Formby's because Wu has a wife that he is neglecting while 'running up the ladder' to spy on women. Additionally, the song highlights how many people are upset that Mr Wu no longer does laundry as 'now there's no clean collars down Limehouse Way' and 'customers… feel quite neglected.' Though a tenuous link, this is the first time Formby acknowledges that Mr Wu has any kind of importance or contribution to the community he lives within; while he may not have been the best at performing the job, it was still an important job to fulfil. Mr Wu, though still portrayed as an inferior comedic character who is spying on women, has integrated into this society and is closer to an equal with Formby's character through their shared occupation and interest in women.

In *I'm the Husband of the Wife of Mr Wu*, Formby further reflects a sense of integration between the white and Chinese communities. The song is humorous in its premise of Formby marrying Mr Wu's wife, inviting audiences to laugh at Mr Wu's misfortune at becoming a cuckold. The choice of the word 'husband' is interesting in that, in terms of rhythm and syllables, the words 'lover,' 'boyfriend,' or 'partner' would have also worked and not contradicted the idea that Mr Wu is still married to his wife. However, 'husband' suggests that she is still married to Mr Wu but has married another man. This is interesting in that it suggests a level of assertiveness or agency on her part, as she is a woman with multiple male partners—a subversion of the power dynamic of the more common trope where men have multiple mistresses. This could also be read as a disregard on Formby's part of her marriage and existing relationships, perhaps suggesting that he was able to marry her because she was married to a man he has portrayed as foolish and incapable of maintaining relationships and therefore the marriage was illegitimate. However, the song itself focuses solely on Formby's relationship with Mr Wu's wife; she is never named and only referred to as 'the wife of Mr Wu,' which is telling of his regard for

her as a person outside of her relationships with men. Despite this, the song is about Formby's character's enduring faithfulness to her despite the invitation of multiple ESEA women to leave her. He details how a geisha on their honeymoon in China, a geisha serving him tea, and 'a girl' all make sexual advances towards him (respectively by calling him 'sporty', saying 'me likey you', and saying 'I intend to marry you, of little ch*nks we'll soon have twenty-two') but he refuses because 'I'm the husband of the wife of Mr Wu.' In the chorus he repeats that 'she feeds me up with nice chop suey… of charms she has a lot, don't know exactly what, it's just a little something that the others haven't got.' The humour in this song seems to be derived not from any racial stereotyping of the wife of Mr Wu, but of the increasingly forward advances of various ESEA women towards him and his staunch rejection of them. The song also includes multiple examples of Formby's character engaging in perceived Chinese culture; Geishas are traditionally Japanese. This interestingly does not distinguish between Chinese and Japanese culture as this period was shown to emphasise. This is likely due to the fact that the differences between Chinese and Japanese people was so heavily based on men and the perception of ESEA men's characteristics. In contrast, ESEA women were not being differentiated in the same way, but were instead being homogenised as an overall submissive, hypersexualised group that did not have any agency or humanity and therefore had no distinguishable cultures that influenced their personalities. These references are not done in a derogatory way (though they do fall into stereotypes of what exactly signifies Chinese culture) but instead merely use them as a setting for the joke of Formby rejecting the women. This contrasts with Formby's earlier ridicule of Chinese culture through the pointed difficulty of using chopsticks.

The song does hypersexualise the women in it, which falls into the existing stereotypes of ESEA women. All of the women mentioned are ESEA (identified either through the term 'geisha' or the self-proclaimed 'ch*nk') and are pursuing a sexual relationship with him; the

various encounters all include some innuendo and the wife of Mr Wu is implied to be doing so through Formby's refusal of some silk pajamas as 'I don't think I shall require them, I'm the husband of the wife of Mr Wu.' The women do not fall under the Lotus Blossom—meek and subservient—or Dragon Lady—manipulative and aggressive—stereotypes, as they are all shown to be a combination of actively pursuing Formby as well as respectful of the fact that he is married as his explanation that he is 'the husband of the wife of Mr Wu' stops them. However, this is not necessarily a signifier of attitudes as the concise nature of the lyrics prevents any more context around the characters of the women. Instead, they are condensed purely into their sexuality and their race which reflects the perception of ESEA women of the time.

The 1940 song *Mr Wu's an Air Raid Warden Now* returns to the life of Mr Wu and portrays him in a sympathetic and patriotic role. The song opens with an explanation that 'he's chucked his limehouse laundry shop and his window cleaning, too, he's got another job and it's one of the best, now he's doing his bit for England like the rest' by becoming an air raid warden. The song still includes derogatory elements towards Mr Wu, but as with his progression to becoming a window cleaner he is shown to be more assimilated than previously. The pun 'if you've got a chink in your window you'll have another one at your door' is repeated in the song, literally meaning that Mr Wu's occupation requires him to ensure that everyone has blacked out their windows; the line is a signifier of the combination of racism still leveled against the character and the acknowledgement that he is steadfastly performing an important and patriotic duty to his community. This is also seen in the contrast of making a pun of Chinese names, with his cousin being named 'One Way In'[35], and the fact that they are both removing bombs from the area. The song is also condescending to Mr Wu ('don't he look cute in his new siren suit') and laughs at his romantic ignorance ('One night while on his beat, a couple he did meet, they

[35] The use of stereotypical Chinese names that are monosyllabic to create puns is a long enduring comic technique. "Names" such as 'Sum Ting Wong' are frequently used as punchlines.

were cuddling in the shelter anyhow, he said the all clear's gone you see and the chap said boy you're telling me'). It additionally suggests that he only successfully put out a bomb because he urinated out of fright rather than committing a heroic act ('He put the fire out but he didn't use sand'). However, the overall appearance of the character in a position that has people saying 'that he deserves a medal' for his service is something of an acknowledgement that he is more assimilated and a contributing member of his community than initially thought.

Japanese Representation & Bugs Bunny

Unlike Fu Manchu and Chinese representation at the time, there was not a singular character in popular media who embodied what the West perceived Japanese people as being. However, as previously expanded upon, Japanese people were often initially considered closer to white, Western people than Chinese people due to their apparent shared values such as nuclear families and Christianity. As a result, one of the first popular Japanese characters at the time was an Oriental Detective, Mr Moto, who began as a literary character but starred in multiple successful films. Like Charlie Chan and Mr Wong, Mr Moto was mostly played by a white actor (Peter Lorre) but was portrayed as assimilated and contributing to the society that he lived in. He attended Stanford University and was a member of a fraternity in his time there, again showing his assimilation through his Western education as well as his occupation.

However, following the attack on Pearl Harbour, the perception of Japanese people was drastically altered. Fuller (2010, pp. 128-130) highlights the fact that in WWII, Hollywood largely utilised previously beloved ESEA characters such as Mr Moto and began associating them with evil. This was done instead of utilising existing evil ESEA characters such as Fu Manchu to

reflect the betrayal felt by the US during the attack on Pearl Harbour; they began to represent the idea that someone familiar and friendly could turn around and attack you. As Fuller (ibid) writes, 'during the war the Oriental detective's position as a trusted assimilated figure was suddenly perceived as an unqualified deception. These figures of the popular imagination swiftly became wedded to the political and military interests of Asia—Japan, in particular—as race, previously concealed among a host of idiosyncrasies, revealed itself paramount.' This can be seen in a notice from the front page of *Variety* in 1941 entitled *Me No Moto.* The notice detailed that film producer Sol Wurtzel could not find any Japanese actors for his film *Secret Agents of Japan* (1942) and that Chinese actors 'won't even discuss it' (Variety 1941, p. 1). By equating the name Moto with the negative perceptions of Japan and the fact that ESEA people were refusing to associate with it, the article clearly shows the shift in attitude towards the previously accepted Japanese character. This, alongside the fact that the Chinese origin of Fu Manchu made him a less fashionable villain meant that there was a decline in generally Oriental villains. Instead, there was a great rise in specifically Japanese villains; the Office of War Information (OWI), which was charged with overseeing the film industry by the US government, 'officially advocated criticism of "fascism and its ruling cliques, not the German or Japanese people"' (Fuller 2010, p. 130).

However, at the same time, the depictions of Japan needed to reflect the idea that they were inferior in order to promote the idea of Western and American victory in the war. Stereotypes of ESEA people were greatly contrasting due to this political need to show Japan as a formidable enemy that warranted the effort to fight against in order to "save" Western capitalist society while also portraying them as easily outsmarted and inferior both physically and mentally. An example of this dichotomy in comedy is the short animated film *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips* (1944).

The film starts with Bugs Bunny floating through the ocean in a crate, singing ‘someone’s rocking my dreamboat’ and contentedly waiting for ‘the island that inevitably turns up in this kind of picture.’ The island (just labelled as ‘Somewhere in the Pacific’) appears and initially looks idyllic, a paradise for Bugs Bunny to swim towards. He calls it ‘a beauteous Garden of Eden, a veritable Shangri La of fragrant beauty, a lustrous pearl of the Pacific… So peaceful, so quiet’ but is then bombarded with explosives as he reaches it. This sequence seems to symbolise the sense of unity that the US had felt towards Japan prior to WWII and the perception that Japan was an opulent, rich, and culturally wealthy country; Shangri La has often been used to symbolise an exotic, perfect but lost world, an oriental version of the Garden of Eden that Bugs Bunny mentions. This perception of what Japan could be was then ruined by the attack on Pearl Harbour, symbolised by the bombs here. The deceptive appearance of the island could also be symbolic of the idea that Japanese people, who were considered somewhat assimilated in the West, were actually highly suspicious and could turn against the West at any moment.

Bugs Bunny comes across multiple Japanese characters, all of whom (except for the sumo wrestler) have small, slanted eyes with thick round glasses, are short, bucktoothed, speak unintelligible gibberish, and wear military uniforms (sans footwear).

Figure 6: A frame of* Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips *(1944, 02:47) with an example of the Japanese caricature characters in the film.

The first one he encounters appears with the sound of a gong and starts attacking Bugs Bunny with a dagger while yelling a stream of gibberish. Bugs Bunny attempts to escape by diving into a hole in the ground, which the man throws an explosive into. The man covers the hole with dirt and sits on it until he hears the explosive go off; thinking it is safe, he digs the dirt back out only to be faced with Bugs Bunny who is unharmed and hands the explosive back to him. The bomb then goes off in his face. This interaction first shows that the Japanese soldier is well-armed and able to inflict injury on Bugs Bunny. He is also shown to be intelligent enough to listen for the sound of the explosive going off before digging again. However, he is ultimately defeated because Bugs Bunny is clever enough to anticipate this. This embodies the propaganda message that the US was attempting to push—that the Japanese were a threat but that the US would ultimately defeat them if they were clever about their tactics. It is worth noting that this slapstick routine is not uncommon in Bugs Bunny cartoons; for example, this is the kind of interaction that he would often have with Elmer Fudd, the hunter who is constantly attempting to

hunt Bugs Bunny and shoot him with a rifle. However, this specific iteration of Bugs Bunny outsmarting his foes is particularly politicised. In the first instance, it is politicised by the crude caricature drawing of his enemy, who looks and speaks in a way that the American public would recognise as highly racialised. Secondly, the humour of this interaction largely comes from the smugness and self-satisfied demeanour of the Japanese soldier being undermined by Bugs Bunny. When is he lighting the explosive, burying it with Bugs Bunny, and sitting atop the dirt the character is clearly smiling and very pleased with his own cleverness. When he is digging up the dirt again to see what he believes will be his defeated enemy, his movements are enthusiastic and the purpose of digging up a supposedly dead Bugs Bunny is to gloat over it. This joke operates through relief, as there is a tension building here for the American audience at the time. The tension is being caused by the apparent harm being done to the character who represents them, the West, in a conflict with a Japanese soldier and is being escalated by the building glee with which the character handles what he believes is a victory. Additionally, there is environmental tension surrounding the audience at the time, not just from the cartoon itself but from the political world around them. The fear of war, unexpected attacks such as Pearl Harbour, and the supposed internal threat of Japanese residents in the US who could turn against them at any moment were causes of tension for American audiences at the time. Therefore, when the soldier digs up the hole only for Bugs Bunny to reappear unharmed and hand him the intact explosive, there is a relief of tension which prompts laughter from the viewers. The tension that is relieved is that of both the uncertainty of Bugs Bunny's safety as well as the audience's fear for their own and national safety during this period. The interaction can also be viewed as an example of the theory of superiority, with the audience laughing at the perceived superiority of Bugs Bunny (and therefore the audience who are represented by him)

over the “inferior” Japanese soldier, who is the one who ends up holding the explosive when it goes off despite his earlier smugness.

The Japanese soldier angrily picks up a machete, ready to attack Bugs Bunny again, when Bugs Bunny reappears dressed in what appears to be a costume of General Hideki Tojo (who appeared in the *How To Tell J*ps from the Chinese* article previously mentioned), but could also be a generalised Japanese military uniform with the same thick-framed glasses that all the Japanese characters are wearing to signify his intended nationality. The man immediately begins kowtowing and apologising, saying ‘regrettable incident, not knowing honourable general’ in a thick faux-Japanese accent. This follows existing stereotypes of ESEA people being traditional and respectful of their elders, which are not inherently negative characteristics but are framed as being upheld to the point of undermining or humiliating themselves. The characteristic is then used by Bugs Bunny to gain the upper hand against the Japanese soldier. The humour of this section derives from the immediacy with which the soldier changes his disposition, from an angry and proud fighter to a cowering inferior of the general. The audience here are laughing at another perceived inferiority of the character to both themselves and Bugs Bunny.

However, the soldier then realises Bugs Bunny’s ruse, saying to camera ‘that-a not-a Japanese-a General’ and identifying him as ‘Bugs Bunny… see in Warner Brothers… cartoon picture… He no fool me!’ He goes up to Bugs Bunny and starts mimicking him by chewing a carrot and saying ‘Eh, what’s up, honourable doc?’ in a variation of Bugs Bunny’s signature line ‘Eh, what’s up doc?’ This prompts Bugs Bunny to realise he has been found out and run to a nearby plane to escape. The man jumps into the next plane to chase him, but we see that Bugs Bunny is tying the man’s plane to a tree and is not actually in a plane himself. The rope pulls the airplane from beneath the man and he falls with a parachute while speaking constant gibberish.

Bugs Bunny then appears in a plane and hands him an anvil, saying ‘Here’s some scrap iron for Japan, Moto’ and throwing it to him, causing him to plummet to his death with a crash. Once again Bugs Bunny is shown to be in danger of being defeated by the Japanese soldier, but manages to win through his cunning manoeuvres. Additionally, the reference to Mr Moto in a propaganda film reflects the subversion of the friendly Mr Moto character to signify the threat of Japanese victory.

The film cuts to Bugs Bunny painting a Rising Sun flag[36] on a tree, seemingly to memorialise or keep a tally of the Japanese soldier he has killed. When he turns around he runs into a sumo wrestler who is much larger than him. The wrestler is again a caricature, with buck teeth and slanted eyes as well as an approximation of a sumo wrestler costume. Bugs Bunny then turns around and paints another flag, this time much larger, on the tree. This seems to indicate his intention to also kill this sumo wrestler, who is much bigger and is therefore represented by a much bigger flag. He then fights the sumo wrestler, who easily defeats Bugs Bunny (shown through Bugs Bunny’s body being tied up into knots) and wipes his flag off the tree. Here, Japan is again portrayed as a worthy opponent who is very capable of causing damage to Bugs Bunny. Tension is being built in the audience as they watch Bugs Bunny being easily defeated in combat. When he turns around, a faux-oriental tune plays and Bugs Bunny appears in a robe and wig with a fan in an approximation of a geisha costume. He speaks gibberish Japanese in a flirtatious manner to the sumo wrestler and, when the wrestler leans in for a kiss, hits him over the head with a mallet. The sumo wrestler dazedly paints his flag back onto the tree to signify his defeat and collapses as Bugs Bunny yells ‘Timber!’ Once more, Japan’s tactics are overcome through shrewd use of their weaknesses. The audience laughs

[36] The Rising Sun flag has a long history of use in Japan but is considered by many cultures to symbolise Japanese imperialism during WWII, particularly by South Korea and Southeast Asian countries who were heavily impacted by this. This has most recently come into public awareness through the decision not to ban it at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics despite requests from South Korea (Illmer 2020).

due to the relief of the tension caused by Bugs Bunny appearing to lose; the slapstick and absurd elements of the interaction then add to that humour.

Figure 7: A frame of* Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips *(1944, 05:23) depicting the sumo wrestler character and Bugs Bunny's geisha costume.

Now out of costume, Bugs Bunny turns and sees many boats approaching. He exclaims 'J*ps! Hundreds of 'em! This calls for strategy.' He then drives an ice cream truck[37] into the open, calling for customers while we see that inside each ice cream there is a grenade. Soldiers then swarm the truck, waving money at him and clamouring for ice creams. Bugs Bunny responds to them using derogatory language, saying 'Here's yours, bow-legs. Here, one for you, monkey-face… here you are, slant-eyes.' We then hear the sound of multiple explosions going off, prompting Bugs Bunny to drive off in success. However, one of the customers runs after him, yelling 'Just one minute, you no get away from me,' initially making the audience believe that he is angrily chasing down Bugs Bunny before it is revealed his first ice cream had a free

[37] The truck has the name 'GOOD RUMOR' written on the side, likely a reference to the American ice cream brand Good Humor.

ice cream token on the stick and he is chasing the truck to redeem it. Bugs Bunny gives him the free ice cream, saying ‘it’s a pleasure, business is booming!’ before we hear it detonate off screen. This scene depicts a long standing stereotype of ESEA people being very frugal, here to the point of actively harming himself in order to obtain the free ice cream he is entitled to. This is another supposed weakness in Japanese people that Bugs Bunny is able to exploit to win. The humour of this sequence comes mostly from the audience perceiving themselves and Bugs Bunny as superior to the Japanese soldiers, as they are clever enough to know that the ice creams are unsafe. This is amplified firstly by the derogatory language which Bugs Bunny uses to address the soldiers, then again by the soldier who claims his free ice cream despite the clear damage it will cause.

Figure 8: A frame of* Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips *(1944, 07:15) where he is surrounded by Rising Sun flags painted on the trees to signify all the Japanese soldiers he has killed.

The film cuts to Bugs Bunny surrounded by painted flags on trees, representing all the Japanese soldiers he has killed. He then says ‘now as I was saying, what a beauteous Garden

of Eden, so peaceful, so quiet… and if there's one thing I can't stand, it's peace and quiet! Get me out of this place!' He begins crying and throwing a tantrum before a ship with an American flag approaches, to which he exclaims 'I'm saved!' He begins running after it with a white flag and, frustrated at the speed of the ship, says 'You think I want to spend the rest of my life on this island?' This dialogue showing Bugs Bunny growing tired of the island suggests that, without any enemies to eliminate, there is no reason for him to want to stay. However, he turns and sees a female bunny flirtatiously approaching him, saying (in a distinctly American accent, suggesting she is not meant to represent an ESEA person) 'Hmm, it's a possibility.' He reacts with howling and thumping his foot and she runs away with him chasing her. However, she clearly stops and turns around to check that he is chasing her, encouraging him to follow rather than genuinely fleeing with fear.

Comparison

Over this period, there is a clear decline in generally 'Oriental' villains and specifically Chinese villains such as Fu Manchu in favour of anti-Japanese and anti-fascism portrayals of characters. The treatment of Chinese characters clearly favours them in terms of ability to assimilate and perform patriotic duties for Western communities; this can be seen in the rise of the Chinese Oriental Detective characters in the USA and the progression of George Formby's Mr Wu character in the UK. On the other hand, Japanese characters such as Mr Moto who initially represented Japanese assimilation in the West became synonymous with the Yellow Peril that had become assigned specifically to Japan. This was largely seen in American media, as there was not as large a Japanese population in the UK, but the sentiment was likely widely

upheld due to the allegiances in WWII. However, both nationalities still faced discrimination and negative stereotyping. Both can be seen to be the subject of humour that disparages and ridicules them for supposed inferiorities. Mr Wu is framed as unintelligent, romantically inept, and cuckolded while also contributing to his community and aiding the Allied war effort; while he is a fool he is harmless and has good intentions. The comedy of the songs invites the audience to laugh more at Formby and the people/circumstances around Mr Wu than directly at Mr Wu himself. Conversely, the Japanese soldiers that Bugs Bunny faces are shown to be somewhat intelligent and able to be formidable enemies to the West through being armed, cunning, and having physical strength but are ultimately not as clever as the West (embodied in Bugs Bunny) who always wins. The comedy frames the Japanese as being overly confident in themselves, inviting the audience to laugh at how easily they were tricked and how simple tactics by Bugs Bunny using their weaknesses against them could lead to their defeat. The target of the humour is always the Japanese characters.

Chapter 3: The Victimisation of ESEA Women, 1945-1979

The Cold War in ESEA and the Impact on Western Perceptions, 1945-1979

This chapter will focus on the changes in perceptions of ESEA people in the US and UK from 1945 to 1979. The events covered are broadly regarding three pivotal events: Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings in 1945, the Korean War (1950-1953), and the Vietnam War (1955-1975). This chapter culminates in a case study examining the development of how ESEA women were viewed by the West, as this is an area of stereotyping and Western understanding that was largely unchanged until this period. Specifically, I will argue that the idea of Yellow Peril persisted until the bombings of Japan in 1945, after which anti-Communist sentiment overtook fears of specific ESEA nationalities and therefore stereotypes of ESEA people as a whole underwent very few changes. This is largely due to ESEA conflicts taking place within countries, rather than between them or against the West. The great changes during this period were of the stereotypes of ESEA women, caused by the increase in interaction between Western people and ESEA women, particularly white soldiers who were stationed in and around Korea and Vietnam.

Reactions to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki Bombings

This section will examine American and British reactions to nuclear bombing in Japan, particularly focusing on newspaper articles at the time reporting on the bombing and its

aftermath. The newspaper articles reflect how public opinion was shaped during the time to react to developments in the bombings and how Japan was being affected by them.

American Reactions

Following the immediate news that the bombings had occurred, the shifts in American attitudes towards the bombings were largely dismissive of any lasting effects. An article on August 25 in the Los Angeles Times (1945) entitled *'Tokyo Reports 30,000 Delayed A-Bomb Deaths*' throws into doubt the idea that there were any illnesses causing fatalities as a result of the atomic bomb. The article starts by saying 'Tokyo broadcasts said yesterday that "radioactivity" and burns from the atomic bomb at Hiroshima claimed the lives of 30,000 persons within two weeks after the bomb was dropped, and that some burn victims asked to be killed to end their pain.' The use of quotation marks around "radioactivity" suggests a disbelief in the term or reasoning. Additionally, the article suggests that the broadcast was 'perhaps intended to arouse sympathy,' suggesting dishonesty or exaggeration by the Japanese in order to appear more damaged than they were. In light of this apparent stand by the newspaper, the inclusion of the detail that victims were asking to be killed to end their pain seems to be either quoted in disbelief or to gloat on the Americans' part. Another article in the Los Angeles Times (McGlinoy 1945) ten days later details the casualties of the bombing as well as the additional death toll due to the aftermath of the bomb. It then goes on to say ''Only One Bomb': One bomb. That's the key to the most staggering single event of the war. You can ride through the dead city and look at it again. All the time you say to yourself, "one bomb did all this."' There is a sense of awe or perhaps pride in the fact that the US was able to build such a powerful weapon, and this view overshadows the statistics of how many have died and were dying from the bomb.

As Yavenditti (1974, pp. 224-225) points out:

> *'Despite their confusion about the military and peacetime implications of atomic energy… Americans reached near agreement on one point: they approved the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A vocal minority regarded the atomic attacks on two urban centers as atrocities, comparable to the Nazi extermination camps. Other Americans were troubled by casualty reports that placed the fatalities from the bomb at 100,000, most of whom were civilians. In the immediate postwar years, however, the use of two atomic bombs on Japan produced little public remorse.'*

Additionally, in a Gallup poll from August 24-29 1945 showed that 85% of American approved of the use of the atomic bombs against Japan and only 10% disapproved, with 69% of people surveyed saying that they thought that it was a 'good thing… that the atomic bomb was developed' and 17% said that they thought it was a 'bad thing' (Saad 2016). In September of the same year, a poll from Roper Opinion Research found that 54% of people agreed with the use of 'two bombs on cities' and 23% thought that 'we should have quickly used many more of them before Japan had a chance to surrender' while 14% felt that they should have 'dropped one first on some unpopulated region… and only dropped the second one on a city if they hadn't surrendered after the first one' and only 5% felt that 'we should not have used any atomic bombs at all' (Valentino 2016). This aggressive support of the use of atomic bombs could be seen as a direct result of a poll from 1944 in which participants were asked 'What do you think we should do with Japan as a country?' and 13% responded 'kill all Japanese' (ibid).

These polls and newspaper articles show an overwhelming and lasting stance in support of bombing Japanese civilians, which was likely influenced by the fact that Japan surrendered shortly after the bombings and therefore the bombs were seen as successfully achieving their intended outcome. It is clear that for Americans the positive impact of ending the war with Japan quickly, the victory and power it gave them, and the feeling that the Japanese deserved the bomb due to their conduct over the last decade meant that there was little sympathy for Japan.

Many of them agreed with Winston Churchill, who suggested that ‘a million American and a quarter of a million British lives’ were saved by using the bomb rather than continuing fighting and losing that many soldiers to ‘the desperate battles and massacres of an invasion in Japan’ (Ruane 2016, p. 300).

Overall, it appears that Yellow Peril was very distinctly attributed to anti-Japanese sentiment in the US, but that the dropping of the bombs resolved any fear of further conflict with Japan. This is not to suggest that anti-Japanese racism ended here; the mass internment of Japanese residents in the US that occurred during this period created great hardship for everyone of Japanese descent, and this continued for years following the closing of the camps (Blakemore 2021). Additionally, any notion of Japanese American people becoming citizens or part of white communities was destroyed by the act which forced them into the camps; as Chambers-Letson (2013, p. 100) describes it, ‘With only six words (“all Japanese persons, both alien and non-alien”), citizenship was disarticulated from US-born persons of Japanese descent, who were transformed into “non-aliens.” The order enacted a universal ascription of primordial Imperial Japanese identity to Japanese Americans, radically deterritorializing any previous national identification (to the United States, Japan, both, or elsewhere) they might have maintained before the order.’ This had a lasting impact on the perceived assimilation of Japanese people, regardless of their previous positions in the communities they lived in prior to internment. However, the perceived threat of invasion or an attack from within the country by Japanese forces was ended with the bombings. In regards to stereotypes, the image that was projected during this period appeared to shift from Japan being viewed as the villainous Fu Manchu-type to the weaker, more pathetic Charlie Chan-type character.

British Reactions

British reactions to the bombings appeared to be much less uniform that American reactions. While the British had been involved in WWII and had contributed scientists to the development of the atomic bomb, they had not been the target of a direct attack from Japan the way the US had been with the attack on Pearl Harbour. Ruane (2016, pp. 299-300) details some examples of how the public felt regarding the atomic bombings:

> *'For most people in Britain in August 1945, such moral unease as the Bomb aroused was probably cancelled out by the sense of relief that the war had ended so quickly. [Cuthbert] Thicknesse [Dean of St. Albans], however, chose to publicly denounce the 'indiscriminate massacre' of civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and banned a service of thanksgiving in the city's Abbey because victory over Japan had been achieved by 'devilish' means… At the other end was Gladys Langford, a middle-aged school teacher from London whose diary quietly records the moral ambiguities of the moment. It was noticeable, she wrote, how many people seemed 'very proud of the Atomic bomb we've dropped on Japan and yet those same people cursed the Germans for their cruelty when they bombed us.'... Joan Wyndham, stationed with the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in Nottinghamshire, wrote of her perplexity on hearing that somewhere called Hiroshima, and then Nagasaki, 'had been wiped out'... There were no 'wild parties, hardly any drunken celebrations' such as accompanied VE Day. The end of the war had been 'too unheroic"*

On the other hand, Winston Churchill delivered the following speech in the House of Commons:

> *'There are voices which assert that the bomb should never have been used at all… I cannot associate myself with such ideas… Six years of total war have convinced most people that had the Germans or Japanese discovered this new weapon, they would have used it upon us to our complete destruction with the utmost alacrity. I am surprised that very worthy people, but people who in most cases had no intention of proceeding to the Japanese front themselves, should adopt the position that rather than use this bomb, we should have sacrificed a million American and a quarter of a million British lives in the desperate battles and massacres of an invasion of Japan. Future generations will judge these dire decisions, and I believe that if they find themselves swelling in a happier world from which war has been banished, and where freedom reigns, they will not condemn those who struggled for their benefit amid the horrors and miseries of this gruesome and ferocious epoch.'*

It seems that there was a divide in the opinions of the public and politicians, rather than the clearer overall agreement that the US population had. This is likely a result of a level of removal from the situation compared to the US; the US had a strong sense of anger and attachment to defeating Japan, as they had been the target of a direct attack during the attack on Pearl Harbour. However, as Churchill pointed out, a large number of British soldiers were fighting in the war and to end the war quickly would save many of their lives. Combined with their alliance with the US, there was still a sense of relief and gratitude that the war had ended, albeit without the sense of pride and personal vengeance that the US seemed to gain from the bombings.

The duality of the British reaction to the bombings can be seen in the newspaper articles reporting on them at the time. A *Daily Mail* article on August 7 referred to the atomic bomb as a 'wonder-bomb… the world is waiting to hear the effects of that first history-making bomb on a city roughly four miles by three, with 300,00 inhabitants… Many hours after the bomb was dropped the target was still covered by the cloud, which alone indicates the incalculable destructive power of the bomb' (Brough 1945). There is a sense of awe and pride at the destructive potential of the bomb in this article, and this can be seen in multiple editions of the Daily Mail in the following months.

On September 5, an article details the illnesses that survivors of the Hiroshima bomb have been suffering from and explains the effect that impact can have on the human body (Langdon-Davis 1945). However, the article starts with a warning that reports of these illnesses 'should be received with caution' and ends by telling readers that these illnesses could be Japanese propaganda to make 'the world believe they [Japan] were beaten only by the demoniac power of atomic energy… [this] will soon have their people satisfied that they were robbed of victory only by the bomb. So, let us wait before we accept accounts from any quarter claiming worse horrors than the reality, which is bad enough' (Langdon-Davies 1945). This

disregard for the experiences of Japanese people and reports of the destruction caused by the bomb shows an unwillingness to frame the Japanese as sympathetic, instead suggesting that they were attempting to trick the West into believing they were suffering more damage than they actually were.

On September 12 a Daily Mail article included a play-by-play of how the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, 'this dramatic story of the aircraft and the aircrew who delivered the bomb to its target. The story is told by Sgt. Robert Schwartz in the current British edition of the American Army magazine 'Yank'' (Daily Mail 1945). The article frames the events as heroic and the crew carrying out the drop in a way that emphasised their humanity, describing one of the aircrew as 'a boyish redhead who looks like every kid in every breakfast cereal advertisement ever printed' (ibid). The Enola Gay, the plane which dropped the bomb, is described with awe: '"She sang," they say now, with the deep pride that airmen feel for a ground crew that can make a plane sing' (ibid). The article centres their reaction to the bomb and its immense impact, while only mentioning the Japanese to ask 'how many [bombs would it] take to make Japan surrender' (ibid). The title of the article, 'If people knew what we're doing, we could have sold tickets for $100,000,' is a quote from Lieutenant Jeppson, which suggests that people would have paid huge amounts of money to see the atomic bomb drop. This frames the bombing as a spectacle, akin to a fireworks display, that members of the Western public could enjoy. In titling the article after this quote, the article immediately removes any sense of humanity or empathy from the Japanese victims of the bomb. In the bottom left hand corner of the newsheet with this article, there is also a small article featuring a handwritten note by Hideki Tojo, the Prime Minister of Japan and a figure that embodied the Japanese war effort for many Westerners. The article ridicules Tojo, whose death was 'as ignoble as the life he lived. He did not even fall on his sword in the traditional harakiri of the Samurai warrior.'

On the other hand, other publications showed a more reserved and slightly more sympathetic picture of Japan in the aftermath of the atomic bombs. An article from The Times on August 8 opens with: ‘An impenetrable cloud of dust and smoke, standing over the ruin of the great Japanese arsenal at Hiroshima, still veils the undoubtedly stupendous destruction wrought by the first impact in war of the atomic bomb. A mist no less impenetrable is likely for a long time to conceal the full significance in human affairs of the release of the vast and mysterious power hitherto locked within the infinitesimal units of which the material structure of the universe is built up… at least as big with potentialities of good and evil as when the forces of steam or electricity were harnessed for the first time to the purposes of industry and war’ (The Times 1945). The article communicates a sense of uncertainty and cautiousness regarding the use of atomic bombs. The article highlights that the pressures of war and the attempt to prevent further destruction through continued fighting created the need for the bomb, and that it must be used responsibly. The article does not fully condemn the use of the bomb, but appears to be leaning more towards disagreeing with its use than justifying it.

A later edition of The Times on September 6 details that ‘the atomic bomb was still killing Japanese [in Hiroshima] at the rate of 100 a day… The Japanese told Mr. Lawrence that 20,000 more people had died in Hiroshima since the last official return was issued on August 20, bringing the total dead there to 53,000. They predicted the final count of dead alone would exceed 80,000 persons’ (From Our Own Correspondent 1945). The article ends with the fact that ‘the people of Hiroshima hated the Americans, whom they regarded as the cruellest people in the world’ (ibid). The article, though very short and largely descriptive, centres the Japanese experience and impact of the bomb rather than the Western view. It highlights the immense impact and great death toll of the events, pointing out that the initial count was inaccurate

because many more were dying due to the aftermath/radiation poisoning (though they did not call it radiation poisoning at the time).

In The Illustrated London News on September 15, an article includes three large images of Hiroshima in the aftermath of the bombing. The caption of the first image describes it as ‘part of the appalling devastation caused by the single atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima on August 6’ (The Illustrated London News 1945). The article opens by saying ‘the recent pictures of Hiroshima… provide an awful warning for civilisation; and the appalling as, it would appear, incalculable results of this most recent of science’s achievements form a terrible commentary on modern war’ (ibid). The article very clearly takes a stance condemning the use of the bomb and its effects on the Japanese population.

There appears to be an overall progression from great uncertainty regarding the use of the atomic bombs to more concrete opinions, though those differ greatly between the newspapers. The Daily Mail articles acknowledge that they were still ‘waiting to hear the effects of that first history-making bomb’ in the first few days, though largely frames the event in a positive, victorious light, while The Times emphasises the ‘stupendous destruction’ and potential negative impact that the bomb might have. In September, the Daily Mail moved towards glorifying the bombs and dismissing any potential further impact that the radiation was causing, focussing on framing the events as successes. On the other hand, The Times and the Illustrated London News reported on the illnesses and devastation that continued to happen due to the bombings, framing the events as catastrophic and much more harmful.

In terms of the stereotyping that occurred at the time, the British attitude appeared to reflect the American one in viewing Japan as less of a threat, but there were still strong undercurrents of suspicion that the aftermath was being exaggerated to make the West let their guard down. While this narrative appears somewhat in the American media, it is possibly more

apparent in British media due to the lack of preexisting emphasis that Japan's defeat would signal victory; in the USA, due to the investment that Pearl Harbor created, the idea of defeating Japan became their ultimate goal in the war and the successful dropping of the bombs meant that there had to be an immediate change to the narrative, whereas in Britain there was less involvement and focus and therefore there was no great shift in perspective to create the same contrast.

The Korean War, 1950-1953

American reactions to Korean War

This segment will briefly outline the events and changes in attitudes, focusing on the impact which they had on the public perception of ESEA people and culture, but will not go into greater detail regarding the tactics used and complex nature of the conflict. For further detail regarding this period, Steven Casey's *Selling The Korean War* (2008) illustrates the way in which the government 'sold' the war to the American public despite its incredibly complicated nature, covering much of this area of history and its impact.

American involvement in South Korea began following the end of WWII, where the US supported the rebuilding of South Korea while the USSR backed North Korea. Though the two countries withdrew from these areas in 1949, tension continued to rise and in June 1950 North Korean forces attacked South Korea. The UN called for members to support South Korea, where conflict continued to escalate. Across the Korean War, efforts were made on both sides to

push the border and gain control of more territory, with the US providing the majority of support to South Korea.

In contrast with past events involving ESEA, the Korean War was interesting in that it was largely framed as a fight against Communism rather than a specific ethnicity or nationality, such as the bombings of Japan and other past instances of Yellow Peril fear. The USSR and China being involved with North Korea is likely the main reason behind this perspective on the issue. However, it was undoubtedly still a conflict that impacted the Western perspective of ESEA. The graph below charts changes in the US public opinion regarding whether people felt the US getting involved with the Korean War was a mistake or not:

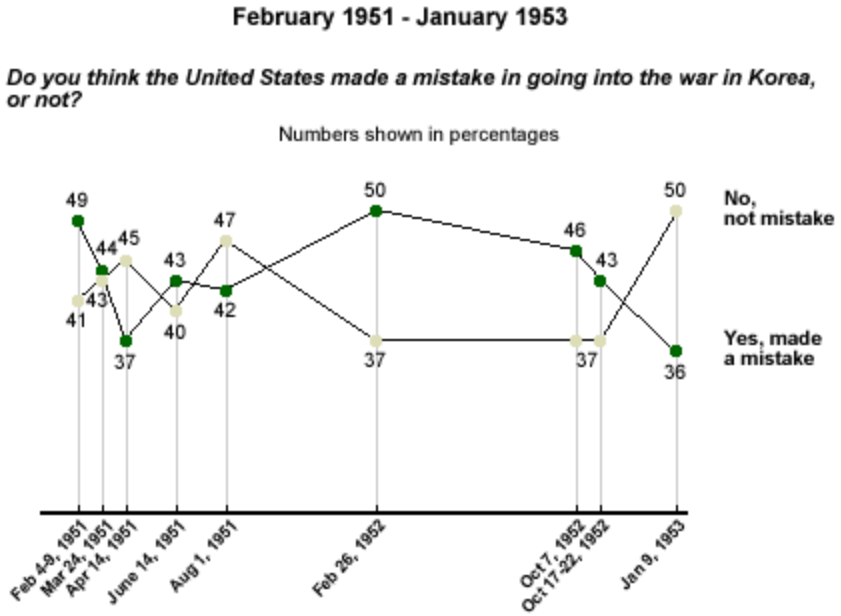
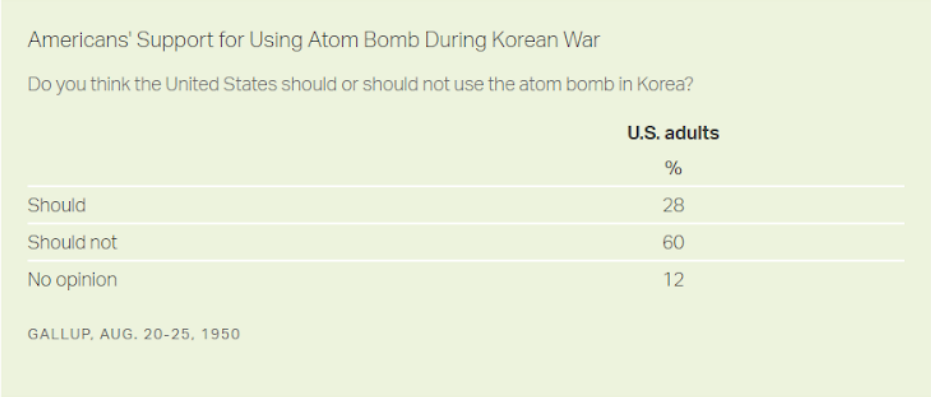


Figure 9: A graph charting responses to the question 'Do you think the United States made a mistake in going into the war in Korea, or not?' (Crabtree 2003).

It is interesting to see that at the very beginning of the conflict breaking out, the majority of the responses felt that it was a mistake. This is likely due to the recent nature of WWII and the bombings in Japan, as there was no indication of how long the conflict would continue. The

table below is interesting to note, in that the media coverage implies that the public overall did support the use of the atom bomb in Japan, but when asked if it should be using in Korea at the beginning of the conflict most felt it should not be. This suggests that the public perhaps did not feel that the conflict in Korea was as urgent or important as Japan.



Americans' Support for Using Atom Bomb During Korean War

Do you think the United States should or should not use the atom bomb in Korea?

	U.S. adults
	%
Should	28
Should not	60
No opinion	12

GALLUP, AUG. 20-25, 1950

Figure 10: A table showing the results of a poll asking 'Do you think the United States should or should not use the atom bomb in Korea?' (Saad 2017).

The combination of the above graph on whether entering the conflict was a mistake or not and the following graph is also indicative of this attitude—it appears that in this early period of the conflict most of the public felt that the fighting would continue and lead to World War III. It is also perhaps a reflection of the attitude that ultimately made Korea a 'forgotten war,' in that the conflict was far away and did not directly involve American investments as their forces had already been withdrawn.

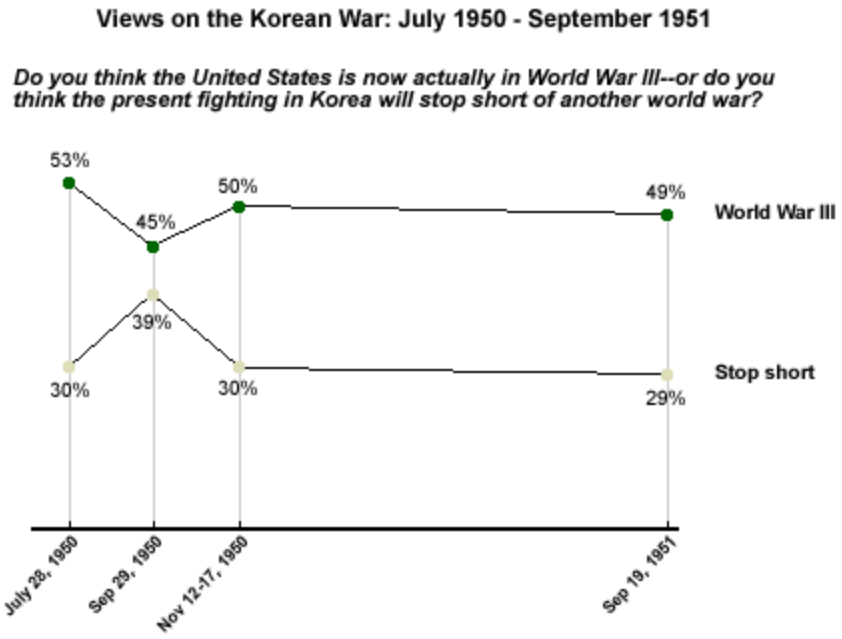


Figure 11: A graph showing responses from July 28 1950 to September 19 1951 to the question 'Do you think the United States is now actually in World War III—or do you think the present fighting in Korea will stop short of another world war?' (Crabtree 2003).

However, the gap between those responding 'yes' and 'no' to whether they felt it was a mistake is not very large, and this could be a result of the US stance championing democracy and capitalism against the growth of Communism. During this period of time, the 'Red Scare' was a particularly prevalent movement, spreading fear of Communism through campaigns such as 'right-wing politicians [accusing] anyone left of center of being procommunist,' creating 'a torrid environment' and anti-communist sentiment (Casey 2008, p. 12).

For the rest of the conflict, there are multiple shifts in public opinion regarding the US involvement in Korea. As Casey (2005, p. 4) points out, there appears to be a 'simple relationship between casualties and domestic support… when casualties rise, the public tends to turn against a war,' though this implies that 'the government is effectively powerless to reverse such an inexorable process' when in reality the government was actively attempting to

‘construct the Cold War consensus at home.’ Regardless of the interactions between the media, government, and events of the conflict, the outcome of the Korean War was that the US public largely felt that it had been the right decision to become involved.

In January 1953 when there had been a stalemate for around two years and just before the Armistice was signed, public opinion was split to the greatest degree during this period in favour of US involvement in the war. This was likely due to the perceived end of the conflict, where, although the US did not outright win and North Korea continued to be an independent Communist country, the US was seen to have prevented South Korea from being invaded and held the border from being pushed further south by the North. Following the end of the war, which, ‘unlike previous wars… ended not with an atomic bang or conquest of a foreign capital, but when the last prisoner stepped off the boat,’ Young (2006, pp. 49-60) argues that the US suffered a ‘crisis of confidence.’ This was partially due to the lack of an outright victory, combined with the unprecedented stories of collaboration and collusion between American prisoners of war with the enemy, as well as many defectors (ibid). The number of POWs who were returning with stories of torture, ‘brainwashing,’ and working alongside the Communists led to a narrative that ‘the Reds had ‘gotten’ to many prisoners [which] was particularly disturbing’ (ibid). The lasting impression which the Korean War appeared to have on the US was that the most prominent threat was Communism, rather than any specific anti-Asian sentiment.

British reactions to Korean War

The Korean War is often referred to as a ‘forgotten war’ and this was particularly true in Britain, as the conflict was seen to be taking place far away and was overshadowed by the conflicts in WWII and Vietnam that occurred on either side of it. Much like the conflict in Japan, the UK had less of an investment than the US, but were nonetheless involved through their allyship with the US. From newspaper reports at the time, it can be seen that the public and government stance on the Korean War was one of acting when needed, but not initiating conflict or acting too quickly. For example, when China warned that further advancement towards its border would lead to war, the Derby Daily Telegraph (1950) reported that the US were ‘urging that Allied aircrafts should bomb Chinese supply lines in Manchuria. Britain is standing out against this action. We are prepared to give the Chinese a little more time to come to their senses. But if, at the end of that period of grace, they still refuse to discuss the situation in Korea we shall be forced to agree to the strongest measures against them.’ This shows a clear portrayal of Britain as loyal allies while also wanting to be perceived as less violent and more reasonable than the US. It is also indicative of Britain’s lower level of involvement, in that they were willing to take action when it was crucial but did not want to unnecessarily use resources in the conflict.

This narrative was closely tied to the underlying reasons for Britain to take part in the conflict, which were framed as being for the benefit of the Korean people, as well as for human rights. This meant that Britain could justify becoming involved when the stakes were higher, but also refrain from engaging in warfare that could be seen as causing more damage than good. The Gloucester Citizen (1950) reported that:

'The British Government has taken initiative in trying to solve the future of Korea by presenting a resolution to the United Nations delegations which would lay down broad lines for a post-war solution.
'The main lines of the British proposal… are: The establishment of a unified and independent Korea; free elections under the supervision of the United Nations; the establishment of a strong United Nations commission to supervise the transition from war to peace, and the United Nations responsibility for economic reconstruction.'

It appears that Britain was portrayed as being proactive in creating long term peace and upholding freedom while being supportive of but not leading US military action.

Additionally, the service of British troops was celebrated by the media, emphasising their importance in the conflict. For example, the Gloucestershire Regiment was key in halting Chinese forces from advancing at Hill 235 on the Imjin River, with many of them being captured or killed (National Army Museum). The Times (From Our Own Correspondent 1951) reported on a ceremony where '20,000 troops in Korea of Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and India were organized into one new division—the 1st Commonwealth Division—in a ceremony yesterday near where the Gloucestershires made their heroic stand on the west front a few months ago. Included in the new division are some new Gloucestershire men and some of the survivors of that great fight.' The reference to the Gloucestershires makes it clear that the general public were already aware of what 'their heroic stand' is referring to, and that they had been portrayed in a positive light previously. It can be seen that the British public were very supportive of their troops and understanding of their sacrifice, therefore supportive of the cause for their presence.

It is interesting to note that these articles do not touch on Korean people at all; they focus on governments, military movements, and the U.N. but not on the impact that the war has on Korean people. This is perhaps a product of the lack of nuance in Western understanding of ESEA at the time; that the war was taking place between North and South Korea rather than two countries that the West saw as having distinctive characteristics and therefore had to rely on

the core differences: that the North was ruled by Communists and the South backed by the West. As such, the only characteristics to make note of in the media were therefore the governments and ruling parties. This is in contrast to the coverage of the bombings in Japan, which detailed the aftermath for civilians. It is also likely due to the feeling that the war was not of particular importance to Britain, leading to it becoming a 'forgotten war.'

Overall the British attitude towards the Korean War seemed to be one that was largely uninterested except where British parties did something worthy of pride and celebration. There does not seem to be any particular sentiment either way regarding Korean people specifically, other than a general sympathy for their fight against Communism. The British government's involvement was framed as being active where necessary but otherwise not committing more resources than needed to the conflict.

The Vietnam War (1955-1975) and the Civil Rights Movement

American reactions to Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement

America during this period faced an unprecedented amount of anti-war activism, particularly from students and those who had also participated in other social movements at the time such as 'pacifist, anti-nuclear, feminist, and civil rights movements' (Hess 2015, p. 3). In particular, American involvement in the Vietnam War was seen to be lacking the 'moral cause' that 'Americans of the World War II-Cold War generation had become accustomed to… the belief that the use of military force against totalitarianism that threatened democratic values… was justified and indeed necessary' (ibid). Instead, they saw involvement in the conflict as

immoral and unwanted by South Vietnam, leading many to protest the escalation of violence by the US. In particular, the Vietnam War was viewed ‘as a civil war about self-determination and [many] regarded US involvement as both unjust and a breach of international law’ (Ellis 2013, p. 557).

U.S. Adults' vs. College Students' Support for Richard Nixon's Vietnam Policies in 1969

Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Nixon is handling the situation in Vietnam?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
	%	%	%
U.S. adults	64	25	11
U.S. college students	50	44	6
Students by region			
South	60	34	6
Midwest	52	43	5
West	50	42	8
East	36	58	6

RESULTS FOR U.S. ADULTS BASED ON NOV. 12-17, 1969, SURVEY; RESULTS FOR U.S. COLLEGE STUDENTS BASED ON NOV. 1-16, 1969, SURVEY.

Figure 12: A table of responses to a poll in 1969 asking ‘Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Nixon is handling the situation in Vietnam?’ (Saad 2018).

However, according to the above table, the American public were still largely supporters of US involvement in Vietnam, with over half the student respondents in every region except the East approving of Nixon’s approach. Overall within the student demographic, 50% approved and only 44% disapproved, despite the overarching view of anti-war protestors being students. However, ‘the same survey showed 69% of students in favor of slowing down or halting the fighting in Vietnam, while only 20% favored escalation. This was a sharp change from 1967, when more students favored escalation (49%) than de-escalation (35%)’ (Saad 2018). Additionally, the gap between the US adults who approved and disapproved was much larger than in US college students, showing that there was still a larger number of students who disapproved than the general public.

Alongside the Vietnam War, there was also an undeniable shift in American culture due to the Civil Rights Movement which began around the same time. While the movement was largely focused on Black civil rights from the 1950s onwards, Asian American activists fought alongside them and it was during this period that the term ‘Asian American’ was coined by Yuji Ichioka. The term was revolutionary in uniting the terms ‘Asian’ and American,’ as the two had been considered and portrayed as mutually exclusive throughout history, particularly with the assimilability of ESEA people being questioned and Orientalism positioning them as opposites. In creating the term ‘Asian American,’ activists fought to be recognised as equal citizens. Activists fought for solidarity between different ethnic groups towards the goal of equality and recognition in the USA, part of which was protesting American involvement in the Vietnam War.

This period also saw the rise of the term ‘model minority.’ This is a term that has already been utilised in this thesis earlier than its formal formation, as it has roots that stretch far back to the beginning of the period covered here. In particular, the history of pitting minority ethnic groups against each other by suggesting that the stereotypically ‘well behaved’ group are more assimilable in order to condemn the protests of other ethnic groups occurs as early as the first case study. However, it was during demonstrations for the Civil Rights movement where the term gained its modern socio-political implications, where it was used to reject the implications the stereotype held regarding ‘myth… that Asian Americans have triumphed over obstacles–racial or otherwise–through good values and hard work’ (Kim 2015, p. 173.) The term has been utilised to criticise the history of creating tension between many different groups to prevent protests, and is often associated with anti-blackness, not only in white, Western society but also within other ethnic minority groups including ESEA people which will be expanded upon later in this chapter. The stereotype has ‘been linked to mental health issues among Asian American students, to political justifications for cutting welfare and affirmative action programs,

and to increased tension between minority groups… In rejecting the stereotype, critics have emphasized socioeconomic differences among Asian Americans and drawn attention to communities whose struggles might be overlooked or discounted because of this racial preconception' (ibid, pp. 173-174.) Additionally, Kim (ibid, pp. 174-178) argues, the 'model minority' stereotype is particularly resonant when applied to ESEA groups as it is closely linked to the opposing existing stereotype of 'Yellow Peril'; the supposedly rigorous work ethic and dedication to work is admirable until to threatens to overtake white labour and intellect, at which point those characteristics become malicious and suspicious.

With the movement's momentum, Asian American representation grew not only in the media but in performance, too, such as the rise of Asian American theatre. The goal of these companies was, as Shimakawa, (2002, p. 71) articulates, was to 'firmly establish Asian Americanness as indistinguishable or indivisible from "humanness" and to resist the impulse to exclude Asian Americanness and reconstitute it as (foreign) Asianness' as well as the impulse 'to absorb and erase Asian American cultural specificities and their difference from dominant (white, heteronormative) forms of Americanness.' As apparent most prominently in the treatment of Japanese American residents who were forcefully relocated to camps, there was a very recent and impactful history of Asian American people being treated as less than human, and less than American, which the civil rights movement aimed to reject. This manifested in performance practices which drew from the lived experiences of Asian American people such as incorporating their daily rituals and routines, which had for so long been used to discriminate against them, their language, and the stereotypes that were projected onto them. For example, Shimakawa (2002, pp. 90-92) writes regarding the inclusion of stereotypical accents being used by Asian American characters in the play *The Year of the Dragon* (1974): 'Asian American writers in the larger U.S. American literary culture have been denied a language authentic or

proper to them… restricted to specific, grotesquely abject ways of speaking.' The character in the play, who speaks fluent English but puts on a stereotypical accent when leading tours for white tourists, is only 'given a voice with which to speak' when 'speaking in the approved, accepted, and recognizable registers of the stereotype' (ibid.) It was through these performances that Asian American people were able to create more nuance and critical engagement with the long and largely homogenous representation of ESEA people prior to this. Kim (2015, pp. 134-136) argues that the work that represented Asian Americans rituals and experiences onstage was, in the same line as Brechtian theatre, able to 'affect how we view naturalized behaviours and potentially reflect back on and reshape their constitutive social conditions.' The Civil Rights movement and the fight for ESEA representation by ESEA people undoubtedly contributed to creating space for more ESEA performers.

British reactions to Vietnam War

Similarly to the Korean War, British involvement in the Vietnam War was more distanced than US involvement, as they were allies to the US but were not directly involved in the conflict. As such, 'Britain provided broad support for US objectives but refused to countenance troop commitments' as the government faced anti-Vietnam War pressure from Britain and pressure to support the war from the US (Clements 2020, p. 1) Much like in the US, there was a large anti-war movement in the UK that was largely made up of student activists (though the support for the movement spanned all age groups) (ibid). As Ellis (2013, p. 557) writes, though 'the British government provided crucial rhetorical support for the US effort in South-East Asian and minor intelligence and medical assistance,' and did not send any troops, 'this 'complicity' in the

American war effort, however limited, evoked a strong negative response from British politicians, peace groups, the labour movement and a large section of the British public.'

Table 1. Public opinion towards the British government's policy towards the Vietnam War (Gallup).

Date	Question	Distribution of opinion (%)		
	What do you think is more/most important for Britain?	To support the Americans in Vietnam	To try and get the peace talks going in Vietnam	Don't know
04/65		9	71	20
07/66		9	81	10
08/66		8	87	5
03/67		10	84	6
02/68		7	87	6
	Would you approve or disapprove if the Government were to send troops to fight alongside the South Vietnamese in Vietnam?	Approve	Disapprove	Don't know
09/65		17	69	14
02/66		10	78	12
06/66		13	75	12
07/66		8	81	11
08/66		14	75	11
11/67		7	82	11
	Is Britain right or wrong to continue its support of US policy in Vietnam?	Right	Wrong	Don't know
05/66		34	32	34
06/66		40	32	28
07/66		33	38	29
08/66		42	37	21
05/67		38	42	20
10/67		34	45	21
12/69		28	43	29

Source: Compiled from Gallup (1976a, 1976 b).
Note: Percentages sum across the rows.

Figure 13: Table of responses by the British public to the questions 'What do you think is more/most important for Britain: to support the Americans in Vietnam or to try and get the peace talks going in Vietnam?'; 'Would you approve or disapprove if the Government were to send troops to fight alongside the South Vietnamese in Vietnam?'; and 'Is Britain right or wrong to continue its support of US policy in Vietnam?' (Clements 2020, p. 3).

As apparent in the table above, the British public overwhelmingly felt that Britain should 'try and get the peace talks going in Vietnam' rather than 'support the Americans in Vietnam' and disapproved of the Government sending troops to support South Vietnam. This is indicative of the anti-war movement at the time, as well as the lack of engagement that was felt by the UK in contrast to US involvement. However, when asked if Britain was 'right or wrong to continue its support of US policy in Vietnam,' the responses were fairly equally divided between 'right,'

‘wrong,’ and ‘don’t know.’ This is interesting in that it shows a conflict between the importance of being allies to the US and the anti-war sentiment. However, it appears that the overarching opinion was that the US and Britain should not be involved in the conflict in Vietnam, regardless of British support of US policy.

Overall, the circumstances in the US and UK at this time led to few changes in Western perceptions of ESEA. The conflict was again framed as a fight against Communism and for democracy, though this received unprecedented levels of scrutiny and distrust in Vietnam, and as the conflict was within two sections of one country it did not lead to any new stereotyping of ESEA identities. The largest changes that occurred during this time took place in Southeast Asia, where fighting took place and large numbers of troops were being sent.

The impact of soldiers in Vietnam and Southeast Asia

This period of time marks the beginning of what would become the sex tourism industry, which created a new dimension to stereotypes regarding ESEA people, particularly women. A Cohen (1982) points out, prostitution and the sex trade were by no means new in the twentieth century, but ‘“commercial sex never came close to today’s scale until foreign demand for it soared in the mid-1960s”’ (Phongpaichit 1981a in Cohen 1982, p. 406). Though Cohen (1982) focuses specifically on the relationship between tourists and sex workers in Thailand, his analysis regarding the roots of the sex tourism industry clearly link them to ‘the arrival of American military men in 1962, many of whom had Thai mistresses, referred to as “hired wives” or “rented wives” (Smith 1971, p. 129). The easy availability of sex became one of the chief attractions for the “... American servicemen [who] began coming on one week rest and recreation visits from South Vietnam in 1966” (FEER 1976, p. 27).’ It is clear that Western military presence in Southeast Asia created a demand for sexual services, and in response an

industry was created which continued past the end of the conflict as Western tourists continued to travel to Asia for these services. In particular, the following quote from Cohen (1982, p. 407) provides a particularly apt summary of what occurred:

> *'After the GIs left, foreign-oriented prostitution suffered a short recession, but it was soon "... rescued to a certain extent by the successful promotion of tourism" (FEER 1976:28). Indeed, tourism to Thailand expanded at a quick pace since the Vietnam War: according to the Tourism Organization of Thailand, the number of foreign arrivals which in 1971 stood at 634,000 rose to 1,098,000 in 1976 and reached 1,591,000 in 1979. Males outnumber females among tourist arrivals by two to one.'*

A *TIME* article from 1966 covers Thailand's relationship with the West with a focus on the King and Queen and how they have influenced the country. The article starts with a portrait of life in Thailand in that moment, observing the mixture of old temples and 'gentle air and lemony Siamese sunlight, rice, corn and coconut palms' with 'hard-top highways, built with U.S. aid and thick with speeding new cars' and 'neon-lit bars, cinemas and boxing pits' (TIME 1966, pp. 1-2). The article clearly considers Thailand the most prosperous of Southeast Asian countries, as it details how Thailand 'seems to soar above the roiling troubles of the region all around it. Neighboring Laos is half in Communist hands, Cambodia hapless host to the Viet Cong, Burma a xenophobic military backwater. The Chinese talons are less than 100 miles away, North Viet Nam a bare 20 minutes as the U.S. fighter-bombers fly from their Thai bases. Everywhere on the great peninsula, militant Communism, poverty, misery, illiteracy, misrule, and a foundering sense of nationhood are the grim order of the Asian day… With one important exception: the lush and smiling realm of Their Majesties King Bhumibol (pronounced Poom-ee-pone) Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit, which spreads like a green meadow of stability, serenity and strength from Burma down to the Malaysian peninsula—the geopolitical heart of Southeast Asia.' It is clear that the article intends to paint Thailand as an alluring and exciting

country, a mixture of modern due to its proximity to Western values via its alliance with the U.S. against Communism and ideas of ‘oriental’ tradition and oddity. The article includes a segment which extolls the various tourist attractions and quirks that can be found in Bangkok; this segment ends with the sentence ‘Equally abundant are instantly available women’ (TIME 1966, p. 2). The article frames all the details of life in Thailand as being simultaneously exciting and bizarre, and this sentence encapsulates how that attitude applied to ESEA women at the time. The article also acknowledges that Thailand is frequented by American GIs who visit regularly, and that many of these tourist attractions are what have been drawing them in. As such, Thai women are treated as another tourist attraction—objects that are exotic and as easy to obtain as ‘star rubies,’ ‘instant antique Buddha heads,’ and ‘Russian caviar’ (ibid, p. 2).

In the aftermath of the Vietnam war, this reputation of Southeast Asia was utilised to promote it as a tourist destination by travel companies, solidifying this image through publicity and creating a demand for sexual services to continue to be provided through the systems created during wartime. Cohen (1982, p. 408) details how ‘the demand for sex has given rise to a new type of organized tour, the “sex package tour” brought predominantly by European, especially German, and Japanese tourists, who “travel mainly to buy sex” on short trips to Bangkok as well as some other-Asian destinations,’ offered by specialist companies ‘such as “Jet Sex” of Zurich and “EuroTours” of Amsterdam.’ This led not only to the reinforcement of Thailand’s ‘whorehouse reputation’ in the West, but also police ‘crackdowns on prostitutes’ that were ‘directed primarily against the women, rather than the institutions which promote prostitution, or the conditions which generate it’ as well as targeting ‘tourist-oriented prostitutes’ in order to ‘protect the national reputation’ (ibid). It is clear that the image that the West had of ESEA was experiencing its largest shift in regards to the way ESEA women were being viewed,

as this image was so widely understood that it was being used as promotional material by travel companies.

A shift in the existing stereotypes regarding ESEA women can be seen happening around this time. From the nineteenth century until this point, the main contact between Western people and ESEA women was through Chinese prostitutes in Chinatowns, resulting in stereotypes of submissive and subservient hypersexualised ESEA women who were either trafficked or desperate to make money. Much of this was linked to their status as immigrants, as they were perceived to be looking for employment and resorting to sex work. As Thanh-Dam (1983, p. 536) points out, the circumstances in which Western men encountered ESEA women in Southeast Asian who provided sexual services were no longer just in brothels but women as 'the freelancer, the call girl, the chartered prostitute, and the 'mail order bride'' who engaged in sex work to varying degrees. For example, in massage parlours, through catalogues, and at bars and clubs. Encountering sex workers in a range of settings outside of brothels likely contributed to the stereotype that ESEA women were 'instantly available,' as women who had 'government jobs… factory workers and other semi-skilled workers' were also seen as providing sexual services. This meant that the stereotype no longer only applied to prostitutes but to all ESEA women.

Thanh-Dam (1983, p. 537) outlines that the presence of soldier in Southeast Asia particularly contributed to the demand for more prostitution in new structures in two ways. Firstly, the soldiers were unable to 'establish a regular relationship [due to] prolonged separation from home and peer groups' which led to 'heterosexual male demand for prostitution services' (ibid). There was a 'conducive climate for entrepreneurs to organize prostitution' and 'entertainment centres grew up around these military bases to form a service infrastructure' (ibid). Following the end of conflict, these structures—while 'largely disappear[ing] following the

American withdrawal' in Vietnam—continued to provide sexual services to the new group of clients in Thailand and the Philippines: tourists (ibid).

Hand in hand with these shifts in the stereotypes of ESEA women came the amplification of colourism within ESEA groups as well as white, Western perceptions. The divide that was now emerging between East and Southeast Asia was significantly informed by the way in which women from these geographical areas were being categorised. There are many factors which play into this divide. For instance, a history of colonialism and white supremacy across the world contributes to the promotion of eurocentric beauty standards and the favouring of lighter skin colour. Additionally, there exists a historical association between having lighter skin and being wealthier (sometimes linked to the idea that people who performed manual labour in the sun having darker skin as a result) (Rondilla and Spickard 2007, p. 4). During this time period, there was a strong association by the West of darker skinned Southeast Asian people being victims of lighter skinned East Asian countries (such as Japan's presence in Southeast Asia). These associations have persisted, as will be most prominently discussed in Ali Wong's work in chapter 5, in the perception of Southeast Asia as less developed or civilised in comparison to the technologically and financially advanced East Asia. As Rondilla and Spickard (2007 p. 5) write, 'the impulse towards lightness has both indigenous Asian class roots and also a colonial or postcolonial Whiteness element laid over it.' This is still seen today, such as in the popularity of skin-lightening products in ESEA communities and stereotypes such as the 'ABG' (Asian Baby Girl), which utilises a specific aesthetic that includes having light skin, emphasising a youthful appearance, and incorporating Western accessories such as piercings and tattoos (Tran 2020). The ABG stereotype in particular has a complex history of being understood as a subversion of the 'lotus blossom' and 'dragon lady' stereotypes by allowing ESEA women to have more agency in being sexualised as well as rejecting the 'model minority' stereotype, while

also being criticised for reiterating existing stereotypes (particularly infantilisation) (ibid). Overall, it is clear that there is a long history of colourism both within ESEA communities and white, Western ones which coincide to create a culture of colourism against dark skinned Southeast Asian women.

This change in cultural reference points at the time meant that the original stereotype of submissive, subservient, hypersexualised women was not subverted but amplified and made more geographically specific. Southeast Asia, which was already considered less ‘developed’ than countries such as China and Japan who had fought alongside Western countries and had a history of military power, became seen as ‘a ‘lost paradise’ of traditionally submissive women’ (Thanh-Dam 1983, p. 539). White men could not only find access to sex workers but also browse ‘catalogues that stress the obedience and devotion of Asian women’ to find themselves a ‘mail-order bride’ (ibid).

A Case Study of ESEA Women in Western Media: The Moose (1972), *M*A*S*H*

This research has thus far mostly examined male stereotypes and case studies. The decision to do this has largely stemmed from the fact that, since the first stereotypes which appeared in the first chapter, the Western understanding of ESEA women changed very little. There were no large-scale interactions with ESEA women in new circumstances the way WWI and WWII created for ESEA men. As a result, until soldiers were being sent to ESEA in conflict, there were very few changes to make note of. However, as a result of the focus on ESEA men, there is now some catching up to be done before the case study for this chapter. This section will therefore provide an overview of representation of ESEA women in popular media prior to 1945 before moving into a case study of an episode of the sitcom television show *M*A*S*H*.

The most prominent representation of ESEA women during this period was the actress Anna May Wong. Anna May Wong was known for introducing the dragon lady stereotype which 'has had a long history in Western verbiage and has endured as a gendered stereotype even in contemporary popular culture. The irony of this stubborn label is that the vast majority of Asian women immigrants to this country were by far in the absolute opposite position of this type. Rather than heartless victimizers, they were victims of widespread exploitation' (Fuller 2010, p. 24). However, Wong also played the opposite and only other type of ESEA female character available at the time, the self-sacrificing and delicate type whose story was often linked to a white saviour. Wong originally became known for her role in *The Toll of the Sea* (1922), an adaptation of the Madame Butterfly story, as the submissive and lovelorn female lead named Lotus Flower who falls in love with an American soldier who returns to America after their

wedding. While he is away he marries an American woman and Lotus Flower gives birth to their son. He returns to China with his new wife, causing Lotus Flower to give them the child and commit suicide in despair. The lack of interest in ESEA love interests meant that Wong was rarely able to play leading roles again. In a 1933 she gave an interview in which she denounced the portrayal of Chinese people in Hollywood, saying:

> *'I was so tired of the parts I had to play. Why is it that the screen Chinese is always the villain? And so crude a villain—murderous, treacherous, a snake in the grass! We are not like that. How could we be, with a civilization that is so many times older than that of the West? We have our rigid codes of behaviour, of honor. Why do they never show these? Why should we always scheme, rob, kill? I got so weary of it all—of the scenarists' conception of the Chinese character.'*
> (Okrent 1990 in Chung 2005)

Wong wanted to play the part of O-Lan in an adaptation of Pearl Buck's 1931 novel *The Good Earth*, a novel that 'did not eliminate unsavory American Orientalism [but] its adaptation into film promised to be a major improvement upon past racism in movies' (Hodges 2012, p. 134). However, the leading roles were cast with white actors and the role of Lotus 'a sensual twenty-year-old, and the fifth most important role in the film' was offered to Wong instead. She replied:

> *'"If you let me play O-Lan, I will be very glad. But you are asking me—with my Chinese blood—to do the only unsympathetic role in the picture, featuring an all-American cast, portraying Chinese characters."'*
> (Hodges 2012, p. 136)

ESEA women were often not getting roles during this time as many believed that ESEA people were incapable of acting well. An article in *Variety* claimed that 'Orientals don't make good actors, and plenty of good acting is required in the picture [*Blood on the Sun* (1945)]' to justify Caucasian actors for ESEA roles (Fuller 2010, p. 126). This belief that ESEA people

could not be good actors likely stems from the stereotype of being stoic and emotionless, often referred to as being 'inscrutable.' This term has a long history of racialised implications, such as its use to bolster stereotypes of Yellow Peril such as Fu Manchu and Dragon Lady characters. In periods where Yellow Peril was being assigned to different nationalities, their supposed 'inscrutability' was used to suggest an inherent maliciousness and perpetual plotting against the West. As Xiang (2020, p. 33) writes, 'the inscrutable Oriental enhanced belief that secrecy guarantees security, that enemy intelligence is related to racial intelligibility, and that a deep meaning lies beyond the surface deception of masks, covers, and veils.' Xiang writes specifically about the Cold War period which this case study is focussing on, but the concept is also applicable to the previous periods covered in this thesis.

The term 'inscrutable' also has a history in conjunction with the idea of the 'model minority,' though it was not referred to as this until later in history.[38] Ngai (2005, pp. 93-95) points out that there is a history of 'exaggeratedly emotional, hyperexpressive, and even "overscrutable" image of most racially or ethnically marked subjects in American culture: from Harriet Beecher Stowe's ebullient Topsy (1852) to Warner Brothers' hyperactive Speedy Gonzales (1950), to the hand-wringing Jews, gesticulating Italians, and hot tempered Greeks.' In contrast, Ngai (ibid) says, the stereotype of the inscrutable ESEA people is not that they are overly animated but that they are *being* 'animated' or controlled by Western culture, 'forced into the position of model minority–that is, the person "made" uniform, accountable, and therefore safely "disattendable."' This contrast links to the history of framing minority groups against each other, such as seen in chapter 1's case study and as will be seen later in this thesis, particularly in relation to Black stereotypes and ESEA stereotypes being places in opposition to each other,

[38] For further discussion see p. 145-147.

often with the goal of tearing down one or both sides by suggesting that progress cannot be achieved for one without oppressing the other.

In addition to this stereotype impacting the way in which their abilities were perceived, when films moved from silent to talkies, many felt that ESEA performers would not be able to transition as their voices were presumed to be too heavily accented, despite the fact that actors such as Anna May Wong had American accents (ibid, p. 24). Additionally, in 1930 the Hays Code banned miscegenation between stars in Hollywood films, preventing any ESEA actresses from playing love interest roles even when their male counterparts were in yellowface (Sun 2016; Fuller 2010, p. 26). The code technically specifies African American and white miscegenation but 'this unofficially extended to most other visually discernible nonwhite races and ethnicities' (Fuller 2010, p. 26).

The views of ESEA women that were allowed at the time are perhaps best summarised by an excerpt from Sax Rohmer's *The Insidious Dr Fu-Manchu* (1913, np):

> *'You don't know the Oriental mind as I do; but I quite understand the girl's position. She fears the English authorities, but would submit to capture by you! If you would only seize her by the hair, drag her to some cellar, hurl her down and stand over her with a whip, she would tell you everything she knows, and salve her strange Eastern conscience with the reflection that speech was forced from her. I am not joking; it is so, I assure you. And she would adore you for your savagery, deeming you forceful and strong!'*

This reflects the idea that ESEA women, with 'Oriental minds,' crave violence and oppression and recognise it as the only way to gain respect. It additionally reveals the notion that this can only be provided by a white man who can exhibit these qualities, with the implication being that ESEA men are not capable of being 'forceful and strong' in a way that would satisfy the needs of a woman's 'strange Eastern conscience.' The excerpt paints ESEA women as able to be defiant against authorities and keep secrets—which is the dragon lady

stereotype—but are only able to do so if their weaknesses of white men and violence (which they both fear and crave) is not exploited to make them submissive—which is the lotus flower stereotype. This perception lasted from its conception into the mid-twentieth century.

As expanded upon above, the Korean and Vietnam wars created a shift in Western perceptions of ESEA through a combination of public opinion on engaging in conflict that did not directly involve the US and UK as well as the close proximity of Western forces to local ESEA communities. The episode of *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983) that will be analysed below offers insight into these changes in the West towards ESEA women; in particular, it highlights the victimised perception of them and how Western intervention aimed to help them while also revealing the inherent racism that still existed at the time.

The Moose (1972), *M*A*S*H*. Series 1 episode 5

*M*A*S*H* (1972-1983), was an American television series which followed a team of army doctors (in a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, hence the title) stationed in Uijeongbu, South Korea during the Korean War. The series was based on the 1970 film of the same name directed by Robert Altman, which itself was an adaptation of the 1968 novel *MASH: A Novel About Three Army Doctors* by Richard Hooker. The film was anti-war, and Altman famously disliked the series. He said of the difference between the film and series:

‘I didn't like the series because that series to me was the opposite of my main reason for making this film — and this was to talk about a foreign war, an Asian war, that was going on at the time. And to perpetuate that every Sunday night for 12 years — and no matter what platitudes they say about their little messages and everything — the basic image and message is that the brown people with the narrow eyes are the enemy… And so I think that series was quite a racist thing. I didn't approve of it, I don't like it, and I thought it was the antithesis of what we were trying to do. But most people don't even know this movie exists. If you poll the world, they'd say, 'Oh, that was that series with Alan Albert,' or whatever his name was.’

(Deseret News 2002)

Both the film and the first three years of the series were released during the Vietnam War while being set in the Korean War, providing a backdrop that allowed for satire and commentary on the current ongoing conflict in ESEA. While the film was a bleak, dark comedy, the series was a mixture of situational comedy and drama and for the first few seasons featured a prominent canned laughter track that played over the episodes, despite being shot in 'an immersive, fluid manner' rather than in front of a studio audience (Greene 2014b). Both works had elements of anti-war sentiment, showing frustration with the conflict and the US involvement in it (though, as will be expanded upon later, the show seems to have inconsistencies in its stance). Both works also included ESEA characters who interacted with the main characters, but remained largely in the background; in the film, Ho-Jon is a Korean teenager who works at the hospital but ultimately gets drafted into the South Korean Army and is not seen again (though the screenplay includes a storyline where he is injured sent to the same hospital for the main characters operate on him, but he dies and his body is taken away.) In the series, ESEA characters frequently appear in the plot and background, with Ho-Jun as one of the only ESEA recurring characters.

This case study will focus on one early episode of *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983) which prominently features an ESEA woman who has a substantial amount of dialogue. While there is a huge amount of interesting content from the series as a whole and its cultural impact, this case study will focus solely on this episode and how, as an early episode before the series developed its renowned status, audiences would have perceived and understood ESEA stereotypes at the time of airing.[39] The episode, titled *The Moose*, follows the main character

[39] For further reading, see Wittebols' book *Watching M*A*S*H, Watching America* (1998), which charts the series' interactions with the socio-political changes taking place around it.

Hawkeye as he attempts to free a young Korean woman named Young Hi from Sergeant Baker, a man who bought her from her family for $500. The episode is titled after the phrase ‘moose,’ which is derived ‘from musume, Japanese for ‘girl’’ (The Moose 1972, 03:21-03:25). The main characters are all horrified to find out that Sergeant Baker, who has just arrived with Young Hi, bought a human being and expects her to carry out much of his domestic work. In the opening scene he commands her to ‘find the noncom tent, organise a shower, unpack my clean fatigues and shine my other boots, draw rations from the mess tent, and then unpack the other gear, and be sure to keep them cigarettes under lock and key’ while she is carrying all his belongings (The Moose 1972, 02:23-02:38). When they find out that they cannot report him for doing this (Colonel Blake, who leads the unit, informs them that the man with the authority to order Baker to release Young Hi ‘has a moose of his own’ (ibid, 04:45-04:48)) they cheat at a poker game to force Baker to either release Young Hi or lose all his money. He does so, begrudgingly, but they realise that Young Hi is insistent on working for whoever she ‘belongs’ to and refuses to leave them to pursue ‘her own life’ for fear of ‘dishonouring her family.’ They attempt to put her on a truck to go back to her family in Seoul, but she finds her way back to the unit and attempts to work for them again. They then get Ho-Jon to find a member of her family to bring to the unit and try to convince her to go with them. Benny, her younger brother who appears to be in his early teens, shows up to take her home, reprimanding the unit for being ungrateful enough to send away a hard working woman who they paid money for without a ‘refund.’ When they realise that he intends to sell her again, they allow her to stay. At the end of the episode, there is a time jump and the unit receives a letter from Young Hi, who is in a Christian convent school in Seoul (despite, as she points out in her letter, being a Buddhist, which will be expanded upon later.) It is unclear what events lead to her being there, but the characters express their delight that she is learning and seems well. The character of Young Hi has multiple interesting

interactions in this episode, and the use of comedy provides insight into the nuances of how ESEA women were being viewed at this time. Despite having a substantial amount of dialogue and an apparent agenda in the episode, she still embodies many stereotypes and the characters/writing address her with an undertone of colonial ideas.

Before analysing the use of comedy and stereotypes in this episode, it is worth first noting the position that the American characters take on issues of Western involvement in the conflict and the local people. When Baker shows up with Young Hi, he says of her willingness to work for him 'The gooks, they don't mind working!' (ibid, 02:44-02:46). The term 'gook' is considered a highly offensive term for people of East and often specifically Southeast Asian people (Dictionary.com 2021a). Hawkeye, who is his superior, responds by pulling him aside and saying 'I don't care for that word… knock it off.' This is the first case study in this research where a character has been criticised for using a racial slur, and this signifies a turning point in attitudes in the general public; the idea of political correctness and rising sympathy for ESEA people as expanded upon earlier this chapter are clearly reflected in the characterisation on *M*A*S*H*. This is a clear indication that the characters are meant to be fairly liberal, actively against racism and taking care to be respectful of the Korean people they interact with. This is interesting as there are instances of humour that will be expanded upon later that clearly show a disregard and disrespect for ESEA people.

There are also two instances of characters expressing frustration at the way the war is being fought and how outside forces are interacting with the conflict. After finding out that Young Hi was bought, Spearchucker[40] says 'I read someplace the UN was here to liberate these people. Must've been a misprint.' Later, when Hawkeye first fails to convince Baker to free Young Hi, he dejectedly asks 'Then what the hell are we doing here? Why do we spend 18

[40] Spearchucker, a Black character, is referred to by this name in reference to his javelin throwing skills as he is an accomplished sportsman, but it is also a racial slur; this is not acknowledged in the film.

hours a day putting people back together? Doesn't that have any meaning? What's the purpose of that? Practice?' These are both instances where the characters feel disenchanted with the way the war is being fought and ESEA people are being treated. However, this dialogue also seems to suggest that the characters are not actually anti-war, but rather believe in the core reasoning for the war ('liberating' ESEA people who are less fortunate than them) but are frustrated with the bureaucracy and methods of the people who are in charge of the war effort. They both acknowledge that their very presence is clearly detrimental to the local people in exposing them to being taken advantage of while also believing that the war effort is genuinely meant to be liberating the Korean people and contributing to the overall improvement of their quality of life. This is perhaps what Altman meant in his criticism of the show; that by repeatedly showing the frustrations of the soldiers in response to episodic conflict in the plot, the show somewhat trivialises the genuine criticisms of US involvement in ESEA conflict by reducing them to sarcastic remarks that do not get expanded or acted upon. Additionally, at this time, the medium of sitcoms required plot to be reset by the end of each episode and norms reestablished at the beginning of the next for audiences who may not have seen the previous episode as they did not have the ability to easily find or rewatch them.[41] With episodes running at about half an hour, and the beginning being dedicated to reestablishing the characters and their circumstances, there was little time to address any issues in depth beyond quips and short storylines. As a result, any effort to create a lasting change in circumstance or attitude and any progress that may have been made would have been reset by the next episode.

[41] This structure of reverting back to original circumstances is often referred to as the 'reset button' technique, which, prior to episodes being widely accessible on demand, allowed for episodes to be replayed in any order and for viewers who may have missed episodes to be able to engage without missing important plot developments (TV Tropes.) Though my chosen source for this is the community-contributed website *TV Tropes*, its inclusion on such a website is indicative of how common this technique is in sitcoms.

When the character of Young Hi is introduced, she is visibly burdened with Baker's belongings, but is smiling and cheerful, bowing as she reacts to his commands. She also verbally responds by saying 'Roger wilco, Sergeant Baker-san.' This phrase is repeated throughout the episode whenever she addresses another character, saying 'roger wilco, [rank] [name]-san.' This is interesting for several reasons.

Figure 14: Young Hi responding to Sergeant Baker's commands when she is first introduced (The Moose 1972, 02:25).

Firstly, the addition of 'san' to the end of names does not appear to be from the Korean language, but rather from Japanese (Choi 2016; Baseel 2015). There appears to be a lack of differentiation by the writers between the two ESEA cultures and languages, as well as an assumption that the audience will have the same generalised understanding of what an Asian pattern of speaking and manner of address is. This is worth noting as perceptions of Japan and Korea at the time were very distinct; the trajectory of Japan from enemy to victim of the atom

bomb and then to ally was vastly different from the perception of Korea as a divided country with people that needed Western aid to be liberated. What this conflation perhaps indicates is that the writers were attempting to either make the character of Young Hi sound authentic or othered by including a recognisable ESEA speech pattern, but there were no Korean patterns that were recognisable enough to be immediately clear to an audience. These two interpretations are perhaps too overtly optimistic and pessimistic; it is possible that they were attempting to achieve both these effects. This is a reflection of the overarching stance that the episode appears to have regarding Young Hi and the Korean War, in that they are promoting broadly liberal beliefs while also perpetuating smaller, more specific racist attitudes. Secondly, the phrase ‘roger wilco’ is an extension of the commonly used ‘roger’ to mean ‘understood’ or ‘received’ when being issued directions; ‘roger wilco’ is shorthand for ‘roger, will comply’ (Dictionary.com 2021b). The fact that Young Hi only ever uses the full phrase including ‘will comply’ is reflective of how the other characters view her and how she is written—as inherently obedient and submissive to orders.

The repetition of the phrase ‘roger wilco’ is met with amusement and endearment by the unit, and this gag is repeated using different phrases throughout the episode. When she asks them what the word ‘slob’ means, they tell her ‘It’s a way of referring to another person’ and she begins addressing people as ‘[name] slob-san.’ No one corrects her, and it is clear that they derive amusement from her misuse of the word. Similarly, Hawkeye tells her ‘You are beautiful’ in response to her learning more English phrases. She then tells multiple people ‘I am beautiful!’ making them laugh and applaud her. Additionally, she repeatedly refers to her own English as ‘goodly,’ a grammatical mistake that is always shown to make Hawkeye and his colleagues smile in response. These reactions to her perceived inability to speak English properly are clearly condescending, even if they are not mean spirited; the manner in which they feed her

phrases and laugh or applaud in response is very similar to the way one would teach a child a rude phrase and reward them for using it in front of other people for their entertainment. It is also clearly meant to be a gag for the audience, who are prompted to laugh at her 'broken' English.[42] This is a clear example of superiority humour, in which the audience are laughing at a young woman who is less capable than them at speaking and learning English. Again, it does not appear to be mean spirited, as the supposed liberal values of the show and its characters steer away from being malicious to the subjects of its humour. However, there are clear roots of older, racist stereotypes in the gag that are similar to the swapped 'Ls' and 'Rs' stereotype.

These exchanges also seem heavily reliant on her femininity, as it seems highly unlikely that they would have the same attitude towards a male ESEA person speaking and reacting the way she does. The use of the phrase 'I am beautiful' in particular suggests that her gender impacts their reactions to her learning English. The infantilisation of her character by the unit is particularly noteworthy in comparison to her younger brother, Benny, who arrives to take her back to her family. Benny is clearly very young, likely in his early teens, and the immediate gag of his appearance is that he is much younger than the family member he is in charge of. However, it is clarified immediately that he is mature for his age through his perfect use of English slang and businesslike attitude; he tells the men 'What's the beef? She goofing off?... No refunds, guys, you understand that?' He also addresses Young Hi as if he is much older, asking 'How are you, baby?... You come back to Seoul and we'll get a thousand, maybe fifteen-hundred bucks for you easy!' Once they hear him speak the men of the unit do not question that he is in charge of their family affairs and business, making a couple quips about his age—'I may get on my knees and punch this kid in the nose'—but never undermining his authority in the situation. It is vividly clear that Young Hi, who appears to be a young adult, is

[42] I have been unable to find a version of this episode which includes the laugh track. It would be very interesting to see whether these moments are given as obvious a cue as canned laughter.

much more infantilised and spoken down to than the literal child that is her brother because she is a woman and does not speak English as well as him. From this it can be seen that her treatment by the unit is hugely reliant on her gender.

There are further moments of humour which clearly show a colonial understanding of what characteristics and values Young Hi has as a person. When they first hear that Young Hi was bought and that the term 'moose' is from a Japanese word, Hawkeye asks 'Yeah? What's the Japanese for living together?' and Trapper John asks if she's working for Baker 'with or without fringe benefits?' There is an automatic assumption there that she is a prostitute or provides sexual services to Sergeant Baker. While this is not necessarily a reflection of what they perceive her personality of qualities are, it is indicative of the reference points that Western people had of ESEA women at the time; that they were all seen as sex workers or must be wanted for their sexual abilities. The gag of these sarcastic comments is that it is ridiculous to suggest that an ESEA woman being employed by a white man is not also being taken advantage of sexually, so by pointing this out they are relieving the tension that everyone in the unit and the audience felt by this apparently obvious aspect of their relationship being ignored.[43] Before they are able to free her from Sergeant Baker, Hawkeye and Trapper John have a conversation with her to discern her feelings towards being bought:

Hawkeye: Hey, Young Hi, can we talk to you for a minute?
Young Hi: You got washing?
Hawkeye: No, no… You understand that it's wrong for human beings to own each other?
Young Hi: Roger wilco, captain-san.
Trapper John: Yeah, but do you really understand?

[43] I do not intend to suggest that this was not a common occurrence—many ESEA women were taken advantage of and took part in sex work during this period for a variety of reasons. However, this analysis aims to point out how predominant that stereotype was, leaving no room for even the possibility of an ESEA woman working without a sexual aspect to her job.

Young Hi: Yes, I make English perfect, speak very goodly!...

Trapper John: Why do you stay with this Baker?

Hawkeye: Are you in love with this slob?

Young Hi: What means slob?

Trapper John: It's a way of referring to another person.

Young Hi: Roger wilco. Don't love Baker slob-san, don't make monkey business with him.

Hawkeye: Look, we can help you get away from Baker. You can go back to Seoul, or anywhere you want.

Young Hi: To run away I dishonour my family. Sergeant paid money for me, I can leave only when he says.

Trapper John: Is it possible this kid likes her work?

Hawkeye: She doesn't understand, she's too young.

(The Moose 1972, 05:40-06:50)

Hawkeye and Trapper John appear to believe that she does not understand that it is unethical for people to be bought, even when she directly answers that she does when asked. They do not seem to give this answer any weight, as they repeat their question and say to each other (over her head while she is still present and listening) that she is 'too young' to understand despite appearing to be an adult. This is another moment of Young Hi being condescended to; while they are not being malicious and are in fact trying to help her, they disregard her answers and her ability to grasp Western morality.

The writers also appear to justify her happiness to serve Sergeant Baker by having her claim that it is because she does not want to 'dishonour [her] family.' This is another stereotype that they are drawing from, which is that ESEA people are strongly bound by traditions of family and beliefs, with the idea that 'honour' is the most important motivation in their lives. This stereotype links to perceptions that ESEA people are less socially advanced than the West,

adhering to ancient traditions and beliefs to guide their decisions rather than logic or morality. The idea that Western values are more important or valid than ESEA ones occurs throughout the episode. Young Hi is shown to be incredibly reluctant to get on the truck they attempt to put her on to return to her family in Seoul, even after being told she can do whatever she pleases. Hawkeye pushes her up onto the truck and she clings on to him, asking desperately 'Please, no stay here with you?' When he replies 'You've got a right to a life of your own and you're going to have it,' she replies 'But I make you happy… I be a good worker for you… Please, I want to stay, I don't want to go!' It is interesting to note that Hawkeye, who keeps telling her to live 'a life of her own' is refusing to allow her to do exactly what she wants with her life—remain with the unit. This shows that he is forcing her to follow his idea of what 'her life' should be and how she should live it. Hawkeye shows that he believes she is too indoctrinated into beliefs that make her prioritise her family's honour and serve others to determine herself what she should pursue in life.[44] At the end of the episode, we see this manifest in the unit's decision to send Young Hi to convent school, despite her being Buddhist. The audience are not shown how Young Hi was sent there or to what degree she had a voice in the matter, but the happiness that the unit expresses at her being there and her line saying 'I thank once more your efforts' suggest that they initiated the move. It must be noted here that there is a historical connection between Christianity and colonialism as explored in Chapter 1 of this thesis, with conversion often being conflated with assimilation and progress. To have a character's apparently ideal situation be a Christian convent school despite her straightforward expression that she is not Christian seems to be reflection of the Western forces inhabiting her country; again, this is an instance of the short structure of sitcom plots not allowing for nuance and resorting to quick solutions

[44] This is not to suggest that people in Young Hi's situation would not struggle to come to terms with having freedom and what to do with their lives; the point here is to address the lack of nuance to Young Hi's characterisation and her interactions with the unit.

that—knowingly or not—reinforce colonial ideas. What is perhaps the most telling part of the episode in regards to this is Young Hi's excitement when telling her brother that she 'work in hospital' when she was there as a moose that is followed by them refusing to let her stay, but when she writes in her letter that 'the sisters say one day maybe I can work as helper to nurse' they support her decision. Her work in the hospital unit as a moose and her eventual dream of working with nurses is essentially the exact same situation, but the unit makes the decision that she cannot reach this goal by being a moose and must do it via their approved, Western, Christian route.

There is another dimension to her happiness to work for whoever she 'belongs' to, which appears to be the belief that she is inherently subservient. Young Hi exhibits this most apparently when she returns to the unit after being put on a truck to return to her family. As Hawkeye and Trapper John are discussing what they should do with her now that she has returned, Hawkeye commands her to 'just stand there and don't clean anything.' When they turn away to talk, we see Young Hi secretively tidying up the space. This shows that her determination to clean and help Hawkeye is not actually about her position and desire to perform well at her job, as she is disobeying a direct command from him. Instead, she seems to be motivated by an innate need to serve him and the unit, acting against his request in order to satisfy her own nature. Earlier in the episode, when they are still trying to figure out how to make her leave the unit, there is a shot of Hawkeye reclining while Young Hi gives him a shave. This is despite his protestations of her working for anyone, and the gag here appears to be that she is so determined to work for him and the unit that her persistence wore down his moral stance until he caved and allowed her to give him a shave. Additionally, the outraged unit realise that she has 'committed a neatness' in their tent, where they usually take pride in their messiness, and call Hawkeye away from his shave to tell him to prioritise sending her away so they can

‘dirty up the joint and get back to normal.’ These interactions again suggest that the character of Young Hi is written with an innate need to serve and perform domestic work, fuelling such an enthusiasm for service that even Hawkeye, the moral leader of the show and unit, gives in to her insistence.

This is interesting in that Young Hi is shown to be exhibiting one stereotype (subservience and domesticity) to the extent that she eclipses another stereotype of ESEA women at the time—being weak willed and passive. The humour of showing her enthusiasm for cleaning and shaving appear to be the incongruity of a characteristic that is usually associated with meekness being displayed with aggressive eagerness. This could be seen as an attempt to provide nuance to the character, as they are not showing her strictly within the boundaries of existing stereotypes. However, because the humour appears to be derived from how unexpected her portrayal is, there is an element of reinforcing stereotypes as they are framing her aggressive persistence as unusual and worthy of laughter. Bergson (2005, p. 66) suggests that laughter is a social indicator, as it shows people that if they behave in ways that are discouraged in society, they will be laughed at the way the subject of a joke is laughed at. With this in mind, Young Hi’s portrayal and the way comedy is used in relation to her defying stereotypes suggests that her behaviour should be discouraged. While there is a tenderness in the way she is treated, which—as expanded upon above—is likely her being infantilised due to her gender, they are undoubtedly still attempting to change her ways to better conform to their idea of what is acceptable behaviour.

The incongruity of Young Hi’s behaviour could also be an early form of what is commonly referred to as lampshading. This is when writers point out flaws in their work by having a character address it in the work before moving on; it is a technique that is now often criticised for failing to engage with issues more deeply, as it is self-congratulatory in pointing out that the

writer is aware of issues without working to solve or provide nuance to them.[45] When Hawkeye points out at the beginning of the episode that they do not tolerate racial slurs or racist behaviour, it appears that he is doing so in order for the show to avoid criticism of the same behaviour; consequently, the writers are able to write stereotypes and frame the comedy to laugh at Young Hi as they have signalled to the audience that they are aware of the racism and therefore must be anti-racist.

It is also worth noting that Young Hi is only ever viewed as a victim in this episode until she is "saved" by being sent to the convent school. Originally, she is the victim of human trafficking, under the control of a white man who is assumed to be taking advantage of her. It is also implied that she is a victim of her upbringing, as they frame her contentment with being a moose and working for whoever provides for her as an unfortunate product of her ESEA values and sense of "honour" to her family. She is then shown to be a victim of her family, represented by Benny, who shows a lack of familial attachment by prioritising financial gain and who plan to sell her immediately after being reunited with her.[46] As expanded upon in the previous section, ESEA women were seen as inherently sexual beings due to the abundance of circumstances in which sexual services could be bought by Western soldiers in the Korean and Vietnam wars. While this created an image of hypersexuality and subservience, what this episode shows us is that this also created a dimension of victimhood in the perception of ESEA women. This is perhaps an acknowledgement of how many women were forced into prostitution and sex work,

[45] A popular current example is the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-2019), which heavily relied upon its main characters being awkward, socially outcast, emasculated straight male scientists who pursue various women for its comedy. As Pop Culture Detective (2017) points out, most of the punchlines ridicule characters who 'fail' at traditional gender roles, but 'rather than writing different punchlines the writers attempt to duck any criticism by pointing out the sexism inherent in their own jokes themselves.'

[46] Interestingly, in the seventh episode of the second season, Hawkeye makes a point of telling another character that it does not matter that ESEA women who marry Western soldiers are often doing it to escape their circumstances rather than genuine affection, because their circumstances are horrible enough to warrant any means of escape. In this episode, it is not acknowledged in any way that her family may be struggling or in dire circumstances, but instead it is implied that they are generally untrustworthy people through their attitudes towards Young Hi's freedom and their mother working for the 'black market.'

either through trafficking or in order to make money. However, it could also be a further element to the Western understanding that ESEA women are weak and submissive; as a result of these characteristics there is a perception that in any circumstance ESEA women are perpetually being taken advantage of by other, whether that is Western men or ESEA structures of power such as family and social values.

Conclusion

This episode of *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983) is one that is, at the surface, making a statement against racism and the treatment of locals during the Korean and Vietnam wars. The characters actively shut down slurs and trafficking in order to allow a young Korean woman to pursue a life that is of her choosing. It is undoubtedly the first case study in this thesis that has had such a stance and is a marked improvement in its antiracism in that it does not obviously reinforce harmful and violent stereotypes of ESEA people. However, its method in carrying out this improvement can be seen to itself have racist undertones and intentions when viewed today. The infantilisation, victimisation, and condescension to Young Hi is a large part of this, as the character is deprived of her actual wishes in the pursuit of a Western, Christian path through life. The use of language and honorifics by her character as well as the responses of the unit around her reinforce her position as an outsiders and as a vulnerable person who is taken advantage of—perhaps not in the same way she was being when she was a moose, but in their handling of her situation. The progressiveness of the writers and the way they signal this through the lead characters appears to be a mask of good intentions, behind which they are able to use Young Hi as the subject of jokes. The format of the sitcom also does not allow for much nuance or time to expand upon situations, which leads to the flattening of Young Hi's character that falls into stereotyping.

Chapter 4: 1980-Present Day Margaret Cho Case Study

This chapter will act as a bridge between the first section of this thesis, detailing the historical influences on ESEA representation and stereotypes in the US and UK, and the second section, analysing contemporary stand-up comedy and how it interacts with the aforementioned stereotypes. The case study is on the comedian Margaret Cho, whose work as a stand-up began in the 1980s and continues to this day. Cho was the first ESEA stand-up comedian to rise to prominence, and was in the unique position of being the first ESEA stand-up to address the perceptions and stereotypes associated with being ESEA to a wide audience. She is therefore ideal for this case study, as she marks the turning point between the representation of ESEA people by white performers/writers and the beginning of representation of ESEA people by ESEA people. This case study will first examine her early stand-up and how she addressed preconceptions the audience had about her, prior to her reputation being well known enough to overtake any racial assumptions. It will then move on to more recent work and compare how her material and persona changed once she became an established comedian.

Again drawing on a Foucauldian approach to analysing the material, this case study will examine how the 'truths' regarding ESEA people that have been produced and perpetuated are not neutralised by time but still impacting stand-up comedians today. Indeed, in many instances new systems of power and productions of 'truths' have arisen which give new context and meaning to these stereotypes, and Cho addresses them in her material. This approach allows us to view these stereotypes in a way which does not naturalise or negate them, as they are

shown to still be powerful and prevalent, while still validating the experiences of ESEA people who have been impacted by them.

It is worth noting at this point that prior to 1980, comedy saw a number of large changes. Most notably, the rise of stand-up comedy in the format that we recognise today emerged. In the US in the 1950s and 1960s, a new school of comedy led by Mort Sahl was becoming increasingly popular. This included comedians such as Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, and Robin Williams, who performed material that broke the existing mould of comedy by discussing politics, pop culture, and their personal lives/opinions in an often improvised and anecdotal manner as opposed to the more rigidly structured jokes and punchlines of older comedy (Double 2020, pp. 15-18). In the UK this came from the Alternative Comedy movement, which sought to perform and create comedy that was ‘non-sexist, non-racist’ in reaction to the working men’s club comedy that preceded it (ibid, p. 46). Though Cho’s style is in line with these newer formats of comedy, it is not essential to know this history in order to understand and analyse her material. Though they undoubtedly paved the way for comedians who people of colour and queer to be able to perform stand-up comedy, these changes are also largely reflected in the cultural shifts that have been analysed across this thesis. As such, I will not cover these changes in stand-up comedy, but it is important to acknowledge that such a change occurred prior to the first prominent ESEA stand-up comedian and that it played a large part in the formation of her style of comedy as well as diversifying the people who were able to perform stand-up.

Early Work Addressing Stereotypes

Cho began doing stand-up in the 1980s when she was fourteen and was mentored by comics such as Jerry Seinfeld and Roseanne Barr (Cho 2012). Her work has often touched on perceptions of ESEA people, in particular intersecting with her material on sexuality and politics. However, a large part of her material which directly addresses her cultural upbringing is in relation to her parents and family life. Cho was 'painfully made aware of her otherness at a young age' due to her father being deported from the US, and though he returned he worked to ensure that his children would not be perceived as 'foreigners' such as by insisting they spoke English to him and did not have a Korean accent (Lee, J. 2020). The use of ESEA accents as a signifier of being 'unassimilable' and 'other' has appeared in every case study in this thesis so far, including the character of Ch*nk the laundry owner who is morally weak and loves to eat questionable foods, the bumbling and inarticulate Japanese soldiers that Bugs Bunny defeats, and the endearing but infantilised Young Hi in *M*A*S*H.* Cho's work in which she utilises the accent often draws attention to the oppression and discrimination that these stereotypes have perpetuated, highlighting how these long-standing and seemingly trivial tropes still impact her life today. This is particularly interesting as Cho speaks in an American accent, but will often employ a Korean accent in her routines both when imitating her family members as well as using exaggerated, stereotypical ESEA accents to mock racism aimed at them. Her use of accents is therefore crucial in the dialogue between her American and Korean upbringings, as it is used as a signifier for differing views on her material subject matter.

This use of accents to add nuance to the expression of a range of ideas can be seen in an early routine Cho performed in 1993 where she uses ESEA accents in two instances (Appendix D). Firstly, she mocks an executive for *Star Search*, an American reality/talent show,

for putting her on the ‘international’ version of the show because ‘I look this way [gesturing at her face] but I talk this way [indicating her American accent]’ and asking her to be ‘more Chinese’ despite the fact that she is Korean (ibid). This attitude towards homogenised ESEA perceptions is clearly echoing that of the early 20th century, prior to the wider understanding of different ESEA cultures/peoples; this attitude is one that would likely be recognised by the audience as one held by older generations as well as more conservative people, with their younger and more politically correct understanding allowing them to laugh at the outdated stereotypes. At the same time, the homogenised view of ESEA was likely still being accepted, with this idea of taking issue with which ESEA nationality one was being linked to being novel for at least some of Cho’s audience. As Mintz (1985, p. 73) points out, joking is a ‘public affirmation of shared cultural beliefs and… a reexamination of these beliefs… the structure of jokes tends to be subversive; in other words, jokes tear down, distort, misrepresent, and reorder usual patterns of expression and perception.’ What Cho is doing here is both ‘affirming’ an existing viewpoint by showing that it still impacts her, while also ‘reexamining’ and ‘tearing down’ those viewpoints in protesting against them and explaining their inaccuracy. We can see here the interaction between the history of ESEA stereotypes and the present moment for Cho.

Cho is also clearly mocking the idea that people who look ethnically ESEA cannot be considered “American” and are othered by the people who have the power to choose what kind of people appear on popular media. This is an idea that has been expressed throughout the periods of history this thesis has covered, and this is a key early moment where we see ESEA people, particularly with Cho’s platform, taking issue with it and explaining how it impacts their lives. Cho clearly frames the executive—and by extension people who similarly regard ESEA people as homogenous and unamerican—as lesser than her. The audience then laugh at the executive in response, as their understanding of how offensive the request of the executive is

also makes them superior to him. As this gag functions through the superiority of Cho and the audience, it can be revealed that, for the first time in this thesis, an ESEA person subverts the previous use of superiority in comedy—to reinforce racism—by instead making herself and her audience superior to racist ideas. Weaver (2010, pp. 149-153) expands upon this idea of reverse discourse, specifically anti-racist reverse discourse, where a comedian 'employs the exclusionary language and/or stereotypes of early racism but does so for the purpose of appropriation or anti-racism… the reversal of racism serves the function of ridiculing the racist position.' In particular, taking into consideration Bergson's (2005, p. 66) idea that laughter is a social deterrent, we can see that Cho and the audience are signifying through their laughter that the racism Cho has experienced is unsociable and unacceptable in the social context they live in.

Cho further criticises and ridicules the executive by showing exactly how absurd his suggestion is; she does this through the use of a caricature of what a 'more Chinese' version of stand-up would look like. Firstly, she pulls a face that lacks expression and with her eyes squinting as seen in Figure 15 below:

Figure 15: Cho's face while doing a character who is 'more Chinese' (Just For Laugh 2015, 0:57).

This is likely a meta-joke, as defined by Ted Cohen, where the audience has to be aware of one joke (here it is the joke that Chinese people have small eyes) in order to understand that this is a play on that existing joke (to mock the idea of conforming to a stereotype, the audience must understand that there is a base racist joke to be mocked) (Critchley 2002, pp. 70-71). As expanded upon in the previous chapter, there is also a history of ESEA people being perceived as unexpressive and specifically lacking facial expressions. The idea of 'inscrutability' has strong links to perceptions of ESEA people both as a threat (e.g. Yellow Peril) and as victims (e.g. as a model minority) as forms of oppressing the community. This notion was particularly upheld by the performance and entertainment industry, which often cast white actors in ESEA roles as they were believed to be more capable of performing emotions.[47] In making this face and keeping her expression very still while performing what the executive was supposedly

[47] This was expanded upon on pages 156-159.

hoping for, Cho is drawing attention to the idea that what many white people perceive as how ESEA people act would be illogical to ask for in a stand-up performance, which relies on her ability to perform emotions and characters. She is additionally highlighting how inaccurate that perception is through the difference between her own natural performance—which is much more animated—and the static, unreadable face of a 'more Chinese' act.[48] At the same time, Cho's use of this specific stereotype not only 'gestures to the orientalist abjection of the Asian, the feminine, and the silent' and its history of use against ESEA people (Huang 2018, p. 200.) By performing 'inscrutability [which] has been racialized and gendered' Cho also 'compels' the audience to fill the silence and lack of expression with their own interpretations of what is being implied, as expanded upon by Huang (2018, pp. 198-200) discussing silence in Yoko Ono and Laurel Nakadate's work. In choosing to perform the stereotype that has historically been levelled against them, Huang argues that these women draw in the audience as well as create space for new understandings and interpretations to arise, breaking the previous mould. Cho in particular utilises it in contrast to her own personality, putting great emphasis on the fact that this inscrutability is not only a performance, but an exaggeration and one that has been forced upon her by the executive.

Secondly, Cho puts on an exaggerated 'Chinese' delivery. She delivers her 'more Chinese' stand-up, a joke about her husband being so fat that 'when he sit around the habuku… he really sit around the habuku!' (Appendix D). While doing so, she uses incorrect grammar and a vaguely ESEA accent before ending the joke by yelling 'GONG.' This combination of elements clearly highlights firstly how ridiculous the idea of being 'more Chinese' in her stand-up would actually be, as well as mimicking what white perceptions of ESEA people would look like. The

[48] It is worth noting that when she is performing the character of the executives she also squints her eyes while pulling grotesque smiles, which serves to highlight the condescending and slimy nature of these people rather than illustrate a point about race.

‘more Chinese’ stand-up material is simultaneously reductive in suggesting that because the performer is ESEA they will have references to Chinese things and use foreign words such as ‘habuku[49]’ while also being extremely vague and broad, generally referring to the trope of a nagging wife making fun of her husband which can be found in many cultures. The joke is also likely a meta-joke; it is reliant on the audience knowing the existing structure of what is typically called a ‘yo mama’ joke, where the set-up is that someone’s mother (‘yo mama’) is extremely unattractive (usually signified through adjectives linked to conventional unattractiveness such as fat, ugly, or smelly) and this leads to a play on words (e.g. being so fat that when they sit around a table with their family, they ‘sit around the table’ because their body is bigger than the table). Cho is essentially making the same joke, but substituting the mother character for a husband, and using a stereotypically ESEA-sounding word in order to make the joke ‘more Chinese.’ This structure of joke is typically associated with immaturity and unsophistication, which Cho is then making a meta-joke about, as she is relying on her audience understanding that her use of this structure of joking is purposefully bad. The material is clearly meant to be inferior to Cho’s actual stand-up, as it is an old trope and offers nothing new except the added Chinese element.

The contrast between Cho’s material on the nuances of her experiences and the observations she makes regarding perceptions of her race and gender with the one dimensional gag and stoic delivery she offers in response to the executive’s feedback highlight her frustration with being stereotyped and categorised when she has a clear ability to deliver funnier, more thoughtful material when given the opportunity. This is an example of what Žižek identifies as ‘overidentification,’ in which people perform a system of power’s ideology by utilising recognisable language and imagery and, through the excessive use of it, encourages the audience to question the systems which uphold those ideals. Here Cho is overidentifying with

[49] This appears to be a word that Cho has made up, made to sound East Asian so the audience understands the cultural context but without holding any specific meaning.

racist structures of power by performing the accent and physicality expected of ESEA people to the point where she brings its origins and perpetuation into question. Cho is again subverting the historical use of superiority to provoke laughter by making the audience laugh at how absurd those previously upheld beliefs are and how, in addition to being offensive, they are the opposite of her true behaviour. By then adding an accent to this section, she is elevating the contrast by signalling to the audience that the material delivered in the accent is clearly the highly racialised and stereotyped version, distancing her own delivery from the accented delivery. It is therefore clear in this section that the use of an ESEA accent is signifying the assumptions that are being made about her due to the race that is associated with her and the accent.

Double (2014, pp. 121-122) writes regarding comedians who use accents that audiences associate with their physical appearance: 'When the accent switches, the joke is revealed. Our stereotypes have been challenged as we realise how ordinary this [comedian] is, without any of the ethnic baggage that's been projected on to [them].' Though Double is discussing Omid Djalili's material where he first performs in a 'thick Arab accent' before revealing his true 'well-spoken, middle-class Englishman' voice to the audience's surprise, the dynamic is very similar to Cho's. The character comes at the very beginning of her set and utilises what she knows the executive—and likely some of the audience—think she *should* sound like in order to highlight just how different she is from that stereotype. As Double (ibid, p. 124) points out, 'it exploits the ambiguity of identity at the centre of stand-up comedy.' Many comedians who are from marginalised identities will employ similar tricks to address their 'otherness' to the audience. In regards to addressing ESEA heritage, comedian Evelyn Mok calls this act of doing 'introductory' material about her heritage 'getting the Chinese Thing out of the way'.[50] This can be examined as an example of relief theory, specifically through Freud's idea that laughter is 'a

[50] I discussed this in my MA dissertation, *'Getting the Chinese Thing Out of the Way': How East Asian Stand-Up Comedians Talk About Their Race to White Audiences*' (Chirapiwat 2018, pp. 1 and 16).

surplus of energy which has to be discharged' when the audience are no longer channelling that energy into repressing unconscious thoughts (Critchley 2002, p. 75). What Freud is suggesting is that, for example, if audience members are actively repressing anti-Asian racism, when they are no longer having to repress those thoughts the energy that would have been used in repressing them is instead released as laughter. Cho can be seen to provoke tension from the audience's internal repressed thoughts—in this case, racist/racially-charged assumptions and 'ethnic baggage'—and allows them to channel that into laughter, relaxing them for the rest of the performance as the 'anti-social emotions' have had a 'harmless release' through laughter (Double 2014, p. 89).

The second instance in which Cho uses an accent is when she is discussing her family members. Cho portrays both her grandmother and her mother through the use of accents and changes in facial expression, similarly to the character of the 'more Chinese' stand-up comedian. This includes speaking with incorrect grammar in a heavy accent while, at times, making a face where her eyes are squinting. However, in contrast to the executive, the dialogue is not general ESEA stereotypes but real dialogue from Cho's life. Cho explains in an interview that the portrayal of her mother, who became a well known recurring character in her comedy, was 'very real and it's very honest, it's not exaggerated. It's also a true part of my life, like somebody that is brilliantly funny but is someone who isn't listened to a lot and so it's great to take her point of view and elevate it' (Cho 2012). This is clear in that, when she is portraying her mother and grandmother, the laughter does not come from the accent itself but from the content of the stories; in this performance the accent undoubtedly adds to the humour through the characterisation, but the audience are laughing at her grandmother's ability to fall asleep mid-sentence and her mother's paranoia that Cho will do drugs if she goes into show business being so strong that she thinks her knowledge of LSD means that she is taking it.

This also contrasts with the previous case study of *M*A*S*H*'s (1972-1983) portrayal of Young Hi and her accent. Young Hi was written to use incorrect ESEA honorifics (the Japanese '-san' when she is actually Korean) and there are multiple gags framed to make her incorrect grammar the butt of the joke, whereas Cho draws from her family's genuine speech patterns and makes the nuanced behaviour of her family the core of the punchline. Additionally, when Cho is portraying her family members, she does not squint her eyes (except for a moment where her mother squints at her with suspicion) and she is still very animated in her expressions and defies the idea that ESEA people are expressionless or all have the same face. Indeed, much of the comedic delivery comes from the extremely concerned and overly suspicious character of her mother.

Double (2014, pp. 172-173) writes regarding a similar routine by Rhona Cameron in which she reads out a letter from her mother:

> *'the laughter may come at her mother's expense, but she is not portrayed as mean or stupid… she has taken the common phenomenon of grown-up children making fun of their parents and made it work in a more public context. We do not laugh purely because of what her mother has written, but also at Cameron's amused reaction… this is about a cultural gulf between the generations, and it comes across as a fond, amused portrayal of a parent, not a hostile one.'*

Cho similarly finds the humorous moments in her delivery of her relatives' personalities through her timing and mannerisms, heightened by using their 'real' accents, and accentuating the nuances rather than targeting the words being spoken. I use the term 'real' here as there is no evidence (to the audience at this point—Cho's parents have been recorded speaking about her

but not at the time of this performance, especially as she was not well known yet) that her family uses these accents. Cho's portrayal of her family using these accents and its perception as not stereotyping her own relatives relies on the idea that she is telling the truth onstage. As Double (2014, p. 160) highlights, the 'central idea of stand-up comedy: [is] that it is about telling the truth.' Much of stand-up comedy as it is recognised today is about comedians relaying stories and opinions that are true to their offstage selves, and 'audiences are… used to taking what stand-ups say at face value' (ibid, p. 161). As such, we believe that Cho is telling the truth about how her family speaks and is not assigning a stereotyped accent to them in order to get laughs from the audience. As previously expanded upon, it appears from her delivery and the emphasis on the mannerisms rather than the words or accent that Cho is not using the accents to get laughs, but to signify the characters that she is playing outside of her own persona.

Figure 16: Cho's face while portraying her mother (Just For Laugh 2015, 2:00).

While both instances of utilising accents and playing characters in telling her stories have heightened accents and facial expressions, the distinction between them is clear. In portraying the executive's version of 'more Chinese' stand-up, Cho is setting up the audience to laugh at how absurd his request was by enacting how bad that kind of stand-up would be and uses the accent to signify stereotypical qualities. When portraying her family members, she is imbuing stories from her life with a range of characters and personalities that heighten the comedy that is already found in the material, using the accent to signify the 'accuracy' and nuance of her relatives' personalities. However, in both instances Cho is also still using accents to signify otherness and Asianness. There is a sense that Cho is still mocking what has historically been used to discriminate against ESEA people and question their assimilability. By drawing attention to the fact that her family have thick accents and speak in broken English, Cho inevitably draws connections to the fact that they are more 'othered' than her, because she is able to switch between their voices and her own fluent, American-accented English. This is perhaps a reflection of the generational difference between Cho and her family members; Cho, having grown up in the aftermath of the Civil Rights and Asian American movement as a second generation immigrant, benefits from being able to identify with and be associated with the now-established Asian American identity, whereas her parents who were not raised in America and do not have the same identifying characteristics as her are seen to be more 'alien' than 'American.' Cho herself has said of the accents she uses for performing her mother as a character: 'I think it's really something that's developed, that I was trying to differentiate myself from my foreignness and my immigrant family. I think, Asian Americans especially, they do that, they make fun of their parents because their parents are so different from them and they try to differentiate themselves and be more American by highlighting the difference' (Cho 2012). While her family may be a more nuanced and accurate portrayal of ESEA people than the executive,

she is still drawing attention to her own American accent and fluent English in contrast to the two women.

In this performance, Cho draws attention to the tension between her ESEA and American identity several times. In addition to the attitude of the executives making her go on the 'international' of Star Search and the contrast between herself and her family, she discusses perceptions strangers have of her in the US. She tells the audience that she likes travelling but it makes her 'kind of nervous when I go to places where there aren't a lot of Asians. Like Alabama' (Appendix D). She explains that in Alabama, a man 'actually calls me a chink? [Shocked face]. I mean, actually called me a chink! I was so mad!' Here, she sets up an expectation with the audience that she is upset because she has been called a racial slur by a stranger. However, she continues: 'I just looked at him, I said 'Chink?! I'm sorry, chinks are Chinese, I'm Korean I'm a *gook,* alright? If you're gonna be racist at least learn the terminology. Get like a redneck to English dictionary' (Appendix D). This gag functions through incongruity, as Cho subverts the audience's expectation by revealing that the cause of her anger is not that she has been called a racial slur, but that she has been inaccurately called a slur for Chinese people when she is actually Korean. What this view on the gag reveals to us is that, at the time of the performance, such attitudes of calling people racial slurs were considered shocking; while this may appear to be an obvious statement, it again signifies a change in attitudes from previous periods covered in this thesis as slurs had been used to varying degrees of resistance, but never to the point where they were shown as unacceptable to the majority of people. By setting up her punchline with the shock of being called a racial slur, Cho shows us that it was widely acknowledged to be bad enough that she could receive the intended reaction by saying it.

In drawing attention to the inaccuracy of being called the wrong slur, Cho also highlights the ridiculousness of fact that there are different racial slurs for different nationalities when ESEA people are viewed as so homogenised in the West that most people cannot seem to tell them apart. As expanded upon in the previous chapter, the distinguishing of different ESEA countries was a prominent part of villainising some nationalities while painting others as victims; to then confuse them while attempting to call someone a slur reveals that the root of both attitudes is still racism and stereotyping, even when they are meant to be more sympathetic to one over the other. The use of incongruity in the gag is complemented by the framing of the man as inferior to Cho as he possesses multiple socially unacceptable qualities that, according to Bergson's (2005, p. 66) theory of laughter as a social deterrent, provokes laughter at him; the gag operates through superiority, in that Cho, who tells off the man for being inaccurate and insults him by telling him to get a 'redneck to English dictionary,' is clearly showing herself to be more intelligent and literate than him. As such, the gag works because Cho is able to frame herself as superior because she can understand and articulate the incongruity of the use of a nationalised slur by someone who cannot differentiate between ESEA people, while he cannot even "accurately" call her a racial slur. Additionally, the use of 'redneck to English dictionary' subverts the longstanding stereotype of ESEA people being unable to properly speak English, which was often used to justify discrimination against them.[51] Calling him a 'redneck,' which is a derogatory term, makes him lower status than her; by then suggesting that he is the one who is unable to properly understand English compared to her, she is framing herself as more adjusted to being American than him. It is interesting that she does decide to utilise a derogatory term against the person who is using derogatory language against her. The purpose of this is perhaps to signify that she, through being offensive to a similar level as the man, is not any

[51] This is discussed on page 58.

meeker than him as stereotypes levelled against her may suggest and is capable of standing up for herself through the same means in which he speaks out against her. While Cho's humour in utilising the term 'redneck' is punching down to him, encouraging the audience to laugh at a stereotype of uneducated, ignorant, and specifically American man, the framing of this within the story of her being attacked by him perhaps softens the blow of targeting his perceived characteristics.

The gag can also be analysed in terms of Kant's (1790 [1987], p. 203) contribution to relief theory—that 'laughter is an affect that arises is a tense expectation is transformed into nothing'; Cho creates tension in the audience by saying a racial slur that is clearly meant to attack her, which builds as she expresses her emotional turmoil in response to it. Then, when she reveals that she is not upset due to the slur but due to something as trivial as the accuracy of it, the audience laughs due to the relief of the 'tense expectation' being 'transformed into nothing' (ibid). This differs from the previously mentioned Freudian take on relief theory in that the tension does not appear to be an internal repression—e.g. the internal racism in response to Cho's use of accents—but instead one that Cho manufactures through the purposeful framing of the story by opening with a dramatic and seemingly traumatic encounter with this man. It is particularly interesting to view the story from this perspective, because it reveals to the viewer a change that Cho herself signifies; prior to this point there have not been any ESEA comedians addressing these issues from their perspective on such a large platform. We not only see an ESEA stand-up but an audience who clearly sympathises with her.

Figure 17: The crowd that Cho is performing to, which appears to be largely made up of white audience members (Just For Laugh 2015, 2:55).

The audience that can be seen in certain shots appear to be largely white, and the fact that Cho can create tension by using a racial slur signifies that there exists a sympathy for her being a victim of racism and a wide awareness that the use of such terms is derogatory and harmful. While the previous case study of an episode of *M*A*S*H* included a character scolding another for using a derogatory term for ESEA people, the show was making a point to signpost to audiences that they believed that this was how ESEA people should be treated and had a didactic quality to it. Here, Cho's set does not seem to be aimed at changing people's minds regarding these issues; she is instead framing her progressive views in contrast with views upheld by older generations to make the audience laugh at and distance themselves from them while siding with her. For example, later in the set Cho says:

'I think that racism is the biggest disadvantage to being Asian in America, but if I were to choose, I think the biggest advantage to being Asian in America is that if you're at an airport or a

bar or something and somebody comes up and talks to you and you don't want to talk to them, you can just pretend you don't speak English. [Laughter.] [In an exaggerated Asian accent] 'Oh no, I don't know! [Giggles into hand while bowing] [Laughter.]'
(Appendix D)

In this section, Cho is once more clearly working on the assumption that the audience largely agrees that racism is, if not the biggest disadvantage to being Asian in America, then at least a serious, prevalent problem facing Asian American people. The humour of this section does not come from any element of surprise that the audience might experience from hearing about the issue of racism, but about two subjects that Cho addresses. Firstly, that there is such a thing as a 'biggest advantage' to the racism ESEA people experience. Secondly, that the biggest advantage is something as simple and antisocial as having an excuse to avoid talking to people. Bringing Mintz's analysis of stand-up to this again, Cho once more 'affirms' that such issues exist while also 'reexamining' them to offer a new and unique perspective on experiencing racism that provokes laughter through the 'subversion' of expectation (Mintz 1985, p. 73).

Again, Cho utilises a caricature of what many white people expect ESEA people to be, this time smiling shyly and putting on a much meeker physicality by bowing while covering her face with her hand. This is clearly a different stereotype to the previous version when she delivered 'more Chinese' stand-up; instead of the nagging housewife character, she is instead a giggling, childlike, and suppliant Lotus Blossom character who is often seen as a sexual object as expanded upon on page 43. By showing us this character, Cho again highlights the contrast between who she is when she is allowed to be herself and the way that others view her; the character is clearly differentiated from her sarcastic, confident, and relaxed persona on stage. Cho is not introducing her audience to the stereotype that she is portraying as it is clearly recognised by the laughing audience, but is instead framing it within the context of a set she has just performed as her own persona in order to show how ridiculous and inaccurate that

stereotype is. She is also utilising a stereotype that assumes that ESEA women are submissive and easily manipulated in a situation where she is actually manipulating the people approaching her in order to make them stop speaking to her, subverting the expectation of how this stereotype should behave. The audience here are encouraged to laugh at their and Cho's superiority over the people who actually fall for her tactics because they actually do believe that the stereotype is accurate, which is likely an older generation's belief, whereas the audience can see Cho's deception and understand that she is using the disadvantage of racist stereotyping to her advantage.

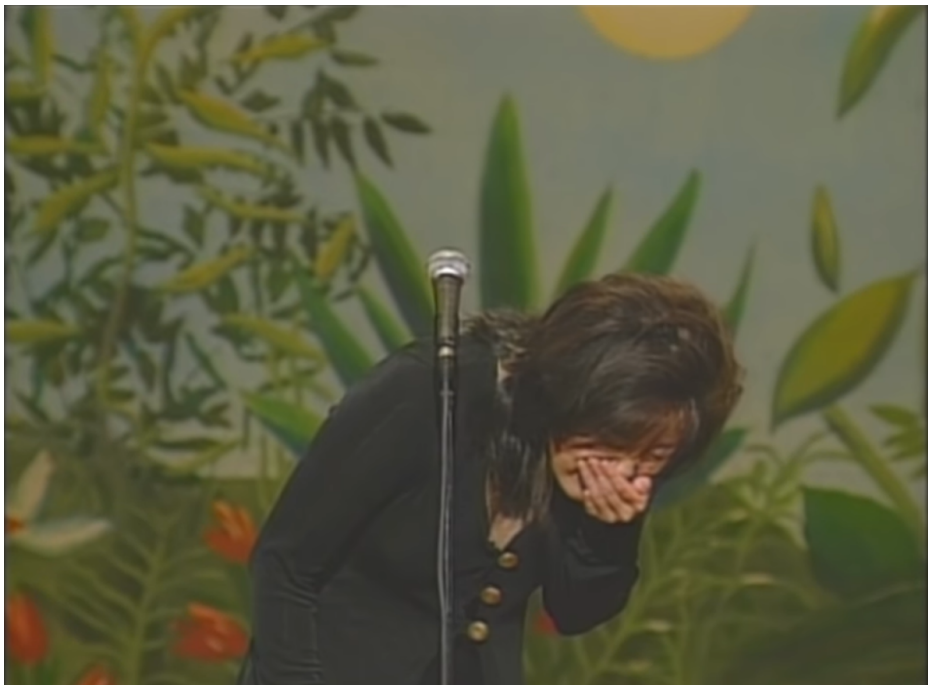


Figure 18: Cho behaving the way many ESEA women are perceived by the West in order to avoid speaking to strangers who approach her (Just For Laugh 2015, 4:08).

The idea of comedians performing to people that already agree with them on issues, particularly political ones, is often referred to as a negative circumstance. In an interview with Oliver Double, they discuss this idea:

Double: People often denigrate political comedy by saying it's just sort of 'preaching to the converted', but to me there's almost a value in almost rallying the troops if you know what I mean, celebrating shared values.

Cho: Yeah… it's where people get educated and they're moved and learning about what's going on in the world, and also seeing where everybody else's opinion is. So, it's valuable because there's a lot to say and a lot going on. Actually, within America right now the most popular comedy is the political stuff with shows like the Daily Show, The Colbert Report… it's sort of what Americans are thinking about. Comedy that's political is what's most valuable.
(Cho 2012)

This idea that Cho is performing to people who may hold the same political ideals as her but who still stand to learn something from her material can be seen in most of her work; performing as an ESEA person, especially as a queer person, to a majority white audience means that Cho is often providing insight into the Asian American experience that is novel, even for those who are very supportive of ESEA communities. As with the example of avoiding strangers speaking to her, Cho's material is comedic in its unexpected perspective while also being informative regarding how racism and stereotyping impact her life. This is perhaps a subtle form of providing information to the audience, as the comedic value of the anecdotes are prioritised over any educational aspects, but they undoubtedly provide insight into her perspective.

Onstage Persona

One element of the previous excerpt which is crucial to Cho's performance is her onstage persona. As Quirk (2015) writes, 'one of the key functions of the comedian's persona [is] that of economy.' The persona of a performer allows them to communicate more quickly to

the audience various characteristics or qualities that they might have, which in turn allows them to play with or subvert those assumptions. With Cho's persona, particularly at the point where she was not yet well known, much of the information that the audience would infer about her character would have come from her appearance as an ESEA woman, before she even begins to perform. Comedian Phil Wang (Appendix F) spoke about his experience performing as an ESEA stand-up, saying:

> *'I think by simply being on stage I was playing against stereotype. 'Cause you know, Chinese people aren't known for being comedians… aren't known for being outspoken in that way, getting on stage and speaking at all let alone humorously. So I felt just by getting on stage I was confronting stereotypes, but the stereotypes help in that you have something to play with. You have a joke, a premise, and you can make jokes about assumptions people have about Asian people. In many ways I feel lucky to have had all these things to talk about.'*

For Cho, as a woman and especially as she was performing much earlier than Wang and there were not other ESEA comedians widely known at the time, many of these stereotypes would likely have been more impactful for her. Cho incorporates ideas of what ESEA 'should' behave like according to Western standards and understandings of ESEA into her work, as previously seen by her use of behaving 'more Chinese' and the Lotus Blossom character she adopts. As Wang mentions, they are something that she is able to 'play with' as she understands that these are what her audience are likely familiar with when viewing ESEA women perform. Indeed, there is perhaps a Freudian element to the laughter she received from these sections, where the audience who have repressed their racist impulses which lead them to believe in the stereotypes are able to release that energy into laughing *at* the stereotypes when Cho utilises them as the target of her jokes (Critchley 2002, p. 75).[52]

[52] This is not to suggest that attitude endorsement theory as described by Carroll (2014, pp. 92-98) is correct; I concur with Carroll's argument that people can laugh at jokes about race and racism without themselves being racist. Jokes can be interpreted in many ways and can be laughed at out of appreciation for structure or wit, and understanding any stereotypes it might incorporate does not mean

At the same time, Cho subverts all these stereotypes of ESEA women as soon as she appears onstage. Firstly, as Wang points out, 'simply by being on stage' she is 'playing against stereotype,' as the qualities of being meek, quiet, and not speaking out on issues would inherently go against the idea of performing stand-up comedy in front of a large audience. Cho leans into this with her confident and loud persona, speaking clearly and quite casually to the audience with no sense of nervousness or fear. It is not unusual for comedians to be extremely confident in their onstage persona, as 'confidence is so important. If a comic shuffles onto the stage cringing under the glare of the audience attention, fiddles with the microphone, and reels out the first joke in a terrified, wavering voice, the chances are it will be greeted with an embarrassed silence. If on the other hand, the same comic swaggers onto the stage, grabs the microphone as if it is his or her own private property, and tells the same joke without apparently caring what the audience thinks of it, it will probably get a healthy laugh' (Double 1997, p. 160). For Cho, there is an added element that being confident is the furthest she can be from the Lotus Blossom stereotype, so by performing confidently she is not only gaining the advantages explained by Double but is also preventing the stereotype from being applied to her.

The way in which Cho delivers material is equally subversive of stereotypes, with her unquestionably American accent and expressive face providing a contrast to the moments in which she leans into stereotypical characters and voices, as previously expanded upon. She uses these to touch upon material that is rebellious and irreverent; the mocking of a powerful executive, the dismissal of men who approach her, and the derision of white men in general targets people who are in power and, especially in the world of stand-up comedy, have long

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one also believes in them. In this instance with Cho, the joke being laughed at purposefully frames racism and stereotyping as the butt of the joke, rather than people who may conform to (or be assumed to conform to) those stereotypes. Therefore, while there is a chance that it is being interpreted as a racist joke if someone believes in those stereotypes, the likelihood is that the audience are not endorsing racism but instead are able to release their inner tension by directing their energy (laughter) at the perpetuator of stereotypes.

been the majority. In doing so, Cho not only subverts racial stereotypes of ESEA people but also Western standards of acceptable female behaviour. Mintz (1985, p. 75) writes of Joan Rivers's onstage persona which embraces 'a failed or flawed woman' who is 'unattractive, lacks the proper female attributes' that she 'has begun to emphasize an expression of pride in these very "failings"... [she]seems aggressively to repudiate these traditional cultural values… to engage in a conspiracy with women in the audience to reject male demands that women fulfill their romantic and domestic fantasies.'[53] While Cho is not necessarily portraying herself as unattractive, her brashness and openness to speaking out against authority is similarly engaging the audience, not only as women to reject male 'fantasies,' but as more socially aware and politically correct citizens to reject racist 'fantasies.'

Cho's clothing also contributes to her onstage persona. She wears a long, black overshirt which is only buttoned over her chest and splays out, showing a fishnet top with a thick lace collar in the style of a choker necklace, black shorts, black stockings, and black boots underneath. When Cho first walks onto the stage, the overshirt billows and she holds it slightly open so the audience can clearly see what she wears underneath it. While not a revealing outfit, it is also not a conservative one and leans into a quite gothic aesthetic. This is emphasised by her dark lipstick and eyeshadow she wears and ruffled hair.

[53] For further reading on this topic, *Comedy Studies* (2011, issue 2(2)) published a special issue on Joan Rivers in which many works expanded upon this aspect of her work.

Figure 19: Cho's clothing while performing her set (Just For Laugh 2015, 4:10).

The clothing combined with her open, casual body language conveys confidence as well as a rebelliousness and mature femininity, traits which are not present in the infantilised stereotypes of ESEA women; as seen in Young Hi's character in the previous case study, ESEA women have often been shown to be extremely naive, innocent, and in need of protection, whereas Cho is outspoken regarding the way she has been treated.

These elements of Cho's persona created the image which has been the base for her fame. Her more recent performances have utilised her established personality of being loud, graphic, queer[54], and irreverent. The opening of the recorded version of her 2002 show *Notorious C.H.O* is footage of her audience entering the theatre and addressing the cameras

[54] I use the term 'queer' here in accordance with Jagose's (1996, p. 99) definition, which is any identity that does not follow the 'homo-hetero binary.' Cho has identified herself throughout her material as a lesbian, a bisexual woman, and as a queer woman.

there. They are all clearly huge fans of her work, and many of them are wearing, holding, or buying Margaret Cho merchandise.

Figure 20: Fans of Margaret Cho outside the theatre before her special* Notorious C.H.O *(Machado 2002, 0:19).

The signs pictured above clearly utilise language that could be considered offensive and discriminatory, but the people holding them are cheering on Cho and her use of these words to describe herself and the fact that she embraces them. Like Joan Rivers before her, Cho has clearly engaged her audience in subverting preexisting notions of what women, especially women who share her aspects of her identity such as queerness and being ESEA, should be. Many of the audience also repeat famous quotes from her past performances at the camera, most of which involve profanity or graphic language which the fans are clearly revelling in the crudeness of. Cho's persona which is exhibited in her early work has clearly carried on throughout her career, and her audience is enthusiastic about embracing the traditionally rejected female and racial characteristics.

Material on Sexual Stereotypes

As expanded upon in previous chapters, the stereotypes of ESEA women are predominantly linked to their perceived sexual behaviour and preferences. This is largely through the stereotype of the Lotus Blossom, who is meek and submissive and often victim to dominant, aggressive white men (with the implication that the Lotus Blossom actually enjoys or is seeking out men to dominate her). The Lotus Blossom stereotype is one with no agency and that does not pursue sexual pleasure but is instead viewed as a sexual object and through the lens of the pleasure the white men gain from her. Cho's persona on stage subverts this portrayal of ESEA women in many ways, and when Cho discusses her sexuality it is often addressing and in contrast to this stereotype. In her 2015 show *Psycho*, Cho said:

> *'[Being very Asian] is awesome, I like to sort of feel exotic, you know? I love white dick. [Laughter.] You know, I do! I love some white dick. It makes me feel exotic, like I want to put a flower in my hair like [in a Korean accent] "They remind me of my homeland" [giggles and covers face with hands. Does a peace sign with her hands multiple times between giggles.] [Laughter.] Love that. White dick is not, it's not too big so it doesn't stretch me out. It's not small, 'cause white dick has got the girth. I'm talking about that Colin girth. [To the audience's laughter] I know, it's good, it's good! It's like being fucked with a potato. [Laughter.] It's just, I think Asian women, we have a lot of power. I think Asian women are really beautiful, it's sort of like we're blondes but nobody think we're stupid. [Laughter.] I think if there was an army of Asian women with big boobs we could solve all of the problems in the Middle East, because we can make Jews do anything. [Laughter.] I mean, if it had been us instead of Moses it would not have taken 40 years to get out of the desert, they would've followed us no questions asked. Sometimes it's a little bit like, Asian women are a bit too beautiful. They're just so beautiful that no one can compare. Sometimes there's a good couple with, like, a beautiful Asian woman with a beautiful white man, and it's nice, but sometimes you see like a really beautiful Asian woman and she's with the most fucked up face, broke down, busted white man and I'm just like, bitch are your eyes that small? [Laughter.]'*
> (Asher 2015, 08:22-10:40)

In this section, Cho does several things to subvert and address the perception of ESEA women's sexuality. Firstly, she addresses the Lotus Blossom character by enacting how she would act if she followed that stereotype, similarly to how she enacts the executive's idea of a 'more Chinese' comedian. To do this, Cho shrinks her physicality by raising her shoulders and lowering her face, only looking up to make a peace sign with one hand while giggling into the other. She speaks with a Korean accent in a quiet, high pitched voice while discussing her 'homeland,' which highlights the sense of being 'exotic' when she performs this stereotype.

Figure 21: Cho performing a Lotus Blossom type character (Asher 2015, 08:41).

This portrayal of a clear sexual stereotype of ESEA women is an example of Bhabha's (1984) concept of mimicry in that, by embodying the stereotype, Cho is both reiterating and subverting the stereotype. As Shimizu (2007) argues regarding ESEA women being criticised for playing into stereotypes, 'if sexual representations not only represent trauma but also acts as sites for wrestling with power, resistance, and redemption, such an avenue must be explored for Asian/American women.' Cho, by playing with the ambivalence of stereotypes, is bringing their origins into question while also providing a new context through which it can be seen,

particularly framed within her material which purposefully contrasts with the moments of stereotype.

The contrast between her persona before and after doing this character is clear; Cho leaves a beat as she goes in and out of it, adjusting her physicality and dropping her voice to her natural, lower pitch and her American accent. However, in contrast to when she was performing the 'more Chinese' comedian, this character is one that Cho is doing for her own pleasure and not due to pressure from a white person or society. Cho's material is based on the idea that she sometimes enjoys being perceived as 'exotic' and 'very Asian,' because she feels that she has a lot of power this way. Once again, something that is often considered a disadvantage is addressed in a comical way by subverting the audience's expectation into seeing a potential advantage to it.

Cho is also subverting the stereotype by framing this character within a section that leans heavily into crude language, repeatedly discussing 'white dick.' She stereotypes white, cis men by saying that they have 'that Colin girth,' using a common white male name to discuss their genitalia. It is also likely a pun of the name of the actor Colin Firth, who is (and usually plays characters who are) a white middle class man. She goes on to describe it as 'being fucked with a potato.' This particular description is likely meant to undermine the idea of rewarding traditional signs of masculinity, such as penis size, as 'potato' is such an incongruous word to use in the context of sexual ability/desirability and has connotations of unattractiveness. In discussing potential white partners in this manner, Cho is reversing the generalised, degrading, and objectifying language that has been used to address ESEA women to instead reduce white (cis) men to their genitals and their sexual abilities. Cho is showing the audience that she is using this originally reductive stereotype in a way that makes her feel empowered, reversing the fetishisation of ESEA women by suggesting that she is the one who derives pleasure from

performing the stereotype while objectifying men who fall for it rather than being subjected to the sexual desires of those men.

Cho goes on to say that ‘Asian women, we have a lot of power. I think Asian women are really beautiful, it’s sort of like we’re blondes but nobody think we’re stupid.’ This is an interesting point to make; often women who are considered conventionally attractive are assumed or portrayed to also be unintelligent. As Cho points out, the stereotype of blonde women—who are understood to be attractive in ‘blonde jokes’—is that they are incredibly gullible and ignorant. On the other hand, there are stereotypes of women who must be unattractive because they are clever. However, the stereotypes of bookish and industrious ESEA people combined with the fetishisation of ESEA women have created a sexual stereotype that considers them meek and complying but well educated and spoken. Cho’s perspective that this gives ESEA women ‘a lot of power’ is perhaps drawing from historical fears of Yellow Peril—that ESEA women were tools of conniving ESEA men to seduce and entrap white men—and subverting them to instead suggest that they are being used for good (or at least only for her sexual pleasure and nothing more). Cho’s example is that this power could be used to ‘solve all of the problems in the Middle East.’

This small section on the stereotype of Jewish men and ESEA women is interesting to note. There appears to be a very American stereotype that Jewish men and ESEA women are very attracted to each other, and that there are a large number of couples made up of Jewish men and ESEA women. For example, as Ghert-Zand (2010) points out in her article for Forward—the ‘most influential nationwide Jewish media outlet today—in the 2010 film The Social Network there is a scene set in a Jewish fraternity party where ‘Zuckerberg glances over at a group of Asian female Harvard students and asks what they are doing here. Saverin answers something about how Asian girls like “us,” meaning Jewish guys.’ Ghert-Zand goes on

to question whether this is ‘a false stereotype or a legitimate trend,’ finding that some felt it was based on the ‘stereotypes that Asian women are submissive and Jewish women are demanding’ and others ‘thought that the affinity was due to a common emphasis on education and family that is shared by Jews and Asians. “Asian women don’t see nerdiness or lack of athleticism as a negative,” said one of the [Asian] women.’ Freedman (2012) in an article for The New York Times also called this a ‘trend’ with ‘arguably the highest-profile example of the phenomenon’ being Mark Zuckerberg marrying Dr Priscilla Chan. Freedman (ibid) writes that ‘to the limited degree that numbers exist, they suggest that the proportion of intermarriages of American Jews and Asian-Americans is growing’ and is ‘built on a deep sense of shared commitment to “tight-knit families, hard work, and educational advancement.”’ The stereotype appears to be one that, like many newer stereotypes that are not directly linked to overtly racist/antisemitic beliefs, can be traced to a mixture of positive and negative portrayals of both groups and circumstance.

What is interesting about Cho’s material on this stereotype is that she is clearly framing it as Jewish men being helpless and more submissive to the more powerful and seductive ESEA women. The portrayal of Jewish men here is very passive, subject to the strong influence of ESEA women that Cho is detailing and focussing on. This ties in to her previous segment on how ESEA women hold a lot of power through their perceived sexuality and beauty, but it is also another form of subverting stereotypes. As Ghert-Zand pointed out, there is a long standing perception that ESEA women are submissive, and by flipping this to suggest that they are purposefully acting this way in order to foster peace by compelling men to do good, Cho shows a different perspective on a derogatory stereotype.

In the next section, Cho discusses the fact that she finds ESEA women incredibly beautiful to the point where they are vastly more attractive than the white men who they are

dating. There is an unspoken idea here that Cho also finds most white men unattractive, as she only mentions that ‘sometimes’ there are ‘beautiful’ white men, whereas for the most part they cannot ‘compare’ to ESEA women. Of the ESEA women who date ‘the most fucked up face, broke down, busted white man’ she says ‘bitch are your eyes that small?’ Cho is referencing a common stereotype that ESEA people have small eyes, which is usually seen as a negative trait and is something that ESEA people have often been mocked for. However, what Cho is doing by using this stereotype to express incredulity at beautiful ESEA women dating unattractive white men is turning the stereotype against the people who have perpetuated it; Cho is clearly framing the white men as low status and the butt of the joke, as she is suggesting that a racial stereotype that they created would have to be true for someone to be attracted to them. It first seems that she is also reinforcing the stereotype by bringing it up in this manner, but then Cho gives the audience a knowing look which shows that she is asking it because it is clearly *not* the case that they have small eyes, they merely have an attraction to those men that Cho disapproves of because she believes they are too beautiful to be with unattractive men.

Material on Queerness & Politics

In analysing Cho’s material on sexuality, it cannot be overlooked that Cho also identifies as a queer woman, and has material which addresses this aspect of her sexuality. Much of her persona is also informed by this aspect of her personality, particularly as she became more well known. Being queer as well as the first ESEA comedian to address stereotypes on a large platform is, regardless of her material, a subversive act; Cho’s presence onstage is one that already does not conform to ideas of quiet, domestic, and submissive ESEA women. Being

queer implies something that is inherently missing from almost all of the representation up to this point, and that is sexual agency. By identifying as queer on stage, Cho is also breaking the stereotypes of ESEA women craving male dominance in the exclusively heterosexual representation they have had so far, as well as implying sexual preference and desire which has thus far been missing. She breaks the representation of ESEA women who have only been seen through a white, male gaze and who have been hypersexualised but never given power over this sexual perception of them. Indeed, Cho goes as far from the timid, demure stereotype as she can when discussing her own life. For example, in the following excerpt, also from *Psycho:*

> *'Sometimes we really need to figure out who we are, and often I think we are more than our relationships, you know? So you discover and you grow. I'm very curious when people know who they are, because I had very different feelings about it. I am actually bisexual, so I have serious feelings about both. I started off very much a lesbian, I had a girlfriend and we looked exactly alike. We were like those freaky gays who looked exactly alike, and we shared a vibrating egg. We would pass it between each other, it was real March of the Penguins. [Laughter.] Then I realised that there is a side of me that likes dick. [Cheering]. The inside. [Laughter.] So, I like both, and what I love most of all is sex toys. My favourite thing is sex toys. It's really fun and exciting… that's the great joy of having sex with women, you always get to get new sex toys. If you get a new girlfriend, you gotta get a new cock, gotta get a new dildo, celebrate your new love with a dildo, it's really exciting. [Laughter.] I always have to get the biggest one. Whenever I go to the sex store, I always get the biggest cock they have, the veiniest cock, the most giant one [laughter] like 'hey can I get the one that looks like a pylon?' [Laughter.] Because my eyes are bigger than my pussy! [Laughter.] And if you do that over a long time you get stretched out.'*
> (Asher 2015, 41:55-43:55)

Cho frequently performs material that is very graphic, particularly when discussing genitalia and sexual acts. What this achieves is firstly that the audience laugh at her mixture of incongruous and shocking descriptions. For example, she discusses sharing a vibrator with her female partner, how much she enjoys sex toys, and the joy she finds in buying the 'biggest,'

‘veiniest’ dildo, which are all related to her sexual pleasure and activity. However, in the midst of that she compares a sexual act with her partner to *March of the Penguins*, a 2005 documentary about the annual migration and domestic lives of penguins in Antarctica that was widely regarded as an exceptional, wholesome, and heartwarming film. The documentary was also widely heralded as a celebration and affirmation of ‘traditional family values… like monogamy, sacrifice and child-rearing’ by religious, Conservative groups in the US (Smith 2005). The incongruity of the gag is doubled, as she not only undermines a graphic sexual story with a reference to a family film, but also uses a film co-opted by Conservatives in order to describe a positive, queer sexual experience she had.

Again, Cho is playing on Freudian tensions in the audience; she is drawing on the social etiquette that prevents people from openly discussing topics such as sexual pleasure and queer relationships, which means that when she addresses them she is provoking laughter as a response to and relief of ‘anti-social emotions’ (Double 2014, p. 89). At the same time, the audience is encouraged to laugh at the surprise of her incongruous descriptions among the graphic details. However, she is also dispelling any notion that the audience may have that she falls into the Lotus Blossom character. By being overtly sexual and discussing this so crudely, Cho not only exceeds the expected level of comfort that ESEA women have with sex, but also exceeds the (white) audience’s level of comfort with those topics, not only breaking the stereotype but fully reversing it so that she is the more sexually open party with the audience seeming prudish in comparison.

It is worth noting that in the above excerpt, Cho does not address being ESEA while discussing her experience being a bisexual woman. By 2015, Cho was very well known, and her reputation of openly discussing being queer and sexually active was part of her fame. Comedian Evelyn Mok said of addressing race in stand-up:

'I want to feel like I don't need to address my race when I first get on stage, and I feel like already I've started to not need to do that but I think it's a learning process because that's how you learn to write comedy, when you start out and just try to find jokes and then you subvert stuff and now I'm at a stage where I'm trying to make what I feel and think funny… it's all these stages you have to get through… til you can just go on stage and talk.'
(Chirapiwat 2018, Appendix B)

It's clear that becoming more established and having more experience performing stand-up has an impact on how much material can—or has to—directly address the performer's ethnicity. Cho, who had been performing to wide audiences for over a decade by 2015, is clearly comfortable and able to discuss these topics without directly incorporating being ESEA into the material. However, this does not mean that the material is not closely linked to and impacted by the stereotypes and audience assumptions that have been detailed. Cho has already addressed sexuality in relation to her ethnicity in this special when she discussed how 'white dick' made her feel 'exotic,' so there is still a sense that she wanted the audience to view her perspective on sexuality through the lens of race before moving on to discuss being queer. Additionally, Pelle (2010, p. 22) argues that the way Cho expresses her sexuality and discusses her body is inherently linked to her ethnicity and the stereotypes that it carries.

Pelle (ibid), references Kathleen Rowe's ideas on the 'grotesque… "excessive" female body' and the idea of a body 'that both consumes (food) and produces (speech) to excess, is a more generalized version of that other, more ambivalent conceived female orifice, the vagina.' Therefore, Pelle (ibid) argues, 'Cho's body is interpreted and responded to as excessive and threatening because it is big, loud, leaky, perverse, abject, dangerous, and always transforming. In addition to Cho's big mouth, (sometimes) big body and defiant pussy, her queerness, along with her Asianness, mark her as even more excessive, uncontainable, and unrepresentable… the way Cho is responded to as a queer Asian American woman shapes her own conception of

self, as well as her paradoxical movements in the world.' What Pelle is outlining is not dissimilar to Said's notion of Orientalism—the West defining itself through its perceptions of the East by positioning itself as the opposite of the East. What Cho is doing, according to Pelle, is somewhat the reverse—Cho is being defined by her rejection of Western understandings of ESEA people and culture. Even in her material which does not directly address her race, her body and the use of body in her performance—such as the great detail in which she describes genitalia and sexual acts—are perceived in comparison to those stereotypes.

Pelle (ibid, pp. 22-23) further elaborates that Cho is performing her 'disidentification'—drawing from José Esteban Muñoz's concept of how people from marginalised identities 'negotiates her/his subjectivity in a culture that often defines such a person as abject, ultimately denying her/his existence'—by taking 'dual stereotypes embedded within representations such as the dragon lady, the geisha girl, the lotus blossom, the live Thai sex show worker, and the mail order bride [which] imply a sexy and sexed obedience concerning the Asian women and [taking] pleasure in refusing, embracing, and negotiating such images… As Cho negotiates her position as a queer Asian American and identifies the extreme pleasure of performing as both a sexualized subject *and* object, she takes particular representations, representations that are shamed and shaming, and internalizes them, throws them back upon the perpetrator, and/or radically twists their meanings.'

It is worth noting Rowe's writing, previously referenced in Pelle's article, on what she calls 'the unruly woman'. The unruly woman, according to Rowe, is one who dominates men, is excessive physically and/or verbally, makes jokes, and 'especially in the public sphere, she creates a spectacle of herself' (Appendix E). Rowe argues that, through comedy, the unruly woman is able to '[assert] her power to be the subject of laughter,' as society has a tendency to view unruly women in melodramatic contexts that 'unlike much of comedy, punishes the unruly

woman for asserting her desire… denying her the power and pleasure of her own [laughter]' (Rowe 1995, p. 59). In applying this to Cho's comedy, particularly on gender and sexuality, we can see that Cho's position as an unruly woman who discusses these topics is making her the subject of laughter, as opposed to the comedy which preceded her that often made unruly women the object of laughter. Through Bergson's (2005, p. 66) theory of laughter as a social deterrent, Cho's identity and behaviour (which Rowe would classify as 'excessive' through the perspective of society's expectation of women's behaviour) as the object of laughter would have been laughed at by audiences signifying that her actions were unacceptable in society. However, by placing herself as the subject of laughter and celebrating the 'excessiveness' of herself, she is instead making the audience laugh at those who disapprove of her and subverting the use of comedy that was used to reinforce the rejection of her behaviour.

Cho's combination of persona and history of addressing longstanding perceptions of ESEA people have continued and combined such that she often discusses current affairs in her work. This is often a combination of popular culture and politics, adapting her material to utilise new reference points that audiences will understand and shed light on her perspective of global affairs. For example, in her 2009 show *Beautiful*, she says regarding Sarah Palin:

> *'And I hate how she says that she tolerates gays. I hate that people fucking tolerate gays—fuck you! [Cheering]. Fucking tolerate gays. Seriously. One night with me and you'll be riding sidesaddle with the Dykes on Bikes [cheering]. And there's my dilemma. I hate Sarah Palin I would never vote for her, I hate her politics, but I kinda [beat] wanna fuck her I know. Appalling. I wanna eat her pussy from behind, Eskimo style [mimes an Eskimo kiss to cheers]. No, you know I wouldn't eat that thing. You know it's frozen, my tongue would stick.'*
> (Machado 2009, 4:51-6:20)

In the year prior to this show, Palin had been the vice presidential nominee for the Republican Party alongside John McCain. At this time Palin voiced support for a ban on gay

marriage, saying ‘she believed traditional marriage is the foundation for strong families,’ with McCain taking a similar stance (NBC News 2008). She additionally voiced support for sex education that promoted abstinence rather than any ‘explicit sex-ed programs’ (Childs 2009). Palin became symbolic of extremely traditional, conservative values and was particularly disliked by the left, as expressed by Cho in her show. Cho especially takes issue with Palin’s insistence that she ‘tolerates gays’ (as opposed to actively opposing them, despite her opposition to gay rights). What Cho is referring to is the contemporary use of ‘tolerance’ to indicate progress, rather than acknowledging that the use of the word was still incredibly problematic. The issue that many have taken with ‘tolerance’ has been the implication that the people being ‘tolerated’ are inherently unpleasant and/or unwanted but are being allowed to remain in society, rather than being held up as equals. As Lewis (2013) explains, ‘it is increasingly used to describe the—certainly agreeable—trend of social equality… When I consider the word tolerate, I think of blood tests, I think of going to the dentist; routine injections; baby-sitting difficult children, perhaps. What kind of a person ‘tolerates’ living in the same country as those of different races, religions or sexual preference?’[55]

With this context, Cho’s material is subversive in more than one way. Initially, the main subversion that the audience sees is that Cho suggests that Palin would support gay rights if she slept with Cho, after which she would ‘be riding sidesaddle with the Dykes on Bikes,’ essentially becoming an active member of the gay community. This implication is that Palin has not had a sufficiently positive sexual experience with a woman to understand her own sexuality. This is a direct subversion of two tropes often used to reinforce heterosexuality; firstly, that queer people would become heterosexual if they met the right partner of the opposite gender.

[55] For further reading on this topic, Žižek (2007) also provides a critique of ‘tolerance’ and its very Western roots, asking ‘Why are today so many problems perceived as problems of intolerance, not as problems of inequality, exploitation, injustice?Why is the proposed remedy tolerance, not emancipation, political struggle, even armed struggle?’

Secondly, that queer people (particularly bisexual people) cannot claim to be queer if they have not validated their claim through sexual experiences with every other gender. By turning a trope that is often used against queer people onto Palin, who is outspokenly against gay rights, Cho is making Palin the subject of laughter by making the audience laugh at her ignorance.

Cho also admits to wanting to 'fuck her' despite the fact that she 'would never vote for her, I hate her politics.' The audience are provoked to laugh through the unexpected attraction that Cho says she has towards someone she has clearly expressed a hatred for. Cho leans into this unexpected turn by graphically explaining what sexual acts she wants to perform with Palin, subverting the audience's understanding of Cho's feelings towards Palin. In highlighting the contrast between Palin's policies and Cho's own stance and feelings, Cho succeeds in two elements of subversion. Firstly, much like with the *March of the Penguins* gag mentioned earlier, Cho is taking something that represents conservative, specifically heteronormative values and placing it in a queer, sexual context where she is gaining pleasure in order to provoke laughter from the audience. Secondly, Palin, as someone who is against 'explicit' sexual education and promoted abstinence, the graphics sexual content clearly goes against the beliefs she holds that Cho sees as harmful.

However, Cho then goes on to tell the audience 'you know I wouldn't eat that thing. You know it's frozen, my tongue would stick.' This play on words—framing Palin as prudish and therefore 'frigid,' which then literally translates to being 'frozen'—incorporates Rowe's idea of the unruly in that drawing attention to bodily functions, genitalia, and intercourse are all signature elements of the unruly woman. As such, Cho's choice to specifically discuss Palin's supposedly 'frozen' vagina highlight's Cho's unruliness, specifically making clear to the audience that Cho is not someone who succumbs to societal pressure to embody traditionally feminine characteristics such as being conservative, quiet, and small. Additionally, by admitting to the

audience that her gag about wanting to sleep with Sarah Palin is not true, Cho reveals that it is purely for comic effect. In doing this, Cho undoes what she frames as possibly the only positive aspect of Palin—her potential as a sexual partner—and instead leaves the audience with the impression that Palin has no redeeming or desirable qualities. She is further diminishing and subverting the power that Palin has as a politician with a large platform and power by instead utilising her image to make the audience laugh and remove any element of attractiveness from her. As with her use of the term 'redneck' in her early performance, the use of derogatory terms to create humour which punches down – here it is her use of a sexist trope of women being 'frigid' – is framed within material which makes it clear that Cho is punching up by applying terms that traditionally punch down. Here, in attempting to undermine a powerful politician, she applies a misogynistic term to her in order to encourage the audience to laugh at her. The framing therefore softens the blow of the dated term as it is being levelled against someone who is clearly harmful to Cho and the audience.

Conclusion

Cho's work is a crucial point in the shift from comedy written about ESEA people to comedy by ESEA people, particularly when addressing elements of identity such as multicultural backgrounds, sexuality, queerness, and perceptions of femininity. There exists a clear link between the history expanded upon in the first half of this thesis and the comedy of today, both explicitly and implicitly, where the audience still hold (or at least understand) the historic perceptions of ESEA women in a way which allows Cho to play with those expectations in her comedy. The pervasive nature of these perceptions is something she addresses as a barrier to her life in the West, while also acting as a springboard for her to reveal elements of her lived

experience in a manner which paved the way for future ESEA comedians to perform, as will be expanded upon in the next two chapters.

Cho successfully finds and takes advantage of the tension in her audiences, whether those are tensions which exist due to socio-political circumstances or due to her own crafting of tense situations, and turns them into opportunities for laughter which subverts the history of comedy targeting ESEA people and culture; Cho sets up gags which encourage the audience to laugh at behaviour that she no longer finds socially acceptable (racism, sexism, harassment), using their laughter as a 'social deterrent' as well as an opportunity for discussing difficult topics (Bergson 2005, p. 66). A large part of the way in which she does this is through her persona, which embodies a casual, confident air that allows Cho to create a sense of 'truthfulness' and authenticity to her material. Embodying this persona allowed Cho in her early career to discuss the impact of racism on how she was perceived as a performer, and therefore created space for her to reveal to the audience the difficulties surrounding ESEA representation in the West. This perception of Cho allows her in more recent material to delve into graphic, crude, and frank discussions of her life including her sexuality and queerness that are both shocking and humorous to her audience.

Chapter 5: Ali Wong Case Study

Ali Wong is a Chinese-Vietnamese American stand-up comedian who rose to fame following her hugely successful Netflix comedy special *Baby Cobra*. She has since filmed a second special, co-wrote and starred in the Netflix film *Always Be My Maybe*, voiced a lead character in the animated show *Tuca & Bertie*, and published an autobiographical book. Her material often discusses gender in regards to social roles/expectations, sexual experiences, and birth/motherhood as her two main works (*Baby Cobra* and her second Netflix special *Hard Knock Wife*) were performed while she was heavily pregnant. In particular, she utilises graphic descriptions and crude language to discuss these topics, as her persona is an outspoken, brash one that is often very aggressive. Wong follows Margaret Cho as the next ESEA comedian to reach this level of renown in the West, making her an ideal case study for ESEA representation in comedy in the last decade.

Ali Wong is also a particularly good case study for this thesis as she has specifically Southeast Asian roots, as well as East Asian and Asian American. As has been expanded upon previously, there have been several strains of stereotypes against ESEA women which interact with different geographical perceptions as well, and Wong incorporates many of them into her work. Perhaps one of her most well known segments is one where she discusses the difference between ‘fancy Asian’ and ‘jungle Asian’ (Karas 2016). Wong describes her and her husband’s cultural background using these terms:

'I think my husband and I have a huge unspoken understanding between each other because he's half-Filipino and half-Japanese and I'm half-Chinese and half-Vietnamese. So we're both half-fancy Asian [beat] and half-jungle Asian. [Laughter.] Yeah! You guys know the difference. The fancy Asians are the Chinese, the Japanese… They get to do fancy things like host Olympics. [Beat.] Jungle Asians host diseases. [Laughter.] It's, it's different.'

Wong's differentiation between the two is explicitly geographic, as she names some of the countries that are 'fancy' (China and Japan) and some of the ones that she considers 'jungle' (the Philippines and Vietnam). A large part of the laughter in response to this appears to be the audience immediately understanding what exactly she means, reflecting the resonance it has with existing stereotypes of East and Southeast Asia. In particular, the historical perception of East Asia embodying 'Yellow Peril' and being more technologically advanced while Southeast Asia has been seen more as the victim of other powers (e.g. East Asian countries, communism, and Western power.) There are also strong links between powerful, wealthy East Asian people being light skinned while the struggling, poorer Southeast Asian people are typically darker skinned, and this comes with its own history of stereotypes due to colourism in both ESEA and the West.[56]

Wong, in categorising herself as 'half' of both 'jungle' and 'fancy' Asian discusses how stereotypes of both sides apply to her, such as her penchant for expensive luxuries (e.g. retreats, specialty foods, and brand name clothes) which coincides with her stinginess with money (e.g. haggling prices down, finding expensive things cheaper on eBay, not buying formula 'because breast is free') (Karas 2016; Kara 2018). She also discusses how her parents have clearly been affected by historical events in ESEA and have passed this down to her, such

[56] For more on this see pages 153-154.

as Wong and her mother hoarding items because she ‘is from a third world country and… you never know when a dictator’s going to overtake the country and snatch all your wealth’ (Karas 2016). There is a sense that, in bringing up these characteristics in relation to her Southeast Asian heritage specifically, she is utilising a shorthand with the audience, who understand because of this framing that she behaves these ways due to her cultural background and upbringing rather than as quirks of her personality. This shorthand comes with layers of both subtle and overt stereotyping.

This is perhaps an approach which allows her to actually defy stereotypes, by emphasising how many contradictory characteristics from both geographical areas apply to her, giving her room to discuss the nuances of her lived experience. However, Wong is also reiterating many of them by claiming that they are all true because they variously apply to her own life. At the same time, she acknowledges that the perception of her abiding by stereotypical behaviours ‘sometimes… makes me feel like we’re white people doing an impression of Asian people,’ particularly in relation to her engaging with ESEA culture through white structures such as buying Chinese and Buddhist products from American stores (Karas 2016). There is clearly a tension in her own and others’ understandings of her personality, and it is likely informed by the vastly differing stereotypes of East and Southeast Asia that have been applied to her. This divide in geographical stereotype has been particularly influential on the stereotypes of ESEA women; in chapter 3 the impact of Western soldiers in Southeast Asia and the resulting perception of Southeast Asian women as impoverished, enslaved sex workers was detailed, and Wong often touches on how her perceived sexuality and personality have impacted the way in which she interacts with others and forms relationships. These are particularly clear when she discusses gender expectations and her own sexuality.

Sexuality and Gender Roles

Wong is perhaps best known for her material where she discusses the grey areas of gendered and racial expectations in Western society, which often addresses her position as an ESEA woman who has others' perceptions projected onto her as well as her own ideas of how she should behave when interacting with stereotypes. This often includes both reinforcing and subverting stereotypes of ESEA people in controversial and often crude ways. For example, in *Baby Cobra* she explains:

> *'A lot of people are shocked [that my husband is Asian], because usually Asian-American women who, you know, wear these kinds of glasses [gestures at her own glasses] and have a lot of opinions like to date white dudes. You go to any hipster neighbourhood in a major city in America and that shit is turning into a Yoko Ono factory. [Laughter.] It's too much. I don't know what's wrong with these bitches. [Laughter] I get it, you know, because being with a white dude… You feel very picturesque when you're with a white dude, you know. You feel like you're in a Wes Anderson movie or something. [Laughter.] And you know white dudes teach you about a lot of cool stuff like voting and recycling and disturbing documentaries, [laughter] they introduce you to cool stuff like that and it's very, you know, hot hooking up with a white dude, I mean, nothing makes me feel more powerful than when a white dude eats my pussy. Oh, my god I just feel like I'm absorbing all of that privilege and all of that entitlement right there, through the money hole, and also he's so vulnerable down there! [LAughter.] I'm, like, 'I could just crush your head at any moment, white man! [Laughter.] I could just kill you right now! Crush those brains! Colonise the coloniser!' [Laughter.] You know?'*
> (Karas 2016)

What Wong is first doing here is acknowledging that there is a perception that ESEA women do not usually date ESEA men, which partially stems from the stereotype that ESEA men are undesirable to women and are effeminate, whereas white men are stereotyped as being traditionally masculine and attractive. A long history of stories where ESEA women are saved from evil ESEA men and/or sacrifice their lives for white men has also reinforced this perception, particularly stories such as *Madame Butterfly* and the works it has inspired (e.g. the

musical *Miss Saigon*). These stories romanticise the idea of ESEA women—who are shown as the Lotus Blossom stereotype—pursuing white men, which Wong explains that in a modern context makes 'you feel very picturesque… like you're in a Wes Anderson movie or something.' Wes Anderson films are well known for being beautifully shot and aesthetically pleasing; however, Anderson also has a history of not including non-white characters in his films, with the exception of Isle of Dogs, which was set in Japan and accused of utilising racial stereotypes and 'marginalizing Japanese culture' (Sharf 2018).[57] What this stereotype and the idea of feeling 'picturesque' seem to be echoing is also the idea that ESEA women are extremely traditionally feminine; they are seen as small, fragile, obedient, and sexual objects. By pairing them with white men who are upheld as traditionally masculine, the stereotype enforces ideas of traditional gender roles. Wong appears to be addressing the overall traditionally, positively portrayed (but still very racially charged) history of ESEA women being shown to prefer to pursue relationships with white men by largely disagreeing with 'these bitches' who do so, but still acknowledging the social reinforcement and appeal of them.

Additionally, Wong discusses how there is a villainising side to the stereotype of ESEA women in relationships with white men. As previously explored, the binary of how ESEA women are depicted means they are either the Lotus Blossom stereotype or the Dragon Lady stereotype. Her inclusion of Yoko Ono in this segment likely reminds the audience of the public perception of Yoko Ono as someone who was accused of being a 'witch' (Ono 2007) and specifically a 'dragon lady' (Yam 2021) who caused The Beatles to break up by supposedly manipulating her white husband John Lennon. Ono was subject to intense scrutiny and racist abuse by the public, particularly avid fans of The Beatles who 'would often surround The

[57] What Wong is also perhaps suggesting through this analogy is that ESEA women are able to be a part of and/or view white culture where they would normally be excluded through dating white men and appearing to be more "assimilated" in doing so.

Beatles company headquarters and call Ono a "'nip,' 'Jap,' 'Chink' and other insulting names, insisting that she should get back to her own country"' (Yam 2021). This attitude towards Ono appears to have disregarded the fact that Lennon was an incredibly powerful public figure at the time, instead painting him as being unsuspecting or innocent. By utilising these popular culture references, Wong succinctly sums up the two sides of social attitude towards ESEA women in relationships with white men: one that views it as a natural combination of traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine demographics, and the other that regards the women with suspicion and views them as manipulators of seemingly naive white men.

Wong goes on to address the social imbalance between ESEA women and white men, calling the hypothetical man she is with a 'coloniser.' She additionally acknowledges that white men hold 'privilege' and 'entitlement' over ESEA women. However, Wong is also subverting this power dynamic. Firstly, she is disparaging towards interests that are stereotypically held by white men, such as 'voting and recycling and disturbing documentaries,' reducing them to three very banal, bland topics. These are also topics which suggest an element of condescension; they are widely understood topics that have no association with being obscure or difficult, but the white men being described are 'teaching' women about them, suggesting that they are being patronising. The audience is also encouraged to laugh at her dismissal of these topics because, though they are important parts of society and popular culture, they are uninteresting and paint a demographic that holds a lot of sociopolitical power as dull. Additionally, they are topics that hold connotations of supposedly Western innovation while also being widely known to not have originated in the West; voting is often seen as an inherently Western concept, while the West is often praised for its recycling initiatives when in reality most of recycling is shipped to ESEA for processing (Parker 2018). The gag appears to be an example of Bergson's (2005, p. 66) idea of laughter as a social indicator, where the audience directs their laughter at characteristics which

they collectively find unwanted. From this it can be seen that the characteristics of being, firstly, boring and, secondly, condescending are the undesirable characteristics. The further implication of this gag is also that those are characteristics that are typical of white men who are 'colonisers' and hold social power, and the laughter is therefore subversive in that it undermines their cultural monopoly and assigns them laughable characteristics.

Then, while addressing the 'privilege' and 'entitlement' they hold, she is also removing those characteristics from the hypothetical white man; this is partially through her claim that engaging in sexual activities with white men makes her feel powerful and that she is 'absorbing' them from him. However, it is largely done through her graphic and crude descriptions of the power exchange and sexual activities. She describes it as being absorbed 'through the money hole' while he is 'eat[ing] my pussy.' In using strong language, she provokes laughter from the audience who seem shocked at her choice of words and in turn makes them laugh at the man who she claims she is making 'so vulnerable.' They are then prompted to laugh at her admission that 'I could just crush your head at any moment, white man! [Laughter.] I could just kill you right now! Crush those brains! Colonise the coloniser!' The laughter puts Wong in a much more powerful position because the audience are cheering her in her potential to murder a man for his inherently powerful position as someone who has benefitted from colonisation.

This delivery has many similarities to Margaret Cho's work, as expanded upon in the previous chapter, which utilises the shock value of crude language to deliver material that actively subverts stereotypes of ESEA women. What Wong's language and aggressive delivery is additionally achieving is subverting stereotypes that are associated with her. As a petite, young ESEA woman she acknowledges that there are certain preconceived perceptions of her; in this segment she directs the audience's attention to 'Asian-American women who, you know,

wear these kinds of glasses [gestures at her own glasses] and have a lot of opinions' who are often perceived to 'like to date white dudes.'

Figure 22: Ali Wong gesturing to her glasses as she describes 'Asian-American women who, you know, wear these kinds of glasses' (Karas 2016, 10:33).

What she appears to be addressing is the 'dragon lady' stereotype that Yoko Ono was subjected to, in which ESEA women who are not the fragile, obedient Lotus Blossom stereotype are instead cast as commandeering women who manipulate white men. Though what Wong is discussing—preferring to date white men—is not as aggressively negative or villainising, it stems from the same binary of stereotypes for ESEA women. Additionally, both stereotypes of ESEA women largely lack sexual agency; the Lotus Blossom stereotype is a sexual object for the benefit of men while the dragon lady does not engage in romantic relationships because she is preoccupied with exploiting people for social and/or monetal gain. By employing strong,

graphic language while discussing her sexual history, Wong is subverting those stereotypes and relishing in the crudeness of her stories. She discusses these encounters through the lens of her own pleasure and her own pursual of sexual partners. What this approach to delivering material regarding sexuality does is also give Wong room to discuss things that could be seen as reinforcing stereotypes from a perspective that rejects those perceptions. For example, later in the special she says:

'My husband is unfortunately just not as freaky as me. When I've asked him to spank me this is what he does: [In an overly gentle, cautious voice] Hey, hey, are you okay? Are you alright? You know I respect you right? [Laughter.] I'm like, yes I know you respect me! And that's why you need to abuse me, okay? [Laughter.] Because it's the most strong-headed, loud-mouthed women who like to be abused the most in bed, women who are CEOs they just wanna be roughed around, glasses always means the woman wants some. It's because we're so in control all the time that we just wanna experience some risk and be out of control, you know? Like, I don't wanna die, don't kill me. I don't wanna die! But I also don't want to be sure that I'm gonna live. [Laughter.] You know? I just wanna be out of control for once, just choke me enough so that I can't talk, [laughter] 'cause if I can talk I'm gonna tell you what to do and I'm tired of being the boss. I'm the boss all the time so in the bedroom you be the boss. Because I'm the real boss and I told you so, motherfucker, so do it. [Laughter.]'
(Karas 2016)

The notion of an ESEA woman wanting to be sexually abused because it is in her nature to crave being dominated is one that has been present from the twentieth century. As quoted in the case study for chapter 3, in Sax Rohmer's *The Insidious Dr Fu-Manchu* (1913, np) is one of the most famous and direct references to this perception of ESEA women. In this anecdote Wong is expressing a similar desire to be dominated by her husband in the bedroom, asking him to 'abuse' her. However, what Wong does is address this by expanding on what makes her want this, utilising her signature crudeness and aggressive delivery to ensure that there is no mistaking her reasons. She raises her voice and puts on an aggressive, exasperated voice

when she is telling her husband ‘I know you respect me! That’s why I need you to abuse me’ and then again when she says ‘I’m the real boss and I told you so, motherfucker, so do it.’

What this does is show the audience that Wong is clearly the more authoritative figure in the relationship, and that her husband—who is clearly hesitant to do anything that might hurt her—is only ‘abusing’ her because she has explicitly asked him to. He is also framed in this segment as being *too* cautious with her, as Wong provokes the audience into laughing at him by putting on a mockingly gentle voice when imitating him asking her if she’s okay. It is worth noting that Wong repeatedly portrays her husband as not conforming to ESEA stereotypes as well. ESEA men have historically been portrayed as abusive and manipulative, particularly towards women whom they have social control over (e.g. their wives, daughters, younger relatives), as well as unattractive. Wong portrays her husband as caring, accommodating, and repeatedly mentions how she thinks ‘Asian men are the sexiest,’ going against these perceptions of ESEA men.

She additionally lends the anecdote a sense of authenticity by framing it through her personal reasoning, similarly to Margaret Cho doing her family members’ accents by imbuing the impressions with specific details. She once more points to her glasses as an indicator of her attitude towards being ‘roughened around,’ and uses the fact that she is very talkative as a reason he should be choking her so she does not have to continue speaking. Wong also very clearly lays out the parameters for this request from her husband, which shows the audience that—though she is using words such as ‘abused,’ ‘roughened around,’ and ‘choked’—she knows she is not going to be in any physical danger. She frames this in a humorous way for the audience, saying ‘Like, I don’t wanna *die*, don’t *kill* me. I don’t wanna die! But I also *don’t* want to be *sure* that I’m gonna *live*… I just wanna be out of control for once.’ In doing this, Wong again provides personal detail to a potentially ambiguous story, alleviating any sense in the

audience that this may be a dangerous or abusive situation that could relate to the racial stereotype.

This use of persona and framing to discuss potentially stereotypical or taboo subjects is also used for topics such as gender roles and feminism. Much of Wong's work is associated with her desire to become a traditional housewife, despite the unprogressive associations with the role:

> *'People are always very surprised at how, off-stage, with my husband, I'm a completely different person. You– Like, you would not recognize my personality at all with him. With him, I'm very soft and very nurturing and very domestic. We've been together now for five years, and for five years, I've packed his lunch every single day. [Cheering.] Yeah. Yes. Yes. Yes. I did that so that he'd become dependent on me. [Laughter.] 'Cause he graduated from Harvard Business School, and I don't wanna work anymore. [Laughter.] I don't. I straight up don't wanna work anymore. [Laughter.] I don't feed him out of the goodness of my heart. I do it as an investment in my financial future. [Laughter.] 'Cause I don't wanna work anymore… I think feminism is the worst thing that ever happened to women.'*
> (Karas 2016)

The cheering that Wong received when she tells the audience that she packs her husband's lunch every day is interesting to note. It appears to be one person whooping, and sounds like a male voice. The timing and tone of this appears to be solely appreciative of a wife making lunch for her husband, as there is not yet any comedic context for the statement. It is particularly worth noting in that, if it is a celebration of a woman performing domestic work for her husband, it appears to be celebrating a return to traditional female gender roles. This is especially linked to Wong being ESEA, as there is a strong association with ESEA people performing traditionally domestic roles (e.g. owning laundries and restaurants) that is only increased for ESEA women. She initially reacts by nodding and agreeing with the cheer, repeatedly saying 'Yes' as if accepting praise, before revealing that the true reason she makes herself appear to be a traditionally domestic wife is in order to manipulate her husband for her

own gain. This reveal receives a much bigger and enthusiastic response from the audience. It appears that all of the audience except the one person cheering were able to read that Wong's behaviour that supposedly falls into stereotypes is put on and exaggerated for comedic effect, rather than her genuine character. This is interesting to note, in that it also reveals that Wong's persona creates an expectation and precedent for addressing this material, which most of the audience were able to pick up on. As Quirk (2015, p. 131) explains, 'we tend to assume all people who give the appearance of belonging to a particular category will embody all of the characteristics we assign to that category… The persona is clearly manipulative in that it is a skilful presentation of the performer's personality that controls perception in order to direct the audience's interpretation and facilitate the gag.' Wong's persona is clearly rebellious and subversive enough that the audience knows that the gag has not reached its conclusion, but that there is a twist to be revealed that undermines the supposed traditional values that she appears to be promoting initially. This cheer is a moment that I will return to later on in this chapter.

Wong also acknowledges to the audience that the way she presents herself onstage is a different persona to who she is offstage; however, she does so in a way that suggests that her persona onstage is actually her true form, whereas offstage 'with my husband' she is 'very soft and very nurturing and very domestic.' Since the rise of alternative comedy, many stand-up comedians have leaned into the idea that the person they are onstage is 'an authentic human being, unaffected by the process of performance,' which allows them to present their material as their own, real perspective on life (Double 2014, p. 128). Wong exploits this tradition by leaning into the audience's perspective of her persona being her true self, and then additionally suggesting that she *is* affected 'by the process of performance,' but only when she is performing for her husband whom she is trying to trap in marriage. This difference is framed as being

manipulative on her part, as she claims she only behaves that way with her husband ‘so that he’d become dependent on me,’ implying she is doing so in order to keep him in their relationship. By doing this, Wong sets up the idea to the audience that the potentially unfeminist ideas she goes on to discuss are not ones she holds because she actually believes in a patriarchal idea of gender roles, but actually for her own gain. With this blatant selfishness, she embodies what Mintz (1985, p. 74) describes as ‘a *negative exemplar*’ who has ‘deviate behaviour’ which allows the audience to laugh ‘in a celebration of a community of shared culture, of homogenous understanding and expectation.’ Mintz (ibid) argues that in doing this, comedians can either be laughed at (similarly to Bergson’s idea of laugh as a social deterrent) or empower people to act similarly. Mintz gives the example of Joan Rivers, as previously mentioned in regards to Margaret Cho, as a comedian who rallies for women to embrace their ‘failings’ as women in order to reject male fantasies of them (ibid). Wong appears to fall into a similar category of rallying for her audience to embrace and celebrate her selfishness in place of marital love, even though the way in which she expresses this is through traditionally female labour. She directly tells the audience that her domestic actions are not ‘out of the goodness of my heart’ but instead ‘as an investment in my financial future.’ She goes on to explain that her husband is from a wealthy family on top of being a graduate from the prestigious Harvard Business School, meaning that a relationship with him is a way for her to not have to work anymore because she can rely on him financially. The audience can see that Wong, in her aggressive pursual and manipulation of her husband, actually holds much more power in the relationship than him because he is reliant on her, despite her insistence that she wishes to be a housewife—a role which traditionally holds very little power in a relationship.

Wong addresses the stereotype of being a housewife and how societal expectations have changed from one spouse working while the other does domestic work at home to both spouses working:

> *'Our job used to be no job. We had it so good. We could have done the smart thing, which would have been to continue playing dumb for the next century and be like, 'We're dumb women, we don't know how to do anything so I guess we better just stay at home all day and eat snacks and watch Ellen, 'cause we're too stupid to have any real responsibility!' [Laughter.] And then, all these women had to show off and be like, 'We could do it! We could do anything.' Bitch, shut up! [Laugher.] Don't tell them the secret! [Laughter.] They ruined it for us, and now we're expected to work. When I hear the phrase, 'Double-income household,' I wanna throw up. [Laughter.]'*
> (Karas 2016)

Wong is suggesting that women had a much easier life when they were 'playing dumb' before 'tell[ing] them the secret' that women are actually capable and intelligent. She is again framing the role of the traditional housewife as a choice made by women who had the power to make that choice while pretending they did not, rather than a role imposed upon women in a patriarchal society. While this appears to be a flippant take on the state of women's rights in the past, Wong signifies to the audience that this is purposefully inaccurate in order to illustrate her point in a comedic way. She does this partially by describing the supposedly ideal housewife's day as getting to 'stay at home all day and eat snacks and watch *Ellen*.' The choice to add the detail of watching *Ellen*—a reference to *The Ellen Degeneres Show* talk show hosted Ellen Degeneres from 2003 to 2022—not only provokes laughter in the audience due to its incongruous inclusion in a scenario that appears to broadly be based on the 1950s nuclear family, but also shows that Wong is not attempting to be accurate in her depiction of being a housewife without the right/pressure to work. Instead, it reveals that Wong is using this absurd

version of being a housewife to describe to the audience the lifestyle that she wants in the present day, including watching the currently-airing *Ellen* show.

Wong does also address the fact that this segment could easily be misconstrued as willfully ignoring the progress of women's rights:

> *'A lot of women get very upset with me about those comments. And they're like, 'But, Ali, we have so many more options now.' Oh, you don't think we had a lot of options when our day was free? [Laughter.] Unscheduled, unsupervised, and most importantly, sponsored? [Laughter.] Do you know how much shittier food tastes when you know you have to earn it? [Laughter.] A lot of my friends, when we walk around together, they'll get very judgmental about housewives that we'll see on the street. And they'll be like, 'Look at that fucking housewife, not doing anything. Look at that housewife, just walking around all day, getting massages in her Lululemon pants.' I'm like, 'That bitch is a genius. She's not a housewife, she's retired. [Laughter.]"*
> (Karas 2016)

In this segment Wong reverses the hypothetical accusation of being unfeminist by subverting the view that women cannot want the lifestyle she has been describing and aggressively showing her support for women who are living it despite the criticism from women such as her friends. She shows that people tend to assume that women such as 'that fucking housewife, not doing anything… just walking around all day, getting massages in her Lululemon pants' are unintelligent and unambitious as they are choosing not to pursue careers. She then subverts that assumption by calling these women 'genius' for essentially being 'retired'—reaching a point in their livelihoods where they have accomplished what they wanted and now are able to live comfortably without working.

Similarly to Cho's material in which she addresses how her behaviour is often looked down upon, Wong is subverting social pressures by making the audience laugh at those who disagree with and/or misunderstand her. Taking into account Bergson's (2005, p. 66) idea of laughter as a social deterrent, Wong is framing the dismissal of housewives being unambitious

and lazy as a socially unacceptable behaviour because it is being laughed at by the audience. At the same time, she is still intentionally misrepresenting the idealistic nature of being a housewife; it is established that she is idealising the situation, not only through the projection of her own wishes onto the figure of the traditional housewife (e.g. including *Ellen* in her earlier anecdote) but also through the reveal of her own situation. Additionally, it is clear to the audience once more that she is not being supposedly unfeminist because she holds any real belief in the lack of women's rights, but instead is claiming she does for her own personal gain. This is similar to the cheer that was previously highlighted, where one audience member appears to cheer for the facade of anti-feminism that Wong is playing up rather than the punchline that she is only claiming to be anti-feminist for personal gain, which receives a huge reaction from the rest of the audience who are able to distinguish between when she is building up to a punchline rather than expressing her genuine opinion. In this case, the extremely specific examples she gives of her dream life are clearly specific to her and nothing to do with the progression of women's rights that feminism has achieved. The audience are able to laugh here because they can see that Wong is being selfish and willing to eschew feminism in exchange for a more relaxing lifestyle. This is partially from the incongruity of the segment; it is clear that Wong's persona is a woman who speaks her mind, dislikes being domestic (as she only performs domesticity to ensure financial stability through her husband), and generally does not fit the stereotype of a traditional housewife. Therefore, it is incongruous for her to be claiming to want to be a housewife when she so clearly, naturally does not fit the part. This is another moment where Wong's persona as a *negative exemplar* is clear, as Mintz (1985, p. 74) elaborates that the function of a comedian who embodies 'flaws' is for the audience to laugh at them for embodying traits that are 'not socially approved' while also being able to 'emphasize an expression of pride in these very "failings"' when they reject traditional/oppressive values.

Wong spends the whole special emphasising how much she does not want to work, and in particular how she relied on her Harvard-educated, businessman husband to provide for her once they were married. While she discusses working on the television show *Fresh Off the Boat*, which she says she is proud of, she admits she hated working there as she had to use 'that one-ply toilet paper, that office toilet paper' and had to 'muffle [my] shit' in case her employers got angry that she was using her office hours to use the toilet for extended periods. This is clearly a gag that makes the audience laugh because she is equating a huge professional success (writing for a popular television show) with what she considers an equally large loss (having to use the bathroom in secrecy and using ineffective toilet paper), which that audience can see do not actually balance each other out. She uses this story to re-emphasise the luxury of housewives' lifestyles, who 'get to shit in their house… don't gotta muffle their shit,' once again describing her ideal life as a housewife. She even bitterly details how her husband's father had a conversation where he told them that 'you guys need to make a lot more money if you want to provide your children with the same kind of privileged childhood that you guys had' to which she responded 'why are you telling me this shit? I should not be a part of this conversation, you tell your son that! Don't you understand that I trapped your son for his earning potential?... When I said I do, what I really meant was, oh, I'm *done*.' Wong creates an expectation with the audience that she does not want to work and is in fact refusing to work as she has an idealised vision of traditional housewifery that she is striving to attain. However, at the very last moment of the special, she reveals the following to the audience:

'I meet this dream guy who's way more handsome than me, out of my league, graduated from Harvard Business School. Worked hard to trap his ass, got him to propose to me, oh my god, then we get married, all my dreams coming true, then we got pregnant and recently we bought our first home together. And two weeks into the escrow process, I discovered that my beautiful, Harvard-educated husband was $70,000 in debt. [Audience gasp/react audibly.] And me, with my hard-earned TV money, paid it all off. [Cheering.] So, as it turns out, he's the one who trapped me! How did he do it, how did he bamboozle me? Oh, maybe because he went to

Harvard Business School, the epicentre of white-collar crime! He Enron'd my ass, and now if I don't work, we die! Why else do you think I'm performing seven and a half months pregnant?'
(Karas 2016)

Wong signs off the special with this story to the cheers of the audience, who react enthusiastically to her story of being able to pay off her husband's debt while laughing at the irony of her situation when she so desperately did not want to work and was relying on her husband to accommodate that. It also provides a greater context to all of her stories in the special regarding not wanting to work and idealising the life of a housewife; the audience can see now that the reason she has such exaggerated and fantastical ideas of what being a housewife would be like is because she has projected her own dreams of not working onto the role due to the pressure she is under to work extremely hard and be the main financial provider for her family. This is especially heightened by the bitterness of feeling that she was very close to attaining this dream—through her marriage and the lengths to which she went to change her behaviour to 'trap' her husband—before realising it could not be a reality due to her husband's debt and her own professional success.

This reveal at the end of the special changes the reception of her material in which she longs for social regression to the nuclear family and to women having fewer rights. While Wong appears to be expressing anti-feminist ideas—even saying 'I think feminism is the worst thing that ever happened to women'—the reveal makes it apparent that she does not truly hold any of those opinions. However, this is already established before the reveal through her persona which clearly rejects many of the values she claims to be championing, expressed through delivery methods such as incredibly crude language, sexually explicit content, and foregrounding her own pleasure and agency above all else. Wong has clearly greatly benefitted from not being a housewife, as she has experienced huge professional success as a tv writer

and stand-up comedian, to the extent that her family would not be financially stable if not for the opportunities she has had to pursue a career. This frames all of her anti-feminism as not being genuinely felt but rather an outpouring of her bitterness and disgruntledness at having to work when she was so intent on relying on her husband. Wong simultaneously uplifts women who are often frowned upon for choosing to be housewives while also acknowledging that society's progress towards women being financial providers for their family has been hugely beneficial to her.[58] Wong's back and forth between these two ideas and her facade of anti-feminism that is revealed to be untrue is facilitated by her persona on stage.

On-stage Persona

Though Wong's persona has been incorporated into the analysis in this chapter already, such as her crude, graphic language as well as her focus on sexually explicit material, there are elements of it which have not yet been expanded upon. For example, her aggressive, high-energy delivery is a large part of how she addresses these topics. In all the previous excerpts, Wong delivers her material in a confident, loud voice and is often punctuating what she says with intense hand movements such as pointing in a threatening manner to both the audience and hypothetical men she is discussing (see Figure 23). She also often opens her eyes very wide and stares down the audience in order to emphasise her frequent disapproval or anger at situations she relays in her material (see Figure 23).

[58] It is worth noting that in her next special, *Hard Knock Wife* (2018), where she has been raising her first child and is pregnant with her second, that Wong briefly addresses her previously special by admitting that 'I was stupid and naive and I thought that being a stay at home mom was about chillaxing, getting to shit in your own home, watch Wendy Williams, and go out to brunch with your sassy girlfriends. I did not understand that the whole price you have to pay for staying at home is that you've got to be a mom, and that's a job.' However, as these are in two different performances with little connection, there is no specific pay-off in the second special that relies on her stance in her first special.

Figure 23: Ali Wong pointing at the audience and widening her eyes in an aggressive manner to highlight her exasperation, in this case specifically people who gather around her car to help her parallel park because they assume she is bad at driving because she is ESEA (Karas 2018, 9:39-11:05).

In adopting this very enthusiastic and determined delivery style, Wong is able to strongly cement in the audience's minds the idea that she is very strongly supportive of the views which she is expressing. For example, when she is angrily discussing how feminism ruined her dream of staying at home and watching television all day, she reinforces to the audience that these are truly her values. This in turn means that when she reveals the twist—that she is the main source of income for her family despite marrying a man who seemed to be the perfect candidate for providing her dream lifestyle for her—the impact of the subversion is even greater, further pushing the comedic value of the punchline.

At the same time, as previously touched upon, there is an element of her persona and delivery that means that the audience knows to wait for this twist, rather than laughing at the moment where the singular audience member cheered at her performing domestic duties. As Quirk (2015, pp. 15-20) writes, 'with every joke a comedian makes he is faced with a difficult and potentially dangerous balancing act. If he cannot persuade his audience to accept the challenge implied within his joke, he will lose the audience's laughter and possibly cause anger among them. If he does not make any challenge at all, he will not be making a joke.' What Wong is doing is similarly a balance between discussing seemingly unacceptable ideas (saying that feminism is the 'worst thing that ever happened to women') but framing them in a way that challenges the audience (making them consider their assumptions about housewives being unambitious and lazy) and also manipulates them in order to achieve the most impactful comedic outcome (the reaction to her revealing that she is the financial provider for her family because seemingly financially stable her husband was so in debt.) In heavily leaning into being a dominating presence with a seemingly inflexible opinion on these matters, Wong is able to discuss such old fashioned ideas because she makes clear to the audience that she would not actually fit into the traditional, idealised housewife role that she longs for. The idea of meek, subservient, and altruistic women, particularly ESEA women, which has a history of being perpetuated stops applying to Wong as soon as she enters the stage and begins performing, and the audience are left in no doubt that Wong likely has more to say and subvert than what she seems to be pushing when discussing her dream of retiring as a housewife.

Her physical appearance also plays a large part in this. Her costume for all her Netflix specials have included a tight-fitting dress in quite loud patterns, paired with flat soled shoes and her signature glasses. This is an outfit which comedian Evelyn Mok described to me as 'the outfit of the Asian mom, with the flip flops, tight leopard print dress, and glasses and hair.'

Figure 24: Ali Wong's costume in* Baby Cobra *(2016),* Hard Knock Wife *(2018), and* Don Wong *(2022).

This perception of Wong's clothing is likely one that Wong is leaning into, as much of her material, as previously addressed, is attempting to actively subvert the stereotypes which may be directed at her based on her appearance and therefore relies on those assumptions being obvious. As her material subverts ideas of traditional femininity, maternity, and ESEA stereotypes, by dressing as what one would call 'an Asian mom,' Wong builds that base with her audience visually straight away. Additionally, her clothing in the first two specials enhances the appearance of her pregnancy, and in all three specials the clothing allows her to highlight the crude physical demonstrations she performs onstage when highlighting her sexual experiences (in particular, the first segment of Figure 24 shows a moment of this.)

However, Wong embracing this style of clothing was not always the case. In her early career, she explains that she used to dress 'like a hip-hop child dancer… [I] wore my hair in these two Mickey Mouse buns. I did that in part to desexualize myself' (Hou 2017). Later, when she was pregnant and tried on the dress from her first special, she said she 'felt pretty funny and *hot*' and decided to wear it for the special. It is worth noting that Wong, through her choice of clothing, was able to reverse the sexualisation of herself by the audience and instead dress in a way where she felt 'hot' on her own terms, similarly to her material which subverts the sexualisation of women and particularly ESEA women.

A large part of Wong's persona enhancing and facilitating her material is also due to the fact that her two most successful and accessible performances—her Netflix specials—were filmed when she was heavily pregnant. Though Rowe's concept of the 'unruly woman' has been touched upon in the previous Margaret Cho case study, pregnancy is an aspect of the unruly woman which has been unexplored here and greatly applies to Wong's persona. Rowe (1995, pp. 33-34) states that:

> *'Whenever the body is engaged in the functions that bring it closest to the thresholds of life and death—being born, having intercourse, giving birth, and dying—it is grotesque… It is this notion of the grotesque body which bears most relevance to the unruly woman, who so often makes a spectacle of herself with her fatness, pregnancy, age, or loose behaviour. The grotesque body is above all the female body, the maternal body, which, through menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation, participates uniquely in the carnivalesque drama of "becoming," of inside-out and outside-in, death-in-life and life-in-death.'*

Pregnancy is also one of the characteristics she includes in her list of characteristics for unruly women due to its proximity with being associated with 'looseness' (Appendix E). In addition to bringing the 'thresholds of life and death' to attention, Rowe (ibid, p. 64) also argues that it is the opposite of the 'legitimate' female body which 'conceals any traces of its reproductive processes.' Pregnancy therefore lends itself to making an unruly woman appear outside of

socially accepted boundaries, which in turn allows for her to discuss topics outside of these more readily.

Wong's state of being heavily pregnant while also being excessive—in her speech when discussing taboo subjects, her mannerisms by being loud, and the spectacle of being on stage making jokes—puts 'being born, having intercourse, giving birth' into extremely close proximity both physically and through association. She addresses this in her second Netflix special where she is pregnant with her second child, saying:

'A lot of people seem to wonder, Ali, now that you have a daughter are you going to tone it down?'
(Karas 2018)

Wong acknowledges that there is a social barrier between children/giving birth and intercourse/crudeness, which she breaks by going into graphic detail about sexual encounters, genitalia, and her and her husband's attempts to conceive. In doing this, Wong breaks the taboo by placing all of these in close proximity to her pregnant body, which Rowe argues is one of the key features of the unruly woman.

Additionally, Wong seems incredibly at ease with her pregnant body, performing with high energy and often moving rapidly to lay down, squat, and run across the stage, as well as at ease with discussing the controversial material she does. Rowe (1995, pp. 62-64) argues that ease is a quality that, in those with social power, is associated with 'relaxation,' but in those who society aims to control, is associated with 'looseness' of morals and 'sloppiness.' By being at ease while society attempts to control them, the unruly woman 'diminishes the power of others to control her' because her ease indicates that she is not affected by social pressure to conform to its standards (ibid). From Rowe's concept of how these characteristics function when women

perform comedy, it can be seen that Wong's physical ease and comfortable discussion of difficult topics are greatly interlinked; her physicality while also being pregnant means she is perceived as unruly, which allows her to jump in and out of socially forbidden content as the audience can see that she already has proximity to those topics.

However, Wong is not only utilising these characteristics to discuss being a woman and topics of birth, intercourse, and death—she also uses this to subvert stereotypes of ESEA women. As discussed on page 29, stereotypes of ESEA women stem from the large percentage of ESEA women who were prostitutes in the late 1880s in the US: obedient, passive, and sexualised, often being quiet and physically small. These qualities can be seen to be linked to very traditional ideas of what women should be according to Western society, and what women are often pressured to become. It is therefore arguable that ESEA women in the West face additional social pressure to not only conform to being traditionally female, but also to be a specific and more extreme idea of ESEA women. As such, Wong's ease, unruliness, and overall persona are pushing boundaries not only faced by women but specifically ESEA women.

It is worth noting here that Wong is someone who has actively rejected being pigeonholed as merely an ESEA female comedian, but has pushed to be recognised for being an outstanding comedian regardless of her gender and ethnicity. In her 2019 autobiographical book *Dear Girls*, she dedicates an entire chapter to this entitled 'My Least Favorite Question.' She writes:

> *'A question I always get asked is: "What is it like being an Asian American woman in Hollywood?" I hate this question almost as much as I hate "What's it like to be a female in comedy?" because nobody wants their identity and defining characteristics reduced to just race and gender… What disappoints me even more is that the people asking me are always Asian American. It feels like they want to hear a titillating story about a meeting with a high-powered Hollywood executive, who sat me down in his office and said, "Look, we love you, Ali. In fact… we love you long time!" then threw rice in my face, forced me to watch Mickey Rooney's scene from Breakfast at Tiffany's on a loop for forty-eight hours straight, and kicked me out of his office screaming, "You'll never make it in the white man's world, you chinky ho!"'*

(Wong 2019, pp. 155-156).

She goes on to acknowledge the plethora of racially charged moments in her career and that discrimination against ESEA people is still prevalent, particularly in entertainment. However, she also acknowledges the changes that have occurred recently. She recalls an older ESEA actress telling her that they refused to watch *Crazy Rich Asians* because they were jealous that they were not in the film and felt left out. Wong responded to them: 'It's not your fault. You were made to feel that way. The lack of opportunities for Asian Americans in Hollywood conditioned you to be insecure and envious… you're from a different generation, where the success of another Asian person drives you crazy because you were made to believe that there was only one spot available' (ibid, p. 166). Ultimately, her advice to Asian American women who want to get into the entertainment industry is to 'let go of seeing yourself as nothing more than an Asian American woman. Ask yourself who you are outside of that' (ibid, p. 167). Wong elaborates that she is proud to be Asian American and that it is obviously a formative part of who she is, but that it should not be what defines her.

This is an interesting insight into her approach to comedy, in that it highlights how Wong brings her ethnicity and cultural background into her stand-up material where she feels it is relevant or enhances the comedy, but does not confine herself to material regarding race. In the excerpts included in this chapter thus far, Wong brings in her ethnicity where she is aware that the audience's expectations regarding race and the situation will combine to create a greater comedic reaction, particularly where she is leaning into stereotypes in order to more dramatically reveal her true stance and subvert the audience's perception. However, it can be seen that she does this with multiple ethnicities in her material, not just with ESEA stereotypes. This perhaps most effectively shows that she regards her own ethnicity as a potential base from

which she can deliver jokes, the same way she does any other situation and its comedic opportunities.

Jokes and Stereotypes of Other Ethnicities

Wong's material in which she incorporates other ethnicities and utilises their stereotypes to deliver comedy is particularly interesting. Partially because, as elaborated on above, it provides insight into how she approaches identity in comedy, but also because it is a signifier of how ESEA stereotypes are placed within a very multicultural landscape. Much of Wong's material regarding people of other ethnicities is framed through her sexual history, which is very revealing of how prevalent sexual stereotypes are for different ethnicities. For example, when she is emphasising to the audience how attractive and 'underrated' she thinks ESEA men are, she compares them to men of other ethnicities to make her point:

'I think that for marriage, it can be nice to be with somebody of your own race. The advantage is that you get to go home and be racist together. [Laughter.] You can say whatever you like!, you don't got to explain shit. [Laughter.] My husband: half Filipino, half Japanese. I'm half Chinese and half Vietnamese, and we spend one hundred percent of our time shitting on Korean people. [Laughter.] It's amazing, it's what love is built on, you know? My last boyfriend was Cuban and his family would shit on Mexican people all the time, and I was like, hold it, you guys aren't Mexican?[Laughter.]... Asian men are the sexiest. They got no body hair from the neck down, it's like making love to a dolphin. [Laughter.]... You mess with a Jewish dude and your body is all fucked up afterwards, it's all red and inflamed and you're like, I did not asked to be exfoliated today! [Laughter].'
(Karas 2016)

Wong makes two direct comparisons here. The first one is that she is comparing being with her ESEA husband, with whom she shares a more intricate understanding of ESEA cultures, and

being with a Cuban man, with whom she does not have the same mutual knowledge. As a result of this, she is unable to engage with his family's discussion. The way in which Wong makes this comedic is to exaggerate her lack of knowledge to the point of being racist—homogenising all Latin Americans into being 'Mexican'—in order to create a bigger contrast between the connection she has with her husband through bonding over their nuanced knowledge and her difficulty connecting with her partner who is a different ethnicity. Wong's plays on the audience's existing understanding, firstly of the homogenisation of Latin American people who are grouped into being 'Mexican,' and secondly the social code which gives people leniency to 'be racist' to people of the same ethnicity. Wong arguably could replace Cuban with any other nationality here to the same effect, but appears to have chosen a nationality which her audience—largely American—would understand are often grouped with other nationalities while having a distinguishable identity of its own in popular culture.

The second comparison here is between her ESEA husband's lack of body hair and the stereotypes that Jewish men have a lot of body hair. This joke has two functions; firstly, to subvert the stereotype of ESEA men being physically unattractive. Having body hair is often seen as being traditionally masculine and therefore linked to attractiveness for women. ESEA men have long been depicted as effeminate and therefore physically unattractive, which interacts with the stereotype that they have less body hair than Western men to create the perception that they are less desirable. However, Wong is describing this physical trait as a positive by pointing out that, not only does she personally feel it makes ESEA men 'the sexiest,' but that sleeping with a man who has a lot of body hair makes her skin 'all red and inflamed' due to friction. This leads to the second function of the joke, which is to emphasise her preference of 'dolphin'-like hairlessness by contrasting it with how painful she finds sleeping with someone who has a lot of body hair. She makes the comparison by contrasting the stereotype with a

similar but opposite stereotype of Jewish men having a lot of body hair; this highlights to the audience the difference in her level of discomfort (between being with someone hairless 'like making love to a dolphin' and being 'exfoliated' by being with someone) through the interaction between stereotypes that have a long history of being upheld but in a context that enhances the comedy of the contrast.

This segment exemplifies Wong's stance that race can be incorporated into humour but does not define her style of stand-up comedy; in both instances of comparison, she recognises the audience's preconceptions regarding different ethnicities and demographics and uses them in order to heighten the comedy of her material as she knowingly subverts these stereotypes. However, the material itself does not rely on race, as at its core the material is a continuation of her humour which revolves around her personal experiences and the graphic, often shocking way in which she expresses these.

Wong's humour also often involves her expressing controversial opinions in which she admits to upholding opinions that are largely considered outdated or harmful. In addition to the examples earlier where she discusses her dislike of feminism (which is then subverted to reveal that this is a front she puts on to express her dissatisfaction with not living her 'dream' life), she also delivers material about upholding racial stereotypes:

'When a man doesn't sleep with you right away… it's not because he respects you. It's because he has a small dick. [Laughter.] He's trying to trap you! Do not fall for that trap, [laughter] I'm gonna repeat that shit to my daughter over and over and over again, do not fall for that trap. [Laughter.] I fell for that shit once, fell in love and into a semi long-term relationship with a man who kept on wanting to wait to have sex, and I assumed it was because he thought I was so special and amazing and worth waiting for. He was hiding something! [Laughter.] Months later he finally agrees to get busy and unveils this tiny mess of a thing that wouldn't even reach your molars. [Laughter.] It was a Black dude. [Beat. Shocked screams and laughter.] Creepy, right? Like seeing a homeless Asian person, what happened to you? [Laughter.] Oh my god, who are your parents? Truly! It was a Black dude and I told all my Black friends about it and they were like, where the fuck is he at? [Laughter.] We need to assassinate him right now before he further threatens to tarnish our sacred reputation! [Laughter.] It was the first and last time I had ever seen an actual micropenis. And my honest first reaction when I saw it was, oh my god are you

okay? [Laughter.] What happened, did you just get hit by a bus? [Laughter.] Did a car outside just sideswipe your dick off, and now is your dick rolling around on the street like a severed snake head? [Laughter.] And should we get a mason jar and just scoop it up and bring you both to the hospital to have you sewed back together? [Laughter.] Wait a minute, wait a minute, is this some sort of princess and the frog test? Did a witch curse you a long time ago as punishment for calling her ugly? [Laughter.] And now if I put that in my mouth to prove that I love you, as a reward for my love will it expand? [Laughter.] Like one of those magic towels you pour water on? [Laughter.]'
(Karas 2018)

This segment is interesting in that, where the other examples either subverted sexual stereotypes of ethnicities or did not reinforce them in harmful/degrading ways, this one does seem to reinforce a stereotype in a way which she is encouraging the audience to laugh at a Black man for not conforming to a racial stereotype. In the previous segment regarding dating people of different ethnicities, the audience are encouraged to laugh at Wong. Taking into consideration Bergson's notion of laughter as a social deterrent, Wong leans into embodying a quite superficial stance on dating; she makes herself the butt of the joke by highlighting her own ignorance and vices (being racist to other Asian nationalities, homogenising Latin American groups, being superficial enough to not date Jewish people because she dislikes the friction from body hair). Therefore, the audience are not laughing because they have been framed as superior, not to the stereotypes being described, but to Wong for not being politically correct.

However, in this segment, Wong frames the anecdote in a way where she emphasises the humour she finds in how small a Black man's penis is when the stereotype is that Black men are well endowed. The beginning of the anecdote starts with a subversion that is typical in Wong's material, where she takes an antiquated notion of gender relations (that women should not sleep with men straight away because they will lose the man's/society's respect, and that if a man respects women he will not try to sleep with them straight away) and reverses it to suggest that women should be very suspicious of any men who will not sleep with them straight away.

The gag here is that Wong is subverting a social and gender norm in order to suggest that men who do not sleep with women straight away must have ulterior motives and cannot be acting out of respectfulness or chivalry. This subversion itself already receives a laugh from the audience, who see the incongruity of Wong taking a supposedly courteous act and framing it as suspicious, as well as suggesting that men will never behave this way except out of selfishness. Wong continues by relating an anecdote in which she thought a man was not sleeping with her and she 'assumed it was because he thought I was so special and amazing and worth waiting for' when in reality 'he was hiding something!' and had 'this tiny mess of a thing that wouldn't even reach your molars.' This reveal of his penis size and the punchline of measuring the length of it using which teeth in her mouth it would reach could be the final punchline, and Wong does receive a large laugh from the audience. However, she pushes further and pauses before revealing 'it was a Black dude.' The timing and reaction for this reveal clearly frame it as the punchline, and the joke then takes on a new set of implications. The target of the joke shifts, so the audience is now laughing, not at Wong for crudely measuring penis length using her teeth or for being fooled by a man who she thought was being respectful of her, but at the Black man which she has revealed to have a small penis.

There is also a sense that Wong was setting up the audience to think that she was talking about an ESEA man; prior to this segment she discusses how racially charged it is when people ask her whether her parents approve of her stand-up material. She is clearly drawing on ideas of overbearing ESEA parents who raise their children to be model minorities and overachievers. Therefore, it is likely that by following this with an anecdote about a man with a small penis, Wong is ensuring that the audience is picturing (consciously or not) an ESEA man. There is also an existing stereotype of ESEA being emasculated and therefore having a smaller penis size, as penis size is traditionally equated to manliness. This interpretation of the

audience's assumption that she is referring to an ESEA man is further supported by the reaction to the reveal that 'it was a Black dude,' where there are audible shocked screams from the audience. The reaction suggests that there was not merely a surprising element of the man being Black despite stereotypes, but also that there was an existing assumption that is being subverted. This punchline additionally does not attempt to subvert the stereotype that ESEA men have small penises, or challenge the idea a Black man having a small penis is incongruous; Wong utilises two racial stereotypes but does not critically engage with them.

The rest of the segment toes the line between Wong making her own ignorance the target of the joke and the Black man who does not conform to stereotypes. It is important here to note the difference between what I mean when I say 'not conforming to' and 'subverting' stereotypes. I believe it ties into the broad idea of 'punching up' and 'punching down,' in which some jokes target those in power and some jokes target those with less power (than the comedian or the audience). As Quirk (2018, p. 39) observes, 'many practitioners [who] embrace political correctness… try to always punch up, not down' and many jokes which do this in relation to racial stereotypes will make the target of the joke people who attempt to reinforce those stereotypes, or who are unwilling to see beyond stereotypes. This particularly links to laughter as a social indicator, in which the laughter is targeting the socially unacceptable behaviour (Bergson 2005, p. 66); by laughing at racists rather than at people being racially profiled, the jokes are indicative of the audience's stance while also framing racists as morally inferior. These jokes, such as the ones in chapter 4 performed by Margaret Cho, uplift those who 'subvert' stereotypes and sometimes applaud them for doing so. This is not to say that jokes in which someone is behaving in line with stereotypes cannot be punching up; there have been multiple examples in this thesis where this has been the case, but the nuance and framing of the jokes often ultimately reveal a subversion of those stereotypes or make the perpetrator of

the stereotyping (including the comedians themselves) the butt of the joke. Jokes which encourage laughter at a person who is acting outside of stereotypes is instead punching down, targeting people for ‘not conforming to’ stereotypes rather than celebrating and empowering the ‘subversion’ of stereotypes.

Wong continues to contrast racial stereotypes by comparing seeing a Black man with a small penis to ‘seeing a homeless Asian person,’ which she considers shocking as it goes against the ‘model minority’ stereotype of ESEA people being social climbers and usually financially successful, and causes her to react by asking ‘what happened to you?... Who are your parents? Truly!’ This reaction prompts laughter from the audience, and it appears to be aimed at Wong for her over the top reaction and the implied ignorance of it. The timing of the jokes seems to corroborate this, in that Wong does not pause, instead moving straight into her own reaction of ‘what happened to you?’ rather than pausing for laughter after saying ‘homeless Asian person,’ as well as adopting a comically exaggerated reaction to the homeless person that frames her as being ridiculous. However, the joke sits uncomfortably on the history of the ‘model minority’ stereotype being used to promote anti-Black agendas, framing ESEA people as well behaved, civilised people working to earn their place in Western society and in contrast painting Black people as unworthy of sympathy or rights as a result due to their implied lack of those characteristics. In directly drawing from this comparison of a Black man’s supposed masculinity due to his genitals and the rejection of the idea that an ESEA person could be homeless when all ESEA people are meant to be successful, Wong leaves no room for either group to have nuance or sympathy from the audience for their respective situations. There is also a history of anti-Black sentiment in ESEA communities, drawn from colourism within ESEA as well as Western influences. There is specifically a historical connection between having dark skin and being uneducated, underprivileged, and impoverished, sometimes linked to the idea

that people who could afford to stay inside instead of performing manual labour outside would have lighter skin and were therefore more respectful. Wong's positioning of an ESEA person as being unlikely to be homeless alongside an analogy which relies on stereotypes based on skin colour similarly reflects and relies upon an uncomfortable history of anti-Black sentiment in the ESEA community.

Figure 25: Ali Wong pretending to react in an over the top manner to a homeless Asian person (Karas 2018, 38:57).

Wong then describes how she 'told all my Black friends about it and they were like, where the fuck is he at? [Laughter.] We need to assassinate him right now before he further threatens to tarnish our sacred reputation! [Laughter.]' The audience seem to be set up to laugh at the overreaction of Wong's Black friends to something as inconsequential as one Black man having a small penis, as in this anecdote they seem to take it as a 'threat' to their 'sacred

reputation.' However, the interaction sits uncomfortably close to reinforcing stereotypes of Black people, particularly men, being overtly aggressive and violent (here to the point of 'assassinating' someone) and Wong puts on a lower voice and threatening posture to deliver these lines. There is a sense of 'punching down' here, where an already misrepresented and marginalised group are being depicted in a way that reinforces stereotypes, with the laughter of the audience being aimed at them. This is a noteworthy dynamic, considering Wong's stance on incorporating race into her comedy largely only to enhance the existing comedy rather than have it be the core reason for the gag. I would argue that Wong is deriving comedy solely from the portrayal of Black people behaving in a way that has been seen in stereotypes (i.e. aggressively and violently) and in response to a Black man's lack of conformity to a stereotype (i.e. now being well endowed).

Again, Wong is highlighting the contrast between stereotypes of ESEA and Black people. Firstly, when she utilises stereotypes regarding penis size when associated with the two demographics, then again with the opposing views of ESEA as 'model minorities' and Black people as aggressive and threatening. It is perhaps a lasting impact of the social understanding which informed the chapter 1 case study of *The C**n and the Ch*nk*. While the vaudeville sketch was directly interacting with questions of who is allowed to be 'American,' the core idea that ESEA and Black people are constantly in opposition to each other in Western culture is what has continued to be relevant. In Wong's work, the two stereotypes are concerned with who is allowed to be considered 'masculine' and how that manifests in other racially charged perceptions of the groups. Weaver (2011, pp. 86-91) discusses how, in racial stereotypes, penis size is often inversely linked to intelligence, with Black people particularly being seen as less intelligent but more endowed than white people. On the other side, ESEA people can be seen to historically be considered very intelligent (linking to the model minority stereotype through

characteristics such as studiousness over personal relationships) and having small penises. While Wong's material does not have the outright maliciousness and racism of the vaudeville sketch, the implications of her work draw from these historical understandings and clearly reflect that the positioning of ESEA and Black people in Western comedy continues to be closely interlinked.

The rest of the anecdote shifts back to the laughter being aimed at Wong, who plays up her desperation and superficiality in being obsessed with how the man's penis became so small and how she can make it bigger (such as finding the severed part of it on the road and bringing it to the hospital to reattach it, proving her love, and pouring water on it 'like one of those magic towels'). However, it is still unclear whether the structure of this joke reinforces the idea that a Black person cannot have a small penis unless something bad has happened or whether the target of the joke is Wong's own ignorance. The anecdote is relying not only on the audience's understanding that Black men are stereotyped to be well endowed, but seemingly on their belief in it as well, particularly judging by the shocked reaction to the fact that the man was Black; this distances this anecdote from the previous segments where Wong was playing with existing stereotypes but not leaning into or reinforcing them.

There is clearly a grey area here of how much licence a comedian has to make jokes regarding racial stereotypes when they are themselves from a marginalised identity. Wong addresses earlier when she discusses the benefits of marrying someone of the same ethnicity and how they can be 'racist together' that she clearly understands that there is a limit to how much she can or should discuss racial stereotypes depending on who it is aimed at. The implication of this gag is that she is 'allowed' to be racist to other Asian identities because she is Asian, but that when it came to her racial stereotyping of a Cuban family her behaviour was something to be laughed at. This section on the man who refused to sleep with her is therefore

made more uncomfortable by the fact that she appears to be aware of which methods of incorporating racial stereotypes into her comedy are more socially acceptable and which portray her as ignorant. Additionally, this segment is uncharacteristically lazy comedy; jokes regarding penis size and manliness are outdated and largely considered juvenile[59], particularly when they make no attempt to subvert existing racial stereotypes.

This analysis is not to undermine Wong's other material regarding race, but to highlight that there are levels of engagement and methods of structuring comedy that involves race which do and do not work. Weaver (2010, pp. 149-155) discusses comedy that engages with different racial stereotypes in terms of reverse racial discourse, focussing on a Russell Peters anecdote regarding an interaction the comedian supposedly had with a Nigerian woman in a KFC in Beijing. In the anecdote, Peters invokes stereotypes of 'the chicken-eating black person,' 'a maladjusted or ignorant black person,' 'Orientalist' imagery, and ideas of both Black and ESEA people being 'less civilized,' but it is not entirely clear which group is the target of the joke (ibid, p. 154). The issue according to Weaver is that 'these readings are difficult to pin down, and thus remain polysemic, and less effective as anti-racism' (ibid). By this, Weaver suggests that work is only successfully anti-racist when it can only be interpreted as such, and work where there are multiple meanings (a polysemic piece of work) where one of them could be perceived as racist are therefore unsuccessful, or at least less successful. This anecdote from Wong appears to be an unsuccessful one in its reverse discourse, as the true target of the joke could be interpreted

[59] I say 'outdated' and 'juvenile' for a few reasons. Firstly, to connect penis size to manliness is an inherently trans-exclusionary stance and therefore is linked to old fashioned values, making the jokes come across as 'outdated.' As Weaver (2011, pp. 86-89) also points out, to do so in relation to stereotypes of Black people has a strong racist history of equating penis size inversely to intelligence, therefore implying that all Black people are unintelligent. Secondly, in Peter Lehman's 2007 book *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body* (p. 116), he points out that 'penis-size jokes… are generally dismissed as not worthy of serious attention. Moreover, many of the films in which these jokes occur are not prestige films.' Though he is examining the history of 'penis-size jokes and their relation to Hollywood's unconscious' rather than comedy, there is a clear, wider cultural understanding that jokes about penis size and masculinity are juvenile, particularly as they 'exploit adolescent anxiety about changing bodies and sexual discovery,' rooting them in an immature approach to the topic.

in multiple ways which may ‘rearticulate’ racism (whether it is Wong for her ignorance, the Black man, her Black friends, the Asian homeless man, or any combination of them.)

Conclusion

Wong is a comedian who is clearly aware of the impact of race on her material and the way she is perceived, but unlike Cho benefits from performing in a time where there is more ESEA representation in popular culture and therefore faces less pressure to consistently address her race and has more choice as to when she wants to bring up race in her material. She plays on racial stereotypes particularly when she is addressing her sexuality and the way in which race intersects with traditional gender roles. This also involves incorporating stereotypes of other ethnicities and utilising those to create comedic moments with more efficiency, while also largely subverting those existing stereotypes. In these moments, Wong’s persona allows her to immediately undermine any stereotypes which may be aimed at her, and also gives her flexibility to voice seemingly socially unacceptable opinions in ways which challenge existing perceptions of ESEA women.

Her approach to engaging with racial stereotypes appears to largely be that she only directly addresses them when they heighten the humour of a moment that already exists, rather than relying solely on racial stereotypes to create comedy. However, there are also moments where she incorporates stereotypes where she does not subvert them, instead utilising them to subvert another stereotype or sometimes not attempting to reverse them at all. There are areas of her work which sit on the threshold of being uncomfortable, such as when she leans into stereotypes of traditional gender roles or assumptions regarding race, but largely does this to create a bigger reaction when she subverts them later in her material.

Chapter 6: Phil Wang Case Study

Phil Wang is a Malaysian-British comedian who began his performing career in 2010 when he won the Chortle Student Comedian of the Year Award while at Cambridge. Raised in Malaysia by his Chinese-Malaysian father and British mother until he moved to the UK when he was 16, much of his material addresses his mixed race, multicultural heritage. He began frequenting television panel shows and performing at the Edinburgh Fringe before reaching wider acclaim and recognition following his appearance on the seventh series of *Taskmaster* and selling out both his 2018 tour of his show *Philly Philly Wang Wang*[60] and its subsequent 2019 Edinburgh Fringe run. Wang is now one of the most prominent ESEA stand-up comedians, particularly in the UK, and one of the only male ones to reach this acclaim.[61]

Persona and Stereotypes

Much of Wang's material is him discussing philosophical and political quandaries he encounters, and often attempts to provide an answer to them. This kind of material in particular addresses the uncertainty of being mixed race in the West, such as how he reacts when assumptions are made about him due to his race but turn out to be accurate. For example, an anecdote he has performed in multiple contexts goes as follows:

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[60] When referring to this show, there are two versions which I will be drawing from. The first version is from notes that I made after seeing the show at the Soho Theatre in London in September 2019. The second version is the recorded version that is currently available on Netflix.

[61] Though Ken Jeong is arguably the most famous male ESEA comedian and began performing comedy through stand-up, Jeong is much more well known for being an actor (*The Hangover* films (2009-2013)*, Community* (2009-2015)*, Crazy Rich Asians* (2018)) and a television personality (*The Masked Singer* (2018-present day)) than a stand-up comedian. He has released one comedy special, *You Complete Me, Ho* (2019), to mixed reception.

‘I don’t feel very welcome at home, especially, looking like this in the UK. I go around the UK doing stand-up and everywhere I go people always ask me the same question. You know, ‘Hey Phil! [Finger guns. Laughter.] Philly Philly Wang Wang. Hey Wangnam Style. [Laughter.] Hey Phil, where are you from?’ And then I say, ‘Oh, London!’ And then they say [laughs, then suddenly severe] ‘NO. Nice try, Philly Philly Wang Wang. But it seems you misunderstand the question. What I meant was, where are you originally from? Hong Kong, the Philippines, Malaysia? It upsets me, you know, ‘cause I’m British. I’ve got a British passport, I’m very proud to be British. But I think the thing is that... I am... originally from Malaysia. Which means they were right to have asked! [Laughter.] That’s the worst part of the whole thing, because ideally they shouldn’t have asked, but they were right to have asked. [Laughter.] It was a racist suspicion for them to have had, but the suspicion was correct in the end. [Laughter.] I don’t know whether to be offended by their bigotry or impressed by their detective skills. [Laughter.]’
(ABC TV & iview 2018)

He leans very heavily into being a bookish, slightly awkward person in order to deliver this material. Firstly, he repeats his name in multiple humorous ways while also making pop culture references such as to ‘Gangnam style’ and ‘Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.’ This combination of repetition and a dated pop culture reference gives a tone of ‘dad joke’ to his material; this is particularly enhanced by his awkward physicality of standing extremely upright and placing his hands on his stomach in an uncertain, rigid posture. He also does ‘finger guns’ at the audience, which is a movement that is ‘often seen as corny in a charming way’ (Dictionary.com 2022). In addition to this, Wang wears quite old fashioned glasses with large wire frames and clothing that is often quite smart—shirts buttoned all the way up with chinos and knit jumpers, all in neutral colours.

Figure 26: Phil Wang's posture while performing his material on being questioned regarding where he is from (ABC TV &iview 2018).

The impact of this physicality and his style of delivery is that he is viewed by the audience as quite nerdy—intellectually sharp but somewhat socially awkward. This is effective in delivering material regarding being questioned about his race in that his intellect gives him authority in dissecting the inference and context surrounding a supposedly innocent question, while his awkwardness endears the audience to his struggle with people who make racist assumptions about him and provides a humorous tone to his uncertainty about how to feel about the assumptions.

This segment is interesting in that, while there are two distinct punchlines at the end of the material (the reveal of 'they were right to have asked' and 'the suspicion was correct'), the audience laughs throughout the material. They appear to be laughing due to his persona, his ability to be both very confident and awkward. This can be seen when he is repeating his own

name in different ways, which in itself would not necessarily provoke laughter.[62] However, the humour seems to be derived from the manner in which he addresses himself, particularly as he is addressing himself in the third person. This makes him appear overly formal, almost misjudging the social expectation of the moment. This appears at first to be an example of the comedian being a *negative exemplar*, embodying traits which make them social outsiders (Mintz 1985, p. 74). However, the audience does not seem to be laughing at him for being tonally at odds with the situation. There is no sense of superiority of the audience over Wang, but instead a sense that they are laughing with him at how silly his name can sound. This gag works because Wang's personality is so formal and intellectual, but he is clearly *knowingly* saying silly words and phrases, and that difference is what seems to make the audience laugh.

The importance of Wang's persona in creating humour can be seen again when he delivers the response he gets from saying he is from London: 'NO. Nice try, Philly Philly Wang Wang. But it seems you misunderstand the question. What I meant was, where are you *originally* from?' The audience laughs at the end of almost every sentence here, despite it being a straightforward and quite obviously racially charged thing to say. This is a clear example of Weaver's (2010, pp. 149-153) conceptualisation of anti-racist reverse discourse, in which a comedian may use 'exclusionary language and/or stereotypes of early racism… for the purpose of appropriation or anti-racism… the reversal of racism serves the function of ridiculing the racist position.' Weaver posits that to be successful in utilising anti-racist discourse, there must be no possible misinterpretation of the intention to be anti-racist, and Wang is able to remove any possible racist interpretation of his material through the delivery. Wang is taking a question that has clear racist connotation and a history of being used to suggest that ESEA can never truly

[62] There is a slightly different variation of this delivery which will be touched upon in the 'Addressing Differences & COVID-19' subheading of this chapter where he leans into the humour of the fact that his last name is also slang for penis. However, in this particular version of the delivery I would argue that he is not implying that or provoking laughter through that specific association.

assimilate to Western culture, but is utilising his persona to deliver it in a way which clearly signals to the audience that the person asking the question is the target of the joke, rather than rearticulating any racist sentiments.

It is important to note that Wang puts on a voice for this character of the person questioning him. He enunciates even more than he already is, creating a clear distinction from his own voice with the sharper vocalisation and also lending the character an almost villainous tone. He also raises his eyebrows in an aggressive expression, further creating a subtle antagonistic quality. Again, the use of 'Philly Philly Wang Wang' as a way of seriously addressing him clashes with this harsh character with racist undertones; this not only provokes laughter but also serves to undermine this person's hurtful questioning by "making" them say something very silly. Wang frames himself as higher status than this character by making them almost cartoonishly evil in their racist intentions by playing them with exaggerated speech while also saying a childish version of Wang's name. The audience are also given space to laugh at this person, because they are made to feel superior through their recognition of the question as insensitive and racist. This is another example of Bergson's (2005, p. 66) concept of laughter as a social deterrent, where the laughter of the audience is indicative of what behaviour they find socially unacceptable.

Of his intention with this persona on stage, he explained in an interview I conducted with him in 2020:

'I don't give the audience much opportunity to laugh at me in a way I don't want them to... it's mainly because my persona is quite high status as a comedian, and so I want people to feel a little out of their comfort zones, I want there to be an element of reverence, which sounds arrogant but that's just my character, I think there should be some element of reverence in there. So that's mainly what it's mainly about, I think. I'm not your pal, you wouldn't want to have a pint with me, that's not me. I'm not your mate so I don't want it to feel like a mate-y party atmosphere.'
(Appendix F)

Wang said this specifically in relation to his ability to ensure that the audience were always laughing with him, rather than at him, particularly when discussing race and stereotypes. This idea of being 'laughed at' rather than 'laughed with' is a term which Weaver (2010, p. 151) describes as a 'racist laugh,' or laughter which is aimed at 'race stereotypes or racist exclusionary language.' It is interesting to note that his persona does not discourage comradery with the audience; he plays a likeable character and is often endearing to the audience. However, by 'mate-y' and '[having] a pint with me,' it appears he does not mean being friendly and spending time together, but rather the more traditional view of masculinity and rowdiness that drinking and 'mates' often evoke. Instead, he is prioritising intellectual conversation and philosophical debate that is often not associated with those terms. This is clear in his persona, and the fact that he does achieve moments of laughter without allowing the audience to laugh at him unintentionally. In the moments described above and throughout his work, Wang achieves what Weaver (2010, p. 154) classifies as a successful attempt at anti-racist reverse discourse through the positioning of his persona in contrast to his material, in that the intention of his performance is clearly anti-racist and does not suffer from being polysemic in a manner which could be seen as rearticulating racist rhetoric.

Sexuality & Gender

Wang's persona is also crucial in his approach to material regarding sexuality and gender. As has been explored in many sections of this thesis, ESEA stereotypes are heavily gendered and often involve both oversexualising or desexualising ESEA people. In an interview

conducted in 2018 for my Masters dissertation, Wang responded when asked whether he felt that being ESEA impacted material that was not to do with race:

> *'I feel like when I start talking about, for an East Asian guy to talk about romance and sex, it's… people don't trust me about it because East Asian males are often emasculated, and that is not the stereotype at all. It's the opposite of it. And so, yeah when I spoke about those things I think people had less trust.'*
> (Chirapiwat 2018, Appendix A)

There is perhaps an element of his British heritage also playing into his perceived sexlessness, as there are existing stereotypes of British people being prudish, but it is worth noting that Wang specifically feels that the audience's perception of him being undersexualised is linked to his ESEA heritage and not his Britishness. This is perhaps due to the fact that, at the time of writing, Wang's work has largely been in the UK and therefore the British aspect of his background has not been something that stands out to his audiences. It is clear that there is a sense that the stereotypes of asexuality and unattractiveness in ESEA men, as discussed in chapter 1, is still present in audiences, consciously or not. In order to combat this, Wang said in 2020 that:

> *'I used to, when I first started talking about sex and dating, I took the stance of being very sexually confident 'cause I thought that was a more interesting thing, to contrast directly with the perception of East Asian men. I still really don't do that many self-deprecating sexual jokes, I have a joke in my current show about how little I had sex at university, but that's true. I never make jokes about the quality of my performance because that wouldn't be true, so I don't do that in the way a lot of male comedians do.'*
> (Appendix F)

It appears that what Wang does is quite similar to what Margaret Cho does when discussing her family as expanded upon in chapter 4; when touching on experiences that could fall under

reinforcing stereotypes, they draw from truth and their lived experiences. Those become the core of those jokes rather than a perception of ESEA people. With Cho, this means that the material makes the audience laugh due to the humour of her family members' personalities and the situations they are in rather than the accents that they have. With Wang, it appears that by drawing on his actual sexual experiences rather than stereotypes of asexuality or inability to form sexual relationships, he is ensuring that the audience are never laughing at his expense but rather his attitude towards these experiences. This appears to be another moment in which the idea of a 'racist laugh' comes into play, as the comedians are taking steps to ensure that the laughter is *not* being aimed at 'race stereotypes or racist exclusionary language' (Weaver 2010, p. 151). For example, in his show *Philly Philly Wang Wang* (both the 2018 and 2021 versions) he discusses being single and dating:

'Single once more, ah yes, single fella, single now. [Laughter.] Broke up with my girlfriend, great way to become single [laughter] highly effective, it turns out [laughter.] So once more dating, dating too much, man! Dating way too much, dating far too much, chasing my tail with all the dating, running in this mirage of happiness that keeps receding further into the horizon. [Laughter.] I think I'm trying to make up for something with all this dating. I'm trying to make up for what I perceive to have been a rather sexless youth, you know? I mean, not childhood, probably for the best, whatever. [Laughter.] But like late teens, early twenties, that time in your life when you're supposed to get it out of your system, just get on your knees, batten down the hatches, and just fucking [pumps his fist in an imitation of doing hard work. Laughter.] Just experiment, fucking yeah, just fuck your way to clarity! [Laughter.] Move on, get a job, buy a sensible hatchback. [Laughter.] I never did that, never made the most of those opportunities. University, the big one, I didn't really have sex at university. For religious reasons, uhh… God hates me. [Laughter.]'
(Wiltshire 2021)

What Wang does in this segment is address both how overly active he is now in dating and how he felt he was not active enough in his 'late teens, early twenties' when people are usually perceived to be very sexually active. In framing the segment through these two contrasting states, the audience are encouraged to see him as someone who appears to be

struggling with both experiences due to their severity rather than as someone who is falling into the stereotype of being asexual or incapable of forming sexual relationships. Additionally, he takes time to frame his ‘rather sexless youth’ as something that ‘I perceive to have been’—it is clearly a matter of personal opinion and standards rather than something that society has imposed upon him. By doing this the audience have no real grounds to form their own opinion on whether they personally think he had a ‘sexless youth’ and instead follow the story through Wang’s perspective of a personal journey.

This is not to say he does not make jokes at his own expense for not being sexually active, such as his punchline that ‘God hates me.’ However, the audience here are not being set up to laugh at Wang for not being sexually active; they are being led to laugh at the incongruity of turning something that many people genuinely believe means they should not be sexually active—‘religious reasons’—into something that is comically self pitying but also directs spite at something as powerful and vague as ‘God,’ in a move that is also humorous because it is clearly something that is not actually ‘God’s’ fault. At the same time, Wang also does not make it seem like it is his own fault as he offers no explanation for it beyond the joking reason of ‘religious reasons,’ making it appear as a set of circumstances out of his control. As Wang explained, he is not being self deprecating about his abilities as he makes it clear it was circumstance rather than due to his actions/abilities, but is also not attempting to over compensate for the stereotype by playing up ‘being very sexually confident’ as he acknowledges that he was not very active during this period, and even being active has come with its own problems.

This approach to performing material regarding sexuality and relationships also undoubtedly benefits from his persona. Wang’s nerdiness allows him to derive humour from graphic material through the contrast between his poise and the sexual content. For example,

when he says ‘get it out of your system, just get on your knees, batten down the hatches, and just fucking [pumps his fist in an imitation of doing hard work.]’ The sudden aggression and enthusiasm with which he does the motion is incongruent with his very put together and rigid physicality, making it a surprising and humorous moment for the audience. It seems that the audience are not laughing at the incongruity of an ESEA man simulating vigorous sexual acts, but instead the focus is on his persona and its specific relation to the movement. Additionally, his nerdiness allows him to lean into the quite clinical approach of ‘get it out of your system’ towards having sex that further pushes the contrast once he starts performing the motion.

Figure 27: Wang moving around vigorously to simulate having a lot of sex to ‘get it out of your system’ (Wiltshirt 2021, 23:53).

There is perhaps a sense that Wang's persona, glasses, and smart dress could lead the audience towards believing that his lack of sexual activity in his youth is due to the social awkwardness associated with being nerdy. However, the confidence of his persona as well as the context of his success in a career where he performs to crowds regularly undercuts this. Additionally, the framing of the segment again leads the audience into the story via him discussing being *too* active in dating at the moment, meaning they see this lack of sexual activity as something removed from the person they are seeing now. Furthermore, if the audience were to make this connection it is likely that they would not be laughing at it, as again the segment does not give them space to laugh at Wang's expense, but rather at his attitude towards it and the word play he uses. Weaver (2010, p. 153) points out in his analysis of Russell Peters's material (as discussed on page 233) that the potential for a 'racist laugh is reduced due to Peters' clarifying use of wit,' where the humour is clearly coming from the comedic skill of the performer rather than a racist interpretation of the material, and Wang's material similarly frames his attitude and persona as the cause of comedy rather than any interaction with stereotypes.

However, Wang also addresses the impact that being ESEA has on others' perceptions of him, particularly when being viewed based on appearances alone:

'I'm on the old dating apps too, on the old apps, gotta get on the apps. That can be a depressing venture. I discovered pits of desperation I did not know I was low enough to crawl into on the dating apps. Like, have you ever swiped right on a group photo [laughter] not knowing which one of them it is [laughter], just [dismissively] 'yeah any of them, yeah whatever, I'll date anyone who can afford that ski trip.' [Laughter.] There's a labrador in there, 'I'll take the dog, whatever, he's got a healthy coat.' [Laughter.] Beggars can't be choosers I suppose, and East Asian guys, we have a difficult time on the dating apps. This is a documented phenomenon. East Asian men have the hardest time on dating apps of any group. In the West! I think, in like, Korea they're fine [laughter.] But in the West, East Asian men, Chinese men, we're rarely considered viable sexual options. It's not how we're portrayed in public culture, in media, we're never really the sexy guys. Usually we're portrayed as these sort of gormless bucktooth fools who are primarily asexual, like completely uninterested in sex, which is mad considering how many Chinese people there are. [Laughter.] 1.4 billion people, and that's with the one-child policy! We fuck so good they had to give us a rule. [Laughter, applause.] No one else got a rule. But you know,

these negative perceptions persist, but I understand. I'm not angry about it. A culture's aesthetic tastes, its beauty standards, are a difficult thing to shift, informed by many things. What a society finds beautiful is informed by its own cultural makeup, its literature, its language and poetry. And sometimes I think the English language just isn't equipped to fully appreciate East Asian male beauty. [Laughter.]'
(Wiltshire 2021)

Again, Wang frames the segment through his personal perspective before he addresses issues of stereotyping. Here, the experiences he describes of being on dating apps and finding them 'a depressing venture' is also likely very relatable to many of his audience members and therefore makes the material personal to them as well. Additionally, the inclusion of the detail that he has swiped right on group photos due to his desperation, the added reasoning of a dog that has 'a healthy coat,' and the financial identifier that 'I'll date anyone who can afford that ski trip' elevates the level of personal involvement and engagement, ensuring the audience are seeing this through the lens of Wang's life rather than any stereotypes. These characteristics on dating sites are being used as signifiers of his desperation, and the gag functions through the framing of the audience as superior to a man who is swiping right on seemingly anyone they see on a dating app; however, the humour is derived from the incongruity of seeking out potential romantic partners and these seemingly mundane and (in the case of the dog) irrelevant qualities that he is swiping right for, as he is not framing himself as inferior for reasons relating to racial stereotypes of ESEA men.

The difficulty that he does describe for ESEA men is indeed a documented effect, with OkCupid reporting that Asian men regularly have less success than other ethnicities (Wong 2019). As Wang points out, this is largely linked to the portrayal of ESEA men in popular media as the embodiment of undesirable traits such as being 'gormless… fools,' more concerned with professional success than personal relationships, 'asexual' and sexually inept, and often with malicious intent behind their pursual of women (especially white women.) The data is interesting

to see in that it is a clear indicator of these stereotypes having a lasting impact in the modern day; while portrayals are not perhaps as overt as the Fu Manchu characters of the past, they still exist and reinforce prejudices.

What Wang does in this section to address the stereotype is not only plainly lay out how it impacts ESEA men, but how ridiculous it appears when looking at other aspects of the situation. For example, the idea that ESEA men are uninterested in having sex is incompatible with the size of China's population and the perceived necessity of the one-child policy. The one-child policy is also a widely known one from China and Wang uses it as a reference point that many of the white audience will recognise as well as the references to unflattering sexual stereotypes; by pointing out that they hold both ideas of ESEA people in their general perception despite their inherent incompatibility, Wang shows them the duplicity in Western portrayals of ESEA. He not only subverts the stereotype, but frames ESEA people as being *more* sexually active and able than Western men, as 'we fuck so good they had to give us a rule' whereas such policies do not exist in the West.

He also addresses the stereotypes in a manner that does not blame ESEA men for the portrayals, but also does not entirely blame the West either; instead, he provides the alternative that 'the English language just isn't equipped to fully appreciate ESEA male beauty.' The line provokes laughter, partially due to the unexpected sincerity of his referencing 'ESEA male beauty' in a straight-face manner, but also the self-congratulating implication that he is referring to himself as someone who exhibits 'ESEA male beauty.' What this achieves is drawing cultural differences and misunderstandings into the focus, which somewhat tones down the contrasts and racial dynamics that he has been laying out. He also highlights that 'I'm not angry about it,' saying he understands that different cultures have different reference points. What this approach to the history of ESEA representation and its direct impact on him is perhaps doing is

ensuring that Wang does not appear at all to fall into the characteristics of the Fu Manchu stereotype. This stereotype is one that suggests that ESEA men are driven by their lack of romantic and sexual success into bitterness against Western culture to the point where they assault, drug, or kidnap women in order to force them into relationships with ESEA men. While this association may not be at the forefront of the audience's perception of the material, it is possible that Wang is preempting it and therefore relieving any tension by presenting himself as understanding of it despite its impact on his performance on dating apps.

In these segments on dating and sexuality, Wang appears to be taking steps to ensure that he is not at any point falling into stereotypes and is being understood through his own actions and persona rather than any preconceived notions of how ESEA behave. At the same time, he is able to directly address ESEA representation in the West and how it still negatively impacts his and others' lives, particularly on platforms that prioritise appearances such as dating apps. He does this by pointing out the inconsistencies in Western ideas of ESEA men while also carefully structuring his anecdotes to control where and at what the audience are laughing at.

Addressing Differences & COVID-19

It is common for comedians who are from minority demographics (relative to their audience) to begin their performances by addressing what 'others' them from the crowd; Mintz's (1985, p. 74) idea of the comedian as an outsider shows that stand-ups often draw upon the characteristics that differentiate them from their audience. As touched on in chapter 4 on Margeret Cho, this is no different for ESEA performers who preempt assumptions about their character based on their appearance. Wang begins his show, both in 2019 and 2021, by doing

precisely this. One of his signature comedic signatures, as shown in the opening of this chapter, is his repetition of his name with slight variations, both as a way of introducing himself and as a way to refer to himself in third person throughout his performances. *Philly Philly Wang Wang* takes its title from perhaps the most well known iteration of this, with Wang coming on stage and greeting the audience with a 'Here I am, old Philly Philly Wang Wang.' This usually goes on for a while, with variations such as 'Wangnam Style,' 'Wang Bang,' and 'Gang Wang.' He utilises this to point out how his name relates to his appearance and ethnicity, telling the audience:

'Phil Wang. I'm a mixed race fella, as the name 'Phil [beat] Wang' might suggest. [Laughter]. At some point here, a cultural compromise was made. [Laughter.] My father is Chinese Malaysian, hence the Wang. And the rest of my body. [Laughter.] My father is Chinese Malaysian, but my mother is, uh, normal. [Laughter.] Yeah, got some sour cream in that chilli. [Laughter.] Don't want you to burn your tongue on that hot Wang so mama brought the milk. [Laughter.] White and Chinese, those are my races, white and Chinese. Phil and Wang, white and Chinese. I'm the most powerful race on Earth! [Laughter.] I've got the big ones baby, smoosh them together, I'm white and Chinese. People have tried to tell me that I'm a minority? [Scoffs.] I'm like, I'm both majorities, bitch. [Laughter.] I'm white and Chinese! You can't touch me, I'm Pepsi and Coke. I've got full market share… I'm everywhere, you can't run from me, I'm around every corner. [Pretends to peek around one corner] Hello. [Pretends to peek around another corner] Ni Hao! [Laughter.] I'm Alien and Predator… I'm future-proof, baby, completely future-proof. No matter what happens over the next fifty years, Wang, [beat] or Phil, is fine. [Beat.] Probably Wang though. [Laughter.]'
(Wiltshire 2021)

This opening serves two functions. Firstly, it introduces Wang's persona to the audience: the repetitive style of his delivery that runs throughout the material is immediately used, highlighting the intellectual but awkward character expanded upon above. He additionally leans into the humour of his last name also being slang for penis, as he explains 'hence the Wang. And the rest of my body.' This joke provides a set-up for the second function of the opening, which is that it immediately addresses his racial and cultural background to the audience. The

suggestion of the joke, which is to make the audience believe that he is explaining his Chinese last name is due to his father's heritage before revealing that he was actually referring to his penis, is interesting in that it subtly plays on a racial stereotype. As discussed in chapter 5, there is a long standing stereotype of ESEA men having small penises and this being linked to their emasculated representation. What Wang is perhaps making his audience immediately think of is this stereotype by invoking language about both his ESEA background and his penis. This leads into the rest of the segment in that he then directly addresses being mixed race and the implications this has had on the way he is treated.

This is a tactic to address what the audience is thinking in order to prevent it from distracting them. Wang himself said that 'race is a bit like that, I feel like I have to get it out of the way before I talk about things. In the same way a lot of gay comedians, if they're quite camp or they're quite obviously queer, they feel they have to say something early on so people can get it out of the way and move on and listen to them about other things' (Appendix F). In an interview in 2018 he additionally said that 'I've always maybe sensed there's a certain amount of tension in talking about Britishness. Speaking about things that are more local, I think sometimes I feel like an audience doesn't trust me because they don't think I can, you know, talk about truth—I'm an outsider, fundamentally' (Chirapiwat 2018, Appendix A). By addressing his race at the very beginning and pointing out that he is mixed race, specifically with a British heritage, he earns the audience's trust where they would otherwise not believe he can speak on British experiences and culture.

Wang utilises his repetitive delivery to set up a recognisable structure through which the audience can understand his background, very clearly laying out his racial identity. In this segment, the structure is firstly to equate each of his names to a racial identity. His surname is used to represent being Chinese Malaysian, which he then equates to chilli and spiciness as

ESEA food is known for being very spicy. His first name, representative of being British, is firstly equated to being 'normal,' then to sour cream and milk. In other performances, he has followed up this section by acknowledging that many people consider this joke about his mother being 'normal' offensive, but that is 'only because you knew I meant white.' This usually provokes a big laugh, as the audience members who did consider it offensive realise that they had the instinct to equate 'normal' with whiteness, and the audience members who did not consider it offensive laugh at those who did and have now been called out for their own problematic behaviour. This is another example of anti-racist reverse discourse, in which a notion that is historically linked to racism (whiteness being the default) is utilised to ridicule racism (Weaver 2010, pp. 149-150). The reference to food is twofold; firstly, sour cream is often used in food to counter spiciness, so in relation to the 'spicy' part of his identity it is a reaction. Secondly, Western (specifically British and American) food is often the butt of jokes for being considered bland or lacking spices[63], so he uses two very mild foods to represent this side of his identity.

Wang then goes on to compare being both Chinese and white to being 'the most powerful race on Earth,' 'the big ones,' and both majorities.' In doing this, he is turning what many people consider to be a disadvantage in Western society—being mixed race and/or global majority—into a positive, equating it to actually holding more power. This is likely also referencing the fear that has existed in white, Western society that mixed race children and the mixed race relationships that produce them are a threat to the traditional way of life; as expanded upon in chapter 1 to 3, various laws prohibiting interracial relationships and the depiction of them in media are clear indicators that these fears have been present and impactful throughout history.

[63] For example, in an episode of *Goodness Gracious Me* (1998-2001) the characters 'go for an English' (the way many people say they will 'go for an Indian'/'go for a Chinese' when going to restaurants of other nationalities' cuisines) and proudly asked for 'the blandest thing on the menu' (BBC Comedy Greats 2021).

The analogy then becomes less specific, with being white and Chinese being compared to being both ‘Pepsi and Coke’ and ‘Alien and Predator,’ two examples of famously powerful competitors. The effect here is to infer to the audience that, while they are known to be in opposition to each other, being both means that he has won the notorious battles and is uniquely positioned as the champion. This analogy is interesting in that it frames the West and ESEA as opponents who are actively battling each other, even if that sense of antagonism is not addressed in favour of highlighting Wang’s position as the ‘winner.’ This is perhaps a reflection of modern Yellow Peril and the constant fear that China is attempting to overthrow the West (in particular the US); with the COVID-19 pandemic this has been particularly apparent. As early as February 2020 the BBC was reporting Sinophobia across the globe, with many calling Chinese people ‘bio terrorists’ and accusing them of purposefully spreading the virus (Wong 2020). However, even before COVID-19 there were fears of Chinese world dominance, such as through the construction of 5G towers which led to ‘several governments around the world [blocking] telecoms companies from using Huawei gear in next-generation 5G mobile networks, citing security concerns’ (BBC 2019). Comedian Evelyn Mok stated in an interview (Appendix G) that she used to have a joke about China ‘taking over’ that she now feels she should not perform because ‘I was punching up, but now... people are actually angry with Chinese people because they are dominating and taking over, so it’s really tricky. I think if you do that you always have to be aware of what is out there as a stereotype and what people are thinking and saying and it’s tough.’ From her knowledge of what audiences respond to and how, it appears that there is a sense that China is actually posing a threat to the West, or at least that idea is one that is common enough that most people are aware of its potential to be accurate.

Another interesting aspect of this analogy and the inferred rivalry between the West and ESEA is that the idea that they cannot be combined or united has roots in the perceptions of

who can assimilate in the West. Stereotypes of ESEA people that painted them as unassimilable such as religious beliefs, accents, and habits created a perception that it was not possible to be both Western (particularly American) and ESEA, as they were diametrically opposed. As Said (2003) further explains, the ideals of the West were created in opposition to the perceptions of the East, which meant that, to belong to one, you had to be the opposite of the other.

Wang further plays on both these subtexts by continuing to suggest that he is easily able to switch from one 'side' of the battle to the other. By saying that 'Phil, or Wang, is fine. Probably Wang though,' he is again equating the two elements of his identity to the two parts of his name and therefore suggesting that, whichever side is most beneficial to be on, he can be addressed by the appropriate name and always be on the winning side. Again, Wang is painting his identity as the ultimate victory rather than the disadvantage it is often seen as in another example of reverse discourse, taking a previous disadvantage due to race to become a positive while ridiculing racist attitudes (Weaver 2010, pp. 149-154). Interestingly, the gag could fall into being an example of the theory of superiority, as the audience could be led to laugh here because Wang is showing himself to be somewhat cowardly, holding no true loyalty to either side and only looking after his own interests. However, there is no sense of the audience laughing because they feel higher status than Wang; instead, his persona and the structure of the joke allows him to retain the higher ground. There is a feeling that he is displaying wit in manipulating his position to his advantage, because there is a general acceptance that, in the society he is currently in, he faces many disadvantages and discrimination but is able to twist the scenario to his benefit. This is exacerbated by his high status persona who is very assured in explaining precisely how he has manipulated the situation to make himself the 'winner.' Therefore, I would argue that the audience are not laughing through any sense of superiority but at the incongruity

of someone using something that has historically been an adverse circumstance to achieve both world domination and a guaranteed safe future. Wang's persona serves to achieve this reaction and prevent him from being laughed at or viewed as inferior to the audience in any way.

The next section of *Philly Philly Wang Wang* directly addresses the impact of COVID-19 on ESEA people in the West. Wang explains:

> *'It's weird looking like me at the moment. In the wake of the COVID pandemic, it's weird looking like me [beat]. Chinese, not muscular. [Laughter]. It's weird looking Chinese at the moment. This whole pandemic, it's been bad for the brand to say the least, [laughter] honestly, the last thing we needed. Especially in the UK, the last thing East Asian Chinese Brits needed. East Asians in Britain, very low profile in the UK, so low in fact that we don't even have the word Asian here! [Laughter.] Most places in the world, we have at least the word Asian, not in the UK, in the UK the word Asian usually refers to South Asian, right? Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, which is fine, but there's this whole other half of Asia that they're missing out on! A whole other, I would say, bigger half. [Laughter.]'*
>
> (Wiltshire 2021)

Wang lays out here the context of being ESEA in the UK, prior to the pandemic. He points out that ESEA people are largely underrepresented and unacknowledged there. This partially has roots in the idea of homogenised ESEA people; for example, most forms—including the national census—list 'Asian or Asian British' ethnicities as Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, or other Asian background, but do not list any other ESEA backgrounds (Office for National Statistics 2021). Additionally, the audience let out a laugh of recognition when he points out that 'we don't even have the word Asian here!' which clearly signifies that there does exist a cultural understanding of 'Asian' to mean 'South Asian' in the UK whereas elsewhere it usually means ESEA. The humour of this section appears to come from Wang pointing out this cultural anomaly and emphasising how strange it is considering there is 'a whole other, I would say, bigger half' of Asia that is being neglected by this term.

There is no sense of South Asia and its monopoly over the term ‘Asian’ in the UK being the target of the joke here, but rather that the British framing of Asia is being laughed at.

What Wang does in this section is both acknowledge to the audience that the impact of COVID-19 for ESEA people has been extremely negative, but also that this is on top of existing prejudices against ESEA people. He begins to dissect the attitudes of the West/UK towards ESEA people in order to fully illustrate how the pandemic has built upon that foundation as well as exacerbated existing issues. He continues:

> *‘There’s two types of Asian in the world. [Hurriedly] There’s more, but I don’t have that much time. [Laughter.] Fundamentally, there are two main categories of Asian in the world: there’s Cricket Asian [beat for laughter]. By the sounds of it, you already know who those guys are, you’ve never heard Cricket Asian in your life and instantly you knew who I was talking about. [Laugher.] So, there’s Cricket Asian and then there’s Eats Weird Shit Asian. [Laughter.] Now, I am a member of Eats Weird Shit Asian, I’m a proud Eats Weird Shit Asian, I eats that weird shit! [Laughter.]’*
> (Wiltshire 2021)

Here, he is further dissecting the perceptions of ESEA in the UK. The joke he makes of ‘there’s more, but I don’t have that much time’ is partially a joke on how broad and inaccurate his statement that there are only ‘two types of Asian in the world’ is, but also on how homogenised the British view of Asia is. This is further expanded upon when the two ‘types’ that he explains exist. ‘Cricket Asian’ is clearly meant to cover the countries in Asia that are most renowned for playing cricket; for example, in the 2019 ICC Cricket World Cup, the ten participating countries included Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Interestingly, these are also the four countries that Wang names when he is describing how ‘Asian’ means ‘South Asian’ in the UK—it appears that he is equating the two, and understands that the audience will also likely consider the countries defined by ‘Asia’ in the UK as the ‘Cricket Asian’ countries. This link between ‘Asian’ meaning South Asian in the UK and the fact that they are ‘Cricket Asians’ is

likely due to the fact that these countries have strong ties with British imperialism; as Malcolm (2013, p. 48) describes it, 'the description of cricket as *The Imperial Game* (Stoddart and Sandiford 1998) is almost as commonplace as describing cricket as the quintessential English game. For Mangan (1986: 153), cricket was the 'umbilical cord of Empire linking the mother country with her children.''

On the other side, 'Eats Weird Shit Asia' appears to then cover the 'bigger half' of Asia, meaning ESEA. The depiction of ESEA people as eating 'weird shit' is not new; the case study from chapter 1 on the vaudeville sketch *The C**n and the Ch*nk* (1912) involves gags that play on the stereotype that Chinese people's food is rancid and/or made up of questionable ingredients. Since then the stereotype has evolved to cover most of ESEA, in particular regarding the perception that ESEA people eat animals such as dogs, cats, and mice as well as tourists often eating insects for the novelty experience when visiting ESEA countries. With the outbreak of COVID-19, this stereotype has returned to the forefront of public perceptions of ESEA people and culture. As Zhang (2020) puts it:

> *'The outbreak has had a decidedly dehumanizing effect, reigniting old strains of racism and xenophobia that frame Chinese people as uncivilized, barbaric "others" who bring with them dangerous, contagious diseases and an appetite for dogs, cats, and other animals outside the norms of Occidental diets. These ideas, perennially the subtext behind how Chinese people are viewed by the Western gaze, have been given oxygen anew after preliminary reports linked the coronavirus outbreak to a Wuhan wet market where produce and meat are sold alongside livestock and more exotic wildlife like snakes, civet cats, and bamboo rats; and to bats, which are frequent carriers of viruses that cause human disease.'*

As Zhang points out, the renewal of this stereotype largely comes from the idea that COVID-19 began in a Chinese wet market where people were supposedly buying animals that are not 'socially permissible to eat' in the West for consumption, despite the fact that there is no evidence to confirm this theory, or any of the virus's origins (ibid). By describing seemingly the

entirety of ESEA through this stereotype, Wang is achieving several things. Firstly, he makes the audience laugh, both from recognition of this stereotype as well as through the continued absurdity of simplifying all of ESEA into 'two types.' Again, Wang is not describing what he genuinely views as the two categories of Asia, but what the West views Asia as, and therefore the exaggerated stereotyping and simplification appears to be criticising the perceptions of ESEA by Western cultures. This is an example of anti-racist reverse discourse, as Wang is taking an existing racist construct (the homogenised 'Orient') and framing it such that racism is the target of the comedy rather than rearticulating the original racist sentiment (Weaver 2010, pp. 149-154). Secondly, Wang is setting up the following material in which he fully embraces being an 'Eats Weird Shit Asian' while also addressing the current climate in which that trait is being scrutinised:

'But it's kinda awkward being an Eats Weird Shit Asian at the moment because that's how this whole catastrophe started in the first place. [Laughter.] One of us ate one piece of weird shit too far. [Laughter.] After centuries of living on the wild side we pushed our luck and it finally snapped [laughter] on the wings of a bat, it's awful. Why now? It's always been fine until now, I ate weird shit as a kid, nothing like this ever happened. Growing up in Malaysia I was eating weird shit, loved it! Loved eating weird shit! I would eat squid jerky [growls while miming eating something tough], I was eating little wriggly sea snails [popping sounds] straight out of the shell [slurping sound, laughter], I was eating jellyfish, I was eating pig intestine soup, we'd eat the whole fish for dinner. My little sister would go 'Shotgun the eyes!' [laughter] and me and my other sister would be like [disappointed] 'aww' [laughter.] It's just a different culture out there. In the West people are a little squeamish about the more extreme ends of the culinary spectrum, out in the East there's a sense of delicacy to the strange, nowhere more so than China. China itself. I got to see this firsthand in China recently, went there for the first time. China, the big C, Asia Classic, [laughter] Chinatown Plus. China. [Laughter.] At the start of 2020 I got to go to China. [Beat] Unrelated, it wasn't me.'
(Wiltshire 2021)

This segment is a combination of Wang expressing hesitancy to embrace being an 'Eats Weird Shit Asian' due to the perceptions of COVID-19 and ESEA people, while also being very

celebratory of the ‘weird shit’ he grew up eating and still enjoys eating. He begins and ends the section by referencing COVID-19, first by saying that it is ‘awkward’ to be ESEA at the moment because ‘that’s how this whole catastrophe started in the first place.’ This again appears to be framed as a reference to how the virus was widely believed to have developed, rather than a belief that Wang himself holds about the origins of COVID-19. The reference is very broad and quite neutral—he does not imply that it was purposefully created or specifically mention where he believes it came from, instead generally discussing wet markets and eating animals as cultural reference points. He ends the material by saying that he was in China in 2020 and qualifying it was ‘unrelated, it wasn’t me.’ This suggests that he believes the audience will immediately link him enjoying ‘eating weird shit’ and being in China at the beginning of 2020 with the supposed origins of the virus and therefore he needs to assure them that he did not start COVID-19. However, I believe the humour of this gag is not from him jumping in to assure a suspicious audience that he was not guilty, but rather from the fact that the audience did not actually think to link those elements and by addressing it first he is coming across as paranoid or overly cautious. There is a pause between him revealing he was in China in 2020 and the statement ‘it wasn’t me,’ in which there is no laughter or tension, suggesting that the audience had not jumped to that conclusion yet. The audience appears to be laughing because he is acting exceedingly carefully about his involvement in the creation of the virus, when it is absurd for someone so far removed from the situation to be considered the culprit. He says ‘it wasn’t me’ in a very assured and slightly offhand way, but puts emphasis on it by taking a beat before and after saying it, punctuating it with silence and laughter. The effect of saying something quite cautious in a confident way gives the impression that he is certain that he is not guilty, but also certain that this is in question, as if he is being interrogated. This gag is likely following on from the paranoia that he is describing of ESEA people being discriminated against by people with

racist beliefs, leading to him acting as if he is constantly being questioned regarding his involvement with COVID-19.

In between these references to COVID-19, Wang discusses his love of ‘weird shit’ and what kinds of foods that he grew up eating. Interestingly, there is not much laughter throughout the section where he is describing the foods he ate as a child. There is laughter when he makes a popping sound while miming eating a snail out of its shell, when he imitates his sister saying ‘shotgun the eyes!’ and then when he imitates himself and his sister going ‘aww!’ in disappointment.

Figure 28: Wang energetically depicting the enthusiasm of his sister saying ‘Shotgun the eyes!’ when eating fish as a family (Wiltshire 2021, 7:26).

These laughs do not appear to come from the descriptions of food, but from him doing voices and sounds that are humorous. Wang’s high status, intellectual character makes for a humorous

contrast between his persona and anything that could be perceived as 'silly,' such as the sound effects and voices that he makes in this section that provoke laughter. The lack of laughter around these are particularly telling of the dynamic between himself and the audience. It appears that the audience are not laughing at the foods being described because Wang does not frame them as gags; instead, he is being very straightforward about describing dishes he enjoys and how fondly he remembers them from his childhood. The effect of this is that Wang is providing a sincere insight into his relationship with 'weird shit' without making his culture or upbringing the butt of the joke. This subverts the Western view of ESEA that he has set up—the idea of 'weird shit' that has historically been laughed at is being described through the lens of his lived experience and culture rather than a gag. In light of the discomfort he has felt due to COVID-19 this is providing a relief from the projection of Western ideals onto ESEA culture and the use of it as a gag.

It is also likely that the audience, who appears to be mostly white[64], are very aware and cautious of what they should or should not laugh at. Wang references this anxiety at several points in the special, often getting the audience to laugh at themselves for being so on edge regarding whether it is politically correct for them to laugh at. For example, he performs a short anecdote about his Japanese barber while doing a Japanese accent, which provokes light laughter throughout.[65] He then says:

> *'Now I feel like some of you got uncomfortable when I started doing a Japanese accent there. Which is of course… insane. [Laughter.] But I understand. These are racially fractious times,*

[64] This is partially based on shots of the audience in the special, but mostly through my experience attending the second of the two filmed performances for Netflix.

[65] It is important to note that in this exact instance, I believe Wang sets himself up to get fewer laughs than the rest of the show in order to do this segment, which specifically discusses getting a smaller reaction than usual. The anecdote he tells does not have a clear comedic structure, and he ends it by saying 'There's no point to this story, I just think it's funny when [my barber] says 'whatchamacallit.'' There is no clear punchline, and the only moments of clear humour are Wang clearly finding it funny that his barber says 'whatchamacallit' in a thick Japanese accent. There are not big moments of laughter because Wang is not setting them up.

aren't they? Hard to know what is right and wrong, what is acceptable and what is not, what you can laugh at and what you can't. Far be it for me to expect you to take an unnecessary risk for my benefit. [Disgruntled face, laughter.]'
(Wiltshire 2021)

What Wang is acknowledging is a tension in the audience between their desire to be 'right' or 'acceptable' and their obligation to laugh at him because he is a comedian performing a show—especially one that is being recorded for Netflix and therefore will be viewed much more and by a wider audience than a standard stand-up show. This is a clear example of Freud's idea of relief theory, where the audience's energy that is normally used to suppress racist thoughts is instead channelled into laughter; Wang draws a direct correlation in his joke between tension (suppressing the instinct to laugh because they want to be morally 'right') and relief through laughter (allowing themselves to laugh despite not wanting to imply that they are racist by condoning racial accents through their laughter). This is also an example of superiority theory and Bergson's (2005, p. 66) idea of laughter as a social deterrent, as the audience stops themselves from laughing because they do not want to suggest that having a thick Japanese accent is wrong or worth mocking, then later laugh at their past selves for being overly cautious and overthinking Wang's joke. The audience is able to laugh here because Wang has called them out for being concerned with whether or not they should laugh when they are at a comedy show, which he frames as ridiculous and 'insane.' There is a clear cultural reference of people being aware of what they should laugh at and fears of being perceived as racist for laughing at the wrong moments.

Wang expands more on this idea of being right and acceptable during the COVID-19 pandemic later in the show, saying:

'It's difficult to feel like a good person, all the time at the moment. I don't feel like a good person at the moment. Especially in the wake of this COVID pandemic, I feel—it sounds silly—a little

responsible for it all, because if we're out to believe the leading theory, this pandemic, this virus, started in a meat market in China, so if you're being lazy and a bit racist about the whole thing you could blame the pandemic on two groups of people: Chinese people and meat eaters. Now, I don't know about you, but I am both of those things. [Laughter.] I'm a Chinese meat eater, alright. One of those things I can't change, obviously, no matter how hard I try I can't do anything about. The other would require some sort of facial reconstruction to look less Chinese. [Laughter.]'
(Wiltshire 2021)

In this segment, Wang is pointing out that the supposed causes of the pandemic that he has been discussing—Chinese wet markets and the consumption of certain animals—is actually 'the leading theory,' rather than fact. This again serves to highlight that these are Western beliefs regarding the involvement of Chinese people and culture in the creation of the virus, rather than verified fact. He goes further to bluntly say that this pattern of blame is upheld by people who are 'being lazy and a bit racist about the whole thing.' Much like when he slightly dismissed himself for saying there are only 'two types of Asian' by saying 'there's more but I don't have that much time,' he is pointing out the discriminatory methods behind the Western views that he is mocking by emphasising how unreasonable they are.

However, he also admits that he feels 'a little responsible for it' due to this pattern of blame. What the audience may assume here is that the rise in racist stereotyping of ESEA people due to COVID-19 has made him internalise some of the blame despite clearly not being guilty of creating the virus. Wang further pushes this expectation by saying that, as 'a Chinese meat eater' there is one aspect of his identity that 'I can't change, obviously, no matter how hard I try I can't do anything about.' This deceives the audience into thinking he is talking about being discriminated against for being Chinese, something he was born as and cannot change. However, Wang subverts this expectation by saying that 'the other would require some sort of facial reconstruction to look less Chinese,' revealing that the trait that he 'can't change' is in fact eating meat, not his ethnicity. The audience laughs because they realise the incongruity of

discussing being unable to change an aspect of your identity while being blamed for a pandemic because of it, with the silliness of the aspect being something that is as easily changeable as eating meat, which is not inherent to his identity. What this achieves is firstly to imbue this segment with humour, as the tone is quite serious until the reveal, as seen through the intentional lack of laughter. Secondly, it highlights what Wang was subverting in his gag—that it is ridiculous for someone to be discriminated against and blamed for a virus due to something that cannot be changed and that they did not choose to be.

It is clear that Wang is aware of the nuances of his audience's understanding of ESEA culture and the way in which this relates to how the media has framed COVID-19. This is likely at least partially due to the fact that Wang performed this show from 2018 until 2021, meaning he was adapting his material as the outbreaks began and into the lockdowns which followed. In an interview at the beginning of 2020, when knowledge and fear of the virus was beginning to spread but prior to the lockdowns, Wang said:

'I've been on tour with Yuriko Kotani who's Japanese, and so we're these two East Asian people who are going from town to town in the height of the Coronavirus so on stage I called us the Coronavirus tour, COVID-19 Live. So that gets it out of the way and then you can move on and talk about other things…'[66]
(Appendix F)

It is evident here that he has not only been keeping up to date with how perceptions of ESEA people are changing throughout this period, but also that he has clearly felt that it was impacting how audiences received him and his material. As such, it appears that there has been a return to the pressure for ESEA comedians to address race in their work in relation to COVID-19,

[66] It is worth noting that Wang refers to this period as 'the height of the Coronavirus' as, at this point, there was no indication of how widespread the virus would become or the sociopolitical impact it would have.

where the more recent years of Margaret Cho's work and the beginning years of Ali Wong and Phil Wang's careers saw a decrease in the pressure to do so in general.

Coda: ESEA Comedians Engaging with COVID-19

Whilst this chapter has focused on Phil Wang's work, it is important to acknowledge that other ESEA comedians have been addressing the changes that have occurred due to COVID-19 in their comedy. Chinese-British stand-up comedian Ken Cheng similarly voiced in an interview conducted in 2022 that he wrote material on COVID-19 in 2020 'as East Asians were brought to the forefront for a few months… I was actually looking to get away from talking about that kind of stuff, specifically racism itself, not necessarily just race… But then obviously, the pandemic happened and Asian hate, all the Asian hate started rising. So I had to really talk about it' (Appendix H). At the same time, Cheng also emphasised that he felt that COVID-19 was more of 'a new reference point' that hasn't 'fundamentally' changed his approach to comedy, and that 'after [COVID-19], I probably will just go to whatever is the current topic' (Appendix H). Evelyn Mok similarly expressed that COVID-19 was being discussed by 'all comics… but Asian comics are going to address the racism of it' (Appendix G). This suggests that there has been a trend of ESEA stand-up comedians feeling the need to address the topic but that they already had the comedic tools to do so, in the same way many of them felt that they had to address race when they first started stand up (Appendices G-I).

It is interesting to note that the comedians interviewed expressed how they feel comedy is a powerful format through which to address such heavy topics. Cheng spoke on the idea that comedy is engaging to a wider audience than, for example, 'a lecture about racism or colonialism or the history of the UK', and therefore by addressing topics such as racism in

comedy, comedians are able to encourage more people to view topics from new perspectives while also making them laugh. Mok, who was and knows people close to her who were victims of anti-Asian hate crimes during the pandemic, discussed the catharsis of being able to touch on topics that are graphically and seriously portrayed in media in a manner that releases tension by allowing people to laugh, particularly for ESEA audiences. This ability to utilise comedy to engage with racially charged shifts in popular culture and public perception is perhaps indicative of the fact that, with greater ESEA representation, there is space for ESEA stand-up comedians to discuss more complex and varying issues with nuance than simply address their cultural backgrounds to the audience. In my analyses of the comedy spanning from the 1980s to present day, it does appear that, though there have been large scale changes and there is by no means a linear path, the representation of ESEA in comedy has grown and continues to create space for more ESEA stand-up comedians to perform on more topics. As Wang pointed out in an interview, ‘I also feel a lot less alone now because there are more East Asian comics out there’ (Appendix F).

Conclusion

Wang’s work engages selectively with perceptions of ESEA men, particularly when in relation to stereotypes regarding romantic and sexual relationships, as well as in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These are the areas which he has discerned to be the most impacted by racial stereotypes and therefore works to address them specifically, as well as build his audience’s trust in his ability to discuss them. His high status, intellectual persona allows him to discuss topics which could potentially be interpreted in ways which target racial stereotypes with clarity and authority, to ensure that laughter is instead directed at perpetuators of racism.

This presentation of his character additionally aids him in touching on difficult and uncertain areas, such as morality, discrimination, and the paranoia around ESEA people during COVID-19 in a manner that is both comedic and informative, providing the audience with a new perspective on the topics. He also incorporates an awkwardness and formality into his delivery of material which creates incongruity between his persona and moments of silliness and absurdity and often directs the audience's laughter at himself rather than at potential stereotypes. There are times where he preempts appearing to fall into a stereotype, and either addresses this directly or works to actively subvert them in the framing of the material.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have provided and original contribution to knowledge by creating a genealogy of ESEA stereotypes in the English-speaking West and its representation, perpetuation, and interaction within comedy, utilising a Foucauldian approach by tracking changes in these stereotypes through history without negating their continued impact on ESEA people. This genealogy is the first to collate existing writing and sources regarding ESEA stereotyping in the West in this manner, focusing on the roots and branches of these perceptions across the time period specified. It largely draws upon primary sources which create the 'network' of small and large shifts in understandings ('truths) and also incorporates existing writing regarding ESEA history and identity, comic theory, and stereotypes in performance where relevant.

In the first chapter, I outlined the existing Western understanding of ESEA, prior to the first instances of large-scale immigration of ESEA people to the West. Stereotypes of a strictly traditional, opulent, and philosophical people began here, as well as images of opium addiction and peasants who were greatly suffering under a large class disparity that painted the East as a homogenous, backwards society. These ideas of what the 'Orient' was were largely influenced by stories brought back by traders, sailors, and soldiers. Additionally, the concept of Orientalism, as coined by Said (2003), meant that understandings of the 'Orient' were largely framed through the Western perception of their own identity as the 'opposite' of the East's; this meant that the characteristics and culture of ESEA were understood through a perspective that inherently and perpetually othered them.

Once large numbers of ESEA labourers arrived in the US, these existing ideas were expanded upon through the narrow frame of reference which the interactions between white and

ESEA labourers provided. ESEA men who were largely seen without female companions were understood to be asexual, when in reality many of them had wives and families in China that they sent their earnings back to and who had not immigrated with them due to the associated risk. From this, the stereotype of romantically and sexually inept ESEA men emerged, and its continued impact is still addressed in contemporary comedy by performers such as Phil Wang. Their willingness to work jobs that were considered traditionally feminine such as laundry and cooking was additionally interpreted as signifying that they were inherently effeminate and weaker than Western men. These men had few rights and were there solely to work, and therefore did not often retaliate when discriminated against, even when violence was involved, and this further pushed effeminate stereotypes as well as creating the idea of the 'model minority' who endures abuse in exchange for being allowed to exist in a supposedly superior Western society. This idea is one that Ali Wong continues to address in her work, both as a stereotype that has been applied to her and particularly one that has impacted the ESEA men in her life.

The few ESEA women who interacted with Western communities were often trafficked there as prostitutes, and very few married women travelled West with their partners. As a result, Western communities largely only saw ESEA women in situations where they had little to no autonomy, were sexualised, and were in dire conditions. These women were also often blamed for the moral shortcomings of white men and boys who were found to have venereal disease, as they were accused of seducing the men. This led to the creation of stereotypes of ESEA women being hypersexualised, wanting to be dominated, and requiring a white man to save her, often called the Lotus Blossom stereotype. It also led to the rise of the Dragon Lady stereotype, in which ESEA women do not seek sexual relationships for their own pleasure but instead to manipulate and corrupt white men to doing their bidding. These are both representations which

comedians such as Margaret Cho and Ali Wong have actively worked to subvert in order to be seen as more than stereotypes, but instead as individuals who place importance on their own pleasure rather than only pleasing others as has been shown historically.

The case study for chapter 1, a script for the vaudeville sketch *The C**n and the Ch*nk* (1912), further reveals how ESEA people and stereotypes interacted with the existing racism in the USA; African American people were previously considered intrinsically "un-American" in relation to the white population, but once ESEA people began settling in the country this raised the question of whether they were more or less assimilable than African American people. The sketch clearly draws on many different racist stereotypes towards both demographics, indicating that public understanding of ESEA people was widely established enough for audiences to understand references and their implied attitude towards ESEA people. The sketch could be interpreted in several ways, depending on the audience's stance towards African American and ESEA people's supposed ability to assimilate to Western culture; there is potential for it to be read as a suggestion that both groups are completely unassimilable, as well as implying that African American people were superior to ESEA people, but the amount of derogatory language used against both groups suggests that the main intention was the former reading. Additionally, the comedy of the sketch appears to rely on the audience being framed as superior to both groups, in addition to moments of the characters outsmarting each other. While the specific dynamics of this case study have greatly shifted across time, in Ali Wong's work regarding stereotypes of Black and ESEA men there is a sense in which those racial associations are still greatly interlinked today, often in opposition to each other.

In chapter 2, I covered the development of 'Yellow Peril' and how it became assigned to different nationalities across WWI and WWII. With this came more nuanced understandings of ESEA cultures and nationalities; however, there was little change in Western perceptions of

ESEA, as media leaned into both vilifying and victimising different areas through the use of existing stereotypes. ESEA residents in the US and UK faced harsher discrimination and attacks from the public and their communities, particularly as many could not tell different ESEA nationalities apart based solely on appearance. Though Chinese and Japanese forces aided the Allies in WWI, there were additional pressures such as job shortages and rising miscegenation due to more ESEA people settling in Western countries that led to anti-Asian sentiment and culminated in many violent acts against ESEA people and businesses. When WWII began, and particularly after the attack on Pearl Harbour, anti-Japanese (and by extension anti-Asian) attitudes were soon strongly reflected in media and propaganda, as well as government policy. At the same time, fighting in Southeast Asia specifically cemented a view in the West that Japan was a cunning and dangerous enemy while Southeast Asian people were their victims, as well as being allies to Western POWs.

The media chosen for the case study of chapter 2 reflect this more nuanced yet extremely stereotyped representation of ESEA people and culture during this period. Firstly, the development of the Mr Wu character in George Formby's comedy songs showed the progression from the Chinese man being portrayed as lascivious and romantically inept while working domestic jobs (cleaning and laundry) to working as an air raid warden and (inadvertently, through his ineptitude) helping to prevent a bomb going off. This reflected the change in attitudes towards China, as well as other ESEA countries outside of Japan, where the overall threat of 'Yellow Peril' went from being applied to all of ESEA to just being directed at Japan; as a result, the character's malicious undertones, particularly towards women, were toned down and adapted to more topical subjects such as the war effort. This meant that the character was portrayed as less menacing, instead leaning much more into his general ineptitude and ignorance as well as maintaining the idea that he was incapable of forming

romantic relationships. Phil Wang's work still directly addresses these stereotypes as having an effect on his life and receptions as a comedian today.

The second piece of media, the short propaganda film *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips* (1944), portrays a clear antagonism with Japan, specifically from an American point of view. The Japanese characters are all drawn as crude caricatures with small eyes, buckteeth, and military uniform (except for the sumo wrestler who wears an approximation of a sumo costume), speaking in gibberish to mimic Japanese accents with occasional lines in broken English. The overall effect is that they are humorously villainous while also being clearly racially coded. These characters embody the message that Japan was both a worthy enemy that people needed to join together to defeat, as well as an easily defeated enemy in a war that could be quickly won. The short film also reflects the trend of Japanese characters in Western popular media becoming more menacing, such as Mr Moto, in contrast to the portrayal of Chinese characters.

In chapter 3, the trend of assigning 'Yellow Peril' to different nationalities and areas was seen to continue throughout the post-war and Cold War periods. Japan, North Korea, and North Vietnam were all villainised by Western media, while at the same time there was unprecedented opposition to Western involvement in conflicts, particularly in the US. The victimisation of South Korea and South Vietnam were particularly prevalent, as the conflicts continued much longer than anticipated and the Western public lost confidence in their involvement. What was particularly important during this period was the shift in perceptions of ESEA women, as soldiers stationed abroad encountered local women, as well as 'comfort women' who had been brought in specifically for Western soldiers. Rather than changing the existing hypersexualised stereotypes of ESEA women, this created a reinforced image of ESEA women, particularly Southeast Asian women, and gave birth to the sex tourism industry there.

The case study for this period reflects both the changing attitudes towards Western involvement in ESEA conflicts, as well as the perception of ESEA women. *The Moose*, an episode of *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983), follows the main ensemble of characters as they attempt to free a young Korean girl named Young Hi, who has been bought to be a 'moose' by a disliked sergeant who refers to her by a racial slur. The characters manage to free her from him, only to find that she refuses to leave and wants to continue working for them to prevent dishonouring her family. The episode, while overall promoting respect for ESEA people, condemning racist acts such as using racial slurs and buying people, and incorporating criticism of US involvement in ESEA conflict, still draws from many existing stereotypes of ESEA people. In particular, as an ESEA woman, Young Hi is infantilised and is condescended to, often used as the target of jokes which ridicule her broken English, traditional ties to her family, and untraditional (in Western terms) aspirations. Margaret Cho utilises characters of these stereotypes in order to create anti-racist reverse discourse which criticises racial profiling and the direct, negative impact it has had on her career. The episode signifies a general progression towards treating ESEA people with greater respect rather than perpetuating older racist attitudes, but still utilises racially charged stereotypes in doing so. At this point, there appears to be a critical turning point in ESEA representation in Western comedy; firstly, in the first two chapters, there is stereotyped, racist representation of ESEA people in media and propaganda by white people. Then, with chapter 3 we see representation of ESEA people that attempts to be politically correct and sensitive while addressing stereotypes, while still also heavily utilising existing stereotypes. Then, in the following chapter we start to see ESEA comedians who not only address the stereotypes, but actively subvert them and work to create space for representation of ESEA people, by ESEA people.

The fourth chapter examined Korean American stand-up comedian Margaret Cho's work, which marked a shift from Western comedy about ESEA people being produced by white creatives to ESEA people creating work from their own perspective to address race, racism, and how it has impacted their lives. In terms of the core question for this section of the thesis, how ESEA comedians engage with the history of ESEA stereotypes, Cho's early work directly addresses her background and actively subverts stereotypes, utilising recognisable racially-coded characteristics when performing as various characters in order to contrast them with her own persona. As one of the earliest ESEA stand-up comedians to reach such a wide audience, Cho placed race at the forefront of her material for the audience to overcome seeing her solely through the perspective of her ethnicity; by being on stage and performing in a confidence, loud, and often very crude manner she immediately subverted the existing stereotypes. This material often created anti-racist reverse discourse by targeting racist attitudes with her comedy. Cho's later work also incorporates other areas of her identity and how they interact with racially charged perceptions of her and ESEA women, such as being queer, embracing traits that are not considered traditionally feminine, and being politically left-leaning. It is particularly clear that the hypersexualised, submissive image of ESEA women impacted audience perceptions of Cho, as those are elements which she most actively undermines. She does this through framing material on sexuality through the lens of her own pleasure and agency in sexual situations, sometimes incorporating unwanted advances from men as the target of her comedy as well.

Ali Wong's work in the fifth chapter similarly engages with the existing stereotype of ESEA women by immediately dismissing it through her assured persona, graphic content, and energetic delivery. Reaching international renown over a decade after Cho, Wong deliberately engages with race only when she chooses to, as there is seemingly less pressure for her to

solely discuss racial dynamics in a sociopolitical environment where ESEA representation has been increasing. Wong's material centres more specifically on her married life, particularly in relation to how different the social expectations of marriage are compared to her previous sexual history as well as the pressures of raising children. Also similarly to Cho, Wong does not shy away from leaning into racially coded characteristics, especially where they intersect with gender roles, in order to highlight the contrast between them and her own persona. However, Wong uniquely applies her approach to the incorporation of ESEA stereotypes to stereotypes of other ethnicities as well, utilising them and the interaction between public perceptions of different demographics when they heighten humour but largely not relying on them to generate comedy, with some exceptions.

In the final chapter, Phil Wang's work was seen to continue working under the seemingly diminishing pressure to address race, giving him room to discuss areas such as politics, morality, and current affairs without relating them directly to his ethnicity. At the same time, Wang has clearly stated that in areas such as dating and sexuality, where there are very strong associations with racial stereotypes, he has still needed to carefully frame and structure his material to ensure that the audience are not only understanding it through their racial reference points. Wang's intellectual, high status persona has allowed him to engage with stereotypes in a manner that clearly provides anti-racist reverse discourse, making himself superior to racists and those who believe in racial stereotypes, who are made the butt of the joke. With the global outbreak of COVID-19 and its early media coverage so closely linking it to existing ESEA stereotypes, a new pressure and area for addressing arose for ESEA stand-up comedians. Wang's approach to incorporating this into his work has adapted as the pandemic unfolded, and his material consistently subverts the new social norms to point out the absurdity of many

racially charged assumptions regarding the virus and how it connects to long-standing stereotypes.

The aim of this thesis has been to provide a genealogy of ESEA stereotypes in Western comedy, providing insight into how they arose and interacted with history without negating their powerful, harmful, and continuous impact on ESEA people. This is an area of history that has thus far not been written extensively about, and in doing this I hope to provide a clear basis for future, further analysis of comedy where it intersects with ESEA representation. The case studies of chapters 4 to 6 are examples of how these historical roots continue to interweave in contemporary popular media, and how that history can provide insight into the ever-changing attitudes towards racial stereotypes.

Areas for future research

Areas in which I would like to conduct further study based on the research in this thesis largely fall into two categories. Firstly, further research on the impact that COVID-19 has had on ESEA performers, and how that is changing as our attitudes towards and understanding of the virus have shifted. I believe that it is a period of time which has required a large amount of adapting and responses from the comedians, particularly when gauging how audience attitudes have changed. Secondly, I think it is crucial to examine the impact that gendered, racial stereotypes have on contemporary nonbinary and transgender ESEA comic performers. This thesis has only included cisgender comedians, and I feel that the way in which performers engage with gender outside the historical binary is one that is extremely nuanced and varied. This is particularly interesting when ESEA performers come from cultural backgrounds which may have very different histories and representation of nonbinary gender identities.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - Testimonies on Chinese Immigration

Notes: A collection of testimonies taken from residents in California regarding what they felt the impact of Chinese immigration was on their communities. The testimonies were presented to a committee from the Senate of the State of California, who were aiming to decide whether action needed to be taken to prevent the Chinese population from growing. The excerpts chosen below include testimonies from people associated with religious institutions, education, policing, and members of the Chinese population.

From Shay, F (1876), *Chinese Immigration: The Social, Moral, and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration—Testimony Taken Before a Committee of the Senate of the State of California, Appointed April 3d, 1876*, Sacramento: State Printing Office.

I.

Testimony from Rev. A. W. Loomis (pp. 55-56):

Q.—What is their [the Chinese's] moral condition in their own country?

A.—In some respects they are very commendable. As regards virtue and faithfulness between man and wife, the Chinese will compare favorably with the white race of San Francisco. These Chinawomen that you see on the streets here were brought for the accommodation of white people, not for the accommodation of Chinese; and if you pass along the streets where they are

to be found, you will see that they are visited not so much by Chinese as by others—sailors and low people. The women are in a condition of servitude. Some of them are inveigled away from home under promise of marriage to men here, and some to be secondary wives, while some are stolen. They are sold here. Many women are taken from the Chinese owners and are living as wives and secondary wives. Some have children, and these children are legitimate.

Q.—These women engaged in prostitution are nothing more than slaves to them?

A.—Yes, sir; and every one would go home to-day if she were free and had her passage paid.

Q.—They are not allowed to release themselves from that situation, are they?

A.—I think they are under the surveillance of men and women, so that they cannot get away. They would fear being caught and sold again, and carried off to a condition even worse than now.

Q.—Are not the laws here used to restrain them from getting away—are they not arrested for crime?

A.—Oh, yes. They will trump up a case, have the woman arrested, and bring people to swear what they want. In this way they manage to get possession of her again.

...

Q.—Do you know what they do with the women when they become sick and useless?

A.—I do not know. I have seen some on the street that looked in bad condition, and I have heard of their being abandoned to die, but I have never seen any case of that kind.

Q.—Do you know how they treat these people?

A.—I understand they treat them very badly. Women have come to the Home with bruises and marks of violence on their persons. I think their condition is a very hard one.

Q.—Then it is a slavery which, from the very first, destroys body, soul, and everything else?

A.—Yes, sir; and the women will be glad to escape from it if they knew they would be protected.'

II.

Rev. Otis Gibson (pp. 25-35)

Q.—Do you know upon what terms the Chinese are imported into this country?

A.—They come free. I think all Chinamen come free, except the women.

…

Q.—Is there any system of servitude whatever [in China]?

A.—There may be a system of binding a boy out for a term of years; nothing more.

Q.—Is there servitude for crime?

A.—There is punishment from crime, but I think there is no servitude. I never heard of it. The women I do not include, for they are bought and sold. Among the highest classes dowries pass, and that, though real bargain and sale, is not called such. The poor folk sell their girls outright.

Q.—From what class is our Chinese immigration?

A.—From the lowest class.

Q.—By that you mean laborers?

A.—Yes, sir.

Q.—Do you mean degraded in a moral sense?

A.—I think they are the lowest class of people. Most of the Chinese who come to this country are ignorant—very. I do not think there is one in five that can read a page of a book, and not one in ten that can read a small tract, or book, or newspaper through intelligently. Nearly all of them can read the signs over the stores; nearly all can do that much reading, but to take a book and read it they cannot do it.

…

Q.—What are their habits of life in China, in regard to cleanliness?

A.—The Chinese are not a cleanly people. They are not what we call a cleanly people.

Q.—How are they here?

A.—They are not cleanly here.

Q. Do you know anything about their domestic life here?

A.—There is very little domestic life here' almost none at all.

Q.—Do the wives of the Chinamen come to this country?

A.—Very few. There may be one hundred. I doubt if there is one hundred.

Q.—Are these of the higher classes?

A.—They are the richer ones.

…

Q.—In your opinion, is this Chinese immigration productive of more injury than benefit, or the contrary?

A.—That is a political question. The Chinese have brought some evils; but I think, after careful study, that, as a matter of political economy, they are a benefit; for there are more white people at work in California to-day than there would have been, or could be, if the Chinese were not here.

Q.—Suppose they were to increase in the same ratio during the next ten years, what would be your opinion?

A.—Unless our existing laws are executed with more honesty than they are now, I think it would be unfortunate. I think we have sufficient law, if executed honestly, to check a great deal of it. That has been my experience. I mingle with the Chinese in their quarters a great deal, and I know that this Chinese gambling is simply a matter of buying the privilege to violate the law. The same is true regarding the women. There is a percentage of the profits that goes to persons other than the Chinese, for the purpose of carrying on prostitution.

Q.—Is prostitution in China regarded with the same idea of degradation that it is in this country, or is it a sort of profession by itself?

A.—The standard of morals in China is different from what it is here, for the civilization is lower. I think there is as much chastity among the Chinese as a people, among our people. Among the people who have families it is a great crime for a woman to betray her chastity to a man, and family chastity is a great virtue in China. Prostitution there is regarded the same as it is here. In the cities where they live, they have separate quarters, and are not allowed to go anywhere else. They are under quite as strict, or perhaps stricter, regulations there than they are here.

III.

Dr. J. C. Shorb (pp. 106-107)

Q.—Do you know what influence Chinese prositution has upon the white population?

A.—Very bad—exceedingly so.

Q.—What is the effect on the youth of San Francisco?

A.—The presence of Chinese women here has made prostitution excessively cheap, and it has given these boys an opportunity to gratify themselves at very slight cost. They get syphilis and gonorrhoea cheaper in that way that any way I know of. Now and then these boys have a “windfall,” and go among white girls and distribute these diseases generously. I have had boys from twelve years up to eighteen and nineteen—any numbers of them—afflicted with syphilis contracted from Chinese prostitutes.

Q.—From your own experience, can you give us any idea of the extent of this evil among boys?

A.—It will be very hard to give you a definite idea.

...

Q.—You are satisfied, from the revelations made by patients, that the most of it is contracted from Chinese women?

A.—Yes; some of my worst cases in boys have come from Chinese prostitutes.

Q.—Do you think that this Chinese immigration tends to the advancement of Christian civilization?

A.—My ideas are exactly opposite. I do not see how any sensible man can reach a conclusion of that kind. No man with any knowledge of the facts can do so.

IV.

Ah Chung (pp. 109-110)

Q.—What do the Chinamen do with anybody who testifies in Court against the women [prostitutes]?

A.—An Geo, Wong Woon, and Ah Fook put up money to kill him.

Q.—Do you know whether any paper is ever put up offering money to kill Chinamen?

A.—Yes. I saw them.

Q.—Have they threatened to kill you if you testify?

A.—Yes. I am a little scared.

Q.—What are you afraid of?

A.—Afraid short me.

Q.—Do you know of anybody being killed?

A.—Yes.

Q.—What for?

A.—One boy he testify against women, and they kill him with a knife.

V.

Ah Gow (pp. 110-111)

Q.—Do you know anything about threats made against Chinamen for testifying in the American Courts?

A.—Ah Geo, Bi Chee, and Wong Woon say they shoot me.

Q.—What for?

A.—They say I pick out prostitutes in Court.

Q.—Are you a witness now?

A.—Yes, sir.

Q.—Do they threaten to shoot you if you tell the truth?

A.—Yes, sir.

Q.—Do you know anything about notices being posted up offering rewards for killing men?

A.—Yes. I have seen them.

Q.—What were you put in jail for lately?

A.—George Duffield said I bothered the women and the gamblers by coming into Court against them.

Q.—Do you know how much money the Chinese pay these officers?

A.—The gamblers, five dollars a week; each woman, four bits; lotteries, eight dollars a month.

Q.—What do the people who own women do, when they become sick and helpless?

A.—I suppose they take care of them.

Q.—When they are sick and going to die, do they put them on the street?

A.—Sometimes.

Q.—Do these people who own women whip them?

A.—The boss women whip them all the time.

Q.—Do you live in the Chinese quarter?

A.—Yes, sir.

Q.—Are you afraid?

A.—Sometimes. I do not go out at night

VI.

H. H. Ellis, Chief of Police of the City and County of San Francisco (pp. 111-113)

Q.—Are you acquainted with the Chinese quarters of this city?

A.—Yes, sir.

Q.—What is their condition in relation to cleanliness?

A.—Very foul and filthy.

Q.—Do you know of any quarter of any American or European city that will compare with it for filth?

A.—No, sir.

Q.—It is in testimony that there are about thirty thousand Chinese living in this city, the most of them residing in seven or eight blocks. Do you know what proportion of that population is criminal?

A.—I should say that there are about one thousand five hundred or two thousand regular criminals.

Q.—Including those who violate the city ordinances in relation to fires and health, and those who live off the wages of the criminal classes, what is the proportion?

A.—I think almost the entire population.

Q.—Excluding from consideration the Chinese quarter, how are the laws and ordinances enforced in this city, as compared with other American cities?

A.—Favorably. The number of arrests are greater in proportion to each man employed. I have here a table of arrests made in twenty cities of the United States. They range from eight to one hundred and seven per man, and this latter number is credited to San Francisco. Outside of the Chinese quarter, the laws are administered admirably, although we have a very small force of men…..

Q.—What are the difficulties in the way of enforcing laws in cases where the Chinese are concerned?

A.—The Chinese will swear to anything, according to orders. Their testimony is so unreliable that they cannot be believed.

Q.—What is the greatest difficulty in the way of suppressing prostitution and gambling?

A.—To suppress these vices would require a police force so great that the city could not stand the expense. It is difficult to administer justice, because we do not understand their language, and thus all combine to defeat the laws.

Q.—What is their custom of settling cases among themselves, and then refusing to furnish testimony?

A.—It is generally believed to be true that the Chinese have a Court of arbitration where they settle differences.

Q.—After this settlement is made, is it possible to obtain testimony from the Chinese?

A.—If in secret they determine to convict a Chinaman, or to acquit him, that judgement is carried out. In a great many cases I believe they have convicted innocent men through perjured evidence.

Q.—Do you know anything about offers of rewards being posted up in the city for the murder of Chinamen?

A.—Yes, sir. I have had such notices taken down and interpreted.

Q.—What influence does the presence of the Chinese have upon the morals of the white race?

A.—Very injurious.

Q.—In what respect?

A.—I regard the prostitution question as the worst feature of it, for great numbers of young men visit Chinawomen.

Q.—Are those women held as slaves?

A.—Yes, sir; they are held under a sort of contract, but they very seldom work it out.

Q.—Is it difficult for those women to escape from that life?

A.—Yes, sir. When they do escape they are brought back by force, or arrested for some alleged offense.

…

Q.—Does their presence in this country tend to the advancement of Christian civilization?

A.—It has the contrary effect.

Q.—In what estimation is Chinese testimony held here by men acquainted with the administration of justice?

A.—They look upon their testimony with great suspicion. As a class their testimony is unreliable.

Q.—Is it not frequently the case that on preliminary examinations they swear to one state of facts, and on the trial directly the opposite?

A.—Yes, sir.

Q.—Do you know anything about money being collected for the purpose of paying men around here to see that they were not molested in their criminal pursuits?

A.—I have heard rumors of such things, but have never known anything definitely.

Q.—What is the condition of the chinese quarter generally?

A.—Filthy beyond description.

VII.

David C. Woods, Superintendent of the Industrial School (pp. 113-114)

Q.—Do you know anything about the effect the presence of a large Chinese population has upon the boys growing up here?

A.—I think it has a very bad effect. I find that the larger proportion of boys who come to the school, large enough to cohabit with women, are afflicted with venereal diseases.

Q.—How many boys are usually in that school?

A.—One hundred and eighty, on an average.

Q.—What proportion do you think are affected with that disease?

A.—I think that, during the time I have been there, fifty have come with venereal diseases.

Q.—Do you attribute that to the presence of Chinese prostitutes in this city?

A.—They tell me so themselves. I question them, and they say they got it in Chinatown?

Q.—What are the ages of those boys?

A.—We have had them as young as thirteen, with gonorrhoea; they have all sorts of venereal diseases. There is no time that I have had less than two or four down with them.

…

The following resolution was adopted by the committee:

Resolved, That H. H. Ellis, Chief of Police of the City and County of San Francisco, be and is hereby requested to detail a competent officer to collect statistics as to the number of Chinese employed in the various avocations in San Francisco.

VIII.

Lem Schaum, Chinese resident of California and member of a Christian mission (pp. 135-141)

Q.—Do you know how these bad women [prostitutes] are brought here?

A.—They are stolen and bought in China, and brought here the same as we buy and sell stock.

Q.—Their condition is a very horrible one, then?

A.—Yes, sir.

Q.—Do you know how they are treated?

A. Yes, sir. The parties who own them generally treat them pretty roughly. If they don't go ahead and make money the owners will give them a good thrashing.

Q.—Suppose you were to convert one of these women, would she have any chance to get away from them?*

A.—Yes, sir; they do down at the bay. The Rev. Dr. Gibson has a Chinese woman's home; so has the Rev. Dr. Loomis. When a Chinese woman gets away and goes to either of those places she is taken care of and protected until she can do something for her living, or find a respectable Chinaman to marry with.

Q.—Don't they try to steal those women back?

A.—They can't do it. They would if they could, but they can't do it.

Q.—How many are there, do you know?

A.—I made inquiry about them about four months ago; twenty of thirty were at Gibson's, and fifteen of twenty at Loomis'.

Q. They protect them there?

A.—Yes, sir.

Q.—Is it not very common, when those women try to get away, for the people who own them to have them arrested for larceny, and things of that kind?

A.—Yes, sir.

Q.—They are held by fear of punishment if they try to escape?

A.—Exactly.

Q.—There are cases where Chinamen have cut them all to pieces with knives for running away, are there not?

A.—I never have seen any, but this is what I have heard.

Q.—They torture them?

A.—Yes, sir.

Q.—Do they buy and sell these women here?

A.—Yes, sir.

Q.—And hold them in slavery?

A.—Exactly.

Q.—Do you know anything about turning these women out to die when they become sick from disease, and unable to make money?

A.—I have not heard anything of that kind; but when they are sick, and expect they are going to die, they are taken care of.

Q.—The police officers here have testified that they have found these sick people where they have been left in outbuildings, without food or water?

A.—I presume they do that. I have not seen any case of that kind, and I am not positive.

Q.—You have not associated with these people?

A.—I have not associated with them at all. I am sick of them; I got enough of them.

Q.—You have seen the Chinese quarters? Do you think that it is good for the Chinese, or for the Americans, to have those people living as they do?

A.—I think it is very bad for both Chinese and Americans.

Q.—As a general rule, taking one hundred and fifty thousand of them in California, they don't learn much good after they come here, do they? Don't they learn the vices of the country?

A.—That is your own fault. No Chinaman can take a walk up and down the street unless you find an Irishman or a Dutchman strike them down. They struck one down and I told them I would have them arrested and put in County Jail for six months. A great many Chinamen desire to learn to read and write English, and then also our methods of business, or any kind of work; perhaps the arts of sciences.

Q.—They live very cheaply, don't they?

A.—They must live cheaply, sir. They have got to live cheaply, because they only get about fifteen dollars a month, or three or four dollars a week.

Q.—A great many live in the same house?

A.—Yes; a great many live together, because they have not got money enough to have rooms as you have.

Q.—Do you known (sic) the house Dr. Gibson rents to them in San Francisco?

A.—He didn't rent that at all. They come in there free.

…

Q.—He rents it to Chinamen, don't he?

A.—No, sir. He has got nothing to do with it; he has no money invested in that business.

…

A.—I think this immigration must stop. I say it is not only ruining Americans, but it ruins the Chinese. Their wages, we notice, come down every day. A short time ago Chinamen got thirty-six dollars a month working on the railroad. What do they get now? Twenty-six dollars per month—one dollar a day. This immigration must be stopped in some way.

APPENDIX B - Script of a vaudeville sketch

Notes: A vaudeville sketch from the early 20th century which features–and heavily relies on–racial stereotypes of African American and Chinese people at the time. The sketch was likely performed by many different performers as the script was available from the publisher, and many sketches at the time were reused by different acts. This sketch has a history of being created by African American performers but was published by a company with white clientele.

Carter, W. (1912), *The Coon and the Chink: A Vaudeville Sketch in One Act*, New York: Dick & Fitzgerald.

THE COON AND THE CHINK

A Vaudeville Sketch in One Act

By WALTER CARTER

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THE COON AND THE CHINK

CHARACTERS

COON.—*A tall, lanky, ignorant and unpolished negro. Makeup, comedy black-face. Costume.—Short trousers and coat with short sleeves, crushed silk hat, worn out shoes, long white cloth gloves, white socks, dress shirt, exaggerated high collar, and big soft carelessly tied bow-tie.*

CHINK.—*A short, thin, middle-aged Chinaman. Very stupid and ignorant in disposition. Makeup, typical close shaven wig with queue. Costume.—Typical Chinese coat, trousers and slippers, coat of plain bright colored material, trousers dark satin.*

TIME OF PLAYING.—About 30 minutes.

INCIDENTAL PROPERTIES

An apple, small alarm clock and fob. Bowl supposed to contain chop-suey and chop-sticks; flat-iron, flask, set of false teeth, hair pin, and package containing shirt bosom and a pair of ragged white socks.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

As seen by a performer on the stage, facing the audience. R means right hand; L. left hand; C. center; D. L. door left; D. R. door right. UP, means toward back of stage; DOWN, toward footlights.

THE COON AND THE CHINK

SCENE.—*A plain interior. Doors* R. *and* L. ENTER CHINK *followed by* COON *who has lost his laundry ticket and is trying to induce the Chinaman to give him his laundry.* COON *is eating an apple as he enters.*

CHINK. No tickie—no laundry.

COON. You know who I am, John.

CHINK. You gottie tickie?

COON. I told you I done lost de ticket.

CHINK. You no gottie tickie you no gettie laundry.

COON. Look here, John. I have a engagement for a ball to-night. I come to get my laundry and I don't want any fussing over it, understand?

CHINK. How me finie without tickie?

COON. I don't care nuthin' bout *how* you find it—only *find* it.

CHINK. You comie in Wednesday.

COON. I believe I already informed you I was goin' to a ball to-night, didn't I?

CHINK. You fall?

COON. Me fall. No, but you will if you don't get busy soon.

CHINK. You gottie tickie?

COON (*rolling up fist*). Look here, John, you mention de word ticket to me again and I'm gwana wrap dis around yo' roof, understand?

CHINK. Watie name?

COON. Jackson. Pete Jackson, you know me.

CHINK. Jackson?

COON. Dat's right, dat's right, you know Pete Jackson.

[EXIT CHINK L.

ENTER CHINK L. *with laundry book which he hands to* COON.

CHINK. Which one your laundry?

COON (*turns the book around a few times in confusion then points to one of the characters*). Dat one dare look something like my laundry, bring dat one.

CHINK. Dat one four dollar sixty-two cent.

COON. I guess dat ain't de one.

CHINK (*pointing to a character in the book*). Here one. Jackson, one pair sock, one handkerchief, eight cents.

COON. Dat's it, dat's de one, now shake it up.

CHINK. You gimme de eight cents.

COON (*feels in pockets indifferently and hesitates a moment*). I'll give it to you next Tuesday, John, you see I always like to have a lil change in my pocket when I go to a ball.

CHINK. Den you leavie something?

COON. I ain't got nuthin to leave but my watch and I need dat for tonight.

CHINK. You no leavie no watchie no laundry.

COON (*hands small size alarm clock and fob to* CHINK *who puts it in a side coat pocket allowing fob to hang out and proceeds to* EXIT L. *for laundry.* COON *catching hold of the fob draws the watch from the pocket unnoticed and returns it to his own pocket*). Don't let nuthin' happen to it, John. [EXIT CHINK L. COON *sings any convenient song.*

ENTER CHINK L. *with bowl of chop suey and package of laundry. Hands* COON *package, seats himself in chair and proceeds to eat from the bowl with chop sticks while* COON *unwraps laundry.*

COON (*opens package, containing a shirt bosom and pair of ragged white socks*). I say pumpkin face, it am considerate of you to mend dese socks of mine but you sewed

up de wrong hole. You sewed up de one I put my foot in. (CHINK *indicating hole in socks, scolds* COON *in Chinese*)

COON (*interrupting*). Scuse me suh, scuse me suh, what am de name of dat song? (CHINK *drops a flat-iron which he has been holding so that it drops about an inch from* COON'S *foot*) Look here Mr. Man, I'd advise you not to aggravate me. (CHINK *picks up iron and starts to* EXIT L.) One moment, please (*Takes a collar button from his pocket and hands to* CHINK)

CHINK. What dat for?

COON. Dat's de other button I forgot to put in de shirt. (CHINK *starts to exit with button.* COON *removes watch to see time, the alarm goes off and he conceals it quickly in* R. *hand coat pocket*)

CHINK. Whatie dat noise?

COON. What's what noise? I don't hear nuthin, why man you're daffy. You wanta take something for that. (*Releases grip on watch so that it falls through hole in pocket to the floor*) Here's your watch, John.

CHINK (*picks up watch*). Vely much glad to finie. Me thank you vely much.

COON. Not at all, not at all.

CHINK. You wantie some chop suey?

COON. Dat depends entirely upon what de ingredients of de concoction am constituated of.

CHINK. Chicken and—

COON. Chicken! Never mind de balance of de explanation—only waltz me to it. (CHINK *hands* COON *bowl containing chop suey and chop sticks*) Smells jes like possum-soup. Got a spoon John?

CHINK (*pointing to chop-sticks*). You usie chop-stick.

COON. What! You expect me to eat wif de tooth-picks? (*Takes one of the sticks and tries in vain to carry food to his mouth. Putting stick back in bowl in disgust he reaches in pocket for flask and takes swallow of whiskey*)

CHINK. What that for?

COON. To wash down the chop suey.

CHINK. Me likie chop suey.

COON (*takes set of false teeth from bowl*). Well next time you eat it, don't leave your teeth in it. (*Removes*

large hair-pin from bowl) Dis'll just do for my wife. (*Stirs chop-suey about with one of the sticks*)

CHINK. What you looking for?

COON. Trying to see if I can find me a good jack-knife, I lost de other one I had.

CHINK. Givie me, me makie some more.

COON. No, suh, I resolves to manufacture de next dose myself. Where bouts you keep de chicken? [EXIT L.

(CHINK *sings any convenient song.*)

ENTER COON L. *in high spirits with whiskey flask in hand.*

COON. I have a proposition to make to you, John.

CHINK. What that?

COON. Why, you and me to go on the stage.

CHINK. On stage?

COON. Perzackley, easy as pie, you see I have a brother who knows a man who am acquainted wif de janitor of de Metra-prop-olitan Opera House and as we are liable to get hired mos' any time now I have resolved to practice you up while we possess de time. To start wif we will receive $200 per.

CHINK. What you mean by 200 dolla per?

COON. Why 200 dollars per, means perhaps we get more dan dat. It all depends on de execution, by execution we mean de—what you might call de—it—well you wouldn't comprehend what I means anyhow consequently it would be useless fo' me to definition it to you.

CHINK. What you play?

COON. Me? Why I'm Shakespeare, I would go fro' de motions of de play for you John but I feel too dizzy. Hey! Come back here, how do you suppose I can talk—there—that's better. Look over there John, don't you see something—what resembles a sea serpent? Ain't he beautiful and all de lil' sea-serpents and here comes a purple crocodile wif golden wings and three tails, now he's grinning at me. Look out John!

CHINK. Where?

COON. What! You mean to tell me you don't see that

crocodile. (CHINK *turns to observe crocodile.* COON *raises flask to lips as if to take a swallow and sneezes over the mouth so as to cause sound from bottle*)

CHINK. What that?

COON. That. Why that's the Manager of de Opera house. (*Turns* R. *to talk with imaginary person*) How de do Mr. Manager. Come in, have a seat, fine day ain't it? Let me take your hat. What's dat? Sure we'll work for you, $12,000 for de act? Let me see—dat's $2,000 per night. Couldn't you make it $15,000, Mr. Manager? You see we's been put to considerable professional expenditures lately and besides I'll have to give my friend here a dollar or two (*Turns to* CHINK) Wants to shake hands with you. (*To manager*) My friend Mr. Oleo Margarine (*To* CHINK) Wants to know if you'll work for $3 per week?

CHINK (*to imaginary manager*). What you take me for?

COON (*to* CHINK) Says he wouldn't take you for a gift. (*To manager*) Oh, yes, we'll be there all right. We'll rehearse right away. Good-bye Mr. Manager we are paralyzed to meet you. (COON *and* CHINK *sing last number*)

CURTAIN

APPENDIX C - Aliens Restriction Act of 1914

Notes: The Aliens Restriction Act of 1914 followed on from the act of the same name in 1905, and gave the UK government the authority to refuse any Chinese immigrants from entering the country. This was despite Chinese support of Britain in WWI and the large number of labourers who joined the armed forces.

Aliens Restriction Act (1914) Available at:

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/4-5/12/contents/enacted (Accessed: 20 July 2020)

CHAPTER 12.

An Act to enable His Majesty in time of war or imminent national danger or great emergency by Order in Council to impose Restrictions on Aliens and make such provisions as appear necessary or expedient for carrying such restrictions into effect. A.D. 1914.

[5th August 1914.]

BE it enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

Powers with respect to aliens in case of national emergency.

1.—(1) His Majesty may at any time when a state of war exists between His Majesty and any foreign power, or when it appears that an occasion of imminent national danger or great emergency has arisen, by Order in Council impose restrictions on aliens, and provision may be made by the Order—

(*a*) for prohibiting aliens from landing in the United Kingdom, either generally or at certain places, and for imposing restrictions or conditions on aliens landing or arriving at any port in the United Kingdom; and

(*b*) for prohibiting aliens from embarking in the United Kingdom, either generally or at certain places, and for imposing restrictions and conditions on aliens embarking or about to embark in the United Kingdom; and

(*c*) for the deportation of aliens from the United Kingdom; and

(*d*) for requiring aliens to reside and remain within certain places or districts; and

(*e*) for prohibiting aliens from residing or remaining in any areas specified in the Order; and

(*f*) for requiring aliens residing in the United Kingdom to comply with such provisions as to registration, change of abode, travelling, or otherwise as may be made by the Order; and

A.D. 1914.

(*g*) for the appointment of officers to carry the Order into effect, and for conferring on such officers and on the Secretary of State such powers as may be necessary or expedient for the purposes of the Order; and

(*h*) for imposing penalties on persons who aid or abet any contravention of the Order, and for imposing such obligations and restrictions on masters of ships or any other persons specified in the Order as appear necessary or expedient for giving full effect to the Order; and

(*i*) for conferring upon such persons as may be specified in the Order such powers with respect to arrest, detention, search of premises or persons, and otherwise, as may be specified in the Order, and for any other ancillary matters for which it appears expedient to provide with a view to giving full effect to the Order; and

(*k*) for any other matters which appear necessary or expedient with a view to the safety of the realm.

(2) If any person acts in contravention of, or fails to comply with, any provisions of any such Order, he shall be liable on conviction under the Summary Jurisdiction Acts to a fine not exceeding one hundred pounds or to imprisonment with or without hard labour for a term not exceeding six months, and the court before which he is convicted may, either in addition to, or in lieu of, any such punishment, require that person to enter into recognizances with or without sureties to comply with the provisions of the Order in Council or such provisions thereof as the court may direct.

If any person fails to comply with an order of the court requiring him to enter into recognizances the court, or any court of summary jurisdiction sitting for the same place, may order him to be imprisoned with or without hard labour for any term not exceeding six months.

(3) Any provision of any Order in Council made under this section with respect to aliens may relate either to aliens in general or to any class or description of aliens.

(4) If any question arises on any proceedings under any such Order, or with reference to anything done or proposed to be done under any such Order, whether any person is an alien or not, or is an alien of a particular class or not, the onus of proving that that person is not an alien, or, as the case may be, is not an alien of that class, shall lie upon that person.

(5) His Majesty may by Order in Council revoke, alter, or add to any Order in Council made under this section as occasion requires.

(6) Any powers given under this section, or under any Order in Council made under this section, shall be in addition to, and not in derogation of, any other powers with respect to the expulsion of aliens, or the prohibition of aliens from entering the United Kingdom or any other powers of His Majesty.

Short title and application.

2.—(1) This Act may be cited as the Aliens Restriction Act, 1914.

(2) In the application of this Act to Scotland the expressions "the court" and "any court of summary jurisdiction" mean the sheriff; and the expressions "enter into recognizances with or without sureties" and "enter into recognizances" mean "find caution."

Printed by EYRE and SPOTTISWOODE, LTD.,
FOR
FREDERICK ATTERBURY, Esq., C.B., the King's Printer of Acts of Parliament.

APPENDIX D - Transcript of Margaret Cho performing in 1993

Notes: A transcript of a performance by Margaret Cho early in her stand-up career. This piece of work is particularly notable in its direct approach to discussing the racism that Cho experienced and the impact it had on her comedy career. It also touches on the impact of being specifically an ESEA woman in the USA.

Just for Laughs (2015), *Margaret Cho Stand Up—1993*, Just For Laughs Youtube Channel [Online]. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34lLm_gFTEY. [Accessed 06/08/2021].

Thank you so much, you know this is so exciting for me this evening, taping a television show and everything. It's always a thrill. I love doing TV, I was recently on a show called Star Search, heard of it? [Scattered applause]. But actually, I wasn't on *real* Star Search, I was on Star Search International… because I'm so very.... *international*. They had a real problem with me because I look this way [gestures at face] but I talk this way [gestures generally outward at herself]. That was like a problem and they were trying to be sensitive about it. They were like [pulls a face showing a lot of teeth and smiling condescendingly] 'Margaret, we don't want you to take this the wrong way but could you be a little bit more oh I don't know, CHINESE?' [As herself, disappointed] 'Well actually I'm Korean.' [As executive] 'Whatever.' And I was supposed to go onto this show and tell jokes, what was I supposed to do? [Pulls face with squinting eyes and does an exaggerated caricature of a Chinese accent] 'Oh my husband is so fat… that when he sit around the habuku… he really sit around the habuku! GONG.'

I don’t go to church anymore and my grandmother follows me around, [as grandmother] ‘Margaret, Margaret, how come you don’t go to church? You have many friend at church [snores loudly into microphone]. [Pretending to suddenly wake up] Bingo.’

My mother is convinced that everybody in show business does drugs, she's like [as mother] ‘Oh you cannot go to the club because they take the drug, the people they take the cocaine-su, and they take what is it the L, the D, the D, the D the D the D-’ ‘Mom, it’s LSD.’ ‘How do you know that?!’

My mother really wants me to get married, I don’t know if that’s going to happen soon. I have trouble with men. Do you ever go out with somebody and you like them so much, you like them so much, you like them so much, you like them so much, you like them so much… and then they do something and you don’t like them anymore? I went out with this guy recently, I liked him so much, I liked him so much, I liked him so much, I liked him so much, we went out, we went dancing and he started moonwalking around me… and I didn’t like him anymore. I dated one guy who said that if I broke up with him then he would kill himself. I broke up with him but… he’s not dead yet. I don’t want to call him up and go you know, ‘what’s the deal? I thought we had an agreement.’

I love being here in Montreal, it’s a beautiful city, I travel a lot and I like travelling but I get kind of nervous when I go to places where there aren’t a lot of Asians. Like Alabama. I was in Mobile, Alabama, and I was walking down the street and this man actually calls me a chink? [Shocked face]. I mean, actually called me a chink! I was so mad! I just looked at him, I said ‘Chink?! I’m sorry, chinks are Chinese, I’m Korean I’m a *gook,* alright? If you’re gonna be racist at least learn the terminology. Get like a redneck to English dictionary. I think that racism is the biggest disadvantage to being Asian in American, but if I were to *choose,* I think the biggest *advantage* to being Asian in America is that if you’re at an airport or a bar or something and

somebody comes up and talks to you and you don’t want to talk to them, you can just pretend you don’t speak English. [In an exaggerated Asian accent] ‘Oh no, I don’t know! [Giggles into hand while bowing].’ Thank you very much!

APPENDIX E - The characteristics of an ‘unruly woman’

Notes: Kathleen Rowe’s description of what constitutes an ‘unruly woman.’ This piece of writing is particularly notable in that the characteristics which Rowe incorporates into the ‘unruly woman’ are ones that are very present in Margaret Cho and Ali Wong’s works, and are often enhanced by the racial stereotypes which impact the perception of their femininity and gender roles.

Rowe, K. (1995), *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter*, Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 31.

1. The unruly woman creates disorder by dominating, or trying to dominate, men. She is unable or unwilling to confine herself to her proper place.
2. Her body is excessive or fat, suggesting her unwillingness or inability to control her physical appetites.
3. Her speech is excessive, in quantity, content, or tine.
4. She makes jokes, or laughs herself.
5. She may be androgynous or hermaphroditic, drawing attention to the social construction of gender.
6. She may be old or a masculine crone, for old women who refuse to become invisible in our culture are often considered grotesque.
7. Her behaviour is associated with looseness and occasionally whorishness, but her sexuality is less narrowly and negatively defined than is that of the femme fatale. She may be pregnant.

8. She is associated with dirt, liminality (thresholds, borders, or margins), and taboo, rendering her above all a figure of ambivalence.

These are some of the tropes or signifiers of female unruliness. Ideology holds that the "well-adjusted" woman has what Hélène Cixous has described as "divine composure" (246). She is silent, static, invisible—"composed" and "divinely" apart from the hurley-burly of life, process, and social power. Such is not the case with the unruly woman. Through her body, her speech, and her laughter, especially in the public sphere, she creates a disruptive spectacle of herself. The tropes of unruliness are often coded with misogyny. However, they are a source of potential power, especially when they are recoded or reframed to expose what that composure conceals. Ultimately, the unruly woman can be seen as prototype of woman as subject—transgressive above all when she lays claim to her own desire.

APPENDIX F - Interview with Phil Wang in 2020

Interview on 03/03/2020 with Phil Wang.

For context:

- I had interviewed Wang previously for my MA dissertation on a similar topic, so some parts of the interview mention our last interview.
- Wang is currently in the middle of touring his show *Philly Philly Wang Wang*, which sold out at the 2019 Edinburgh Fringe purely from presales and extra dates were added in.
- A viral video is mentioned which featured Wang editing himself into an advertisement where Tom Hiddleston was promoting the Chinese brand of supplements Centrum and gained him millions of views as well as a large online following (https://twitter.com/PhilNWang/status/1111892343668367360). Just before recording, Wang mentioned that the video had a bigger impact on his career and following than appearing on *Have I Got News For You*, as well as the fact that a previous joke he had made about Hiddleston on *Room 101* had received a large amount of backlash from Hiddleston's following.
- The CAN comedy night is mentioned, which was a stand-up show organised by Chinese Arts Now, an organisation that promotes and commissions work from Chinese-heritage artists.
- Wang mentions the shirt he is wearing in the interview, which was a cream/light brown linen shirt.
- On the Dave comedy panel show *Taskmaster*, Wang wore a bright yellow jumpsuit in the style of Bruce Lee in *Game of Death*. Wang did not score well across the series.

NC: So the goal of this interview is to get your experience on how much you feel like being Asian and race affects your comedy. I feel like last time we interviewed I came in with a strong assumption that it was infiltrating every thought you had, but how much do you actually feel like your race does impact the things that you consciously do in your comedy?

PW: I mean less and less at the moment, now that there are more East Asians in comedy and I've become more British and I've had more years of life experience in which I've had other things to contend with, think about, and process, race is not as not as--and I feel like I did a show that was a lot about it in 2017 and I feel like I sort of got a lot of it out of my system then maybe. Yeah. There's an element of it in everything I do, I mean, I'll always mention *it*, I still always mention it. Currently with the Coronavirus outbreak I have to say something about that otherwise there's a tension in the room, 'cause people sort of expect me to mention something. Especially this last week I've been on tour with Yuriko Kotani who's Japanese, and so we're these two East Asian people who are going from town to town in the height of the Coronavirus so on stage I called us the Coronavirus tour, COVID-19 Live. So that gets it out of the way and then you can move on and talk about other things, so race is a bit like that, I feel like I have to get it out of the way before I talk about things. In the same way a lot of gay comedians, if they're quite camp or they're quite obviously queer, they feel they have to say something early on so people can get it out of the way and move on and listen to them about other things.

NC: That's really interesting because for my MA dissertation I titled it after one of the things that Evelyn Mok said to me which was 'You have to get the Chinese thing out of the way.' The thing

that she does is address it, but I noticed for *Philly Philly Wang Wang* as you walk in there's mandolin music playing and there's a projection, it's quite a strong Chinese vibe.

PW: Where did you see it?

NC: At Soho [Theatre].

PW: Yeah, exactly, yeah that was just because the show is *Philly Philly Wang Wang*, and the poster is quite Chinese... the poster is very Chinese-y, I thought okay the aesthetic of the show is to lean into that, but it has very little to do with the actual content of the show, which is mainly about morality and posturing, but there's still bits about being Chinese and being Asian in there. The music was just a really great Vietnamese-French musician called Onra, who makes all these really neat hybrid, whatcha call it, fusion East and West music so that makes sense for me because I'm also fusion East and West. I guess maybe in a sense it is getting it out of the way as well. But also in another sense just a nice, obvious way to differentiate my walk-in music from anyone else's. I try not to play pop music and I don't play music that people recognise because I don't want them to feel like the venue is their space, I want them to feel like it's my space and they're visiting it, and the way to do that is to fill it with music that they don't know, I find. Whereas if you play, you know, fucking Jackson 5 and people start singing along suddenly they feel a sense of ownership, of that space, you know what I mean? I want them to feel like they're visiting.

NC: So do you feel like when you first started out and people were less familiar with your brand of comedy and personality, do you feel like there was more pressure not to conform to stereotype, like to actively fight against stereotype?

PW: When I was starting out? I didn't really know what stereotypes there were, I think by simply being on stage I was playing against stereotype. 'Cause you know, Chinese people aren't known for being comedians and Chinese people in the UK aren't known for being outspoken in that way, getting on stage and speaking at all let alone humorously. So I felt just by getting on stage I was confronting stereotypes, but the stereotypes help in that you have something to play with. You have a joke, a premise, and you can make jokes about assumptions people have about Asian people. In many ways I feel *lucky* to have had all these things to talk about. I feel genuinely a little sorrier for--the middle class white man is often chastised in comedy but I think they have a harder job in a lot of way, it's much harder for a middle class white English man to stand out.

NC: Last time we spoke, I asked about getting racist hecklers or audience responses, and you said that the audience is self-curating at that point because they've bought a ticket to see your show. Do you feel like, as your audience has gotten wider, that's changed at all?

PW: Yes… I can't even… I don't remember the last time a heckle was racist. I mean there was one ages ago when I first started, I got on stage and some guy near the front asked for a number 69. I don't know if I mentioned this last time. This is when I just started, it was at the Comedy Cafe in Shoreditch. I don't remember how I reacted to it, I must have just been a bit shocked. It was his birthday, I remember that. I don't remember anything else. But people who

are seeking me out now are likely not to be racist against East Asian people [laughs], as you say, they're self selecting now. Now, if I get anything racist it's online, mainly Twitter.

NC: And is that usually in direct response to something you've said on TV or someone who has found your profile and decided to take issue with something you've tweeted?

PW: Often something I tweeted. I tweeted something a couple months ago, a silly thing about how I read a review of the show *Chernobyl*, and in *Chernobyl* there's a scene where they have to shoot all the dogs because they're irradiated, and this review said that was the most difficult scene in the entire series to watch which I thought was ridiculous because you also watch men melting into red jelly. So I said, 'fuck's sake white people' because it's such a white thing to care that much about dogs. And I think Katherine Ryan interacted with it, which sent my profile to all her followers, and so--that's not to say Katherine Ryan has horrible fans but she has a *lot more* followers so by law of averages there are going to be more terrible people and… I got the most racist responses I've gotten to something. Also they had something to go on, which was the dogs thing, you know, 'you probably want to eat them.' It was all there for the taking, as it were. I don't get it live anymore, really. Unless I'm playing in a club but I don't play the clubs very much anymore. Crowds are self-selecting to me and I'm self-selecting to the gigs.

NC: In terms of online response, with the Tom Hiddleston video, which just for the record has 4.5 million views on it, you mentioned a lot of people were saying you were too mean to him on *Room 101*. With people interacting with that video, do you think any of that interacted with the fact that you're Asian and he's white and it was a Chinese ad, or do you feel like that never came into it?

PW: It never came up, it really never came up. I think I don't actually look very Asian in that video and I sound very English. I only acknowledge my Chineseness in the video when he speaks Chinese and I go 'Excuse me?' That's such a subtle acknowledgement. So no, it never came up really.

NC: And did it ever come up in response to your *Room 101* video, in terms of any racist/racism there?

PW: No, no… I don't think Tom Hiddleston fans see colour, I think they just see Tom Hiddleston. [Laughs.]

NC: When you're performing do you ever feel like you're being laughed *at* instead of with? I know you mentioned last time sometimes when you make jokes about dating or sex you have to build more trust there because people still have that stereotype of emasculated Asian men.

PW: That's right, yeah. I used to, when I first started talking about sex and dating, I took the stance of being very sexually confident 'cause I thought that was a more interesting thing, to contrast directly with the perception of East Asian men. I still really don't do that many self-deprecating sexual jokes, I have a joke in my current show about how little I had sex at university, but that's true. I never make jokes about the quality of my performance because that wouldn't be true, so I don't do that in the way a lot of male comedians do. But there's a bit in my show now towards the end where I talk about how East Asian men are portrayed in popular culture and film and television, we're not portrayed as a sexually viable option, we're portrayed

as these buck-tooth fools. When I say that and do a little face that gets a small laugh from some people some times and I'm never entirely sure what kind of laugh that is. I don't know if they're laughing at the observation or at the impression. That's not to say if they were laughing at the impression that they're bad people, that that's bad laughter, 'cause it's just an immediate response to something that is visually funny, but yeah. I don't know what people are laughing at there sometimes. On the whole, I trust people to laugh at things for the right reasons and I trust myself to be joking about the right aspects.

NC: And like you said it's a self-curating audience and you're curating your audience as well, so hopefully you're on the same level.

PW: The other interesting context it comes up in is, I don't know if you've seen my on *Roast Battle* on Comedy Central? I've done three now and the Asian thing comes up every time obviously, when the other person makes jokes about me. They are directly and explicitly racist jokes but because of context it's fine and it's funny and I love it. The whole premise of finding that funny is the acceptance that it's okay to be East Asian so why not say these horrible things. But that doesn't play out in every situation, it plays out in that one I think but not every one.

NC: Do you feel like changing people's perception of East Asians is something you're actively trying to do or is it, like you said, a byproduct of you being on stage and being a comedian?

PW: It was active when I first started and now it's becoming more passive. As you say, just being on screen and being on stage, I think that does a lot. I also feel a lot less alone now because there are more East Asian comics out there, and more East Asian films are doing

really well in Westerns culture and K-Pop is doing great, so I feel like there's a lot less of a drastic challenge ahead of us. I guess in that sense I don't feel like there's quite a need for it as there used to be. Things are getting better and people of our generation especially are quite into East Asian culture and aesthetic. I feel like I'm easing off a little, but recently I was on a Channel 4 show called Kevin McCloud's Rough Guide to the Future. I went to China, they sent me to China and I did a little travelogue show there. I practised my Mandarin to get ready to go there because I wanted to be seen as a British comedian who knew Mandarin and can speak Mandarin, so when I get an opportunity to be very Asian I take it, I guess. In more neutral situations it's not always the thing I go to now.

NC: Would you ever do comedy in Mandarin or Malay?

PW: I'd really like to, I'd like to get my Mandarin that good but it's currently nowhere near. Doing it in Malay wouldn't really make any sense. I would like to do it in Minglish which is like Malaysian-English. There's a couple specials by Malaysian comedians on Netflix, Harith Iskander who's the Godfather who started it all, Sam Jay [Kavin Jay?] I think is the other one. They've got some Minglish in there and I love when it comes up because then suddenly there'll be an English subtitle that comes up to explain what it is. I find Minglish really funny, Malaysians are really funny and Minglish is really funny. So, I'd like to do a show in Minglish but it would be a pure indulgence because of the time it would take and how little reward… It feels like a retirement kind of challenge. Like Eddie Izzard trying to do it in French. When I get to that point maybe I would try to do it but right now it wouldn't be financially sensible.

NC: Do you feel like there's, because you've performed to Asian audiences before, do you feel like there's an Asian or Chinese sense of humour? Because the British sense of humour is such a Thing that people say.

PW: People talk about the British sense of humour, I'm not entirely sure what that is because there are so many different variants even within British… I think senses of humour differ more between age brackets and education, usually. East Asian, I feel like they're really into puns and language tricks. It's a strong tradition in China of 相声 (xiāng shēng), which literally means 'same sounding' because there are so few syllables that have to mean so many different things, there are so many homonyms in Chinese that there's lots of potential for puns and I think that can be translated into English-speaking East Asians as well. So to answer your question I think there is because I wouldn't feel at all secure just taking my show that I'm doing here in the UK, just doing it verbatim in Malaysian. It just wouldn't work, it's very British, there are a lot of British references, and I think it's quite Western in that I mainly talk about self obsession which is not really an East Asian problem, in East Asia the culture is opposite especially in China. So, there's some elements that would not translate but I think most of the jokes would just on a technical level, I think they would work in East Asian. There's a real sarcasm, Malaysians are very sarcastic as well. And mean. And a bit silly, I guess.

NC: When I saw you perform at the CAN night—

PW: Chinese Arts Now, for the record.

NC: —that was just a chunk of your *Philly Philly Wang Wang* show wasn't it?

PW: It was. What's lovely about doing a gig to just East Asians people, I don't know if you were at Yellow Xmas? I hosted, so I just did loads of stuff about East Asians. You have a whole room of just people with the shared experience of being East Asians so I was able to do specific jokes about Yuriko [Kotani] committing ritual suicide and calling Nigel [Ng] 'Uncle,' stuff like this so it's bit of fun you can have with this audience which is why I'd love to do a show in Minglish 'cause there's so much you can have fun with. And even in that Chinatown CAN gig, when I was able to say 'what's nice about performing here in Chinatown is that after the show you can all just go back to work.' I can't do that joke anywhere else and I love doing that joke. In those situations, you can do something unique. My set there, I think I took out all the more Asian-y bits. What I mean is, I think I performed all the Asian-y bits and took out some things that weren't.

NC: The only bit I can fully remember is when you're talking about how you're both majorities--

PW: Yes, white and Chinese.

NC: --and from what I can remember I think you did more Mandarin when you were doing 'hello/nihao,' whereas normally you just say 'hello/nihao,' more of a back and forth between the languages.

PW: Was it not later when I do the bit about China taking over--

NC: And taking photos, yes!

PW: I think I probably did more there, talking on the phone to some Chinese handler?

NC: Is that, like before you went on were you like ‘I’m going to add more here’ or was it more spur of the moment ‘they’re on board with this.’

PW: I think spur of the moment, you only get a sense when you’re on stage and you see a few faces of how many people will understand this if I do this… Weirdly I was the most Asian person on stage. Evelyn [Mok] is from Sweden, Ken [Cheng] grew up in Cambridge, Alissa [Anne Jeun Yi] is, oh no she’s from Hong Kong maybe, but they’re all more Western than I am so I was actually the most Asian person on stage… So I was the most Asian performer on the night so I didn’t know until I got on stage how Asian it could get. Actually that’s not fair to Evelyn, Evelyn is quite Asian actually because she speaks Hindi and Cantonese.

NC: In terms of you talking about how you want the audience to feel like they’re visiting I found that night quite interesting because it was all East Asians but the front row was just ten white guys.

PW: Oh yeah, because they’re the ones who are confident enough to sit in the front. Because East Asians so much want to be out of the way and not be in the spotlight, it’s understandable that it’d be the white guys who sit at the front who want a bit of banter.

NC: So do you feel like when you’re trying to make them feel like they’re visiting, like it’s not their space, does that play into the distinction of being laughed at and with? And if they feel it’s their space they’ll feel more comfortable laughing at you?

PW: I think that's right, that's a good observation, though I would say that I don't give the audience much opportunity to laugh at me in a way I don't want them to. So even if the space felt like their own, it wouldn't mean that I would start getting laughs that I didn't want necessarily. But it's mainly because my persona is quite high status as a comedian, and so I want people to feel a little out of their comfort zones, I want there to be an element of reverence, which sounds arrogant but that's just my character, I think there should be some element of reverence in there. So that's mainly what it's mainly about, I think. I'm not your *pal,* you wouldn't want to have a pint with me, that's not me. I'm not your mate so I don't want it to feel like a mate-y party atmosphere.

NC: So last time we spoke you mentioned how when you're on TV and when you're on stage, you're changing your physicality on different platforms. Is that something that you still do or do you feel like because people are more familiar with you it's more of a set thing that you do?

PW: I find now that if I have space I try to fill it. Certainly when I first started out I really filled every space I was in, I'd bound about and be very expressive and then I became very small in my movement. It made the gigs harder because so much more riding on the words themselves. I had to relearn that if you sell something it can really help, so I'm a bit bigger now and I'm more confident. I'm dealing with more challenging ideas that aren't quite as likeable as my old stuff so I have to be really confident and sell it to the audience.

NC: And in terms of the way you dress… I found when I was talking to especially female East Asian comedians a lot of them said 'I don't wear these things, I can't wear certain colours or

collars,' in terms of if the audience saw that, them feeling like they would immediately fall into a stereotype. Is that something that you think about when you think about what you wear and your appearance?

PW: The main thing is I try to wear things that are relatively understated because if there's a lot going on people won't listen to me as much. It might just be a lack of confidence thing, because I don't think I'm engaging enough on my own, and if I have an engaging shirt people will lose their attention on me and look at the shirt.

NC: Didn't you wear a shirt with big American flags on it for--?

PW: I did but they're not big, they're just a thin thing across the chest there. I'm wearing louder and louder things now. Depends so much on my mood on the day, what I wear. I can spend ages trying to figure out what shirt to wear on stage. I have a few favourites, this one has fallen out of favour. I don't wear this one on stage anymore. I get very superstitious about the shirt I'm wearing.

NC: What was the thought process for Taskmaster, in terms of wearing the yellow suit for the whole thing?

PW: Hmm. I, a couple of years ago, went to the Bruce Lee museum in Hong Kong and I found it very moving because I hadn't realised just how unique and unprecedented he was, because he was this East Asian man who was very strong and very sexy and very confident, and so I thought I wanted to pay homage to that in some way, in a funny way. When you do Taskmaster

they say you have to wear the same thing for every task but you can wear whatever you like, you can wear an outfit, you can wear normal clothes, if you want an outfit we can help sort that out for you. So I saw an opportunity to get a free *Game of Death* jumpsuit, so I said how about this? There were times when I regretted it. It wasn't very practical, it had no pockets, it wasn't always comfortable, the zip on the back would break a lot, it was more revealing than I thought it would be, but people found it funny [laughs] and it took some pressure off me actually being funny because I looked funny. It was mostly about, I wanted to play up the Asianness as well. I was the first East Asian person on the show and I guess I wanted to mark that in some kind of way.

NC: I think you should have won.

PW: [Laughs] I certainly think I should have done better at some tasks than I did.

NC: I do want to ask you about your experience at Edinburgh Fringe last year. Selling out, extra shows, lots happening. I know everyone I know who went to fringe texted me saying 'Phil Wang's sold out his show,' just because they tell me about all the East Asians doing things. Was your experience of Edinburgh Fringe, because I know you've been before, do you feel like it was hugely different in terms of reception, I guess?

PW: Yeah I mean, considering the first year I went up, on the last Saturday, I had fifteen people in, to: I didn't have any tickets left before the Fringe even started. I mean, it was strange and I hadn't expected it to have taken off. I knew I would do better than I had ever before because I had more profile but I didn't think it'd be that much. And that changes the pressure on you

because suddenly you have to prove that you're worth all those pre booked tickets. And some days I felt like I didn't prove it, so the fringe has a way of making you feel terrible about yourself no matter how well you're selling. That year was no different, I still hit a depression slump in the middle, I still felt like the show was terrible at the same point as I do every fringe, so if it's any consolation to people who aren't selling well, take it from me it doesn't make you feel any better [laughs]. It's just one less thing to worry about, which is a significant thing not to worry about, but you still have the same crises of confidence.

NC: Do you want to talk about performing stand-up in Malaysia?

PW: Yeah. The first time I ever performed there was in my hometown of Kota Kinabalu. I did two nights, the first was really awful. It was full of my family and a couple of family friends and the compere was really aggressive. He was this aggressive, gross English-Australian guy. I think I might have been the only actual Malaysian person on, because there's another guy on from New Zealand I think and he was kind of hack and gross. I think he was a magician as well.

NC: Is it mostly expats then, in terms of Malaysian comedy? I know in Bangkok it's mostly expats performing in Bangkok.

PW: I think it certainly used to be but now there's a lot of Malaysian comedians. I think it's less so. But this is a white guy who performs all around Southeast Asia, and he's in some ways very impressive because he's learnt a lot of Southeast Asian languages and he has jokes in lots of different languages, but he's from a very old school of stand-up that is aggressive and bit misogynistic and a bit route one, and I went up and did some stuff I'd written just for Sabah, for

Kota Kinabalu, just for Malaysia, and it went, I wasn't very confident and there was an ugly atmosphere there and so much of the room was my family and it went quite badly. The second night the room was full of younger Malaysians and it was great, really fun. A couple years after I was on tour with, the Melbourne Comedy Festival put on an Asian tour of a few comics and they'd tour around Asian and we did Kuala Lumpur and Penang. The Penang gig wasn't great but the Kuala Lumpur gigs were really good and in my time there I managed to write jokes about Chinese and maybe I had a couple Malaysian gags, I'm not sure, but that was brilliant, in KL, and that experience is what made me want to do some shows in Minglish.

NC: So, like you said there weren't many East Asian comedians until quite recently, but when you first started out were there any comedians you particularly looked up to and took on their style?

PW: I mean at first I sort of copied Russell Peters, who's a Canadian-Indian guy; I value him as someone who showed that Asians can do stand-up and do it very successfully. And he's really good at playing on different nationalities and he really knows his stuff and I don't think people appreciate that bit enough. Dave Chapelle, Louis CK, Patrice O'Neill, Stewart Lee, I think these are the stand-ups I've drawn from, Stewart Lee not so much, a lot Dave Chapelle, and Louis CK I think. But hopefully I'm turning that into something my own.

APPENDIX G - Interview with Evelyn Mok in 2021

Interview on 07/06/2021 with Evelyn Mok

For context:

- I had interviewed Mok previously for my MA dissertation on a similar topic, so some parts of the interview mention our last interview.
- This interview was conducted at a time when live comedy had not quite returned following the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020, so Mok makes references to not having performed recently

NC: I wanted to start by asking you about something you mentioned last time we spoke, which was that at the beginning of performances you tend to address your Asian heritage to “get it out the way” so you can start talking about other things. Do you feel like that’s changed at all or is it something that you still do?

EM: That’s changed, I think… Maybe it’s because I’m more comfortable on stage or maybe it’s because I’ve gotten it out of my system, but then again I haven’t performed stand-up for like a year. It’s probably because I’m getting more interested in talking about other things than that and exploring other things. So, I don’t do it as much anymore, definitely.

NC: And do you feel like there’s an acceptance on the audience’s part? I know I’ve spoken to people who feel that if they don’t address being Asian then it feels like the audience aren’t quite as on board with them as when they do address it. Do you feel like audiences are more on board without having that introduction?

EM: Yeah, I don't think they need it, honestly. It kind of depends on how you present everything and how you present yourself onstage, just your energy and stuff. I feel like audiences don't really… they see that you are Asian. And I used to feel that way, that I needed to address it in order for people to get on board, but now I feel like that's not the case. I think a lot of it can be about how comfortable you are. As a stand-up, our job is to interpret the audience and perceive the audience to make a judgement on what kind of material they might like, and a lot of the times, especially in London, that's not an issue. I think sometimes when we do that we project our own nervousness onto the audience, because doing stand-up is nerve wracking, so it can get mixed up that way. At least in my experience now, in London, a lot of audiences don't care. If I go outside of London then that's a different story, but then that's also a different type of humour that might be more penetrating for an audience… outside of London where the type of humour is a bit more paint-by-numbers, you know? Where they want you to explore subjects that are a bit clearer rather than subjects that maybe would demand them to reflect a bit more.

NC: Do you feel like you being more comfortable has manifested in the material that you do? Do you feel like outside of the introduction do you feel like… there are more topics or different topics that you want to talk about on stage?

EM: Yeah, I definitely feel like I'm trying to do a different type of comedy. I've always been very joke based, but now I'm trying to tell stories, so I'm exploring how to tell stories in a funny way. So it's definitely made me more experimental and more unafraid of bombing, which I used to be quite worried about.

NC: I know being multicultural is something that you have addressed in your stand-up before, and I think there can be a tendency where… people feel like if they have a multicultural background it's ignored because they're viewed as just being Asian, and that being their predominant feature as a comic. Do you feel like your multiculturalism is being addressed more, or has it always gone hand-in-hand with being Asian?

EM: I think here in England, because they're so conscious of race, they address me more as a Swedish person. I think because it's different and it's maybe more unusual and therefore more interesting. So, I think... in my experience, people tend to gravitate towards the Swedishness more than the Asianness. Also, I think it's because they're *very* afraid of being offensive. So, I think it's always been what you decide to talk about, really. In a lot of cases, we—growing up as minorities—because we face so much microaggression and overt racism sometimes, that affects us in a way where we then put ourselves into those categories or kind of box ourselves into categories where we're stuck and can't get out of. So I think it's partially that we face microaggressions and discrimination, but then it's also partially that we tend to keep ourselves or let ourselves be kept in those boxes. As I've gotten older, I've learnt or understood that if we start to define our own values and our own boundaries then people around us will adhere to that and respect it. I'm not denying racism or saying that you can have away with racism just by setting boundaries, but I mean if you have boundaries for yourself just around regular people who want to understand and respect, you teach them what to and how to interact with you.

NC: When you're doing stand-up and you're telling a story or addressing something where you know that there's a stereotype that's linked to that, do you feel like it's something that you'll go out of your way to address or are you at a point where you can leave it and you don't have to

address that. I think especially when talking about sexuality when you're an Asian woman, there are a lot of linked stereotypes there.

EM: I've tried to subvert the stereotypes maybe, but I don't know if I have. I think I probably always have tried to address the obvious stereotypes in some way and hoped that I've subverted it. But then, when you tell a joke you can have an intention with it, but once it's left your mouth the interpretation is whatever the person who hears it interprets. So, if you have an audience of a hundred people you're going to have a hundred interpretations and you can't really control that. I can have an intention with a joke that I tell, but then it can be interpreted in whatever way to whatever purpose, and it'll be due to whatever that person's life experience and references are, so you can't really stop it. However… I think it's really interesting, that thing of trying to subvert stereotypes, because I never know if it's clear or not. I have a joke about being slurred at, at a show, and the punchline is 'sure she can do that, because while she's doing that we're taking over, the Chinese are taking over.' When I started doing that joke which was a really long time ago, I was punching up, but now it's kind of true? Chinese people are kind of taking over [laughs]. So now, I think that joke is kind of enforcing stereotypes so I'm like okay what do I do? I should stop doing this joke even if my intention at the start was to punch up or prove a point. Now it's like, people are actually angry with Chinese people because they *are* dominating and taking over, so it's really tricky. I think if you do that you always have to be aware of what is out there as a stereotype and what people are thinking and saying and it's tough. But I think we all do, every comic who is an ethnic minority does it or attempts to do it and we have to be on our toes. I mean, obviously you should write new material every year and throw out old jokes… you just have to keep an eye on it.

NC: Last time we spoke you mentioned that there are… certain sounds you won't make or words that you won't use, and Ali Wong has spoken about how she used to dress with very baggy clothes and masculine because she didn't want her clothes to fall into a stereotype and distract from her material. Do you feel like that's something that you still do?

EM: That's really interesting with Ali Wong because if you look at her specials she has taken on the outfit of the Asian mom, with the flip flops, tight leopard print dress, and glasses and hair, so that's really fascinating. I think about how I dress now as in I want to look presentable on stage, so I want to look *good* on stage. But I don't think about how I dress in terms of perpetuating stereotypes because I don't think I've ever dressed in a way that would. Also, because I'm a plus-sized Chinese lady, so that already kind of goes against type. I guess, I did wear a jumpsuit that is green and that jumpsuit just kind of made me look like I was part of the communist party [laughs], so I did make a joke about that, but then I wear that intentionally now so I can make that joke. I don't think anyone else thinks that until I point it out. So, I don't think I think too much about that in terms of reinforcing stereotypes.

NC: Do you feel like, when you're addressing an audience that is majority Asian, do you change anything about the way you perform or what you perform?

EM: No, but I relax a bit more because I know that everybody there has the same references and get the jokes on a different level. So, I just relax a bit more. But, I don't necessarily change my material. However, my audience interaction is a bit more, maybe Asian in a way? I can make fun of stereotypes and stuff, and it's like 'oh yeah we're all laughing together' as opposed to, if it was a white audience, I would be more careful to have those audience interactions because in

that case it would be less “we” and more “oh that’s how they are” so it’s that thing of not wanting to foster any new stereotypes in somebody’s mind.

NC: I know live comedy hasn’t been happening for a while… when I spoke to Phil Wang just before lockdown happened and he mentioned, because everyone was quite aware of COVID at the time, when he was performing he would address it. Yuriko Kotani would open for him so he would call them the COVID Tour because they were two East Asian stand-ups. Do you feel like COVID has changed the atmosphere at all for East Asian people?

EM: I think it probably has and will. I think a lot of comics are addressing the racism of it, which is both because it came from China but also that East Asian people have just gotten so many hate crimes, basically. I think... all comics are going to talk about COVID, but Asian comics are going to address the racism of it.

NC: I find it quite interesting that on *Rice to Meet You*, you and Nigel Ng both talk about experiencing racist incidents recently; in terms of addressing that in the current climate, do you feel like in the comedic way that you address that you had to be more cautious because it’s now in the moment or do you feel like it’s something you can quite easily discuss in a comedic way?

EM: I think we could easily discuss it in a comedic way, mostly because Nigel doesn’t really give a damn about being sensitive to a topic, which is great because I think it might be cathartic to people. We both understand the seriousness of it, and because we have both been victims to it, which is crazy, him more severely because he got punched, it’s cathartic for both of us to joke about it. Also, I think hopefully it’s cathartic for listeners to hear because at the moment

everything that covers hate crimes towards East Asian people is so serious. It's the videos, we get to see the videos of the crimes occurring and it's so grim and it's full on, and it's distressing and quite disturbing. So hopefully if people can hear us joking about it that can feel cathartic for them, and hopefully people don't see it as just making fun of the situation because that's absolutely not what we're doing. We're dealing with something pretty traumatic through humour, which is our coping mechanism. So hopefully it helps rather than offends.

NC: Just to finish on a more positive note, are there any Asian comedians at the moment that you are particularly enjoying or that particularly influenced you when you were starting out?

EM: I mean, Margaret Cho obviously, who was The Asian Comedian when I was starting out, is amazing. Now, Ronny Chieng is amazing of course, Karen Chee, Tien Tran, Sherry Cola, and Bowen Yang as well, I think he's so funny. There are a lot of them, or *us*, around!

APPENDIX H - Interview with Ken Cheng on 14/07/2022

Interview on 14/07/2022 with Ken Cheng

For context:

- I had interviewed Cheng previously for my MA dissertation on a similar topic, conducted via email.
- There is reference to Cheng's radio show, *Chinese Comedian* available on BBC Radio 4 which has so far had 3 series. Cheng did a work-in-progress showing of some content in the show and material for his show *To All The Racists I've Blocked Before* on Zoom in July 2021 which I attended.

NC: So I wanted to start off really broadly and just ask you how much you think sort of racial stereotypes do impact what you do, whether that's in the method in which you create work or if it's the way that you perform?

KC: Yeah. I think with stand-up comedy, that's definitely the starting point for anyone of any ethnicity that isn't the default, the majority. You do see it as a jumping off point for where you build your material, so definitely anyone who's starting out might think, OK, how am I different? And in my case, it was that I was Chinese, and when I started doing this there were—there still aren't—many East Asian comedians in the UK, but there were even fewer than, so it was seen as quite a rarity, so definitely the jumping off point. As time went on, I definitely still use that as a kind of starting point at times, but I tried to think of more kind of interesting ways to do it and more unique ways to do it, because you end up watching a lot of other East Asian comedians, on maybe TV, or like, for America, a lot of them tend to go straight for the stereotypes and

they're often play up to the stereotypes which I never wanted to do. I never wanted to be like, hey audience, I agree with this stereotype, which I think you see a lot of comedians from the noughties and probably before, like if there was an East Asian comedian, they do tend to do that a lot more. And I didn't want to do that. So I started trying to think of ways to actually talk about it by celebrating it rather than punching down on myself, really.

NC: And do you feel like there's material where you felt like it had nothing to do with your ethnicity, but once you performed it to an audience, you realised that it was being viewed through that kind of perspective?

KC: I think to an extent, yes, I think ultimately a comedy is all about the person, so you're always going to be defined by that, even when you don't want to be. I remember there was definitely a period about five or six or seven years ago, where I didn't do any material about race and I think you would still, people kind of still take note that you are different and I think it's kind of like a double… sometimes you can't win in the sense, that sometimes if if you don't talk about your race, people want you to talk about race, and then if you do talk about race, they want you to stop talking about your race, you kind of get into that catch-22. I remember, I think the comedian Lolly Adefope, if you're familiar with her, she had a review of her first show that she didn't bring up her ethnicity at all, and that was seen as sort of, a kind of negative point about the show. But then if you do get comedians who talk about it a lot and you get the same exact criticism the other way. So it's, yeah, you end up getting that regardless of what you do.

NC: I saw you do a work in progress on zoom like this time last year and it was the one that you brought up in the new episode of *Chinese Comedian* where you ended up having to buy zoom.

Maybe I'm in the middle of the gig. I was just wondering in terms of COVID and how that has sort of changed the landscape. Do you feel like pre-COVID and post-COVID the way that you've approached talking about race has changed it all or is it just that it's a new reference point?

KC: I think definitely a new reference point. I think it very much formed the basis of a lot of my material that I wrote that year as East Asians were brought to the forefront for a few months. It definitely inspired a lot of material, but I don't think it's overall changed how I deal with comedy. I was actually looking to get away from talking about that kind of stuff, specifically racism itself, not necessarily just race, but I did a whole show about racism in 2019, before the pandemic, and I very much wanted to stop talking about it because for one, I kind of exhausted how much I could say about it. And then secondly, I knew that audiences across the country don't like it when you shine light on racism. They like material about race, but like I said before, they liked the stuff which they can kind of laugh along with, but don’t like a lens on their own attitudes towards racism and stuff. So I was gonna move away from that. But then obviously, the pandemic happened and Asian hate, all the Asian hate started rising. So I had to really talk about it. And it was all about how to find an interesting way to do that material. But after that, I probably will just go to whatever is the current topic, I don't think it's changed, like, fundamentally.

NC: And I remember in that show you ended with talking about how you felt like you were going to stop doing comedy about race, but at the end, you sort of decided that… the idea of like, it's not enough to not be racist, you have to be actively anti-racist, and that you felt like comedy was a good vehicle for that. I was just wondering if you could talk a bit more about what it is about comedy that you feel like is good for addressing those things.

KC: I think comedy allows us to look at things in a different ways. If you can make a joke out of a thing, it's very different than doing a lecture about it. It's very hard to get the average person who might not go show up to a lecture to kind of go to a lecture about racism or colonialism or the history of the UK. And certainly those are useful as well. But then comedy I think comes at it from a different angle and with the rise of social media and the last 10 years, you now see a lot of comedy which is about issues about social justice and equality, and it can be a very effective way to subtly change how people view these topics. So I think I've always seen it as quite a good anchor when, if you can make someone laugh while also they're thinking about it, that's an extra bonus. And I think people engage much more differently that way.

NC: And in terms of social media, I know you've spoken about getting racist tweets and stuff like that. Do you find at live shows you get sort of like racist heckles at all?

KC: I very rarely, very rarely. Maybe if I do a gig which I don't, where the crowd is definitely not my crowd. It's very rare though I think. I think it takes a lot more courage to do that in a live room compared to an anonymous social media account where you can just type anything and just leave it. I think people are probably thinking racist stuff in the audience but heckling is much more rare. Especially racist heckling.

NC: And when you are performing live, do you feel like there are steps that you take in the way that you present yourself in terms of being impacted by potential stereotypes? I know when I've spoken in particular to female comics, because there is such a strong sexualised stereotype, that there's sometimes a hesitancy to wear certain types of clothing or to behave in specific

ways. I wonder if that's something that you've considered in the way that you present yourself on stage.

KC: Not that actively, actually, I think I'm of the philosophy that I'm happy to be different and I'm not gonna play up to anyone's perception of me. So I don't really think too hard about who I am on stage except being me and just doing the material that I wrote. Maybe subconsciously I might play up to some of that in my delivery, but I think that's definitely less true now than when I started when I would definitely play up to this kind of, okay I'm a Chinese maths nerd, which is why people kind of expect and kind of feel comfortable because that fulfils a kind of stereotype they know. And I think it does. It is quite effective. Also, it's a comedy persona, I'm a Chinese maths nerd, but I'm also able to write jokes and do comedy, but I think I've moved quite a lot away from that since starting out. But it is interesting, definitely, that that is the go-to. And I think a lot of Chinese community/East Asian comedians do play up to that across the world. And it's a very common stereotype that informs how you present, what your persona is on stage automatically without really thinking about it too hard. It was just the default way of me performing.

NC: I'm really interested, in terms of multiculturalism, comedians who do come from a lot of different backgrounds but feel like their Asianness is the thing that audiences end up taking away from who they are. And I know you were born and raised here and you grew up in Cambridge, and I was wondering if you feel like that part of your identity is as acknowledged as much as the Asian part of it.

KC: Probably not as much, I think. Yeah, probably not the fact that I'm British-born Chinese rather than mainland Chinese, I don't think British people really acknowledged the difference there. I think they go by what they see primarily and probably they don't know enough about the difference there.

NC: Do you feel like since you started doing comedy, the audience mindset has changed all, or do you feel like it's more that you've changed the way that you've approached things?

KC: I think definitely the mindsets changed now that there are more East Asian comics like Phil Wang, who's now big, he's massive, he's got a Netflix special, you've got Nigel Ng, Uncle Roger… It's just much more normalised. So I don't get the kind of occasional comments that I did maybe when I started out, you can feel that people would immediately be surprised to see a Chinese comic. And you'd even get comments from people being like, oh, I didn't expect him to speak like that when he came out. Stuff like that. I think it's much more normalised and people, especially comedy fans, definitely will expect a lot more. So it's not something that you would encounter anywhere near as much as ten years ago.

NC: Do you think that has changed the kinds of topics that you can touch on? Like, do you feel like there are more things you can talk about now than when you first started out? Or do you feel like that's always kind of been the same?

KC: I think so. I think the audiences are more knowledgeable and they'll be on your side with you on certain issues, that's for sure. I think that what people know about race and racism has evolved a lot. There are way more books about it. The way more people of colour are on TV and

in comedy and kind of represented everywhere. I think it's talked about a lot more on social media. Yeah, I think you have a different starting off point especially if you're performing to kind of Gen Z, millennials, anyone under 35? Anyone under 40? Probably anyone in London. You'll probably be fine, like you can just reference stuff that, I think we all kind of know the same things at this stage. Yeah, you can assume they know a thing and start further along if you're talking about racism.

NC: And is there anything that you feel like you still can't talk about? Things that you feel like still wouldn't land the way you'd want them to?

KC: I think in certain audiences, yes. If I'm performing to an older audience or an audience in a smaller town, then yes, totally. I think in London, if you're doing a gig which has a quite well-versed comedy-fan audience who sees a lot of alternative comedy, then no, I don't think there's anything that you can't do with them. I think you can kind of experiment however you want with that audience. It’s a very liberal progressive audience who are willing to explore new ideas and anyone who's really into comedy is into comedy because they would like that kind of pushing of the norm, that kind of the weirdness of it and the new ideas. So I think in those audiences, which are getting bigger and bigger the same way that comedy is getting bigger and bigger, you can kind of expect you can talk about almost anything you want to. That is worth talking about, I think.

NC: So when you are performing to audiences that, like you said are maybe older or in smaller towns, do you preempt stuff and change material beforehand or is it sort of about getting up on stage, doing something and then gauging how it goes?

KC: I think maybe the latter. I think recently, because I do so few gigs out of town now, after the pandemic, I usually do a lot worse than how I do in London and I just have to kind of roll with it because I don't really want to be a kind of comedian who has a, like, mainstream set where they just bring it out. Interestingly, if I did material from maybe five years ago when I started, when I was newer, that material will go down better because I think my material has become a bit more advanced on race, especially because I exhausted all the basic stuff I would say about race. And also my old stuff had the kind of stuff which, not necessarily punches down on stereotypes, but to some extent played up to it more than the stuff I do now.

NC: And how how did you find doing online gigs and Zoom gigs in terms of reading the room?

KC: I think online gigs are great. I think, first of all, all the people who came to see online gigs were super comedy fans. You don't get people who are going to the pub and seeing what's on, you got dedicated comedy fans. The Zoom gigs I did were to fans of me specifically, so being able to cater to that makes it a lot better. A second thing is that it allowed me to perform to people who would otherwise be unable to access my comedy in that they probably live quite far away or they have access needs and they can't leave the house. And that whole audience of people isn't touched by live comedy. And that was a great thing that those people got to see me perform. A few other factors like lack of travel time? Incredible. I think the worst part of gigging is travel time. Also it’s really hard to have a bad Zoom gig because the good thing about a Zoom gig is, if three to five people are laughing, the way mic sound works is that you can't discern that from 20 people laughing. There's no difference. So if three people are laughing it sounds like everyone's laughing, and that doesn't happen. People are very self-conscious about who else is

laughing. And if three people are laughing out of 50, then it just sounds… you can hear that. So you can't really have an awkward, or at least I haven't really had an awkward zoom gig even when no one's laughing. You just kind of roll through it more than if you were faced in front of an audience. I could see all their faces while they're not laughing. You can just feel like, OK, I'm in my own room. I'm just talking, it doesn't matter.

NC: I was just wondering, because I think you've performed a couple gigs for *Chinese Arts Now* where the audience is majority East and Southeast Asian, I was wondering how that feels for you performing to a mostly East Asian audience, and if that does feel different to performing to wider audiences.

KC: Yeah. I think if you have a special niche, if the gig has a special purpose, the audience is usually more on board than if it was just a random comedy show. I think those gigs are usually quite raucous. Well, actually it depends. Sometimes, yeah, they can be really great because they're very much on your side as a community thing and your crowd is a community… So those guys are really great. And also I guess usually in those gigs, you would have an all East Asian line up as well. So there's something to celebrate about that. People are very much on board and supportive, they're usually very good gigs.

NC: I'm really interested in the idea of, I know there's the whole idea of like punching up and punching down in comedy, but the idea of, I guess, laughing up and laughing down. I think there are instances in comedy where someone is, in particular, discussing racist stereotypes that have been put against them, and feeling like they're not quite sure if the audience is laughing at

the stereotype or at them for doing the stereotype. I wonder if that's something you've ever encountered where you're not quite sure if the audience laughs with you or at you.

KC: I think I've definitely encountered that, yeah. If I encounter that with a piece of material, I start thinking about whether I should be doing it. If they're laughing for the wrong reason, I don't. I don't think it's worth doing it if you're not getting your intended message across, or you're just getting a laugh for the sake of getting a laugh. I think you can't exactly know why people are laughing, but you can kind of make a judgement call… When you've done material over and over again and you do it and suddenly people are laughing at it a different way, you just immediately know that's why they're probably laughing for the wrong reason. So I just usually cut it out quite quickly in that situation.

NC: Is there's anything you feel like that you've experienced that I've not touched on?

KC: I guess, I'll say that ultimately the audiences are getting better and more supportive, but there's still a lot of problems in the comedy industry as a whole because there are a lot of gatekeepers in position of power and TV and the media, and that's still a bit of an obstructive struggled that we're getting better representation in front of the camera, on screen. But the makeup of a lot of the commissioners and producers is mostly white, Oxbridge educated, middle class and rich. So you kind of have an uphill struggle there. I think I find that to be the bigger barrier than doing live comedy as a whole.

NC: I know you talked about people asking you, what's the biggest change in the way people treat you since COVID has happened, and you were saying, well, I get lots more requests for

interviews now. I wonder if that's something that you feel like is a balance that needs to be addressed in terms of… I guess, I've certainly been in situations where I feel like I'm only there for tokenism, and that—I don't wanna say paranoia because I I think it's legitimate, but that sort of worried that you're only getting things for those reasons. I wonder if that's something that you've experienced or if that's something that you've dealt with.

KC: Yeah, I think it's something that you always fear if you're different. But ultimately, I think weighing up what the challenges of being a minority are greater than the stuff you'll get as a measure of positive discrimination or tokenism. So actually I think it evens out probably. And suddenly there are times where I've definitely got a thing just because of that kind of reasoning, but as long as I think I'm gonna do a good job, that doesn't matter, really.

NC: And are there any East Asian comedians that you are particularly enjoying right now or that have really impacted you?

KC: Actually, I don't think I've seen any, especially new ones, who I haven't gigged with for ages. There's a woman, Chin Wang, who is quite new, and she's actually not British-born, which is quite rare. And she, I think moved to the UK a few years ago, and she's really funny because I think, with people like that who aren't British born, they come at comedy from a very different angle and it's nice to see that happening in real time. Same with Yuriko Kotani who's Japanese born, and I think their brains definitely come at material differently to a lot of British-born East Asians.

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