

## Article

# Adopting Stereotypes: The Yellow Peril, the Model Minority and *Crazy Rich Asians*

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### Abstract

Drawing on Yuko Kawai's elaboration of the dialectic between the yellow peril and the model minority stereotypes in Asian representation in the U.S. entertainment media, the paper examines how these stereotypes are adopted in Jon M. Chu's 2018 film, *Crazy Rich Asians*, by authors and media producers of Asian descent. Hailed as one of the first triumphs for Asian visibility and self-control of representation in the Hollywood film industry, *Crazy Rich Asians*' adoption of racial stereotypes such as the yellow peril and the model minority solidifies the pervasiveness of such white-constructed notions. The objective of this paper is threefold. First, it revisits how Asians and Asian Americans were often oversimplified as either villains or comic reliefs via the yellow peril and the model minority stereotypes, which gave rise to Asian-authored media in Hollywood. Second, the paper problematizes Kawai's dialectical convergence of the two stereotypes, as well as explores their discursive functions and effects on the stereotypical subject through a postcolonial perspective. Third, the paper textually traces how these stereotypes are adopted and appropriated by Asian authors and producers in *Crazy Rich Asians*, specifically in the film's characterization and narrative strategies. The paper also discusses what is happening to Asian representations post-*Crazy Rich Asians*, and although it does not wish to project any assumption into the future of Asian representation, the paper joins with many of *Crazy Rich Asians*' critics in criticizing the film's assimilation into the dominant white values, but with an uplifting cause and result of achieving recognition and success for the minorities.

## 1. Introduction

Throughout its modern history in the U.S. entertainment media, Asian representation on-screen has been shaped, with very few exceptions, by two prominent stereotypes: the yellow peril and the model minority. The former denotes a severely negative image with a racialized xenophobic connotation placing the skin color—yellow—as a despicable threat; and the latter implies a seemingly positive notion where Asians (are expected to) achieve respectable economic and academic status despite being a minority. In her 2005 article, Kawai conceptualizes these two seemingly dichotomous and separated concepts into an interrelated dialectical pair, and analyzes how the two stereotypes simultaneously play out in the 1993 film *Rising Sun*, albeit appears to be a yellow peril film. As a result, Kawai argues that even when Asians are only portrayed as either the yellow peril or the model minority, the presence of the other is guaranteed in the portrayal's connotation, making the two stereotypes “blended”, “ambivalent”, and hence “influential” on their subjects—Asian communities (2005, 126).

While revisiting Kawai's takes on the dialectical pair of the yellow peril and the model minority, which she contextualizes within the economic tensions between the U.S. and Japan in the 1980s, the paper argues that such a notion has become vivid again from the 2010s onwards, yet with major switches regarding the represented subject (from Japan to China) and the controllers of representation (from white to Asian authors, producers and artists). In the recent years, especially after the 2003 counterterrorism Iraq War, China has risen as one of the U.S.'s top rivals (Pei 2020). The representation of Asians in Hollywood, specifically Chinese and Chinese Americans, is hence influenced by this prevailing tension. However, different from other anti-Asian waves in Hollywood before, the remote control of visual representation is in the hands of the minority now, with the release of Jon M. Chu's 2018 acclaimed adaptation of Kevin Kwan's novel, *Crazy Rich Asians*.

The film is not the sole Asian-themed and partly Asian-written media to have appeared in the recent years, with sitcoms and series such as ABC's *Fresh Off the Boat* (2015-2020), Netflix's *Master of None* (2015-), and CBC Television's *Kim's Convenience* (2016-), all receiving significant recognitions. However, within the cinematic realm, where many stereotypes about Asians were produced and strengthened in the past, *Crazy Rich Asians* arrived as a phenomenon. By topping North American box offices within a week of its release, leading to a sequel currently under production, albeit the sole all-Asian-cast picture made by a major American studio for 25 years following *The Joy Luck Club* in 1993 (Richwine 2018; C. Lee 2018; Sims 2018), *Crazy Rich Asians* has become a shining example representing the start of Asian control over their own representation in the still white-dominant arena of Hollywood.

The film follows Rachel, a strong-willed Chinese American, who is feted the youngest professor at New York University, as she visits her boyfriend Nick Young's home country, Singapore. During the trip, Rachel discovers that Nick is the heir to Singapore's most affluent family. Their relationship starts facing many challenges, most of which come from the Youngs, whose matriarch Eleanor—Nick's mother—believes that Rachel is unfit for her son. Rachel also realizes many great differences between her and Nick's backgrounds, especially the clashing mindset between a Chinese American and the long-rooted Chinese tradition. The film ends with Rachel and Nick finally getting together after Rachel uses her wit to win Eleanor's approval.

Despite enjoying much praise and attention by the time of its release, *Crazy Rich Asians* is not immune to backlashes and criticism. Tseng-Putterman (2018) comments that the film's portrayal of Asians and Asian Americans is soaked in white values, which reinforces assimilation to the white norms and weakens ethnic-specific experience and complexity. Also, Sugino (2019) refers to the film as a notable example of the "multicultural redemption narratives", where Asians' liberation from the former white oppressors is limited to occupying the positions of the white and wielding racial power over other races (often of darker skin such as African Americans), hence further "bolster an ingrained system of racial violence instead of dismantling it" (par. 46). I will return to various critiques of *Crazy Rich Asians* in the discussion to further problematize its politics of representation. Yet overall, in a critical study of representation similar to those mentioned above, the paper argues that *Crazy Rich Asians* is a powerful reinforcement of the white-constructed racial stereotypes, now adopted by the subjects (people of Asian descent) themselves. Specifically, the paper examines how the two stereotypes (the yellow peril and the model minority) are simultaneously produced in *Crazy Rich Asians*' characterization and narratives, even when the stereotypes are consciously recognized by crucial characters. For this, the paper conducts an inversive analysis to Kawai's study: where Kawai points out the presence of the model minority stereotype in the considered yellow peril film *Rising Sun*, the paper aims to prove that the yellow peril stereotype is ingrained within the so-called model minority film—*Crazy Rich Asians*. As a result, the paper reinforces the dialectical inseparability between the two seemingly opposite stereotypes, and argues that they have been internalized by their subjects (Asians and Asian Americans) and interpellated as the Asian American identity. By having Asians subjected themselves and their representations to the discourses constructed by white values, the question remains in the discussion if this adoption is the solution to cure Asian invisibility in the U.S. entertainment media for the time being.

It is also crucial to clarify the terminology used in the paper hereafter. Many of the works cited in the paper often use "Asians" to stand for East Asians, or even more

specifically North East Asians. In addition, while using “Asians” in the title, *Crazy Rich Asians* mostly features people of Chinese descent in the U.S. and Singapore—the film’s main location. The paper will acknowledge such a great lack of inclusivity of various Asian ethnicities and birthplaces as not only a crucial characteristic of how the two stereotypes (the yellow peril and the model minority) work, but also a major weakness of the film. Nevertheless, the paper wishes to use terms such as “Asian”, “East Asian”, “Chinese”, “Asian American”, “Chinese American”, etc. interchangeably only for the sake of convenience in the analysis. A detailed differentiation of these terms, which leads to an exploration of each ethnicity’s representation, is undeniably deeper than this paper’s capacity and deserves an in-depth study of its own.

## **2. From the Villainous Yellow Peril to the Model Minority Comic Relief: Asians Onscreen and the Rise of Asian-Authored Media**

Although being considered limited within the realm of the U.S entertainment media, Asian representation has consistently appeared in the form of racial stereotypes, in which the yellow peril and the model minority are the dominant ones. Indications of the yellow peril appeared much earlier compared to the model minority, which dated back to the Mongolian invasions of Europe by Genghis Khan circa the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Marchetti 1993; Kawai 2005). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century following the Gold Rush and the railroad expansion, the Western world, and the U.S specifically, witnessed a massive immigration of various Asian ethnic groups, most of whom came from China (Shim 1998). At around the same time, the white majority also started to be aware of China and Japan’s potential military power through press coverage of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900-1901, as well as the Sino-Japanese war of 1895 and the Russo-Japanese war of 1905 that signified the rise of Japanese imperialism (Kawai 2005, Klein 2015). These events resulted in the resurrection of the yellow peril image in the penny press, which vividly conveyed the impression that “Japanese and Chinese hordes were on the way to take over white America and destroy white civilization” (Shim 1998, 387-88).

Although it began as a warning sign about the military and immigration menaces from East Asia, in which China and Japan were the prime subjects, the yellow peril was not limited to a specific country or race, but it manifested itself as a racial discourse that “referred to cultural threat as well as economic, political, and military threats to the White race” (Kawai 2005, 112). Hence, the yellow peril is “bound by the time and place of the nation-state in which it arises”, whatever nation-state is considered a threat to white power at the time; and eventually serves as “a means of defining the European identity and a justification for European expansion and colonization” (Okihito 2014, 120). This

notion is most vivid in entertainment media, where the yellow peril often embodies the villain who threatens the straight-white-male hero with a twofold characteristic: being a highly intellectual schemer with immense criminal/military power, and being a predator that takes away the white hero's innocent woman. One of the first and most notorious yellow peril villains of this kind is Fu Manchu—the evil Chinaman that kept resurrecting to endanger white civilization, which first appeared in Sax Rohmer's serial novels and was later popularized in a series of onscreen appearances (Mayer 2012; Shim 1998).

Fu Manchu was one of the hallmarks for the yellow peril discourse to shift its prominence from warfare and political coverage on the news to popular culture. Since then, the evil doctor has become a recurrent trope in literature, cinema, and comics, corresponding to several anti-Asian waves related to World War II, the Cold War, the rise of Chinese/Vietnamese Communism, and the decolonization scope throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Repetitions and remnants of Fu Manchu maintain either or both characteristics of the archetypal yellow peril villain mentioned above: intellectually capable and sexually threatening. Notable examples are the *Flash Gordon* strip's Ming the Merciless, who plots to conquer the world while capturing the female lead; and the first major Bond villain Dr. No, who is a genius scientist with an island fortress and an army of ready henchmen (Parungao 2005).

The superhero science-fiction comics also witnessed an introduction of many Fu Manchu-typed villains namely DC Comics' Ching Lung (1937), Marvel Comics' the Mandarin (1964) and the reuse of Fu Manchu (later name Zheng Zu) in the *Shang-Chi* series (Gerding 2017, Patton 2019). In the Marvel Comic's *Iron Man* original story, which first appeared circa 1963 in the heat of the Vietnam War, American billionaire hero Tony Stark was captured by a Vietnamese Communist warlord named Wong-Chu. This was later changed to an Afghanistan warlord in the 2008 film adaptation, reinforcing the purpose of the yellow peril appearance as only depicting the current threat to the Western bloc, and to the U.S. specifically. Shim (1998) also notes that "the Fu Manchu syndrome" lived on in the Asians' portrayal of the Reagan-Bush era, when the economic competition between the U.S. and the Asian bloc (with Japan as a key player) was translated into military-metaphorical headlines such as Theodore H. White's "The Danger from Japan" (1985) and The Daily Breeze's "Asian Invasion" (1991), as well as an influx of Asian gangster films such as *Year of the Dragon* (1985), *Bloodsport* (1988), and *Deadly Target* (1994).

From the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, another notion has gained prominence in Asian representation: the model minority. Comparing to the former stereotype with its explicitly racist and negative connotation, the model minority marks a more positive depiction of Asians and Asian immigrants to the American public. Kawai (2005) remarks one of the first indications of the term can be traced back to two 1966 articles published in The New York Times Magazine and U.S. News and World Report.

Specifically, they feature success stories of Japanese and Chinese Americans in praising these communities as “the model minority groups who had close family ties, were extremely serious about education, and were law-abiding” (Kawai 2005, 113). B. Wong (2015) notes that although William Peterson, the writer of *The New York Times Magazine*’s 1966 article, officially coins the term “model minority” to Japanese Americans in emphasizing their remarkable learning ability, this label has evolved into a discourse that is commonly used to acknowledge the educational and career success of all Asian Americans.

Despite this positive surface, the socio-political context in which the model minority came into prominence reveals its underlying agenda. Kawai (2005) argues that the rise of the model minority put Asians in a triangular relationship with other races, specifically between white and African Americans, as the two articles were published in the heat of the Civil Rights Movement against systemic racism and segregation led by the African American community. Hence, the articles pose as direct counter-arguments to the movement by promoting Asians as “model”, and consequently downgrading other minorities (African Americans to be specific) as “problematic”. Ultimately, “[t]he model minority stereotype is constitutive of colorblind ideology in the sense that Asian Americans’ “success” is used to deny the existence of institutional racism and to “prove” that U.S. society is reasonably fair and open for racial minority groups to move up the social ladder” (Kawai 2005, 114).

Such a ‘divide and conquer’ strategy is not the only major problem of the model minority stereotype/myth. For years, scholars of Asian and Asian American studies have been debunking the myth as damaging to not only other minorities, but also to its own subjects—the Asians. Drawing from 50 years of scholarly research on this notion specifically, Hartlep (2013) concludes that the negative consequence of the model minority stereotype is threefold. Firstly, aligning with Kawai’s elaboration on the racial triangle between the Asians, the white, and the African Americans mentioned above, the model minority myth serves to strengthen the status quo of the U.S.’s racial hierarchy and, hence, verifies the ‘American Dream’ narratives against the Civil Right Movement. Secondly, by picking the Asians to be the ‘model’, this stereotype silences the complexity and multiplicity of real-life Asian experience, which includes experiences coming from not only individuals, but also from the extreme diversity of various Asian ethnicities. Thirdly, the model minority stereotype simultaneously and paradoxically denies and reinforces different challenges that many Asian individuals continue to face in terms of racism, discrimination, and mental health issues. Specifically, Hartlep (2013) notes that many mental health experts have been citing the model minority stereotype, as well as “its attendant high expectations”, as a likely contributor to the alarming suicide rates among young Asian Americans, although they are often perceived as “having few, if any, mental health problems” (par. 9).

Similar to the yellow peril, the model minority stereotype flourishes in entertainment

media. Although the term itself was coined and strikingly proliferated from the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I argue that crucial traits of the model minority stereotype have appeared onscreen even earlier than the term's official introduction. This is typified by several benevolent Asian characters from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the most notable one is Charlie Chan—a Chinese detective based in Honolulu, who first appeared in Earl Derr Biggers's novels from the 1920s. Although Biggers was reported to create Chan as a direct counter-thesis to the Fu Manchu-typed yellow peril villains so prevailing at the time (Ackerman 2018), the character himself continues to divide the critics to be either his defenders or his detractors through the multiplicity of readings and interpretations that the character ignites (Rzepka 2007). Nevertheless, I argue that the benevolent Chinese detective still embodies crucial characteristics of the discourse that the model minority would come to define. Okihito (2014) notes that if Fu Manchu is the yellow peril archetype, Charlie Chan is the model minority counterpart, as “[h]e is led by a white man, speaks with a broken tongue, and is docile and polite to a fault” (143). Wu (1979) also argues that Chan's “submissive, apologetic speech and manners” make him a shining example of “the model minority American, who is willing to be put through certain paces by white Americans in order to prove himself to them” (392). Moreover, the popularity of Charlie Chan, especially during World War II, was particularly weaponized to pitch divisive tensions among the minorities. Specifically, it signaled a triangular relationship, but not with the white and the African American like the model minority's embodiment of the 1960s, but with the white and the Japanese, who was deemed the U.S.'s central enemy at the time. Shim (1998) notices that “[d]uring the war, the Office of War Information (OWI) pronounced that the Charlie Chan series was included in the list of official anti-Japanese films”, posing the Chinese as the “ideal American minority” against the Japanese (392). Above all, these characterizations were often translated onscreen through the practice of “yellowface” by having a white actor impersonating a Chinaman character. Such a performance, hence, epitomizes one of the most racist caricatures of Asian representation on the Hollywood screen, according to a majority of the academic critics (Rzepka 2007).

After Charlie Chan, the model minority characterizations started to gain even more popularity in the U.S.'s visual culture around the same time as the term was made famous in the two aforementioned articles. One of the prime examples is Henry Koster's *Flower Drum Song* (1961), a musical film adapted from the 1958 Broadway play of the same name, which features “Asians as a “humble and quiet” model minority struggling to assimilate into White America without asking for anything” (Shim 1998, 395). Since then, the model minority continues to thrive in the depiction of Asians onscreen, which is marked by the proliferation of various filmic tropes such as diligent workers, Asian kung-fu masters, high-achiever students, computer nerds, and Oriental buddies/sidekicks

(Leung 2013; Ramirez 2020).

The flourish of such stereotypical characters also marked the use of Asian characters as comic relief. This is most typified by the infamous Mr. Yunioshi in Blake Edward's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), another one of the epitomes of racist portrayal and 'yellowface' in Hollywood. In general, the Asian comic relief usually includes characters that are either petty and ruthless, or overtly starchy and serious. Because of such characterizations, some Asian comic relief tropes onscreen, overtimes, does not exclusively embody the model minority but also blend with some yellow peril characterizations in terms of ruthlessness. Shim (1998) notes some of the prime examples of this kind of Asian depiction to appear in the 1980s, such as the exchange student Long Duk Dong<sup>1</sup> in John Hughes's *Sixteen Candles* (1984), or the Japanese characters in Ron Howard's *Gung Ho* (1986) and Lewis Teague's *Collision Course* (1989). Recently, this kind of humor manifests the entire onscreen persona of Korean American actor/comedian Ken Jeong, a notable example of Asian artists gaining fame from playing humiliating yet humorous stereotypical characters (of both the yellow peril and the model minority). This also characterizes one of Jeong's recent roles—Goh Wye Mun—in *Crazy Rich Asians*, which will be explored in the analysis to examine how Asian Americans are adopting the stereotypes onscreen.

The rise of the model minority, evidently, does not equal the disappearance of the yellow peril. Since earlier, the popularity of both the villainous Fu Manchu and the benevolent Charlie Chan signaled a long-running contrast of Asian representation. Once the model minority myth was officially introduced and proliferated from the 1960s, Asians and Asian Americans' portrayal continues to be conflicting between the two iconic stereotypes. On the one hand, the docility of Asian Americans continues to be highlighted in opposition to other 'rebellious' minorities, with the extension of the Charlie Chan series and various model minority tropes; on the other hand, as mentioned above, Asian villains and gang culture continues to appear onscreen that closely correspond with any anti-Asian wave prevailing in the U.S. at the given time (Kawai 2005; Shim 1998).

When not being the villain, the Asian is the comic relief. As a result, many Asian authors and artists advance in Hollywood by embracing the comical role to avoid being the evil one. This is most evident in the arrival of many critical-acclaimed Asian-authored media in the recent years, which is relatively limited to the genre of comedy. Notable examples are Netflix's *Master of None* (2015-), CBC's *Kim's Convenience* (2016-), and ABC's *Fresh Off the Boat* (2015-2020). Also, in many cases, we can see the pattern of Asian authors/artists beginning their career as stereotypical and/or humiliating comic relief minors in popular white-made shows, then later succeeding with self-produced comedy projects that highlights the Asian perspectives, while still maintaining the silly but self-conscious comedic persona/aesthetic. For example, Aziz Ansari, co-creator and star of the Emmy-winning



*Master of None*, was first known for his minor role in NBC's *Parks and Recreation* (2009-2015). The same case happens with another prominent Indian American artist Mindy Kaling, who first appeared as a minor character in NBC's *The Office* (2005-2013), then went on to produce and star in acclaimed television titles such as Fox's *The Mindy Project* (2012-2017) and NBC's *Champions* (2018) (Jenkins 2017). Ken Jeong is also a notable example of artists producing their own comedy shows after gaining recognitions for minor comic relief roles in white-produced films, with the release of ABC's *Dr. Ken* (2015-2017). Notably, Asian-authored sitcom *Fresh off the Boat*, which shares *Crazy Rich Asians*' star Constance Wu, deliberately employs stereotypes, the model minority to be particular, as the backbone of their comical premises and characters. With its success and popularity, *Fresh off the Boat* has utilized white-constructed contents (the stereotypes) and form (stereotype-based sitcom) to deliver a relatable daily-life story of a Chinese American family and present a relieved context for Asian audiences in the white-dominant industry (C. Lee 2016; Truong and Phung 2018). It is from this landscape of Asian-produced comedies that *Crazy Rich Asians* arrived and thrived, which leads to the film employing the same tactic: using stereotypes to celebrate Asian representation onscreen.

### **3. The Dialectic of the Yellow Peril and the Model Minority: Asians as Postcolonial Subjects of "Otherness"**

Although it seems that the yellow peril and model minority stereotypes denote opposite meanings, they are not separated from each other, and one does not simply replace the other. Drawing from Okihito (2014), Kawai (2005) elaborates their interconnectedness into a dialectical circle of racial performativity, in which representations are constantly moving along the arc between the yellow peril and the model minority in order to maintain white supremacy. Specifically, "[p]eople of Asian descent become the model minority when they are depicted to do better than other racial minority groups, whereas they become the yellow peril when they are described to outdo White Americans" (115). For example, after being considered the model minority two decades post-World War II, Japan fell from grace due to its trading tension with the Reagan administration. Together with other rising Asian "tigers" at the time, namely Hong Kong and Singapore, Japan once again became the "perilous invaders", while the model minority token "accommodated other Asian ethnic groups such as Asian Indians, Filipinos, Koreans and Vietnamese" (Kawai 2005, 116). As the result, Kawai (2005) argues that "the construction of the model minority" is not a replacement of the former negative stereotype, but instead "is tied to creating a less threatening face of the yellow peril" (115). However, Kawai (2005) fails to explain what ties these two stereotypes together. For such, the paper turns to

postcolonial theories to elaborate the dialectical dynamic between the yellow peril and the model minority, which is twofold: they both serve to depict Asians as ‘the other’, and they are internalized by the subjects to create a postcolonial Asian identity.

Firstly, the yellow peril and the model minority function inseparably to emphasize Asian ‘otherness’ to white civilization. Specifically, both stereotypes are rooted in Edward Said’s Orientalism, which “lies in its unmasking of the machinations of empire by demonstrating how culture and discourse actually worked...to secure a seamless, Western reality” (Rajgopal 2010, 145). The yellow peril is an explicit product of Orientalism, as it functions to depict the white’s fear of the ‘unknown’ Orient. Meanwhile, the model minority is an implicit one, as it appears to emphasize the successful assimilation to white culture, but even when assimilated, the model minority Asians are not completely ‘normal’. The fear that the yellow peril is designed to evoke, as well as the abnormality that the model minority reminds, are vividly shown in the sexual deformation of characters that belong to these two stereotypes. For example, on the one hand, Fu Manchu and other of his yellow peril peers in films such as Aubrey M. Kennedy’s *The Yellow Menace* (1916) or Paul Powell’s *Crooked Streets* (1920) are portrayed as sexual predators on the “pure” white females (Marchetti 1993, 4). On the other hand, good but docile characters like Charlie Chan are deemed to be “asexual” (Shim 1998, 390). Regarding Asian female representation, which has given rise to an entire scholarship of its own, the Oriental woman usually appears as overtly sexualized and/or submissive. They are often sexually threatened by the yellow peril Asian male or bored of the model minority one, and fated to be saved by the white male hero eventually. In this archetypal character arc, the Asian female is the ultimate exotic and desirable “artifacts” to fulfill white’s fantasy of the Orient (Marchetti 1993; Richardson 2010; Rajgopal 2010), while also serves to highlight the sexual deformity of the Asian males, and ultimately reinforce the yellow peril/model minority’s connotation of ‘otherness’. In later years when the model minority became more prominent, characters of this stereotype continue to embrace the ‘other’ agenda. They usually appear “as passive foreigners without dimension” (Paner 2018, 5), and often seen practicing Asian culture (martial art in most cases) as an exotic spectacle. This is most typified in the respectable but (again) asexual kung-fu masters like Mr. Miyagi of the *Karate Kid* series (1984-) and any of Jackie Chan’s Hollywood roles; or tropes of Asian characters speaking in an animated foreign accent and introducing exotic culture to the white characters (Shim 1998; Richardson 2010; Paner 2018).

Secondly, the dialectical relationship between the yellow peril and the model minority is a notable case of interpellation, in which the white-constructed stereotypes continue to be internalized by the stereotypical subjects—Asian communities—to construct the Asian identity. Kawai (2005) argues that the togetherness of the two stereotypes

makes the meaning of each one blended, ambivalent, and hence influential on their stereotypical subject. For this, Kawai turns to Homi Bhabha and Dana Cloud's theories to argue that stereotypes "contain contradictory messages simultaneously" (2005, 118), which is explained specifically in Bhabha's study of racial stereotypes in terms of fetishism: "[t]he fetish or stereotype gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it" (Bhabha 1994, 107). This allows stereotypes to have multiple meanings simultaneously, with one being an official and one a secret, one progressive and one archaic (Bhabha 1994). Kawai (2005) argues that although the yellow peril can be understood as archaic and secret, while the model minority is progressive and official, the dialectical dynamics of the two create a more "blended" and "complex meaning" than such a binary separation.

However, while Kawai suggests the ambivalence of the yellow peril and the model minority occurs as they are dialectically connected, I argue that the ambivalence has already happened within the function of each stereotype, therefore allowing the blending to happen and further complicate their meanings. For example, although the Fu Manchu-typed characters are the villains to the white heroes, their aforementioned intellectual competency and immense military power means that the yellow peril not only signifies a menacing threat to the white race, but also denotes Asians' advanced intellectuality and capability. This element, however, transcends the yellow peril stereotype to re-appear as a crucial, less aggressive trait of the model minority stereotype. Eventually and gradually, it resulted in the contemporary model minority to be often associated with the intelligent and studious Asians image (S. J. Lee 2009), or even as specific as the problematic "Asians are good at math" narrative (Shah 2021). In addition, the Fu Manchu archetypal characters do not appear simply as sexually threatening, but rather ambiguous in the spectrum between repulsion and attraction, making the yellow peril both a sexual fear and a sexual fantasy (Richardson 2010, Marchetti 1993). Meanwhile, the aforementioned detrimental effects of the model minority on racial justice in general, and on Asian communities in particular, suggest a more controversial and vague meaning to this allegedly 'positive' stereotype. Moreover, by inheriting but pacifying the yellow peril's connotation of the Asians' immense potentials and capacities, the model minority fulfill its own ambiguous and contradictory projection as "a less threatening face of the yellow peril" (Kawai 2005, 115), or "a blessing with a curse" to the Asian community (B. Wong 2015, 741). As a result, the dialectical interconnection between the two already paradoxical and ambivalent stereotypes conveys a mosaic of fluid and dubious meanings, making the differentiation between the yellow peril and the model minority stereotypes, as well as between positive and negative meanings difficult even for the stereotypical subjects—people of Asian descent.

Bhabha's elaboration on the ambivalence of stereotypes is also useful in explaining the internalization and adoption of the yellow peril and the model minority by Asian individuals. Bhabha (1994) calls it "colonial mimicry" —a discourse "constructed around an ambivalence" that refers to "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (122). Singh (2009) notes that although colonial mimicry commonly refers to members of the colonized societies imitating their former colonizers, when put in the context of immigration, it could be considered an opportunistic behavior of the immigrant minority in mimicking the one in power, "because one hopes to have access to the same power oneself" (par. 3). Considering these two strands of understanding colonial mimicry, there have been various signs showing that both Asian countries and Asian immigrant communities, specifically in the U.S., actively perform white-constructed values, especially the model minority, for geopolitical gains and social opportunistic reasons. For example, post-World War II Japan pledged itself as an ally to the Western bloc during the Cold War, achieved immense economic gains, and "re-demonstrated its willingness and "ability" to go along with the West/White" (Kawai 2005, 115). In doing so, many Japanese elites in both Japan and the U.S. collaborated to promote a 'model' and docile image of Japanese emigrants (in the perspective of Japan) and immigrants (in the perspective of the U.S.) conforming to the norms of the U.S. society (Kaibara 2014). Kaibara's elaboration on the transpacific collaboration to strengthen the model minority also proves that the stereotype has evolved beyond the U.S. border to other countries with or without Asian immigrant communities. Although its international trajectories parallel and diverge at certain points, this cross-border proliferation of the model minority shows that the myth does not seem to go away, while continues to be damaging to Asians globally (Hartlep 2014).

Such active pursuits of the model minority eventually resulted in the stereotype being internalized as the subject's identity, because it not only shapes how others perceive Asian immigrants, but also how the subjected minorities perceive themselves (Shih, Chang and Chen 2019). In an article in the Independence School Magazine, V. Wong (2011) observes that, especially in the educational context, "[m]ost faculty and students seemed to accept the stereotype without question, while some Asian-American students even seemed eager to flaunt their newly defined sense of racial superiority". This adoption of the model minority stereotype is what has generated the Asian-authored media as mentioned above, in which *Crazy Rich Asians* is a prime example. Yet, as the model minority and the yellow peril are proven to be inseparable and blended, the strategy in which *Crazy Rich Asians* employs the model minority stereotype as an attempt to create an empowering Asian portrayal inevitably includes the interplay of the yellow peril stereotype, which will be explored hereafter.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 The Interplay of the Yellow Peril and the Model Minority Stereotypes in *Crazy Rich Asians's* Characters

The employment of stereotypes is essentially the representation of people. Hence, it is crucial to trace the manifestation of the yellow peril and the model minority stereotypical dialectic through the characterization of essential roles. Since *Crazy Rich Asians* is a light-hearted romantic comedy with a generally positive depiction of Chinese Americans and Chinese people outside the U.S. territory, most of its leading characters embody the supposedly more uplifting stereotype of the two: the model minority. However, not many characters check all the boxes to fit in this stereotype, and depending on their backgrounds and dynamics with each other, one can adopt both the yellow peril and the model minority simultaneously from time to time, embodying what I shall call the 'model-peril' complex.

First is Rachel, our protagonist, and the epitome of the made-in-America model minority. As soon as the title disappears, the film shows Rachel lecturing at New York University (NYU), in which she is applauded by her students and praised by Nick—her boyfriend—as “NYU’s youngest faculty member” (Chu 2018, 00:39:36). Her upbringing reflects the typical ‘American dream’ narrative, with her mother—a “self-made woman” in Eleanor’s bitter remarks, immigrated to the U.S. even without knowing the language, yet still worked hard and managed a comfortable life for the family. Although Rachel constantly appears as an underdog to the affluence of other Asian characters in terms of wealth, the repeated praises of her academic achievement maintain her position as a ‘model’ first-generation Asian American from an archetypal model minority family background. In every sense, Rachel is the embodiment of the “banana” metaphor: “yellow on the outside, white on the inside”, remarked by Goh Peik Lin—Rachel’s best friend (Chu 2018, 01:15:57), which makes her the closest to be a white protagonist (by embodying white quality) in a film where all main characters are of Asian descent.

However, while Rachel is the protagonist of the film, she is not the ‘spectacle’ it wants to display: the “crazy rich Asians”. The film title points to her boyfriend, Nick Young, with his family and acquaintances in Singapore. “These people are so posh and snobby, they’re snoshy”, said Goh Peik Lin in describing Nick’s social circle (Chu 2018, 00:32:38). The “crazy rich” are led by Eleanor Young, Nick’s mother, who defines Singaporean ‘aristocracy’. She is the matriarch of the richest family in the country, respected by everyone, and even has the acclaimed academic background by studying law at Cambridge. Although Eleanor and the “crazy rich” Singaporeans are posed as an antithesis to the protagonist Rachel (Krairiksh 2019), a point to which I shall elaborate later,

their characterizations in terms of wealth and social status are nowhere less than Rachel, if not more redundant. To differentiate from Rachel's made-in-America model minority archetype, the Singaporean elites embrace the European standards of wealth and nobility. This can be traced in scenes such as Eleanor's book club where the females gather in a solemn manner to recite the Bible, the excessive appearance of European luxurious brands, or the emphasis on the Oxford-Cambridge educational background of the Young's members. This vividly shows that even the so-called 'old money' rich Asians do not escape the postcolonial notion of 'mimicry', in which the level of their wealth and status orbits around the European values and standards of what is considered 'model'.

However, Eleanor and the Singaporean superrich are the natives of their lands, and therefore not a minority. Even their displays of wealth and eliteness are particularly European, and hence unfamiliar to the American standard. These elements distance them from being the textbook model minority, and consequently align them to be the yellow perils who come across as a foreign threat to intimidate the rock-solid 'model' Chinese American heroine, Rachel. The dignified and upper-crust elite Eleanor, who initially appears as the desirable 'model', becomes the film's main antagonist who challenges our heroine's romance journey. Other members of the Young family and their social circle also typify the yellow peril stereotype through their actions and attitude towards Rachel, despite their established status. For examples, Bernard Tai and Alistair Cheng—the spoiled heirs who are ruthlessly offensive towards women, despise Rachel's intention in the relationship with Nick; or Amanda 'Mandy' Ling—Nick's former partner and a successful lawyer—vandalizes Rachel's room and threatens her in a bloody and 'perilous' manner. Although the spectacular Asian richness is displayed in the most lavish way unimaginable for white Westerners/Americans, the more money they spend (supporting characters like Bernard, Alistair, and Mandy) or the higher the status they claimed (Eleanor) only positions themselves as perilous threats to the progress of the Americanized heroine (Rachel).

This 'model-peril' complex can be also found in the Goh family, represented by Goh Peik Lin—Rachel's best friend played by Nora Lum/Awkwafina, and Goh Wye Mun—Peik Lin's father played by Ken Jeong. At first glance, through their introduction sequence, the Gohs are arguably the closest to the yellow peril characterization for two reasons: they are deemed 'the others' to the American and European standards of 'model' and, although comically, posed as a sexual threat to the white (on the inside) American heroine. Specifically, Goh Pek Lin is compared to Rachel as being lesser in academic achievement. Meanwhile, her family attempts to assimilate into the Western-centric values by ludicrously overplaying wealth and Americanness, with Goh Wye Mun cosplaying Elvis Presley, the Goh's children eating chicken nuggets for lunch, or the house being

decorated in Versailles/Trump-inspired abundance. Yet, with all such displays, they still cannot conceal a sense of ‘otherness’ to the American/European elite standards, typified by Rachel and the Youngs’ social circle. Moreover, the Gohs characterize the yellow peril by making (sexual) jokes that make Rachel uncomfortable (when Goh Wye Mun tries to set up Rachel with his son), implicitly echoing the implication that the yellow peril is a sexual threat to the white girl when the stereotype was first popularized in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, these impressions do not last for long, as the Gohs eventually become Rachel’s allies against the aforementioned ‘model-peril’ characters. This is typified when Peik Lin helps Rachel countless times, and when the whole family turns to be Rachel’s ‘fairy godmother’ in her Cinderella-style transformation sequence, making them the benign and cheeky sidekicks to the heroine’s character arc rather than a threat in the full embodiment of the yellow peril stereotype.

Such blended ‘model-peril’ characterizations of Eleanor, the Singaporean elites, and the Goh family indicate that even in the film where Asians are supposedly ‘cool’, having money or displaying Westernized values does not automatically make all Asians escape the employment of ‘yellowness’ as both a menacing threat and a mortifying joke. Returning to Kawai’s remark on the yellow peril and the model minority inseparability with racial performativity, Asians become the model when they align with white narratives, but will inevitably become the peril when they “outdo” white people (2005, 115). With Rachel typifies white values in her model minority American archetype, the other Asian characters orbiting around our protagonist, namely Eleanor (with other Singaporean superrich) and the Goh family, oscillate between being the ‘model’ and the ‘peril’ based on their alignment with Rachel’s journey.

#### **4.2 The Interplay of the Yellow Peril and the Model Minority Stereotypes in *Crazy Rich Asians*’s Narrative and Comic Strategies**

*Crazy Rich Asians* not only adopts the interrelated yellow peril and model minority stereotypes for the characters’ identities, but also employs both stereotypes in its storytelling and humor. Specifically, I argue that the utilization of the yellow peril is crucial to create and highlight the film’s premise—a celebration of Asians as the model minority. Although such employment reinforces the pervasiveness of both stereotypes, there is also a disavowal of stereotypes and other humiliating tropes performed by the characters themselves, reflecting a degree of self-awareness by Asian authors, producers, and artists of the internalizing stereotypes. Also, following the tradition of Asian-made media and artists thriving through providing comic relief in Hollywood, the author and producers of *Crazy Rich Asians* deliberately use humor as a narrative strategy to portray the Asian experience and celebrate Asian recognition. These notions will be respectively elaborated

in the two subsequent examples; which vividly show how Asian authors and producers have opted to participate in the white-constructed stereotypes only to use them to their advantages.

The prime example of the narrative strategies that employ the yellow peril to highlight the model minority and deliver a triumphant moment for Asian people lies in the film's pre-credit sequence. Albeit short, as a section shown even before the opening credit, this sequence carries a significant meaning that lays out the film's entire premise. The pre-credit shows a throwback to 1995 when Eleanor and her family visit a luxurious hotel in London. It is heavily raining, so they enter the hotel soaking in water and mud that soil the white shining floor, while speaking Cantonese agitatedly to each other. At that moment, their identities are unknown to the diegetic staff, as well as the non-diegetic viewers. Together with the symbolic scene of them contaminating the white floor, they are (or at least appear to be) the foreign perils invading the high-class European settings. The hotel staff instantly despises them on their arrival and even refuses them service. It is noteworthy that the staff is among the only white characters with lines in the entire film, making their behavior even more significant. Through their explicitly xenophobic and racist attitude towards the Asian foreigners, it could be argued that the staff projects the yellow peril image onto Eleanor and her family almost unconsciously, as if it has been deeply ingrained in their perception of the 'yellow' race. They took their judgment for granted only to be rebuffed immediately when Eleanor is revealed (to the diegetic white staff and the non-diegetic viewers) as the new owner of the hotel. The power dynamics shift in a split second, as Eleanor orders the staff that has just despised her to clean the muddy floor. Such a shift and its surprise effect, in my opinion, can only be achieved by using the already pervasive stereotypes: let the characters first appear as the yellow peril (to other characters as well as to the viewers), then reveal them to be the model minority. From these first moments, the film's authors have utilized the yellow peril and the model minority stereotypes as strategic elements to create a minor plot twist right at the film's beginning, in which momentarily takes the power trophy from the hands of the whites and gives it to the Asians, while also setting a tone for the entire film.

However, as I have already argued above, each stereotype, either the yellow peril or the model minority, has become ambivalent and blended on itself, making the differentiation between the two, or between their supposedly negative and positive connotations, difficult for even Asian authors, producers, and viewers. Therefore, the employment of the yellow peril to highlight the model minority similar to the pre-credit scene risks creating an inversive interpretation, especially when both stereotypes embrace Asians' capability of wealth and intellectuality—the quality that *Crazy Rich Asians* evidently aims to highlight in its version of Asian representation. For example, one could argue that when



Eleanor and her family first enter the hotel, they are perceived as an insignificant minority. Meanwhile, when they are revealed to be the new owner of the hotel, they become the perilous invaders that outdo the white, making the sequence projects Asians as the yellow peril eventually. Although I argue that this interpretation is unlikely to be what *Crazy Rich Asians*' author and producers was aiming for in their explicit intention of a celebrated Asian representation, it is nevertheless justifiable precisely because of the dubious yet ubiquitous meanings of each stereotype. Once again, the 'model-peril' complex re-appears in the form of a narrative strategy, which not only proves the blended inseparability of the two stereotypes, but also reflects a cautionary example of Asians adopting stereotypes to their advantage in the intention, but might create an undesirable inverse effect in reality.

The second example highlights the film's sense of humor, which shows Asian authors, producers, and artists participating in stereotypes to create comedy, while simultaneously being self-conscious about it. This humor prevails throughout the entire film; nevertheless, its most notable performers are none other than the film's crucial representatives of comic relief—the Goh family with two prominent members: Goh Wye Mun and Goh Peik Lin. As mentioned before, the Gohs characterize the typical humiliating humor that embody attributes of both the yellow peril and the model minority stereotypes depending on their relations with Rachel. Yet, their exercise of such comedy introduces a complex nuance as they are aware of, or even disavow the stereotypes. For example, Goh Peik Lin continuously points out the nature of many crucial characters beneath their stereotypical identities, which is shown in the analysis of the film's characterization above, where I repeatedly used Peik Lin's humorous remarks to describe the main characters (calling out Rachel's 'whiteness' and criticizing the Youngs' "snobby" wealth). For that reason, she is among the characters that are most conscious about the sense of identity of herself and of other characters.

Peik Lin's father, Goh Wye Mun, also delivers an entire scene—the lunch scene with Rachel—where he displays his self-consciousness about the stereotypes he is adopting, as he performs several infamous comical tropes of Asian representation in the past, only to reject them in the end. Goh Wye Mun, played by Ken Jeong, greets Rachel in a silly and spastic manner, while speaking broken English with a strong foreign accent. This vividly recalls one of the epitomes of 'yellow' representation onscreen by placing Asians as the 'other' foreigners who just newly practice white culture. This also echoes Jeong's notorious yellow peril character Leslie Chow<sup>2</sup> in Todd Phillips' *The Hangover* trilogy (2009-2013), which is the role that Jeong himself admits to be most recognizable in his entire career (Jeong 2019). He then repeats Rachel's surname, Chu, "until it devolves into a parody of the "ching-chong" stereotype of Hollywood's past" (Tseng-Putterman 2018), echoing

*Sixteen Candles*' Long Duk Dong's offensive caricature. However, almost immediately, Goh Wye Mun switches to a fluent all-American accent (Jeong's native tongue) much to Rachel's surprise, while remarking: "I'm just kidding with you...I studied in the States too" (Chu 2018, 00:28:52). After such a revelation, he continues to act as the humiliated and bawdy character throughout the entire film, although more naturally, maintaining the stereotype that the character is committed to. This minor twist vividly shows that while playing with stereotypes for comical characterizations, Asian authors, producers, and artists, to a certain extent, have been self-aware of the stereotypes they are adopting, and reveals that the familiar comic relief 'yellow' representation is only a Hollywood-constructed impression/trope of Asian people, which functions to downgrade their complexity and exemplify their petty otherness.

## 5. Discussion: "It's not a movie, it's a movement"

"It's not a movie, it's a movement", quoted director Jon M. Chu at an advance screening for *Crazy Rich Asians* (C. Lee 2018, par. 9). *Crazy Rich Asians* is not the pioneer in celebrating Asian representation, but it is indeed one of the most successful in terms of profit and publicity. However, the film's production was initially a challenging one, as Kevin Kwan, the book's author, was first offered a deal only if he agreed to change the heroine to a Caucasian woman for public appeal (Ho 2018), further proves that Hollywood is still not a free playground for people of color regarding representations. Kwan turned down this request and *Crazy Rich Asians*, the first all-Asian cast film after 25 years in Hollywood and "the most successful studio rom-com in 9 years at the U.S. box office" (McClintock 2018), proves that a project written, directed and starring Asian artists can achieve as much of a box office success as any other mainstream white-cast project. This also dismantles the myth of market share between racial majorities and minorities as an excuse for "whitewashing" —one of Hollywood's worst habits. Together with *Black Panther* (2018), *Crazy Rich Asians* has joined the force of becoming one of the hallmarks signifying the new era of American mainstream cinema: the era that celebrates African superheroes saving the world and the love story of an Asian couple.

*Crazy Rich Asians*' worldwide success indicates the arrival of Asian-oriented stories, as well as the more proactive participation of Asian authors, producers, and artists. Since then, many projects made by Asians and/or featuring Asian artists have been released that are directly linked to the film's accomplishment, as well as to Hollywood's recent movement of inclusivity. For example, rapper-comedian-actress Nora Lum (also known as Awkwafina), who plays Goh Peik Lin in *Crazy Rich Asians*, has risen into international stardom after the film's success. Since then, she has attained a role in Gary Ross's *Ocean's*

8 (2018), become the second East Asian American female artist after Lucy Liu to host *Saturday Night Live* (T. G. Lee 2018), and co-starred in Lulu Wang's critically acclaimed film *The Farewell* (2019)—another Chinese American-produced film featuring an all-Asian cast. In 2020, Lum also produced and starred in her own real-life inspired series *Awkwafina is Nora from Queens* on Comedy Central, which has been renewed for a second season (Petski 2020). In general, the 'Asian wave' continues to take over Hollywood. By the end of 2018, Marvel Studios announced the production of *Shang-Chi* to be the mega-successful franchise's first superhero film with the main casts, writer and director all of Asian descent (Fleming Jr. 2018). In addition to traditional studios, online screening networks have also released several television and cinematic projects featuring Asian American artists as main and/or non-typecast characters. Some of the prime examples include Netflix's titles such as Susan Johnson's *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* (2018), Nahnatchka Khan's *Always Be My Maybe* (2019), and Alice Wu's *The Half of It* (2020); Hulu's series *Pen15* (2019); and BBC America's *Killing Eve* (2018).

*Crazy Rich Asians* was able to expedite an influential movement; nevertheless, it is a shallow one. Although the film generally delivers an uplifting portrayal of Asians and Asian Americans, it indeed shows the solidification of two white-constructed stereotypes—the yellow peril and the model minority—in representing Asians onscreen. Tseng-Putterman (2018) calls the film “a step backward”, as its glorification of white values (typified by having the Americanized Rachel winning over the traditional Eleanor in the end) ignores the complexity of the Asian experience and culture. Even when *Crazy Rich Asians* shows a sense of self-awareness in terms of the stereotypes that was often associated with Asians onscreen, it mostly calls out and rejects those that appear as humiliating and detrimental, such as the yellow peril stereotype. Meanwhile, the film fully indulges in the model minority identity without any critical acknowledgment of its problematic connotation. Its clear attempts to distance Asians from the yellow peril and glorify Asian 'model' identity is, to a certain degree, ineffective. Since both stereotypes are proven to be ambivalent on its own discursive significance, while inseparable in terms of racial performativity, indulging in one (the model minority) inevitably brings about the other (the yellow peril), as clearly shown in the film's characterization and narrative.

By accepting the model minority as the Asian identity, *Crazy Rich Asians* also aligns with the stereotype's 'colorblind' ideology that undermines institutional racism, especially when putting in the racial dynamics with other races, namely the white and the African American. *Crazy Rich Asians*, indeed, does not need to include African Americans in the predominantly Singaporean context, nor does it need to focus on racial justice in such a lighthearted romantic comedy manner. Yet, the film's 'colorblindness' lies in its own portrayal of the ethnic dynamics within Singapore. Appiah (2018) criticizes *Crazy*

*Rich Asians*' generalization of Asian people and the lack of other ethnicities of Asia, which constitute a great portion of the Singaporean population in real life, as if it advocates for diverse representation in the Western world yet ignores the true diversity of the story's own home. In fact, there is only one minor scene showing the presence of another ethnic group—the Indian guards when Rachel arrives at the Young's estate, somewhat reveals the complex class system closely tied with different ethnicities within the Singaporean society.

Despite many setbacks and criticism, *Crazy Rich Asians* is nevertheless a successful film that grants the arrival of more complex representations of Asians particularly, and people of color generally, in future projects. The film itself also introduces Asian-oriented nuances relatively fresh to Hollywood settings. According to Kawai, "[r]acial stereotypes of the yellow race do not distinguish yellows here from yellows there—Asian Americans from Asians, Chinese from Japanese, or Koreans from Vietnamese" (111). Although employing these stereotypes, *Crazy Rich Asians* explores the dynamics between American-born and Asian-born Chinese, especially the clash between different cultures and ideologies of different birthplaces and upbringings within one ethnicity. Its portrayal of such a cultural clash has various problems, namely the lack of depth in resolving the conflict between the Western-constructed standards and Eastern traditions, which in my opinion deserves an elaborate study of its own. Nevertheless, the projects that came after *Crazy Rich Asians* have gradually evolved from depending on one-dimensional stereotypes for attention. For example, Lulu Wang's *The Farewell* (2019) starring Nora Lum/Awkafina brings the tension between the American-born Chinese and the Chinese natives' mindsets covered by *Crazy Rich Asians* to another and more heartfelt level. Other recent Asian-authored films also introduce various main Asian characters that escape the familiar Asian caricatures of the past. For examples, Alice Wu's *The Half of It* (2020) explores the coming-of-age story of a lesbian Chinese heroine; and Nahnatchka Khan's *Always Be My Maybe* (2019) introduces Randall Park's character as an awkward yet relatable male protagonist, while having Keanu Reeves' cameo as a white-guy spectacle<sup>3</sup>. Although *Crazy Rich Asians* is a reinforcement of the yellow peril and the model minority—two white-constructed stereotypes so pervasive in the portrayals of Asians onscreen, the film is ultimately a gain for Asian representation, allowing its following media to improve on its setbacks, introduce more Asian-based stories and create more career opportunities for Asian artists. The adoption of stereotypes in *Crazy Rich Asians* shows that Asian authors, producers, and artists have opted to play by the oppressor's game in order to gain in their own arena. Eventually, the situation post-*Crazy Rich Asians* is more hopeful than ever before for Asian representation and Asian visibility in the still white-dominant entertainment industry.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the yellow peril and the model minority are incredibly pervasive in Asian representation onscreen. Although denote opposite meanings, with one considered negative and one positive, their discursive significances are interrelated and complex. Both stereotypes occur as racial performativity, with one obtains the model minority token when one aligns with white values, yet also falls to be the yellow peril when one opposes and/or outdoes the white (Kawai 2005). As a result, they both work to portray Asians as ‘the others’ to white civilization, and therefore deemed to be conquered and assimilated. Because of such togetherness, as well as the ambivalent nature of each stereotype, the yellow peril and the model minority convey blended meanings rather than simply being negative or positive, making its pervasiveness even more powerful, and increasing its influence to even the stereotypical subjects—people of Asian descent. As a result, many Asians accept the stereotypes as parts of their identity, especially the model minority since it is thought to be the positive one. Yet, the model minority is inseparable from the yellow peril, and therefore adopting one stereotype inevitably brings out the presence of the other.

*Crazy Rich Asians*, crafted by Asian authors and producers while starring Asian artists, is one of the prime examples of Asians adopting such stereotypes. The film employs the yellow peril and the model minority in the characterization of crucial characters and the comical strategies of the narrative to its advance of celebrating East Asian visibility. However, while doing so, the film also risks portraying Asians as the ‘model-perils’, who are capable of immense wealth and intellectuality, but threatening to white values. Although reinforcing the white-constructed stereotypes about Asians, as well as receiving serious criticism, *Crazy Rich Asians* is still considered one of the most successful projects in Hollywood in recent years. Since its immense success, Hollywood has witnessed a surge of more Asian artists, producers, and authors actively participating in the still white-dominant environment, marking an uplifting future for one of the world’s most influential entertainment industries. In a way, *Crazy Rich Asians* is still a colorblind fantasy sterilized from the existing racial dynamics, nevertheless, with its significance as a movement, it is evident that more Asian-oriented projects covering various social issues with depth will continue to be welcomed by the public in the future to come.

## Endnotes

- 1 Long Duk Dong sounds like “long duck dung”, which refers to slang for excrement and penis; it “also associated with “ding-dong”, which is slang for crazy” (Shim 1998, 401). Such a

humiliating play of words is a frequent trope in Asian representation. In *Crazy Rich Asians*, the character Goh Wye Mun also employs such trope in his humor.

- 2 In *The Hangover* trilogy, Leslie Chow is a Chinese gangster that is both the film's comic relief and villain. He "speaks in broken English similar to Warner Oland did for Fu Manchu" and provokes violence on the main characters, but still maintains abnormally weak and "eunuch-like" as he usually appears in feminine costumes (Umeda 2018, 167), making him one of the most famous reincarnations of the yellow peril stereotype in contemporary films.
- 3 Although Reeves is of partly Asian descent, he is widely known as a white actor.

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