

Weekly Journal Entry 1

For decades, American society including the media have defined the Asian image to all the world. Gender, race and class stereotypes of Asian Americans in the media, especially the ones depicted in popular movies, give the impression of what Asian Americans are really like to other Americans as well as to Asian Americans themselves. And often, that image has been shaped by people with little understanding of Asian people themselves- not knowing the kind of impact such images and representations would have on the Asian American community.

Stuart Hall's excerpt from "Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices" basically provides a depiction of what stereotyping is and how it's used as a dangerous means to build negative representations of different groups of people. As human beings we can't help but make sense of our world as simply as possible- by broadly categorizing things that have common traits, or as Hall would call it, building "schemas." As went over in discussion, this prematurely allows us to group those different things in a somewhat meaningful way at the same time acquiring information about something based on previous experiences. This is done by people on a daily basis and is not by any definition negative. Stereotypes on the other hand, according to Hall, takes a toll and "reduces people into a few simple, essential characteristic, which are represented as fixed by nature" (Hall, 257). Covered in lecture, the Asian stereotype has over the years manifested itself through the blend of the media, radio, movies, news and false impressions of the culture's history. These misconceptions have come wrongly from the idea that knowing a person of any particular race can be done by merely

referring to a number of certain traits.

It's just too obvious for me on a daily basis that I see say an Asian face or accent shown as a short-hand symbol for anything that basically opposes American or Western culture. As seen in some Hollywood productions in the past as "Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story" and "The Joy Luck Club," projects like these have been widely welcomed by Asian American audiences. But too often we see Hollywood restricting its portrayals of Asians to a very limited range of certain clichéd stock characters. And this has certainly affected how Asian Americans are perceived and treated in the broader society. Limited portrayals of Asians have traditionally been the norm in the media, entertainment industry, and even political mediums. Despite the fact that Asian Americans have lived and done well for themselves in the U.S. over the past century, Asians are frequently portrayed as newly arrived immigrants who speak choppy English and who struggle to assimilate into American society. I can head to Blockbuster any given day and spot films featuring greedy, evil Asian outlaws out to destroy white civilization defying its laws- and Asian women who are weak, pampering and submissive to the abuse of men.

A more specific example of this kind of imbalance in cultural portrayals can be seen in "Tomorrow Never Dies," Pierce Brosnan's second James Bond flick. Also starring actress Michelle Yeoh, the plot centered on James Bond- a white secret detective- who initially had an Asian female reporter interfering with his duties. With tension at the start, they soon begin cooperating in their operations and eventually fall in love in the end. It has been a common sight seeing a white man paired off with an Asian woman in the movie scene, but hardly ever do audiences see an Asian man paired off with a white woman. Asian women are time and again depicted as easily falling in love

with white men, sometimes even just at first sight.

We have also seen news broadcasts on television where the news anchors comprise of an Asian female and white male. An example of such news partnership was with Juju Chang for ABC news. Anchor team for CBS news, Connie Chung and Dan Rather was also a popular pair on the news broadcast several years ago. But only rarely do people see an Asian man paired off with a white woman on the news. The only times I personally have observed Asian men in news broadcasts they have been solo- for instance as weathermen on the Weather Channel or as Asia-based correspondents on CNN.

Similar conceptions are talked about by Nguyen and Tu in their introduction from "Alien Encounters." They express concern toward the 1985 film "The Goonies" particularly toward the stereotypically nerdy Asian character Data, a member of the young gang. They write "...popular culture is the battle ground for fantasies and desire and identification, as well as anxieties about alienation and incursion..." (Tu & Nguyen, 6). Data's character can be seen as simply another cliché, stock character for Asians, another predictable "racist caricature" (Tu & Nguyen, 2). Unjust and biased roles like this only add to the point that the amount of hard work Asians have put in to their craft has continually been undermined in the film and media world.

I think when we begin to realize that each person has their own story, history, and culture we can come to a mutual respect for one another. The very first colonies of America were founded as a result of religious conflict in their own native homes, and has since then grown into a "melting pot" of cultures and races. The differences among the people in this country should be a source of diversity, not of frustration due to the imprudence of stereotypes.