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December 9, 2019

Representation Matters:  
Changing Portrayals of Asian-Americans in Hollywood films from 1993 to 2019

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## Abstract

### Representation Matters:

#### Changing Portrayals of Asian-Americans in Hollywood films from 1993 to 2019

By Rachel Kim

This dissertation is an investigation of the changing portrayal of Asian-American Hollywood films from 1993 to 2019. This period is significant for this study because, before the 1990s, few Asian-Americans were portrayed in Hollywood films, and those that were presented were depicted as stereotypical or as simplistic characters. These stereotypes and simplifications of Asian-Americans were repeated throughout the decades without much notice. In this research, there are three questions to be addressed. What are the changing portrayals of Asian Americans presented in Hollywood films? How do audiences respond to the changing portrayals of Asian Americans? Within the expansion of Asian American representation, how can Hollywood engage with the audience more productively in presenting Asian American portrayals? The study includes historical context of Asian-American migration to the United States and Hollywood respectively, the relationship between Hollywood race, and examples of Asian-American stereotypes before the 1990s. The study also discusses two case studies: *The Joy Luck Club* (1993) and *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018). Then, there will be interviews with the audience to discover the perception and the reflection that the audience on Asian-American, the films, and future steps for more varied and nuanced Asian-American representations in Hollywood. The thesis will conclude with the analysis of the interviewees and the key summary of all of the findings. This study finds that changing portrayals of Asian-Americans are shown positively that there seems to be more in-depth character development and more dimensional that the audience can learn about these Asian-Americans more. However, the changing portrayals of Asian Americans affect the audience is not always effective depending on the audience's background. Yet, for Hollywood to better engage with the audience more productively in presenting Asian American portrayals, a wide range of solutions was proposed from creating both ethnic-specific stories and universal stories, providing in-depth characterizations, having more Asian-leads, and encouraging Asian-Americans to be involved in the production not just in acting, but also in writing and producing.

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## Introduction

This dissertation is an investigation of the changing portrayal of Asian-American Hollywood films from 1993 to 2019. This period is significant for this study because, before the 1990s, few Asian-Americans were portrayed in Hollywood films, and those that were presented were depicted as stereotypical or as simplistic characters. These stereotypes and simplifications of Asian-Americans were repeated throughout the decades without much notice.

However, 1993 was a significant year for Asian-Americans in Hollywood films. The audience was able to see more Asian-American actors and actresses cast in Hollywood films. The depictions of Asian-American characters seemed to digress from common stereotypical images. However, this progress seemed to plateau until 2018, which was 25 years since the very first film that had “unconventional” portrayals of Asian-Americans. This recent shift in Asian-American representation has limited analysis of its effects and whether or not it is comparable to the 1993 shift.

In order to investigate the changing portrayal of Asian-American Hollywood films, I took two case studies: *The Joy Luck Club* (1993) and *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) because these were the films that caught the attention of both critics and the audience for having a majority Asian cast. I wanted to discover how having a majority Asian cast affects the portrayals of Asian-Americans in Hollywood. To further investigate these changes, I decided to recruit research subjects as I wanted to collect in-depth information on their understanding of Asian-Americans and their own identities, perception of the case studies, and opinions about Asian-American representations in Hollywood. This would allow interviewees to elaborate more on their answers



by conducting a qualitative research method. These in-depth interviews would also help me to identify common themes that were discussed among the interviewees.

In this research, there are three questions to be addressed. The first question is what are the changing portrayals of Asian-Americans presented in Hollywood films? The next question is how do audiences respond to the changing portrayals of Asian-Americans? Then the last question is within the expansion of Asian-American representation, how can Hollywood engage with the audience more productively in presenting Asian-American portrayals?

The dissertation contributes to the field of anthropology. For instance, anthropology centrally focuses on questions of cultural differences. Anthropology is all about learning and understanding people from a different culture. Asian-Americans are considered a minority group. As a result, the American audience, which may not identify themselves as Asian-Americans, is learning about Asian-American culture through a medium that may not tell the story of Asian-Americans in the most accurate or favorable way. This also creates a similar issue to the Asian-American audience who is not satisfied with how the western medium delivers a story of Asian-Americans. I chose to investigate this issue because I wanted to discover what would be the best method for the audience to understand Asian-American individuals and culture portrayed in Hollywood, which is one of the most popular media. I chose to conduct the interviews so that their opinions can influence the conclusion of this dissertation.

The thesis is structured in multiple chapters. The first chapter focuses on the historical background of Asian-American migration to the United States. This chapter will also discuss the Hollywood as a business and area of creative practice. The second chapter is about the

relationship between Hollywood and race. The third chapter lays out the case studies and discusses each film respectively. The fourth chapter explains the research design and its method. This chapter will also introduce the participants of the study. The fifth chapter will review the interviews to highlight and state some discoveries. Before reaching the conclusion, the sixth chapter will summarize and analyze the findings. For instance, the summary of the research findings will make an effort to deliver interviewees' responses to Hollywood. Then lastly, this dissertation will conclude by stating what the dissertation argues overall, how these questions are addressed, and some future steps that other studies can take on.

## Chapter 1: Historical Background

The chapter is structured in two different sections. The first section discusses the historical context of Asian-American migration to the United States. Then, the second section examines Hollywood as a business and area of creative practice. Hollywood's issues are important in this study because Hollywood's both interests in creating artistic products and generating profit create a conflict that eventually leads to the concern of representation that impacts the minorities. It is important to understand how Hollywood works in order to explain cultural stereotyping in film because Hollywood's coping mechanism with uncertainty, its own decision-making process with creativity, and its structure and network may have a great influence that results in concerns of portrayals in films.

### Historical Context of Asian-American Migration to the United States

Before discussing the history of Asian-American migration to the United States, it is important to consider the term, "Asian-American." Where does the term, "Asian-American" originate? The term "Asian-American" was coined by mostly American-born young Asian descents in the late 1960s to resist the name "Oriental," which was a common name for people of Asian ancestry (Chan 2007, 126). "Asian-Americans believed the idea of being Oriental had derogatory connotations because members of the larger society viewed Orientals as exotic, inferior and even sub-human beings who would remain forever alien in American and other societies" (Chan 2007, 126). Therefore, the term, "Asian-American" was a form of resistance in order to make a point that American-born Asian people are, indeed, Americans to fight the

common historical experience of being treated as racial or ethnic minorities within the United States. It can also be viewed as a grievance for Asian and American people to address their experiences of domestic racism, xenophobia, transnational displacement, and colonialism (Shimizu 2017, 119). Although the term, “Asian-American” does not fully recognize diverse Asian cultures, Asian is preferred over such national-origin terms such as Chinese, Filipino, Japanese or Korean because it encompasses a larger grouping with potentially greater political clout in the struggles for racial equality and social justice (Chan 2007, 127). However, throughout the years of Asian immigration in the United States, Asian immigrants have been constantly lumped together and treated as one monolithic group despite their diverse origins and heterogeneous cultures of the outside of the United States (Lee 2015, 36). However, the term “Asian-American” helped Asian migrants who have been alternately welcomed into and excluded from the United States by helping them still fully recognized as “American.”

The history of Asian-American migration can be divided into five different periods: 1850s - 1920s; 1920s - 1960s; 1960s - 1970s; 1970s - early 1980s; 1990s - the present. Before discussing the very first period, it is believed that the “earliest Asians [who migrated] to the Americas came as part of Spain’s Pacific Empire that connected its colony from the Philippines to New Spain (colonial Mexico)” (Lee 2015, 34). Most of these Asians came as sailors, servants, and even slaves, but they served to connect Asia and America together for the first time, possibly dating all the way back in 1565 (Lee 2015, 34). This movement promoted multiracial societies with racial hierarchies. This migration process is repeated throughout Asian migration to the United States.

The first period of Asian-American migrations to the Americas is from the 1850s to the early 1920s. Followed by the early-dated Asian immigration to the Americas, 250,000 indentured Chinese laborers headed to Cuba and Peru and another 419,000 South Asians heading to the British West Indies (Lee 2015, 35). Especially in the mid-nineteenth century, the immigration mostly comprised of Asian indentured laborers to Latin America as well as to the great migrations of Europeans to the United States. “Many Asians were part of large, extended migration chains that extended across generations and were made up of transnational split-family households that spanned the Pacific” (Lee 2015, 35).

Even from this time, Asian immigration covered a wide range from “moving permanently to the United States or to other parts of North America and South America to coming for only a short time or moved multiple times back and forth across the Pacific as well as within the Americas as the search for employment, land, family, and freedom from persecution pushed them to stay on the move” (Lee 2015, 35). However, this was also a time period in which many Americans were either supporting or opposing first Chinese, then Japanese immigration (Chan 2007, 128). For instance, Chinese miners began to arrive in California as gold was discovered in the early 1850s, which was welcomed by the Americans initially. (Chan 1991). Chinese workers also took additional jobs such as agricultural and factory work, especially in the industry. These migrants were also helpful in building railroads in the American west, which helped the migrants to be successful by becoming entrepreneurs in their own right. However, when the number of Chinese migrants increased, many more Americans started to develop anti-Chinese sentiment. In 1850, California “imposed Foreign Miner’s Tax, which was enforced mainly against Chinese miners, who were often forced to pay more than once” (Chan 1991). Later on, The Chinese

Exclusion Act was also developed in 1882 to prevent Chinese migrants to the United States, which strained the diplomatic relationship between the United States and China. Unfortunately, The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first and only immigration law that excluded an entire ethnic group.

However, when the limitation of Chinese migrants in the United States might have satisfied some working class exclusionists, there were still a decent amount of companies and farmers that needed an abundant source of cheap labor. This opportunity soon became available to the Japanese, which created the second Asian migration to the United States within this period. However, the Japanese migration also resulted in a similar response years later that it resulted in Immigration Act of 1924; this act included Asian Exclusion Act and National Origins Act, which prevented immigration from Asia, setting a quota on the number of immigrants. Therefore, the first period of Asian-American migration led to the anti-sentiment of Asian migrants from Americans, creating hardships to Asian migrants.

The second period of Asian-American migration occurs during the 1920s to the 1960s, in which Asians in America were assimilating to European American culture and how Asians were affected by anti-Asian legislation at the national, state and municipal levels the legal status of economic opportunities for these so-called 'resident Orientals' (Chan 2007, 128). This was also a time in which "assembly and relocation/internment camps in which the federal government incarcerated persons of Japanese ancestry during the Second World War functioned" (Chan 2007, 128).

“Racial position of Asian Americans has also been tied to international events and U.S.-Asian relations” (Lee 2015, 36). This was heavily applied during World War II and the Cold War. Especially after the Pearl Harbor attack, Japanese Americans were labeled as members of an “enemy race” and forcibly removed and incarcerated (Lee 2015, 36-37). The U.S.-Asian relations in regards to international events impacted the Asian race in the United States as some groups of Asians were never perceived as a threat or an obstacle to Americanness. However, especially after World War certain “ethnic traits” - often tied to a culturally essentialist version of “Asian” culture defined by filial piety, hard work, and respect for authority - have been celebrated because they complemented the so-called “American” traits and served larger political purposes in the United States (Lee 2015, 37). While the Japanese Americans were demonized from the Pearl Harbor attack, other races of Asian, such as the Chinese, Filipino, and Indian Americans were held up as “good Asians,” whose homelands were U.S. allies (Lee 2015, 37).

However, the Cold War brought more changes in Americans’ new attitudes about Asia. For instance, Japan, a demonized Asian country, became “America’s geisha ally,” “a feminized nation eager to be tutored (and protected) by the United States as long as it continued to perform its important capitalist and anti-Communist role. Chinese American nuclear families helped to highlight one of Cold War-era thinkings, valorization of the nuclear family and anti-Communism, as successful, domesticated and assimilated as an example of the American way of life but also a modern manifestation of the Confucian tradition (Lee 2015, 37). Post-World War II demonstrated not only an increase in Asian immigration to the United States as a growing presence in Asia but also new Cold War realignments and changing attitudes and policies toward Asia and Asians (Lee 2015, 35).

The period of the 1960s to 1970s became a turning point in how Asian-Americans were depicted. This was a time when both Asian and European ancestries set out to unmask and overturn the negative stereotypes that the wider society imposed on Asian-Americans from previous generations (Chan 2007, 128). In order for Asian Americans to have their voices to be heard, they started to adopt “oppositional or revisionist paradigms that focused on the structural or institutional factors oppressing people of Asian ancestry, which also applied for other people of color, women, workers and the poor” that this was considered to be part of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s (Chan 2007, 128). Asian-American Movements started to rise in the United States, and one of these movements included the fight against Asian-American cinema, an ongoing struggle for moving image representation by and about Asian-Americans in the United States.

In the 1970s to the 1980s, the study of Asian-Americans’ lives became an academic field of inquiry in the United States. Prior to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, many stories and research about Asian-Americans’ experience were lost due to anti-Asian migrant sentiment and political disruption. Because of this absence, starting in the 1980s, the scholars put so much effort in covering topics such as the structure of Asian-American communities (both historical and contemporary); ethnicity and race; immigrant/refugee adaptation; women’s and family history; labor history; and the struggles of Asian-Americans for legal, political and racial equality. This period was focusing much more on uncovering ‘buried past’ of Asian-America (Chan 2007, 129).



From the 1990s to the present time, Asian Americans have become known as ethnic or racial minorities residing within the borders of an American nation-state. During these entire periods, including that of present, Asian-Americans have been affected by ‘traumatic defining events,’ in which “particular occurrences or a series of episodes that have so marked the histories, psyches and memories of the group in question that its members can never forget them even if they had not been personally involved in what happened” (Chan 132). For instance, even though the anti-Chinese movement from the 1850s and Chinese Exclusion Act from 1882 to 1943 are still part of tragic Chinese American history that present Asian-Americans try not to forget. Japanese Americans’ past on wholesale removal from the Pacific Coast and incarceration in so-called relocation or internment camps during World War II is considered a traumatic defining set of events in Japanese American history. Korean American merchants also went through hardships in the 1990s including a riot occurred in Los Angeles Koreatown. Even though Filipino Americans and South Asian Americans may not have gone through traumatic experiences like Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrants and their American-born progeny have, refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia have defining trauma not only in homelands devastated by war and revolution and the mortal dangers encountered during their flight but in their difficult post-resettlement lives as well. After all, historical events, especially traumatic and tragic ones, are still remembered by the descendants of Asian Americans even today.

Interestingly, the history of migration also reflects the history of Hollywood and cultural stereotypes. According to Nancy Wang Yuen, the author of *Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism* discusses that “racism, in the form of job exclusion and racially stereotyped roles, has defined Hollywood film industry since its birth in the early 1900s” (Schact 2019). When

Hollywood included Asian characters in the early days, these characters were mostly appeared in the form of racist cliché or played by entirely white Americans, creating an example of yellowface (a non-Asian person impersonating an Asian person) (Schact 2019). Studying Hollywood can reflect the changing perceptions of Asian-Americans. This practice was quite common in Hollywood as production teams preferred to hire white actors to play Asian characters rather than hiring minority actors of any kind, emphasizing the idea of self-reproduction which excludes people of various ethnic groups. But because Asian communities have been historically marginalized in the United States, including not being able to be part of the Hollywood film production, the images of Asians and Asian Americans were not created by Asians or Asians but by people who do not know much about them (Schact 2019). This further creates a very confusing and estranged relationship by Asians and Asian Americans to Hollywood as they cannot fully identify with these bizarre representations of themselves. This indicates that the change in Hollywood's decision-making process and the structure reflect changing perceptions of Asian-Americans. Therefore, the next section of this chapter will focus on studying the Hollywood system to reveal identities.

### Hollywood's Decision-Making Operations & Its Implications

Hollywood is an industry that has high economic performance both in and out of the United States. Hollywood's main product, motion pictures, are a key driver of the worldwide entertainment market. This industry has high cultural significance and attracts a quite a bit of attention because of it. Hollywood is very unique in that it creates products that are both

culturally and economically significant in a market; therefore, it is important to question the methods and processes used to create their product. There will be three segments to discuss Hollywood that explains how Hollywood operates its decision-making process that affect cultural portrayals. Coping with uncertainty, utilizing creativity, and its establishment of structure and network in Hollywood demonstrates the decision-making operation. It is important to understand Hollywood's decision-making process because it reveals how the film was produced and how the process affects the audience.

### *Coping with Uncertainty*

Unlike most commodities, Hollywood films are considered as cultural products. Cultural products are more vulnerable to uncertainty than other commodities because “no one knows anything.” Economics scholars Arthur De Vany and W. David Walls explain that motion pictures, another term for films, “are among the most risky products” (De Vany and Walls 1999, 286). They explain the structure of the film business and how the industry copes with uncertainty while also encouraging uniqueness and artistic expression in their final products.

These scholars agree that movie business is not “normal” because outcomes do not follow a normal probability distribution as it is heavily skewed compared to other outcome contributions conducted by other businesses (De Vany and Walls 1999, 286). In other words, there is no statistically significant ‘average revenue’ that a film will make. “Movie projects are, in reality, probability distributions and a proper assessment of their projects require one to do a risk analysis of extreme outcomes” (De Vany and Walls 1999, 286). The business becomes even more frustrating when there is no formula. Even current popular techniques like filling your

movie with stars has been shown to not be a great indicator for success. According to De Vany & Walls, only 19 stars had a modest positive correlation with the success of a film they starred in, and the scholars concluded that no star is “bankable”. Also, these products tend to have a short “shelf life” in which the films are only out on the market (in theaters) for a few weeks; they enter and exit the market on continuing basis (De Vany and Walls 1999, 288).

Based on their findings, these scholars believe that the way how Hollywood has to cope with uncertainty is by responding to what the audience demands; “the audience makes a movie a hit and no amount of “star power” or marketing hype can alter that” (De Vany and Walls 1999, 302). Interestingly, as mentioned before, it is not about which celebrities star in those films and how much of their fame can move the movie box-office revenue probability distribution toward more favorable outcomes. Having powerful stars could help in increasing the median of the returns distribution and making it less skewed, but they don’t entirely help the films to dominate the market in terms of gross return to budget (De Vany and Walls 1999, 300). These stars can also help to increase a film’s prospects with increased ticket purchases and theater screens, yet the successes of the star’s films in the past do not imply that these successes will be repeated in the future (De Vany & Walls 1999, 310). After all, there is nothing so typical of films. Having celebrities in films is not a reliable formula for success, despite popular opinion in Hollywood. Audiences tend to watch films and judge them based on their merit, not the stars in it. The most common method for the film industry, a profoundly uncertain business, to cope with uncertainty is responding to how the audience reacted to their films.

This method, though popular, is not the best measure to use on choosing what film should be produced next. Though attempting to satisfy the audience is important, extreme and uncertain events play a large role in the success or failure of a film. If films succeed because of the audience, then how does the film business then satisfy the demand of the consumers, the movie-goers? Many movie-goers mainly demand blockbusters, and this could be supported by Hollywood's historical context.

Another scholar named Marco Cucco explains how Hollywood responded to uncertainty by starting to focus more on producing blockbusters. Blockbusters are the audiovisual products that best represents today's Hollywood, and there is no clear outline on how to produce them. They can have a wide range of genres and there is no particular distinguishing feature about it. Blockbuster is a high economic investment. Hollywood began to create blockbusters when it was facing a crisis in between the 1940s and 1950s in which involved the migration to suburban areas where movie theaters were not available, the baby booming reduced cinematographic consumption, the more investment toward durables (houses, cars, electrical appliances, TVs), the cinema's bad reputation involving McCarthyism, the birth of new competing media such as televisions, and the rise of other activities such as sports and gardening.

In order to respond to this crisis and to help resolve the uncertainty of the future of film business, Hollywood decided to focus on reducing the number of films to produce and creating big and expensive motion pictures (Cucco 2009, 215). Although big productions required to use the most advanced technology, it helped to differentiate the product from the supply of competing media and helped revive the theatre as a privileged place for the film experience and

high-quality entertainment. This big production led to the creation of the blockbuster where the promotional process, the choice of genre, the narrative component, and the place of consumption have been added to supplement Hollywood as a bigger film industry. The point about Hollywood not having a formula is true, but the high economic investment was able to show a bigger return of investment. The special effects that are added by using more advanced technology helped to distinguish the products from their competitors, and the choice of the genre also helps the production to choose what kind of special effects it should be using to enhance the experience of seeing a film; special effects performed better if screened on a big screen. As the blockbuster started to be a trend, Hollywood became a film industry that has been focusing more on providing entertainment rather than on the narrative itself, which it developed into a mainstream entertainment industry. The blockbuster also promises the audience that it will be showing something astonishing that makes them ‘must-see’ films as they are often defined (Cucco 2009, 218). Although motion pictures are considered artistic products, in order to meet the audience’s demand, films have become similar to commercial products in that they need to “produce money and cover the expenses of those films that have not reached the break-even point as well as those projects that have been stopped during their development, pre-production or filming, thus producing no income but only costs” (Cucco 2009, 218).

Because of extreme uncertainty and risk in the film industry, Hollywood had to respond by creating blockbusters to provide high-quality entertainment with more investment but also to help the film business become more predictable. It is all about avoiding risk, so blockbuster has to appear to the public with a simple, immediate, easily recognizable identity to maximize its audience. Blockbuster also has a tendency to produce sequels, prequels, and remakes, and to take

the subject from known successful products, like novels, comics, TV series, or plays. This provides more security in its success and is less intimidating because these previous products worked before in their respective media. The blockbuster is a new type of “cultural” product that worked well in reducing risk and is the main strategy Hollywood uses to cope with uncertainty.

Additionally, scholars Wayne E. Baker and Roer R. Faulkner also support Cucco’s claim that the rise of blockbusters also copes with uncertainty in the film business. They argue that the Hollywood film industry now serves as a resource to combat the uncertainty with the rise of the blockbuster, and now there are two processes to maintain blockbuster creation. “Through adaptation, filmmakers adopt role combinations with intrinsic capabilities of solving technical and organization problems” (Baker and Faulkner 1991, 279). Through imitation, filmmakers copy the role combinations associated with early blockbusters and gain legitimacy in Hollywood’s institutional environment (Baker and Faulkner 1991, 279). These strategies are implemented because, again, Hollywood knows that the blockbuster method works that the industry wants to maximize its use with the blockbuster. By adapting and imitating early work, it can also help to reduce the risks and increase security within the business.

However, a common criticism of the blockbuster strategies is that it is too formulaic and reduces the artistic expression of the final product. But Baker and Faulkner argue that this strategy can help to enhance the quality of artistic products as these two processes allow the increased specialization of the producer, the separation of the business and artistic domains, and the increasing fusion of artistic roles. Considering the benefits of this strategy, why would

Hollywood not take advantage of blockbuster by adapting and imitating if it worked before and if it means to reduce the risks and cope with uncertainty?

The implication here is that Hollywood is responding to extreme uncertainty in its industry. Film industry production is more complicated than that of most products, because it has limited amount of finance but a massive audience it needs to please. Since the audience also has a power to determine which film succeeds in the box office or not, the films need to be produced with more deliberate choices. As Hollywood film is both a cultural and economic product, Hollywood needs to find an equilibrium point that which can satisfy the artistic needs and economic needs.

This reveals that Hollywood has to deal with uncertainty because Hollywood's other main goal is to generate profit. Producing films in Hollywood is equivalent to making an investment, and to continue to be able to have a profit, Hollywood is making risky choices, and one of their main solutions was to start developing blockbusters. Additionally, since Hollywood structured itself as a business, the first thing that it is going to focus on is how to avoid making right decisions while it is unclear on what direction that this film business needs to take to continue attracting sales.

### *Utilizing Creativity*

According to social studies scholar, Shirley H. Engle, decision making requires more than mere knowledge of facts and principles; it requires a weighing in the balance, a synthesizing of all available information and values (Engle 2003, 7). He also adds that in order to make real-life decisions, it is all about making value decisions. This is especially true in cultural production



side as it is very important to assess how much value can a product offer in order to continue generating the business. To support that case, Hollywood does apply creativity in its decision-making to produce films in the future.

The previous segment did discuss Hollywood's solution on creating blockbusters to cope with uncertainty. But some may question how blockbusters and creativity can co-exist. They may argue that because blockbusters are formulaic, creativity cannot exist. However, as mentioned earlier, blockbusters do not have a clear set of guidelines. This gives a room for Hollywood production to be creative and decide what type of story it should tell. It is true that, sometimes, there will be a formula on how to produce a successful blockbuster. However, there is a study conducted by two researchers, Stefan Leijnen and Liane Gabora at the University of British Columbia in Canada, that says "creative ideas can only spread if they are actually adopted by others. Too much creativity, and not enough imitation-ideas die on the vine, because there are so many of them and few ever catch fire. For good ideas to spread, there is an optimal balance to be reached between creating and imitating." (Kuang 2009).

What this means is that in order to create the next successful blockbuster, productions may need to study the success of past blockbusters while also promising to deliver something better. Hollywood films may be an updated artistic product that has a different variation from previous films. The highest grossing film from 1997 was Titanic, an emotional dramatic love story. In 2017, just 10 years later, the highest grossing film for that year was Star Wars: The Last Jedi, a science-fiction and fantasy film that continues the Star Wars saga. These two films have little in common besides having a classic story structure: introduction, conflict, rising action,

climax, falling action, and conclusion. This can be seen for most blockbusters that are not in the same film franchise. Blockbusters challenge Hollywood to produce artistic products and generate profit. Therefore, blockbusters and creativity can co-exist. To keep the audience's interest, Hollywood is challenged to produce different types of films. It is a balance between the formula that works and the creativity that keeps bringing the audience back.

What does it mean to use creativity in Hollywood decision-making? As mentioned earlier, Hollywood is all about dealing with uncertainty and producing cultural products that could be commercially successful. In order to achieve this goal, Hollywood heavily relies on creativity. Scholars Kimberly D. Elsbach and Roderick M. Kramer inform that creativity is defined as the potential to create original, unique, unexpected, and/or emotionally moving phenomena and uncreativity as the lack of such potential. Hollywood is interested in producing content that they find creative.

Scholars Kimberly D. Elsbach and Roderick M. Kramer argue that there are dual process models to judge how creative ideas are. For instance, when pitchers, the screenwriters, present their ideas to catchers, the executives, it is a case in which the catchers evaluate the pitcher based on various prototypes: artist, storyteller, showrunner, neophyte, journeyman, dealmaker, and a nonwriter (Elsbach and Kramer 2003, 284). While the prototype of artists ranks the highest and nonwriter ranks the lowest, the catchers decide what category the pitcher falls into based on the idea that is presented, judging how creative the idea is in the process. As creativity is hard to be judged and only so many scripts can be judged, executives already have a categorization of

prototypes to see who can be the most creative writer or not based on the executives' images that they already picture for the next film before the pitch begins.

Another part of this process is whether the catchers can see themselves engaging and forming relationships with the pitcher. If the catchers find themselves engaging by making suggestions and participating proactively, this develops into a creative collaboration between the pitcher and catcher, thus making a better relationship between them. This finding demonstrates that creativity is not a linear process but rather an effort that should be brought from many facets.

Scholar Alexander G. Ross focuses on the important connection between script quality and film success (Ross 2011, 1). He notes that Hollywood, as a conglomerate, is trying to discover the ways to secure the highest possible return for their volatile shareholders, acknowledging the nature of its unique uncertainty. He acknowledges that there are many stakeholders involved such as the studio executives, talent agencies and stars, special effects making teams, profit-and-loss decision-makers, and a marketing team. However, he ultimately argues that the baseline of a film being successful or fail is determined by the "writer's ability to create an original and fascinating storyline, peopled by memorable characters" (Ross 2011, 25). Creativity has always been the most important "ingredient" in film, yet the studio executives have limited understanding of the creative process. This has an impact not only on the production, but also on the studio's shareholders' dividends and their profits. (Ross 2011, 25). Ross' findings emphasize that creativity is very important when it comes to deciding what and how films should be produced, but there are often barriers among connections of people within the industry.

Very similar to creativity, decision-making is also viewed as something artistic, reinforcing it as a creative process. Thomas H. Davenport and Jeanne G. Harris, scholars for MIT Sloan Management Review Paper, acknowledges that to decide what films should be produced, it is important to find out the patterns and feelings that drive decision-making (Davenport and Harris 2009, 23). It is easy to view decision-making based on an artistic approach such as what kind of feeling can this film evoke. However, it is more common to have access to data and use sophisticated technology to make decisions. Davenport and Harris discuss prediction and recommendation efforts for a variety of cultural products for analytical and scientific use, but, in the end, determine that the creative process will always play a “vital role in the creation, shaping, and marketing of cultural products” (Davenport and Harris, 2009, 24). They do acknowledge that Hollywood has been resisting a more formulaic and scientific decision-making process. Hollywood in general tends to employ impressions and opinions rather than analytics and formulas. Based on their findings, it can be assumed that Hollywood does focus more on the artistic characteristics and impressions when it comes to decision-making. It is flawed to make decisions on a next film to be produced by simply looking at historical data.

After all, the implication of making decisions in Hollywood using creativity is that Hollywood is also trying to allow production happen if the idea for films is worthy enough with a budget. In order to decide the next film production, creativity is important to create a product that is both cultural and economic. Hollywood is interested in something that is unpredictable and favorable to the audience to ensure long-term return on investment. Although creativity is something that is not quantifiable, it often has a measuring system to judge if this developing idea is worth developing; it is all about viewing the products creatively.

### *Hollywood's Structure and Network*

Lastly, examining Hollywood's structure and the network can also help to explain how the decision-making operates, and how this affects the motion picture industry. Coping with uncertainty and using creativity in Hollywood's decision making process is related to this section, because now this section examines the network, the people who are involved in Hollywood. This segment examines the understanding of people who are part of the production that solves the uncertainty and to undergo film production. To discuss more in-depth about the structure, scholars Joseph Lampel and Jamal Shamsie first point out the importance of the evolution of motion picture industry as a result of transition from "a studio era dominated by integrated hierarchies to a post-studio era dominated by flexible hub organizations supplied by networks of resource providers" (Lampel and Shamsie 2003, 2189). The break-up of the studio back from the hierarchy based studio system in 1954 plays a vital role in the future of motion picture industry that still impacts today.

Their findings suggest that the industry capabilities evolve in response to the rise of new organizational forms, and those practices include initiating a wide ranging exploration and experimentation. An important evolution in Hollywood's structure involves the integration of the supply chain, from production to distribution. Each part of the supply chain has to work interdependently with other parts of the supply chain. It is interdependence because if there is mismanagement in development of practices and routines in one area, it will also cause negative consequence by not encouraging development of practices and routines in the other areas

(Lampel and Shamsie 2003, 2190). But the break-up of the studio actually strengthened the perceived link between highly rated creative resources and box office performance. This suggests that Hollywood is interested in developing cultural products that can also be commercially successful. Hollywood's evolution in structure also is responsible for developing the network in film industry that is crucial for today.

Within the structure, the network, a connection system among the people in Hollywood, is inevitable as the motion picture product is a result of interrelationships in a film industry. However, another important question to ask is what social position is the most favorable to be in to maximize his or her performance? In order to decide what film is going to be produced next, there are also people who provide the "greenlight," approving the decision. Scholars Gino Cattini and Simone Ferriani argue that individual who occupy an intermediate position between the core and the periphery of their social system are in a favorable position to achieve the best results, which is producing creative results in Hollywood including decision-making. The previous section discusses using creativity as a way to make decisions for Hollywood. Now it focuses on at what position should an individual overall be within the structure of Hollywood to increase the odds of having the decision approved. This is important because the film industry has long embraced arrangements featuring flexible and short-term relationships that rely on enduring networks, in which mutual trust and reputations have been cemented over time (Cattani and Ferriani, 2008, 825).

Focusing on both the structure and the network, Hollywood has both core and periphery network. Individuals in core are usually key members in the community such as coordinators and

executives. Individuals in periphery may not always be the visible and but still socially engaged members, but they are still somewhat involved in the process of production. However, Cattani's and Ferriani's study suggests that it is most preferable to be in the middle of both core and periphery networks. Being closer to the core enhances the chance that a creative outcome or response will be readily recognized and legitimated, and individuals at the core can also obtain the kind of consensus necessary to pursue original ideas and overcome the initial illegitimacy of these ideas (Cattani and Ferriani 2008, 826).

However, it is not always in the best case to be so close to the core because the core members may find it difficult to judge the freshness of their ideas and escape the pressures to conform to the established norms of the field. Core members are more likely to be in fear of abandoning existing ideas and knowledge to explore new ones because of the large risks and economic incentives involved in the film industry. But, on the other hand, peripheral actors are more likely to contribute fresh perspectives to the system and maintain high intrinsic motivations, although they lack the visibility and endorsement necessary to boost their work's recognition (Cattani and Ferriani 2008, 825). But even though periphery position allows one to explore ideas and information not yet widely shared throughout the network, the core position is still more effective in mobilizing support around those ideas and information. By integrating both the core and periphery positions, one can maximize the creative performance and minimize the disadvantages that each position has individually.

Network matters. But how much is too much? Scholars Olav Sorenson and David M. Waguespack examines the social structure and exchange in the film industry (Sorenson and

Waguespack 2006, 560). Within Hollywood, there are the producers and distributors who can work in concert to maximize the strategy of a film success. It is heavily emphasizes that it is very important to have a network to be able to work together and benefit everyone from the practice. However, Sorenson's and Waguespack's study actually points out that distributors and producers with strong prior relationships will have a high degree of trust in one another, which can cause overly-ambitious decisions to be made, hurting both parties in the process . Strong relationships matter, but in this case, the results for the study suggest that distributors can overallocate scarce resources to prior exchange partners, and thus losing money for both parties in the process.

It is true that distributors are more willing to work with someone that they had prior relationships with by approving larger production budgets, marketing the films more heavily, and scheduling them on more attractive release dates (Sorenson and Waguespack 2006, 567). But films resulting from this type of relationship actually perform worse at the box office because the films engaged in repeated exchange may result in lower quality on average and distributors may overestimate the true quality of these films. Or often times, these distributors may even knowingly and willingly carry films of lower quality from their prior partners because they gain satisfaction from working again with the individuals involved (Sorenson and Waguespack, 2006, 571).

Yet, film involving prior exchange partners do perform better, on average, before controlling for the distributor's efforts. But the film business is an extreme economic practice and whoever is involved in production should be wary of these consequences. Both production teams and distributors are aiming to maximize revenue. But it seems like there is an unequal



amount of power, especially exerted more from the distributors. Therefore, it is too idealistic to think that anyone in the film industry should always be working with people. This implies how decision-making not only in film production itself but also choosing who to work with can also impact the result of the film's success. Their study supports the notion that decision-making should be considered within the structure and the network of Hollywood as well. After examining Hollywood's structure and network, what this implies about Hollywood's operation in the decision-making process can be beneficial but also disadvantageous. Once one understands the structure and comprehends how to approach Hollywood, it becomes a much easier process. However, realizing that there is also structural racism that it becomes less encouraging for anyone who wants to be involved with the film production and be able to make decisions. The implication, overall, is that decision-making operation in Hollywood is not equitable and unreasonable.

## Chapter 2: Hollywood and Race

Decision-making should be equitable for everyone, but the structure and network can distort that expectation. For instance, Hollywood sets barriers and boundaries that it ultimately results in inequality. Therefore, this chapter will examine the relationship between Hollywood and race as the previous chapter explained the historical context of Asian-American migration to the United States and Hollywood. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the effects of a complicated relationship between Asian-Americans and Hollywood, resulting in racism, misrepresentations, and stereotypes founded in Hollywood films.

Here, this chapter has three sections. The first section studies the relationship between Hollywood and race. The second section examines the Asian-American stereotypes in Hollywood films before 1993. Then the last section of this chapter briefly explains the history of Hollywood films that reflect stereotypes of Asian Americans – from *Broken Blossoms* to *The Karate Kid*.

### Relationship Between Hollywood and Race

Hollywood's relationship with race tends to be deteriorating. For instance, one of the major issues of minorities facing in Hollywood is the notion of whitewashing. Whitewashing is a case in which white actors are playing Asian characters, implying how Asian-Americans continue to be invisible. For instance, it was unsettling when Tilda Swinton was chosen as the Ancient from the action film from Marvel Studios, *Doctor Strange*, creating an image of the

clean-shaven head and “mystical Asian garments. Along with that, Scarlett Johanson’s casting as the cyborg Motoko Kusanagi in Japanese anime classic *Ghost in the Shell* from DreamWorks and Paramount also sparked controversy for whitewashing, and the technology was employed to make Johanson look more Asian. Asian-Americans fall into the category of victims of whitewashing. The important question to impose is why would Hollywood not cast Asian actors? Then the most common answer to that question is the fact that there are no A-list Asian celebrities right now on an international level, according to screenwriter, Max Landis for *Ghost in the Shell* (Chow 2016). Then he adds that the audience does not understand how the industry works. To answer why Hollywood continues to whitewash the characters that are ethnic-specific, still, the most common answer will be that there are not any Asian movie actors and they do not have a box office track record and are not famous enough yet to be cast in mainstream films. But it is important to refute that answer because it may not entirely be true.

Despite the fact that there are not many minority actors in Hollywood, minorities also tend to be under-represented compared to their actual presence in society and tend to take on stereotypical roles. Stereotypes are understood as images that are “controlling” in the sense that these negative stereotypes provide justification for social controls. But stereotypes do not necessarily have to be negative all the time; there are also positive stereotypes that provide normative models for Asian thought and behavior. Specifically focusing on Asian Americans, there are four main stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans emerged from primarily white cultural products in Hollywood: “Yellow Peril,” “Dragon Lady,” “Charlie Chan,” and “Lotus Blossom.”

The concept of “Yellow Peril” is rooted in politics and racism. This notion first originated when Europeans encountered Genghis Khan and his “Mongol hordes.” According to Europeans, it signified invasion and infection of civility by an inferior culture. But in the American historical context, this idea emerged when white Americans on the west of the United States started to discriminate against Asians. These Americans feared the increasing number of Asian population and felt threatened by Asians, mostly men, who were working harder and taking more economic opportunities in the American market. (Shah 2003, 3) Asians were categorized as the “Other” and were seen as different from the white norm that Asians leased unwanted swampland to make it arable and competed successfully in the local produce markets.

In Hollywood films, these Asian men, despite ethnic backgrounds, were depicted as menacing, predatory, and lusting after white women. These images were heavily portrayed in *Broken Blossoms* (Shah 2003, 4) and *The Cheat* (Shah 2003, 4). Additionally, the concept of the Dragon Lady is a characterization of Asian females rooted in American cultural imagination. In Hollywood, most Asian women are portrayed as diabolical, sneaky, and mean, but also added characteristics of being sexually alluring and sophisticated and determined to seduce and corrupt white men. This image first emerged from a film called *Thief of Baghdad* (Shah 2003, 4).

The concept of Charlie Chan was created by Hollywood in 1936. Unlike previous stereotypes that depict Asian men as dangerous and threatening, this type of character is seen as a mysterious man, possessing awesome powers of being able to deduce. Rather than seeing as threatening, Charlie Chan is still deferential to whites, yet still seen as someone who can reveal his “Asian wisdom.” and “Lotus Blossom.” But this quiet, unassertive, and ostensibly positive

character evolved from a derogatory Asian character in popular fiction: the Asian domestic servants who were commonly called Charlie, as a way of calling “Good boy, Charlie” by their employers (Shah 2003, 5). Similar to that image but for females, the concept of Lotus Blossom also exists. They are seen as submissive, meek, and ready to serve a man’s every need, trying to portray a positive image of Asian women. The film *Sayonara* (Shah 2003, 5), which is about US Air Force pilots on leave in Japan, was one of the first to show the updated Lotus Blossom stereotype. Based on these stereotypical images and whitewashing, it demonstrates that Asian-Americans have less voice in advancing themselves in Hollywood.

What are the causes of this strained relationship between minorities and Hollywood? This can be broken into three categories: numerical representation, quality of representation and centrality of representation. “Numerical representation describes a social group’s presence or absence on-screen or behind-the-scenes, usually referring to the proportion of a particular occupation that the group occupies” (Erigha 2015, 79). Quality of representation includes the kinds of roles that groups occupy on-screen and behind-the-scenes. In front of the camera, actors favor multi-dimensional, multi-faceted roles over stereotypical, one-dimensional parts (Erigha 2015, 79). Lastly, the centrality of representation assesses how central groups are to an industry’s core institutions (Erigha 2015, 79) For instance, research on the centrality of representation is interested in examining whether racial/ethnic minorities are located in institutions that are in the core or periphery of cultural production (Erigha 2015, 79).

By examining numerical representation, minorities are heavily underrepresented in acting, writing, directing, and creating for Hollywood films. Especially for acting, Caucasian

actors dominated positions, occupying 75% of all roles while African Americans occupied 14%, Latinos 5%, and Asian Americans less than 3% of roles (Erigha 2015, 81). Although Asian Americans have increased their presence with 4.4% of speaking roles from less than 3%, the percentage still remains relatively the same. This trend becomes even more substantial when examining the placement of lead roles. Minorities are only accounted for 10.5% of lead roles even though they are accounted for 36.3% of the US population in 2010 (Erigha 2015, 81). “Racial/ethnic minorities subordination in supporting roles compared to leading roles provides them with less on-screen visibility than their White counterparts, despite their increasing proportion of the general population” (Erigha 2015, 81).

The issue of diversity and number is not only present in actors but also directors as well. Caucasian males were more prone to receive significantly more director jobs at 82.4 % of the total while only 12.5% of feature directors from 2013 to 2014 were minorities. After all, the writing occupation shows similar patterns of White overrepresentation and minority underrepresentation. This statistic indicates that minority directors are virtually shut out in the multibillion-dollar industry that has a deep financial and cultural impact in a global society, including in the United States where diversity should be celebrated.

In terms of quality of representation, minorities were typically associated with ethnic genres and performances of race and ethnicity (Erigha 2015, 82). Especially, Asian American actors were racialized in roles as martial arts guns, superhuman characters, or victims (Erigha 2015, 82). Actors with Asian backgrounds were generally typed as foreign and asked to speak in Chinese accents since casting directors failed to distinguish between foreign-born Asians and

Asian Americans, nor account for variation in Asians' ethnic backgrounds and cultures (Erigha 2015, 82). Also, on the production side, minority film writers have few opportunities for work outside of minority-themed genres (Erigha 2015, 82). Even today, they are constrained to remain on ethnic niche shows (Erigha 2015, 82).

Lastly, for the centrality of representation, studies do demonstrate that minorities employed in Hollywood were having a much more difficult time accessing the core of the industry and more often find work with marginal companies. Bielby and Bielby's (Erigha 2015, 80) study showed that minorities were less likely than White men to belong to core talent agencies. It is far more advantageous to work for major studios by offering benefits that smaller studios cannot afford such as better reputation, resources, authentication, legitimacy, employment, and income, making career success and helping to make advancement substantially better by being in part of core talent agencies.

This does not only apply to actors but also directors as well. For instance, only 9.2% of actors, 6.3% of writers, and 7.3% of minority directors were represented by talent agencies while the majority found representation from talent agencies outside of the core talent agencies (Erigha 2015, 83). Underrepresentation in core institutions in film prevents racial minority directors, writers, actors, and creators from full participation in Hollywood cultural production and also limits the scope of their careers in Hollywood. The truth has always been this: racial/ethnic minorities have always been underrepresented in Hollywood, far below their proportion of the US population.

### Asian-American Stereotypes in Hollywood Films Before 1993

There are four different ways of how Asians are portrayed in the media. This includes poor communicators who are quiet, shy, humble, passive non-confrontational and speaking poor English with accents. (Zhang 2010, 21). There are also nerds who are all about “all work, no play” or workaholics, who are technologically savvy, but not interested in fun and social activities, and lacking proper communication, social skills, and cultural knowledge (Zhang 2010, 21). However, the question that needs to be posed is that is this so-called model minority positive after all? A model minority is not the most accurate measure or validity of the “success” for instance, but this does not consider other factor factors such as working hours, number of workers in the household, ethnic status, and education. (Zhang 2010, 24).

There is also the foreigner stereotype in which Asian-Americans are continued to be portrayed as foreigners in the mainstream media (Zhang 2010, 26). Asian-Americans are seldom depicted as full-fledged Americans (Zhang 2010, 26). The stereotype continues to depict Asian-Americans as exotic, non-American, foreign, inassimilable, and acting fresh off the boat, and as if they do not belong in the United States to the same degree as other minorities (Zhang 2010, 26). This stereotype functions as identity denial, suggesting that Asian Americans are ostracized as an out-group or outsiders (Zhang 2010, 26). The last stereotype that is worth mentioning is the fact that as Asian-Americans are stereotyped as foreigners with poor social and communication skills, they are the ones who are less likely to initiate a friendship with other ethnic groups of people (Zhang 2010, 27).



Stereotypes can be “positive” and negative, but the media stereotypes about Asian Americans are mostly negative, unfavorable, and unflattering (Zhang 2010, 32) But including this positive stereotype of model minority, is also constructed, activated, and perpetuated by the media (Zhang 2010, 32). Ultimately, all types of stereotypes tend to result in harmful effects. With all of these negative and “positive” stereotypes, it is important to know how the audience perceives these images. Are people’s perceptions of Asian Americans consistent with the media’s stereotypes?

Unfortunately, results demonstrate that people’s perceptions and judgments about Asian Americans are aligned with the media representations and these stereotypes affect people’s intent to interact with Asians (Zhang 2010, 32). Even though the general public is aware that stereotypes on minority could be inaccurate, overgeneralized, distortion, and more myth than reality, it tends to accept the stereotype as a social reality (Zhang 2010, 32).

As media cultivates the homogenized and standardized ideology about Asian Americans, it has become evident that the public has a consistent perception of Asians (Zhang 2010, 32). The most popular stereotype about Asians is still about them as more prepared, motivated, and more likely to have greater career success than peer ethnic groups (Zhang 2010, 32). The way how media portrays these Asian Americans as “overrepresentation in number-crunching professions that require minimal language proficiency and underrepresented in social science and humanities field display their little amount of language and interpersonal communication skills” (Zhang 2010, 32). This only fosters and reinforces the image of Asian-Americans as quiet, shy, and poor English speakers. The nerd stereotype can also lay a damaging effect on Asians’ socialization

process because it demonstrates that Asian-Americans are continued to be excluded from peers and continue to emphasize their poor language, communication and social skills (Zhang 2010, 32). Because of all of these poor representations even though these images initially come from positive looking images, it ultimately results in negative consequences such as people are less likely to initiate a friendship with minorities, including Asians, and how Asians are continued to be viewed as outsiders.

“These results indicate that people’s perception of Asian Americans are much aligned with the media representations, and these stereotypes impact people's interaction with Asians” (Zhang 2010, 35). Because of these stereotypical images portrayed on minorities in films, it is inevitable that the audience generally fails to notice its problems and continue to re-emphasize. That is why it is crucial for minorities, especially Asian-Americans, to take less ethnic-specific roles to tackle the negative consequences on minorities resulted from films.

### History of Classical Films with Asian American Stereotypes

This chapter will further elaborate more on films that provoke Asian American stereotypes. Four notable films from different time periods by decades will be discussed, and this chapter will focus on some problematic Asian American stereotypes that are employed from different plot lines. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate different Asian American stereotypes founded in films from a wide range of time periods and to show how Hollywood has been portraying Asians in the past.

The first film *Broken Blossoms* (also known as *The Yellow Man and the Girl*) is a 1919 American tragic, silent, drama film. It was directed by D. W. Griffith (also a producer of *The Birth of a Nation*) and the story focuses on a young, Caucasian girl named Lucy Burrows, who is abused by her alcoholic prizefighting father, and meets a Chinese man named Cheng-Huan. Cheng-Huan has a very kind heart unlike Lucy's father, and he falls in love with her. The film was based on a short story written by Thomas Burke called "The Chink and the Child" from the 1916 collection *Limehouse Nights*. The film sets in London as Cheng-Huan immigrates to London from China to spread Buddha's teachings abroad, prompting Cheng-Huan his need of civilizing with a white community.

Lucy and Cheng-Huan meet as Lucy runs away from her abusive father and finds refuge in Cheng-Huan's home. During that time, Cheng-Huan helps Lucy to cure back to her health and the two forms a bond. However, as Lucy's father finds out where Lucy has been hiding, he brings her back and punishes her. By the time when Cheng-Huan arrives to rescue Lucy, yet Lucy is already dead at that point. Cheng-Huan faces a battle against Lucy's father, finishing the battle by shooting Lucy's father repeatedly with his handgun. Later the fight, Cheng-Huan brings back Lucy's lifeless body, Cheng-Huan builds a shrine to Buddha and commits suicide by stabbing a knife to himself.

The film received a positive critical response for focusing on interracial relationships (Chinese men and white women in this case), which was illegal during this time period. *Broken Blossoms* was considered to be well-produced from a racial perspective because of its flagrant promotion of race-mixing (Hamilton 2013) at this time period. D. W. Griffith's portrayal of Lucy

and *The Yellow Man's* relationship was viewed as brave and controversial at the time, as it was a taboo subject (American Culture Honors 2017). But it is important to know the director chose not to portray these two characters in a sexual light by displaying their love and affection in a very subtle manner. However, the stereotype begins to show when a Caucasian man plays a Chinese man who befriends an abused English girl. But this stereotype seemed to be dismissed as much evidence focus on the fact that Griffith has done well in portraying an interracial couple in American society in which it was not ready to completely accept the idea of an interracial couple. Perhaps this is why many people did not find this film so problematic.

Still, this film does cause a problem overall. The film focuses on Cheng-Huan, a Chinese man, as the "Other" in comparison to Lucy and Lucy's father, emphasizing the theory of Orientalism (American Culture Honors 2017). Orientalism is an idea that shuns people because of their ethnicity, race or religion. By applying the theory of Orientalism, Cheng-Huan, or the Yellow Man, was stereotyped through this film. When the character was portrayed by a Caucasian actor, it emphasizes the stereotype of Chinese men as a peaceful Buddhist, an opium addict, and a shopkeeper (American Culture Honors 2017). Although there were many Asian actors in silent films during this era, there was really one actor who had a leading role. After all, this causes a problem as Griffith did not contribute any effort promoting diversity in Hollywood or reject the stigma of Chinese stereotypes; the film essentially employed Orientalism by failing to use accuracy and to correct political issues in the Yellow Man's portrayal (American Culture Honors 2017).

Charlie Chan serves as a protagonist in his films, and there are numerous amounts of films that include Charlie Chan from 1926 to all the way in 1981. Charlie Chan is a fictional character from Honolulu, who works as a detective, originally for a series of mystery novels; the character was also based on Hawaiian detective Chang Apana. After appearing in novels, then he was featured in a number of media such as films, radio shows, and television shows. However, this chapter will be focusing on Charlie Chan Chantology, a series of six films produced from 1944 to 1946 to show a specific time period. Those films include *Charlie Chan in the Secret Service*, *The Chinese Cat*, *The Jade Mask*, *Meeting at Midnight*, *The Scarlet Clue*, and *The Shanghai Cobra*.

Charlie Chan was heavily praised by the audience by showing the good nature of a Chinese man. Charlie is known to be wise, inscrutable, and foreign. However, it is the actions that are done by Charlie Chan in films that emphasize the stereotypes of Asians. For instance, Chan, in films, just shuffles from room to room at the scene of the crime looking thoughtfully at chairs and at strange marking son walls (Mackenzie 2004). “When it’s time to interrogate a witness, Chan has a huge and boring arsenal of lame Orientalist proverbs, all uttered with the same half-assed pigeon-English (he skips the articles “a” and “the”)” (Mackenzie 2004). Similarly to *Broken Blossoms*, a Scandinavian actor, a white actor was playing as the Chinese detective. However, the interesting thing is that Charlie Chan’s sons were acted by Asian-American actors; Charlie Chan the character himself was never played by a Chinese man though.

The way how Charlie Chan is viewed is very different from Caucasian Americans and Asian Americans. “Caucasian Americans find Charlie Chan a funny, beloved, albeit somewhat

inscrutable character who talks wisely and acts even more wisely. But to many Asian Americans, he remains as a harmful example of a racist stereotype; the type of Chinaman, passive and unsavory, who communicates himself in broken English” (Corrigan 2010). Like a blackface minstrel, Charlie Chan carries both the stigma of racial parody and the stimulus of creative imitation (Corrigan 2010).

Yet, the complex character of Charlie Chan does imply an upgrade of Chinese characters that are usually portrayed as karate and Kung Fu men. “He may have slanted eyes, a chubby and inscrutable face, and a dark goatee, but he prefers western suits to his native garments and wears a Panama hat in the tropical sun. He is no fan of tea; he prefers to drink sarsaparilla. Moreover, unlike a timid, inarticulate Chinaman, Chan is voluble and enjoys spouting fortune-cookie witticism that is alternately befuddling and enlightening” (Corrigan 2010). Comparing to the physicality of Jackie Chan’s slapsticks in Kung Fu films, Chan is revealed as a Chinese man as a sage and a wisecracker. Granted, Charlie Chan may have had a more nuanced and sophisticated portrayal as an Asian-American, but is it, after all, positive if Asian-American themselves do not like the portrayal?

*Sayonara* is a third film that will be discussed in this chapter. *Sayonara* is a 1957 drama film that focuses on the love story of an American Air Force flier during the Korean War and a famous Japanese dancer. The film focuses on the protagonist’s initial prejudice against the Japanese while he is stationed in Japan. But his experience through the fact that his best friend falls in love with a Japanese woman, who he intends to marry, and he himself falls in love with a Japanese woman despite the fact that he has a Caucasian fiancé. During this era, interracial

marriage was illegal. While his best friend and his wife tragically chose to commit suicide due to circumstances for not allowing interracial marriage, the protagonist was finally able to marry his Japanese lover.

The film overall received a positive review by winning four Academy Awards, including an award given to a Japanese woman who became the first actor of East Asian descent to win. The film was trying to de-mystify and normalize the contact between postwar Japan and the United States as the cultural issues of war brides and mixed-race children were on the rise in the 1940s and 1950s. The film does break some boundaries such as a romantic love shared between a white man and an Asian woman on-screen, giving a glimpse of white racism toward blacks, and prioritizing the war between the white people themselves and the military culture. But, of course, this film inevitably has stereotypes.

This time, the portrayal of Asian women was derogatory. It was the fact that Asian women were portrayed as submissive. Japanese women, especially in this film, were seen as coy and doll-like figures in which women would do anything to please her men. This stereotype already existed, but it just happened that this film seemed to be emphasizing that furthermore. The film does focus on racism as American characters initially have a strong prejudice against the Japanese. However, the issue is that the film transfers the issue of racism into romantic and sexualized love; racially hatred becomes racially desired (Cloyd 2012). This leaves a question. Did these American men fall in love with the Japanese women because they really liked them as a person or the fact that they are so different by looks and race?

Racism did not disappear; it simply became a competition on who can have a spouse with a different skin color. This leads to the notion of Asian women as objects or competition award but not simply as human beings. The film adequately handles the topic of interracial marriages, especially during the time when Asian women from Japan and Korea could not come to the United States because of law, yet, the problem with the film in ways of tackling interracial marriages is that Asian women have simply become objects for American soldiers to control with and only be attracted because of the exotic nature of Asian women.

Lastly, *The Karate Kid* is another classic film from the 1980s. Although there have been two sequels of *The Karate Kid*, this chapter will be focusing on the first *The Karate Kid* film that was released in the 1980s. *The Karate Kid* is a 1984 American martial arts drama film that focuses on a teenager who learns karate by a wise old man to defend himself and compete in a tournament against his bullies, one of which is the ex-boyfriend of his love interest. Although it is a heartwarming film about cross-cultural, cross-generational bonding that, unfortunately, also displays the Hollywood stereotype of the mystically wise Asian sage, which is similar to that of Charlie Chan.

Overall, these are some examples of Asian-American stereotypes that can be found in classical Hollywood films. However, considering the change in time and era, it is important to decide how these portrayals of Asian Americans are eventually affecting the audience that consists of Asian Americans. These stereotypes exemplify the characters as they were developed by the production who had little or no knowledge of Asian-Americans. This phenomenon creates frustration and confusion for the audience, especially Asian-Americans, because of the way how



Asian-American characters are portrayed seems estranged. This section also serves a way of introducing the shift that Hollywood has taken, and how the “recent” portrayals can be compared and contrasted with two main films that will be focused on. After all, these representations of Asian-American also support how, again, the complicated relationship between Asian-Americans and Hollywood resulted in inequality and racism that continues to constrain because of these strange portrayals. But, moving forward, these portrayals of Asian-Americans in Hollywood films seemed to be changing especially in 1993.

### Chapter 3: Case Studies

To further examine the changing portrayals of Asian-Americans in Hollywood films, my research also includes two case studies of films to provide in-depth discussion, including the content, the style, and the reception, in relation to Asian-American experience and Hollywood. My first film discussion is on *The Joy Luck Club* (1993), directed by Wayne Wang. Then my second film discussion is on *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), directed by Jon M. Chu.

#### Why I Chose These Films

I chose films that were produced by the mainstream entertainment industry, Hollywood since I am interested in researching how entertainment production portrays Asian-Americans and their experiences. I chose these two films as these films were critically acclaimed heavily for leading the “Asian Wave” in the history of film. These films were the ones that brought a lot of attention from the audience as well.

I specifically selected *The Joy Luck Club* because this film was one of the early examples of Asian-American representation that received a positive reaction. It also managed to attract not just the ethnically Asian audience but also other ethnic backgrounds including the whites. This film is also included among the American Film Institute’s 1998 list of the 400 movies nominated for the Top 100 Greatest American Movies. Additionally, I find it interesting that when this film was produced, it was believed to be the catalyst for the rise of Asian-American representation in

future Hollywood; however, it was not. I thought it would be interesting to study a film that became an “epitome” of Asian American representation in the film industry.

I also chose *Crazy Rich Asians* with similar reasoning to that of *The Joy Luck Club*. This film also about Asian-American representation succeeded in attracting a wide range of audiences. *Crazy Rich Asians* were celebrated heavily by people with Asian ethnic background for producing a film that is heavily dominated by Asian and Asian American cast members. Yet, even though this film did receive positive reactions, it has been criticized with the lack of representation of Singapore and sparked the controversy of the casting of the male protagonist, who is half white. But this was a film that has caught attention from both the audience and the critics and has brought the idea back on Asian Wave in the film industry.

Both of these films overall bring interesting discussions on measuring the accuracy and the quality of Asian-American representations, bringing the positives and the negatives after these films were produced. These are the reasons why I chose those two specific films to complement my research. Based on my work in film discussions, these will be implemented in part of my research that analyzes the audience perception of these films, in which the audience comprises of different cultural backgrounds.

### *The Joy Luck Club* Film Discussion

*The Joy Luck Club* (1993) is a drama film that explores the relationships between four Americanized Chinese daughters and four of their immigrant mothers by presenting the

characters and their accounts. However, the film narrates all eight women's stories, and all of them focus on struggles that they face in their lives. The genre of the film helps the audience to portray these characters at their best, their worst, and everything in between. The film explores two conflicting cultures of China and the United States, mostly between mothers and daughters who grew up in very different environments.

### *Description of the Film*

The film is divided into four parts. The first part of the film focuses on a mother named, Lindo and her daughter, Waverly. The second part of the film is about Ying-Ying, a Chinese mother, and Lena, her Americanized daughter. Then the third part of the film focuses on a mother-daughter pair, An-Mei and Rose. Then, lastly, the story focuses on June, the main protagonist of the film, and her mother, Suyan, who was not present in this film.

The division of mother-daughter pairs in this film depicts that although these immigrant Chinese mothers' conflicts were presented during the same era of feudal China, the conflicts that they have gone through are all different from each other. Most Chinese mothers recount their struggles back in China in order to guide their own daughters who are struggling as well. There is a shift between mother's and daughter's flashback in order to use mother's story as a vehicle to help mothers and daughters to reconcile and learn from each other. Within these four divisions of each mother-daughter pair, the audience can notice that there are subdivisions of stories that go back and forth between that of mother and daughter.

The film's main setting is at a family gathering for June, the main protagonist, who is preparing her trip to China to meet her long lost half-twin sisters who her mother, Suyan, passed

away two months ago, abandoned them before she immigrated to the United States for a better life. During this event, June was invited by her aunties to take the place of Suyan to play mahjong with them. These aunties playing mahjong during their past time is also when they formed the Joy Luck Club, which was formed by June's mother, Suyan, with other Chinese immigrant mothers she met at a church. While they play mahjong all together, these Chinese mothers' own stories and their respective daughters' own stories are presented as flashbacks, so that the audience can learn more each about these characters' backgrounds. With four mothers and four daughters, the film is structured into four different sections, corresponding to the number of mother-daughter pair within the gathering. Mothers' stories focus on their harsh lives that they had back in feudal, patriarchal China with arranged marriages and unhappy childhood memories that they faced. Daughters' stories demonstrate their conflicts from their marriages and their hardships of understanding their mothers.

The party scene represents its time as present as all of the three parts out of four parts of the film all conclude by going back to this family gathering. This scene explains to the audience how everything the way it is. It also explains why June is hosting the gathering in the first place, which was from her mother's struggle and how June was able to meet her long half-twin sisters, who were presumed to be dead, in China. Her mother's struggle has led to something that June could learn more about her mother and more about the past. Although June knew about her mother's daughters from China, the fact that June was able to going to meet them became a new thing for her to look forward to.

The opening scene at the June's farewell party also helps the audience to demonstrate that Asian immigrants are similar to other immigrants in the United States. There is an affluent aspect in which there is an abundance of rich food served for guests, by how the party was hosted in a family home just like any other American families would host their parties, but celebrates the diversity of people as party guests are not only Asians but also other races such as caucasians and even blacks, who are also here to celebrate. There are some aspects of American culture in which there were some people watching American football on television, having a cocktail time with serving wines and such. The film successfully portrays how Asian-Americans are no different from other Americans in some traditions such as this party.

After all the stories of all four pairs of mother-daughter are told, the film ends with June learning the truth that Lindo has exchanged letters with June's long lost twin sisters with Suyan's signature, making them think that Suyan is still alive. June wants to tell them to tell the truth, but Lindo believes that it is too late as they already think that it is their mother who is coming. When June arrives and meets her sisters, she tells the truth about Suyan, yet her sisters still embraced them. The film ends with all three of the sisters embracing each other. To June, that was a moment in which she was finally able to understand her heritage but also understand her mother.

### *Cinematic Techniques*

Major themes of this film focuses on Chinese American sensibility, the authenticity of representation, or the politics of cultural identity. Identity is the major thematic dimension, but this sets other central concerns such as matrilineal connection and heritage aside that the audience may be able to miss out. Although the film's major context lies on the identity, but in-

depth, it focuses on universal emotions. The overall narratives do focus on universal topics, yet difficult ones. Majority of the subjects' of the stories were difficult, heavy subjects such as abandonment, control, infanticide, and so forth. But these narratives are closer to Asian, more closely to Chinese, elements because of the setting, including the geography, culture, and politics. The narratives that were delivered in the United States are still considered heavy as they focus on the issue of racism and gender inequality, which are often perceived as difficult issues in the United States.

Stylistically, the film heavily uses flashbacks to portray Chinese immigrant mothers' before coming to America. These flashbacks help the audience to understand the hardship, adversity, and the suffering that Chinese immigrant mothers have faced. "Feeling streamlined despite its more-than-two-hour running time, Mr. Wayne Wang, the director of *The Joy Luck Club*, glides his film through the essentials of Ms. Tan's novel while solving difficult narrative problems with deceptive ease" (Maslin 1993). "On film, the story view makes sudden, acrobatic shifts from one character to another, in a manner that artfully underscores the story's many parallels" (Maslin 1993). The shift between the past and the present was effortless that even though there were so many narratives to be told, the film proceeds with perfect clarity (Ebert 1993).

Chinese mothers and Chinese-American daughters also speak their own narrations in first person perspectives, as if these narrations are monologues, while the flashbacks are presented and in most scenes that were not based in the family gathering. These narrations help the audience to understand the inner thoughts that Chinese mothers and Chinese-American daughters

have as they explicitly state their feelings at certain moments that they were experiencing. There are certain cinematographic techniques that are essential to be mentioned. For instance, the way how the characters are shot is very important as it represents the connection between the Chinese immigrant mothers and their Chinese-American daughters (Li 2010, 6). When mothers and daughters are facing conflicts from each other, the scene is framed “almost always in separate shots and reverse shots, rather than in over-the-shoulder shots” (Li 2010, 6). “The visual separation is a metaphor of their mental difference and an allusion to their sense of alienation” (Li 2010, 6).

However, this exception can be seen from the scene in which Suyuan and June interact after the family gathering in which Waverly’s family was present. The scene was shot in the over-the-shoulder to reveal the moment when a mother and a daughter confront each other, but resolves in a reconciliation, and this offers a chance for a mother and a daughter to communicate to clarify and learn from each other, which is offered in two-shot. “The over-the-shoulder shot allows Wang and his cinematographer Amir Mokri to keep both of their subjects in view before they finally reunite them with two shots (Li 2010, 6-7).” “It marks the narrative transition from alienation to understanding and prepares for the visual as well as symbolic union of June and Suyuan in the concluding shot” (Li 2010, 7).

Two-shot, a film technique that is used consistently throughout the film, is also used in other mother-daughter pairs to create a shared space and have a reconciliation. The two-shot brings closer proximity between a mother and a daughter; however, this does not immediately leads to a resolution. Rather, this shot serves as a way to lead to the climax in which a mother



and daughter start to argue. Using an example of Lindo and Waverly at a hair salon, the helps to juxtapose these characters in a shared space when they their tension and antagonism drain away because of their candid confession of the innermost feelings. This style brings confrontation and reconciliation at the same space after all.

Other major film technique is a mirror feature, serving as a symbolic image in a certain scene. Using Lindo and Waverly as an example again, there were multiple scenes in which a mirror was present, especially at a hair salon. Recurring mirror image has narrative functions to fulfill, for example, eliciting a moment of self-consciousness to provide motivation for the memories of the pasts” (Li 2010, 8). But mirror serves as a symbolism as it testifies to the fact that the matrilineal ties have permeated not only lives, but also the consciousness of the mothers and daughters” (Li 2010, 8). Mirror helps the daughter to realize how her mother is inseparable from her life, therefore, pushing above the limitation in seeing more than what is represented.

Close-ups and medium shots are heavily utilized in this film as well. These film techniques were employed in order to enhance the real nature of people arguing by capturing all the details in the facial expression and body language, making these characters’ thoughts and feelings more visible. One minor film technique is the eye-level shot, which is not from high angles as children often are in films about adults (Li 2010, 6). “This gives equal emphasis to the mother and the daughter and increases the emotional strain of their arguments (Li 2010, 6). After all, all of these cinematographic techniques such as separate shots, reverse shots, over-the-shoulder, two-shots, mirror feature, close-ups and medium shots, succeeded in conveying visual sense of connection that saturates the film with familial warmth.

In this film, it was interesting to see that the subtitles to help translate the Chinese dialogue into English was absent. Yes, there may be some streaming services that provide subtitles, but when this film was originally released, there was no sign of subtitles. As part of an audience, this also frustrated me as I could not comprehend the conversation among Chinese were having, especially in Chinese mothers' parts of the film. Even though the audience is watching the film to figure out what is going on, it was quite difficult for me to convey what was happening. This was the moment in which only Chinese speakers could understand what was going on with dialogues. But for those who did not speak Chinese, cultural disconnection was created, thus having a much harder time to deliver Chinese mothers' narratives to the audience. The absence of the subtitles had probably its intention of conveying the story without dialogues but solely with visual representations to draw the universality of suffering and hardships, but I was reluctant to believe if this were truly achieved. In fact, this technique might have backfired if the film were trying to reach out to other Asian-American audiences who do not speak the Chinese language and still evoke the feeling of relevance and sympathy. These Chinese-American daughters, of course, delivered their stories in English. If the subtitles were present, the Asian experience could have been more relevant and understanding to those who do not speak the Chinese language.

Music is worth mentioning in this film. When the film begins, the audience can hear a traditional Chinese music is played, depicting the Chinese musical culture. The audience can hear the wooden flute playing a low sound and slowly paced music. The Chinese music that is played shows the cultural background that the characters come from, identifying the culture through music. But when June starts talking about the United States, there is a shift in music by

changing the instrument into western instruments, mostly strings. The shift in musical instruments may depict the immigration that June's Chinese mother from China to the United States, demonstrating the cultural shift. But at the end of the narration from June, the music shifts back to that of China, perhaps representing the blend of Chinese and American cultures, which are embedded in Chinese American daughters like June. But this could also represent the theme of cultural and generational clash and reconciliation.

The music is mostly absent while Chinese mothers are telling their stories. But if there is music during these Chinese mothers' flashbacks, then the music is again traditional Chinese with a single flute to depict the Chinese experience and struggle that they had to face. However, the mixture of Chinese instruments and western instruments was presented once again at the Chinese mothers' flashbacks to represent their eventual immigration to the United States, adapting to a different culture. The music that is played during Chinese-Americans daughters' flashbacks, on the other hand, represent their cultural identity as western as there is no presence of traditional Chinese music played as a background.

The tempo of the music is generally slow, which could depict the pace of experience and conflict that these characters had to face and the longevity of these characters' lives. The tone of the music is major-sounding, which hints at having a satisfying solution that these characters receive and hoped to have. The pitch of the music is low mostly to, perhaps, represent their previous statuses of where they used to be such as feeling hopeless and powerless. The harmony represents the resolution that mothers and daughters have in peace.

Although *The Joy Luck Club* was based on a novel by Amy Tan, it was adapted into a screen, reaching a wide range of audiences in theaters. Wayne Wang, the director, wanted to keep the Chinese aspects as authentic as possible. He had difficulty finding actors who could speak perfect Beijing dialect for certain scenes. He also had a hard time finding actors who spoke broken English and American English as a combination. He admits that this creates a stereotype, but his mindset was heavily focusing on creating an authentic Chinese individual.

However, Wang believes his knowledge of the language and his background in Hong Kong helped him to make *The Joy Luck Club* the way it is. He wanted to make sure he was finding the balance by understanding the Chinese culture and learning how to communicate with people who speak Chinese. He also decided to direct the film that is family genre as he saw the growth in popularity. He also believed “American audience was becoming more interested in movies about Chinese-Americans-although elsewhere in the world the ghost stories, the action films, and the kung fu films seem to be more popular” (Tibbetts 1994, 3).

But he took a chance and focused on developing this film because as Americans are in a country of “immigrants, and stories about immigrants and the different generations and how the parents may be closer to their roots in their own history, and the kids are not are things concern everyone, and this emotion is very strong and universal in ways” (Tibbetts 1994, 3). He did fear of telling so many interlocking stories because not only there are just eight characters, but each story has its own past and present that they were 16 stories in total (Tibbetts 1994, 3). He viewed as a very complicated process, but this resolved as he was able to work with a very experienced screenwriter, Ron Bass, who developed a simple structure of a dinner party to see one of the

daughters off to China to visit her twin sisters. Using that structure helped to introduce all the mother and daughters, and using the narration, which is one of unique styles here in this film, helped to bridge things and get more information across (Tibbetts 1994, 3).

Writing a script for this film was a painstaking process as well as he had to figure out how many stories they were going to tell and what emphasis there should be in each story. But most importantly, it was important to figure out how to deliver these stories in an elegant and simple way. One of the solutions was to present each story with a different look. For instance, flashbacks to the near past and far past had different looks. Although the film is more dramatic with full of emotions, Wang wanted to find a balance in maintaining the tragic and the comic elements. In this case, comic relief could be found in the party scene in which Rich almost successfully learned how to use chopsticks.

Wang does realize that the problems of the daughters' don't seem particularly serious, after all, compared to what their mothers went through. But this was a point that he was trying to make, that his current generation, American born Asians, to be so self-centered. The message that Wang wanted to deliver to the audience was that some stories may be old-fashioned, but the younger generation has lost the value of trying to understand where all has come from, and if they start understanding the essence and where they come from, there is a lot of value to them" (Tibbetts 1994, 4)

Overall, Wang had three formative influences from directors Ozu and Satyajit Ray who portrayed human emotions in simple, truthful way, and David Lean who influenced Wang to direct the movie very epic and very big (Tibbetts 1994, 5). Wang wanted to execute this film not

only as a personal, little film but a film that opens into a very epic scale by having both of Asian world and American world in the same film (Tibbetts 1994, 5).

### *Critical Responses*

Critics are looked at this film as “a new beginning for Asian-Americans” (Chow 2018). This film received a positive review with a new portrayal of Asian-Americans in mass media, especially films produced by Hollywood. “The movie was greeted with enthusiasm from critics, who lauded the nuanced portrayal of four middle-aged Chinese immigrant mothers and their Americanized daughters” (Chow 2018).

In terms of portraying Asian Americans in this film, the daughters are just more than a spelling bee contestant or a violinist, typical stereotypes of Asian children that are often portrayed in media. The film provides a full spectrum of “female experiences speaking from generational differences, cross-cultural confusions, the difference between expectations and hope, and the pain caused by misunderstanding and lack of direct communication” (Brussat and Brussat 1993). And because the film focuses on women’s struggles with men, it is inevitable for the film to be portraying negative images of Asian men that may not want to be portrayed. But that would not have been able to deliver the message and the universal nature of suffering that women may face not just in Asian culture, but perhaps in other cultures as well.

Although when this film was released and received critical acclaim, there were some main issues in portraying Asian-Americans in Hollywood films. The main issue that the film faced was that it “covers primal issues of abandonment, infanticide, motherly love, and self-respect, pounds with pathos and is extremely faithful to the novel and found the story

“exhausting” and preachy, with “cringingly bald, full of self-help blather” dialogue (Burr 1993). Some found the film to be too long with too many stories to be told (Levy 2005). Some also believed the mothers’ attempts to “teach their daughters the lesson of self-worth as inadequate and pretensions” (Denby 1993, 94). However, Chinese mothers’ effort to teach their daughters about their self-worth could be contradicting because the parent generations preferred the method of teaching their children of self-worth could differ from culture to culture. White parents may have a different way of teaching self-worth, and so does black parents, Hispanic parents, and so forth. The film depicts Asian parents' way of wanting to teach self-worth, which could provide different opinions and perspectives.

The film was negatively claimed to have imaging Asian-American men as demeaning and caricatures of stereotypical Asian men (Levy 2005). Although Hollywood helped the daughters of Chinese immigrant mothers to portray themselves as individuals who are more than just simply being ‘exotic Oriental people,’ the film failed to do so with men. The male characters were merely additions to the long list of negative images of Asian men in Asian culture, and they were either domineering and misogynist in the worst imaginable way, or they are just clueless and aloof (Soong 1993). I find this as one of the key examples of stereotypes in Asian-American representation because the way how these men are portrayed seems to be assumed as a product of growing up from a patriarchal society. The way that how some men treat their spouses may imply how the culture shaped them to do so.

What Hollywood succeeded in terms of shaping Asian-American identities in this film is that the film delivered an overarching theme of a universality of human nature. For instance, all

of the stories that are shared in this film focus on emotions of pain and suffering. What these immigrant mothers learn from their daughters is that “Chinese, either today or 60 years ago, offer no such contrast to modern Americans” (Tseo 1996, 341). “These stories are about Chinese and Chinese-American characters, but they are universal stories. Anyone with parents or children, which is to say, everyone will identify with the way that the hopes of one generation can become both the restraints and the inspirations of the next” (Ebert 1993) As mentioned earlier, as a most prominent film technique employed in this film, the flashbacks create a link between her mother and her daughter, which shows that the agility that Mr. Wang implemented is quite amazing, and the particulars of each reminiscence, it shows the certainty that the characters from this film to be in some fundamental way, the same (Maslin 1993).

However, in the end, it is also important to note that the production of this film. The director, the cast, and the people who were all behind the scenes were all people who are ethnically Asians. Also, the novelist who provided the story to be adapted into a film is also an Asian-American herself too. As people who were involved with a film that was focusing on delivering Chinese and Chinese-American stories were provided by people who come from Asian culture themselves, they are able to deliver the story of struggles and conflicts that they may face by employing media. Since the early 1960s, “the Asian American cinema movement has identified a systematic social problem in which there are invisibility and misrepresentation of Asian Americans in mainstream industry representations, that is their absence on screen signified a lack of power in shaping US politics and history” (Shimizu 2013). To address these problems, since the 1980s, Asian Americans started to engage more with the power of the film industry to help them find a voice (Shimizu 2013).



Overall, the positives of this film include portrayals of Asian-American women who are more than music prodigies and exotic, sexual figures. These characters who come from Asian heritage were presented as figures who embrace American culture with their flat accents and their ideologies. The stories, whether they were told by Chinese immigrant mothers or Chinese American daughters, were sympathetic enough to evoke universal human emotions such as understanding not just characters themselves but also to the audience. However, the negatives of this film include how Asian-American men were not represented positively as women here did. still reinforcing the gender inequality between men and women, especially focusing on Asian-American women.

Although many argue that it is only men who are presented as stereotypical figures, these Chinese American daughters are also portraying themselves as stereotypical women. The stereotype is rooted from the gender inequality presented in this film. Here, the gender dynamic is interesting. No matter where these women are, whether it is in China or in the United States, the gender inequality still exists. For instance, most of Chinese-American characters' struggles focused on their relationships with men as if women have lost their identities for their men.

### *Conclusion*

How does this film impact Asian-Americans? Here are some major questions that the film raises questions of Asian-American representation. First, can the story of the generation gap between an immigrant mother and Asian-American children who are constantly struggling to face cultural differences, speak to the audience? Additionally, what kind of impression will the film leave to the young Asian-Americans?

How does one evaluate the quality of the stories? Could the audience especially, from today, find the stories told by Asian and Asian-American characters resonating? There are several factors to be considered. The first thing is that this film was introduced in 1993, several years even before some people were born, which means there could be a wider generation gap than there was to be expected. Another aspect that needs to be considered is that these mothers' struggles occurred in China that it is questionable whether other ethnic Asian American audience will find the stories relatable. Some may be able to sympathize with these mothers' struggles during feudal China, but it may be harder for audience members to feel emphasized because of the huge generation gap and different countries that these mothers and perhaps the audience come from.

After learning the story, I am also curious to see whether the audience's perception of Asian-Americans change and if there were any impacts brought to them after learning other Asian-Americans' experiences. For instance, was there anything new about Asian-Americans that the audience did not know about and what were some common themes about Asian-American culture that the audience could identify? What are some changes and continuities that the audience will face before and after seeing the film that became the catalyst for more Asian-American representation in Hollywood?

Knowing that *The Joy Luck Club* was released in 1993, it would also be interesting to know how the audience from today would perceive this film. For instance, how many actually heard of this film and watched and this film? For those who would know about this film, how did they know about it? Since the research will focus on the effects of changing portrayals of Asian-

Americans on young audience, it may be possible that there will be some people who may know what this film is and what this film is about.

Additionally, it would also be interesting to make some comparisons of this film to other films that include Asian-American characters and see how different they are. This is to generate the reflection on how young audience will perceive and notice any differences between how Asian-American characters are portrayed differently before *The Joy Luck Club* was released and even after.

Another factor to consider is how are these portrayals from *The Joy Luck Club* be different. For instance, what were some images of Asian-Americans in this film be different from any other Asian-American portrayals in earlier films? The audience may be able to discuss how there is more character development of Asian-American characters in this film. Some may even talk the story is quite universal that they evoke the same emotional effects of the audience. Some may also discuss the realistic aspects that the film portray such as the hardships that both mother and daughter face. However, I am curious to know what the audience can discuss based on their observation.

Relating to the other question, it is also important to find out if *The Joy Luck Club* may have some stereotypical images of Asian-Americans. For instance, will the audience still be able to detect some stereotypes that can be found in this film? The audience may talk about that the film does not focus on Asian male characters or the film portray them very stereotypical by overasserting and dominating. But what else will the audience think that there are some stereotypical aspects in this film *The Joy Luck Club*.

Knowing that some may find the positive images portrayed in the film, I am also willing to know if these so-called positive images can still be found negative. Not every audience member is going to have the same perspective. It is true that *The Joy Luck Club* was heavily acclaimed for positive portrayals of Asian-American characters, but it is also questionable that if one can find these portrayals negative. If so, how? Audience will always find ways to be critical on these portrayals, and it is questionable to know who and how will they talk about it.

But, most importantly, how can a film about the experience of Asian-Americans be improved? Again, it is important to learn that this film was acclaimed as a catalyst as a movement for more Asian-American representations in Hollywood. Although a similar film like *The Joy Luck Club* has not been released, but I am also curious to know what were some changes and steps that Hollywood have been taking for more varied and sophisticated portrayals of Asian-Americans even though it may not have been very subtle. After all, this film was critically acclaimed for having the majority of cast as Asian descents.

All of these questions will help me shape the questions for the research that I will be conducting. From these questions that have been raised, the way how I want to approach the study has been shaped with I am curious to know what the research will find out in addition to the findings from the literature review. The film will help shape my interview questions that will focus on the audience's self-reflection on their identities, perceptions of Asian-Americans, the film itself, and the relationship between Asian-Americans and Hollywood.

Overall, the film does successfully portray that everyone, no matter how old you are and no matter where you come from, does face conflicts that result in the same human emotion. After

all, being Asian-American is not so different from other Americans who are white, black, hispanic, and so forth. Rather than being ethnocentric and thinking that others cannot understand because their lives were different with dissimilar cultures, it is important to change the mindsets by thinking one can learn something in common from different cultures.

As *The Joy Luck Club* was released in 1993, this implies that Asian American film producers and actors engaged with a film that could help them deliver their own stories in hopes of humanizing Asians and Asian American individuals who are more than just Oriental people and displaying a universal of human nature that could be related to other people who are not only Asians but to other people who come from different cultural backgrounds.

### *Crazy Rich Asians* Film Discussion

*Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) is a romantic-comedy film that focuses on a Chinese-American economics professor named, Rachel travels to Singapore to attend her boyfriend's best friend's wedding. But she finds out that her boyfriend and his family are among the richest in Singapore, which was something that she never knew about her boyfriend of one year whom she met in Queens, New York. The film focuses on Rachel's struggle of facing jealous socialites as her boyfriend, Nick, who is one of the most extremely wealthy people and one of the country's most eligible bachelors, quirky relatives, and the worst, Nick's disapproving mother. The genre of the film deals with Rachel's struggles with light-hearted, humorous ways on the romantic idea of how true love can conquer most obstacles. The film explores cultural differences between an

Asian who has integrated into American culture and the rest of Asians who are preserved and conservative with traditional Asian culture.

### *Description of the Film*

The film focuses on the dynamics of relationships. Of course, Rachel and Nick share a romantic relationship who have been together for about a year. However, Rachel and Nick come from two very different backgrounds. For instance, Rachel is a Chinese-American from Queens, New York. She is also an economics professor from New York University, and she was raised by a single mother. On the other hand, Nick comes from a rich family in Singapore that has a successful real-estate business. Nick also have relatives all around the world who have very luxurious life-styles. Once Nick and Rachel met in New York, it did not matter that these two different backgrounds will hinder from loving each other.

However, from other people's perspectives, it may have been concerning for Rachel as there will be lots of troubles that will occur. For instance, Nick had to decide whether he would choose his love or his family as his family expects him to return to Singapore to take over his family business. Even if Nick chooses to stay with Rachel, Rachel will also have to face a lot of pressure of being a wife of a very rich man from Singapore. They may have to discuss how they were going to decide to live, but for Nick, it was clear that Nick was willing to move to the United States to be with Rachel. Another problem is the fact that they both have different statuses that it questioned the reality of the relationship. How would Rachel survive and how would she be accepted into the rich family? Yet, most importantly, the romantic relationship that Rachel and

Nick have is remarkable in a way that despite the difference in backgrounds and their own hardships, the two remained to stay together and be engaged to each other.

Throughout the film, another important relationship that needs to be focused on is the relationship between Rachel and Eleanor, Nick's mother. The tension between Rachel and Eleanor becomes intense. The tension can initially be detected by the way how Eleanor talks to Rachel since the first time they meet. But as time progresses, Eleanor becomes more direct with her by telling her that she is less than Nick and that she will never be good enough for Nick and his family. However, before the confrontation, Eleanor used to criticize in front of Rachel for Americans being too independent and always going after what they desire instead of making sacrifices for the family. Rachel first responds as if she truly is nothing and less than Nick's family, but she gains courage from Peik Lin, her college friend that she reconnects one she visits Singapore, that she needs to stand up for herself.

However, Eleanor worsens the relationship with Rachel and, in fact, tries to ruin the relationship between her son and Rachel by hiring private investigators to learn the truth about Rachel's birth. Of course, Rachel feels completely devastated and does not want to see Nick again. The relationship becomes unsettling in a way that Rachel used to fear Eleanor so much that even pushed her away from Nick. But, later on, she has showed her courage and bravery once she confronts her for the last time and walks away. This relationship is both predicted but also unusual at the same time. For instance, it will be a common resolution if Rachel decides to walk away from Nick and Eleanor after feeling defeated. However, the fact that Rachel was able to stand up for herself and be able to assert herself in front of Eleanor before she decides to walk

away. It shows that the relationship between potential mother-in-law and potential daughter-in-law does not always have to be skewed by only one party having power, but Rachel and Eleanor's relationship demonstrates that otherwise.

Peik Lin, who was Rachel's college friend, reconnects with Rachel when she visits Singapore to attend Nick's best friend's wedding. Rachel's relationship with Peik Lin is very crucial as well. In fact, it was Peik Lin, who helped Rachel stand up for herself in front of Eleanor. Peik Lin is an important character in this film as she is the one who told Rachel the truth about Nick and his family; she elaborated how Nick and his family are one of the richest and successful families in Singapore. If Peik Lin and her family were not having a dinner together and getting to know more about Rachel, Rachel would not have been prepared to face what some pressuring time she was going to face. Although Rachel was not overly concerned once she found out about Nick and his family, Peik Lin was the one who warned her that she may feel unwelcomed. Even after Rachel goes through a hard time, Peik Lin was able to support her and be able to help her throughout the film.

Rachel's relationship with other girls that she meets at Nick's best man's fiancé's bachelorette party went very awful and distressing for Rachel. Once the girls found out that Rachel was dating Nick, some would make her feel uncomfortable and upset; there was even one girl who told Rachel that she used to date Nick as well. As if these girls were jealous of Rachel's relationship with Nick, many of them gossiped about Rachel as a gold digger. There was also an incident in which Rachel's room was vandalized with a dead fish. Although the relationship between Rachel and Eleanor was already negative in the first place, the relationships that Rachel



was trying to form with other girls at the bachelorette party were very awful, demeaning, and dreadful. The relationships may have been strayed even more because of Rachel's background as Chinese-American who is not considered as a full Asian in native Asians' perspectives. However, for Rachel, it was awful because she did not know anything about Nick's family and their reputation before she even arrived in Singapore.

It is also notable to study the relationship between Rachel and Nick's cousin, Astrid as well. For instance, unlike other girls, Astrid was not condescending to Rachel and did not think of Rachel as a gold digger who was going after Nick's wealth. While Rachel was feeling upset from what happened at the bachelorette party, Astrid was able to comfort her. In fact, while Astrid was comforting Rachel, Astrid trusted Rachel enough to discuss her finding out about her husband's affair with another woman. Astrid and Rachel may have been able to form a positive relationship because both of them were facing hardships on their own ways. Although there is not much interaction between Rachel and Astrid, it seems like their relationship was overall positive that both had a very similar resolution to their conflicts as Astrid was able to confront her husband and stand up for herself despite the fact that she is an Asian woman.

Overall, *Crazy Rich Asians* displays the impact of building relationships with other Asians from an Asian-American perspective. This could be interpreted as a hardship that the protagonist will face, eventually shaping as one of experience that Asian-American will have. The film's main setting is in Singapore, a country where its diversity is celebrated. The film mainly exposes the richness and luxuriousness of Singapore. The film does expose some tourist attractions of Singapore such as Marina Bay Sands, Gardens by the Bay, and the Merlion statue.

The film seemed to take advantage by “advertising” Singapore with tourist attractions, but it also seemed to show a subtle hint that the Youngs were rich enough to afford one of the places for a reception party at the Gardens by the Bay, showing off the wealth that they can afford.

In fact, the film portrayed Singapore as a beautiful country. Despite the heat, humidity, and daily storms, the film was able to capture Singapore as a beautiful place by showing the luxurious tourist attractions and even beautiful nature where the bachelorette party and Nick and his best friend’s “private party was held.” This setting is also important to be noted that the country is located outside of the United States, so, therefore, the experience that Rachel, a Chinese-American, faces does not happen in her own country but in a different country. In Singapore, Rachel is surrounded by Asians who look like her, but they are culturally different from her. The setting becomes interesting that Rachel’s experience as Chinese-American was shaped outside of the United States and a different Asian country where she does not define her ethnicity of that country. The setting may signify a unique experience that an Asian-American can develop outside of her home.

There are multiple party scenes in this film. There are was a dinner party scene in which Rachel meets Eleanor for the first time. The second party, not much of an actual party, focuses on Rachel joining Nick and his family to make dumplings. The third party scene is the reception after the wedding ceremony between Nick’s best friend and his fiancé. The fourth party scene is the engagement party between Rachel and Nick (the fourth party scene will be discussed at the end of this segment). Each party scene represents a social event that rich Asians engage in how they be part of the network of people with similar statuses. Party is also a place where many

interactions occur. Just like a similar argument made in *The Joy Luck Club* film discussion, the party scene also helps the audience to demonstrate that Asians are similar to Americans that there is an affluent aspect with an abundance of food and entertainment provided for guests. But, of course, all of these parties in this film are very extravagant and provides a very similar to that of *The Great Gatsby*.

In the middle of the film, there was a scene in which Rachel and Eleanor were playing mahjong at the mahjong parlor. This is one of the most significant scenes in this film. The mahjong scene emphasized to the audience that playing mahjong, a tile-based game from China, was a normal part of many people, especially Asians, to spend their free time as a way to spend a uniting pastime for family (Hassan 2018). It was also showing that Asians playing mahjong is similar to Americans playing American football, baseball, soccer, and poker (Hassan 2018). It was a great scene to show that Asians' hobby should not be considered something exotic but rather ordinary. This scene is also crucial that Rachel has gone through a huge character development from being afraid of Eleanor and feeling ostracized from other Asians. But Rachel's performance in playing mahjong demonstrated her shared cultural heritage between Rachel and Eleanor that they two are not so different from each other and that Rachel is a very strong woman who can stand up to someone like Eleanor who is very intimidating.

The opening scene displayed as a flashback to the time when Nick's family, the Youngs, became extremely wealthy. In the opening scene, in 1995 London, Nick, along with his cousin, Astrid, his aunt, and his mother arrive at the hotel and claim that they have made a reservation. However, the hotel manager informs them that the rooms are fully booked that they must have

made a mistake. During this scene, a bit of racism is also exposed that the hotel manager and the workers also suggest to the Chinese family to try to find accommodations in Chinatown, mocking their ethnicity as Chinese. However, Nick's mother, Eleanor, called her husband to purchase the hotel while making a phone call outside in a pouring rainstorm. After the phone call, her husband was able to make an arrangement with the owner of the hotel and convinced him to sell the hotel to Nick's family. It turns out the hotel owner happens to be a good friend of her husband, and the hotel owner decided to sell his hotel to Nick's family as he has no heirs to look after the business. Nick's family purchases the business and their family becomes extremely wealthy.

The film ends with on a flight back to New York with her mother, Rachel gets on board but Nick also gets on the same flight before the departure to ask for forgiveness once again. The film ends with a reconciliation between Rachel and Eleanor. Eleanore gives blessing to both Rachel and Nick to get married that once Nick proposed to her with his mother's ring, she says yes and stays one more night in Singapore to celebrate the engagement party. The film does end with a happy ending, one of the characteristics about romantic-comedy films.

However, before ending this segment, it is important to discuss the meaning behind Nick's proposal. What does Nick's proposal ultimately mean? Does it actually mean that Eleanore approves of Nick's relationship with Rachel? Or can it also signify her resignation? It is true that Nick proposed to Rachel with his mother's ring, but this proposal seems to have some interpretations. At the very end of the film, during the engagement party, it does seem like Eleanore was finally accepting Rachel, but it is hard to know what the process was for Eleanor to

eventually allow Nick to marry Rachel. Lastly, what does engagement party signifies? This scene overall brings a happy-ending to Rachel and Nick after all. But, most importantly, it also shows the acceptance of Rachel into Nick's life and people who are part of Nick. As Rachel was originally ostracized for coming from a lower class and also being an American, it was very difficult for Rachel to get along with people who have been part of Nick's life for so long. But after going through hardships and able to marry Nick, it is a celebratory moment for Rachel.

### *Cinematic Techniques*

Major themes of this film focus on cultural conflicts between between Asian and Asian American, who are more exposed to American values. Although Rachel looked like an Asian, her cultural values were different than that of Eleanor that she kept getting disapproval from her. However, it seemed like Eleanor was also being ethnocentric as she was unwilling to learn about American culture and seemed to argue that her culture, the Asian and Chinese, is better than hers because she criticized Americans for being too passionate about going after things that they want rather than thinking of other people surrounding them. It is hard to question whether the ethnocentrism comes from the fact that Eleanor is simply Asian who tends to focus on old traditions or she's richer than most people that she thinks of herself better than anyone else. The cultural conflict between Asians and Asian Americans is very real that there is a social stigmatization toward Asian Americans in Asian countries. I think the film did well in portraying that Asian-Americans experiencing that whenever they visit Asian countries.

Another theme that can be highlighted from this film is about class difference. Rachel was perceived as a commoner from Nick's family's perspectives. The class difference within

Asian heritages was heavily emphasized in this film, and it also asserts that this is how it works in Asia. For instance, despite ethnicity, Asian families do care so much about who their children are being married to. Having a culture that focuses on forming kinship with someone who is in a lower-class is heavily looked down upon, and that theme is delivered in this film. One of the reasons why Rachel was facing conflict was not only including the fact that she is Asian-American but she was also a commoner. As a commoner, it is believed that they bring shame into an extremely wealthy family. The class difference is another theme that is important to mention because Rachel's conflict was also contributed from this.

Stylistically, the film employs some references to western films. For instance, Rachel's hotel room vandalism during the bachelorette resembled a scene from *The Godfather*. Both scenes included bloody writings and some type of animal body laid on top of a bed. There is also a reference from *Carrie*, where Rachel felt embarrassed from a formal party atmosphere when Nick's grandmother spoke disapproving words at the party, which is also very similar in that film.

Incorporating technology by showing the social media network was an interesting cinematic technique that was used in this film. Around the same time when Nick and Rachel were discussing visiting Singapore for his best friend's wedding, Nick's family and friends learn about Rachel from social media. During the film, it incorporates special effects of showing Asians outside of the United States being connected and learning about Rachel through social media. As one girl takes a photo of both Rachel Chu and Nick Young while they were talking about their trip to Singapore, the news of both spread rapidly. This is when Nick's mother,

Eleanor learns about Rachel from both social media and other mothers gossiping, and it foreshadows how her relationship with Rachel is going to look like. This is an interesting technique to display as it directly shows the spread of news about Rachel so fast that the shifting between scenes from Queens to Singapore happens in a few minutes. The use of special effects of people learning about others also reveals a part of nature of being Asians, which is gossiping and hearing about one person through people's words. The implementation of modern technology shows incorporating pop culture, using social media in Asian culture and as a way of gossiping about other people in Asian culture, and this method was well-employed.

There are some cinematographic techniques that are worth noting. For instance, there were many scenes that used separate shots especially when Rachel and Eleanor were engaged in conversations. Rachel and Eleanor are not in the same shot as a way of indicating Eleanor not accepting Rachel into her family. The separation can also be a metaphor for mental and cultural differences that Eleanor is trying to alienate herself from Rachel. However, this was not only common between Rachel and Eleanor but also when Rachel was engaged with other Asian women from Singapore as a way of indicating Asians' isolation from Asian-American, Rachel.

Other film technique that is worth mentioning is the focus scene in which everything else is blurred out except for one. For instance, there was a scene in which Astrid was studying an expensive and luxurious goods at a store. It seemed like Astrid's surroundings were blurred and seemed to be focusing only one object. This could exemplify the perspective that a very rich Asian woman can have and where her focus can lay on. It also helps the audience to focus where on the screen as well. The focus scene helps to observe in more depth as well.

Nick's father was absent in this entire film. Of course, in the film, Eleanor explains that his father is very busy with the business. But it also seems like the film did not intentionally include Nick's father just to the film can focus more on the relationship and tension between Rachel and Eleanor. Of course, it would have been more helpful to know why Nick's father was not included in the film in the first place; however, including Nick's father could have changed the dynamic of these character relationships.

The overall narrative shows that the universality of the story. It does show that this story can also be told by different ethnicities, trying to portray the story relatable. It combines both Asian and western cultural elements that helped the audience to be able to relate what each character was going through. It also shows that any stories that are categorized as romantic-comedy can also be told by non-Caucasians like many films do but it is told by other people with different ethnic and cultural background. The film is also told that the story resembles Cinderella story in which the protagonist needs to survive from characters who provide hardships. Overall, the narrative shows that the story does not have to have specific race to deliver the story.

Fortunately, there were subtitles available during this film. Subtitles only came out when the characters were talking in Mandarin Chinese so that they can help the non-Chinese speaking audience to understand the conversation. Since this film was produced in 2018, the production might have felt a need to translate the Mandarin Chinese conversations to help the audience to understand. These subtitles did aid in keeping the audience engaged in the film. Having subtitles truly help the audience to be immersed in the film. However, additionally, although this is quite minor, there was a bit of inconsistency with language as well. For instance, I was able to detect a



Korean word from Peik Lin's family member. When a young child was calling Peik Lin's father, she used the word, "appa" (a Korean word for dad). This was quite confusing as Singapore's official languages include Chinese and English but not Korean. This is hard to confirm whether the Korean word for dad was used to refer Peik Lin's younger sibling to call her dad (the actor who played the father is, in fact, Korean-American). It could have been the case that the Korean word was used in this film or perhaps the word was not clear enough to be heard. However, if a film chooses to use an Asian language and needs to be translated, the effort to use a language that aligns with the country's official languages. In this case, the audience should expect to hear either English, Mandarin Chinese, Tamil or Malay.

The choice of music was quite interesting for this film. The music is very modern that most music pieces that were chosen were pop music. The music was very fast-paced, upbeat, and very bright that music was played in mostly major chords. It was interesting, though, because most songs that were played were very recognizable as they were referencing the western pop culture with English lyrics. Yet, it was more interesting in a way that those pop songs were sung in a different language. Most of the lyrics were sang in Chinese as if the music choice for this film was like a cover music for pop music. It was odd to hear western pop music singing in different language, but it also gave the impression that Asian culture has become westernized that Asians are now blended with both Asian and western culture. Perhaps, these pop songs were chosen to bring familiarity for the audience who were seeing a film about Asian-American who may have a very different experience than other Americans do. This type of music is mostly played in the beginning of the film, in the middle where it shows a scene of a flight from New York to Singapore, and at the end of the film.

The pre-production of the film was quite surprising and unexpected. For instance, rather than casting an Asian actress, the production team was planning to cast a Caucasian actress to make the film more lucrative (Ho 2018, 42). However, the producers turned down that idea and focused on developing Asian-American representation onscreen and for diversity. *Crazy Rich Asians* already had a potential to succeed at the box office because of the genre, which already attracts massive general audience. Producers, from the beginning, set the high bar by independently developing the screenplay for two years, sending casting directors to search for Asian actors in several countries outside of the U.S and seeking an eye-watering amount of high fashion (Ho 2018, 42). The production made sure to pay attention to every little detail. For mahjong scene, the production team also hired mahjong specialist to design a game and also teach the team.

In terms of portraying Asian-Americans, Asian-American is perceived as if they are less than Asians. For instance, Although there was truly only one Asian-American, who is Rachel, in this film, she was portrayed as a representative of Asian-American in this film. As mentioned earlier, the film does emphasize the social stigmatization of Asian Americans in Asian countries. Even though Rachel was capable of speaking Chinese to Nick's family, Nick's mother still looked down upon her. It is quite unfortunate to admit that Asian-Americans feel the need to approve other Asians that they are one of them. In this film, though, it didn't seem like Rachel was having an identity crisis but rather focusing on how to stand up for herself from those who look down upon her. I did like how she was still embracing herself and not feeling a need to assimilate into their culture and conform into being an Asian.

### *Critical Responses*

This film was critically acclaimed for presenting a modern story and avoiding typical Asian stereotypes, especially about women. It was the first modern story with an all-Asian cast and an Asian-American lead in 25 years, and it succeeded by also keeping the elements of romantic-comedy formula by presenting hilarious, bright, and buoyant (Ho 2018, 43). The film was also hailed as “making history” in cultural representation in mainstream cinema and highlighting the performances. Overall, *Crazy Rich Asians* received positive responses for both performances and Asian representations in mainstream cinema.

Yet, there were some negative responses for this film. For instance, critics found it problematic to have half-Asian be casted as Rachel’s love interest, Nick Young. Some critics found it problematic to cast half-Asians for not being Asian enough. However, the production team argued that it couldn’t find a perfect male Asian actor who did not have fluent British accent to maintain the character accurate as much as possible from the novel since the film was based on the book. I personally do not find this problematic at all because casting a half-Asian actor also gives voices and representations to anyone who comes from multiracial backgrounds. It was also understandable for the production since it wanted to keep the film as accurate as possible.

Other criticism includes lack of representation of diversity in Singapore. This seemed to be very true especially the film was focusing too much on Chinese cultural aspects rather than Singapore itself. Singapore is celebrated for its ethnic diversity. However, the film seemed to

focus too much on Chinese cultural aspect. As Korean-American audience, even I thought the film was too much of Chinese film rather than Singaporean film even since the Youngs keep their prides of having Chinese heritage. Rather than calling themselves Singaporeans, the Youngs displayed its ethnic pride in Chinese. I also noticed in the film that Nick was still referred to as Chinese. All of non-English conversation was held in Chinese while official languages in Singapore is more than Chinese, mostly Mandarin, but also including English, Tamil, and Malay. The film seemed to display that the only ethnicity in Singapore is Chinese. This also tends to simplify various ethnicities with Asian heritage. Despite the movie title, Asian is not a monolithic identity, and especially a country like Singapore is a cosmopolitan that celebrates diversity and economic boom (Ho 2018, 44). It seemed like the film should have been called *Crazy Rich Chinese* not *Crazy Rich Asians*.

I also believe the class difference in Singapore was not portrayed so well. For instance, when Peik Lin and her family informs Rachel during lunch that the Youngs are very extremely wealthy and one of the most well-known families in Singapore, I did not understand why they were comparing themselves to them. Peik Lin's family was also presented as one of more of the upper classes in Singapore. For instance, Peik Lin's family also had a luxurious house with multiple maids in their place. It seemed to be odd for Peik Lin's family, who is also quite wealthy for themselves, to be compared to a family that is more comfortable with financial situation.

Yet, the film communicates to the audience that this is a universal and relatable story that anyone with different backgrounds come from. In anthropological perspective, the narrative of the story also focuses on the idea of familial ties and kinship. It also focuses on the Asian cultural

aspect of the conflict between collectivist and individualist, and this tend to be quite common in Asian families. The film delivers well to the audience on how Asian families are shaped by what certain types of cultural elements.

### *Conclusion*

Similar approach to that of previous film discussion, here are some major questions that the film raises questions of Asian-American representation. How would the story would be different if either Rachel or Nick were a different type of Asian? For instance, although Nick and his family live in Singapore, the family has pride in Chinese heritage. In the middle of a film, it shows that Rachel is able to communicate to Nick's family by speaking in Chinese. But I am wondering how the story would have changed if Rachel was someone else. What if she were Japanese, Korean or even Indian? How would the narrative change if Rachel and Nick were still Asians but different types of Asians? I think this also raises an important thing about Asians is that not all Asians are the same; Asian is not one huge ethnicity but rather consists of different ethnic backgrounds.

As I raised a similar question in the previous film discussion, how did this film impact Asian-Americans? For instance, can Asian-Americans be able to tell how native Asians are different from Asian-Americans? For instance, there is a notion that Asians who are extremely wealthy care so much about their reputation and their presentation to the world. It is true that Nick's family became extremely wealthy from a hotel business, but they are also real-estate owners. It was not too impressed with Nick's family's way of accumulating wealth. Anyone who

has properties such as buildings are known to be riches who have accumulated wealth very easily.

The cultural conflict between Asians and Asian-Americans is very realistic. Asians sometimes tend to look down on Asian-Americans for not being fully Asians and not understanding Asian cultures. There is also the fact that Asian-Americans are represented as people who could not have a great life in their mainland that they had a need to immigrate somewhere different. The social stigmatization is quite realistic, but I am not too sure if the audience received that message.

I also found it quite discouraging that *Crazy Rich Asians* was focusing too much on one specific ethnicity: the Chinese. To me, it still continues to disregard the complex nature of Asians that there are many different ethnic groups within Asians. This also brings a question: how do other ethnic Asian-Americans, especially from the audience, perceive seeing films that only seem to focus on Chinese-Americans or the Chinese? Would non-Chinese Americans find it problematic or do not find anything wrong with this? Since there are so many different Asian cultures, I am curious to know how other Asians feel about seeing different types of Asians being on the screen rather than people who could potentially share the same ethnic background.

Another important question that needs to be proposed. The question is, can the film, *Crazy Rich Asians* portray a true Asian-American experience? For instance, there is really only one Asian-American, who is Rachel, the protagonist of the film. Since Rachel was surrounded by native Asians in an Asian country, it is quite questionable whether *Crazy Rich Asians* can actually be a great story to talk about Asian-American experience. It also seems to be harder with

the fact that the setting of the film was mostly in Singapore not in the United States. I am curious to know how the audience thinks of this story. Is the portrayal of Asian-American in *Crazy Rich Asians* overall positive? Can the experience that Rachel has speak to young Asian-Americans? How does showcasing native Asians having luxurious lifestyle also impact Asian-Americans? The way how the experience can affect the audience seems to be interesting to explore.

As *Crazy Rich Asians* has helped to display Asian-American representation recently, this film certainly brings hope to have more and nuanced Asian-American representation in mainstream entertainment cinema. This film was important to be discussed because many young Asian-Americans know about this film since the film was released not to long ago. The film *Crazy Rich Asians* certainly reinforces that no story needs to be told in specific ethnicity and still provide what the audience demands. Yet, after watching this film, there are some important questions to be addressed and provides an intuition that there still can be some improvements made. However, the film is helping to lead Asian-American representation again, and hopefully, in the future, there will be more modern stories of Asians portrayed in Hollywood. To continue to move forward with the movement of the rise of Asian-American representations in Hollywood, this film serves as a bridge from previous findings to my research.

## **Chapter 4: Research Design & Methodology**

To further understand how the audience perceives the Asian-American representation in Hollywood films, I decided to conduct an in-depth one-on-one interview. I was interested in how the audience thought of Asian-American representation and their perception of the relationship between Hollywood and Asian-Americans. All of these interviews were conducted remotely and in-person. I decided to use a qualitative approach to engage in conversations and to gain many details as much as possible from an individual.

### Recruitment & Methodology

Participants were between the ages of 18 to 22 from Emory University in the United States, who are all college students. Each of them was asked to self-identify whether he or she is Asian-American or not. There was no monetary compensation for their participation and provided consent to conduct the interview. The goal of a number of interviews to be conducted was 10, and I was able to reach that goal. In fact, I was able to conduct 11 interviews for this dissertation. The original goal was to have five interviews from the participants who self-identified as Asian-Americans and the other five interviews from the participants who self-identified as non-Asian Americans.

I recruited my participants through friends and connections that I had at Emory University. I initially recruited more individuals that I thought would self-identify as non-Asian Americans, but there was a surprisingly more amount of participants who self-identified as Asian-Americans. With that being said, I recruited two individuals who self-identified as non-Asian Americans and eight participants who self-identified as Asian-Americans. After careful



consideration, I eventually concluded that perhaps having more in-depth answers and conversations from participants who have an Asian-American background will still be able to generate meaningful data concerning this issue, so I decided to go ahead and conclude my interview process after I finished interviewing 11 individuals. I originally wanted to have an equal amount of non-Asian Americans and Asian-Americans to avoid some biases and bring equality in terms of voice to be heard. However, realizing that it actually should be Asian-Americans who should be able to speak up more since it's about their representation, I think it was a fortunate situation that I was able to collect more qualitative data from participants who self-identified as Asian Americans regarding Asian American representations in Hollywood films.

I did go ahead and send out recruitment materials to anthropology department by first getting an approval from the honors program coordinator and then sent out the recruitment email to the undergraduate program coordinator to be sent out as a mass email to students who are enrolled in anthropology department, but I had more and quicker responses from individuals that I have contacted in-person.

I wanted to conduct interviews with individuals that I had some relationship with so the participants could feel more comfortable and be more open to sharing their thoughts, opinions, and concerns. With the amount of network that I was able to have, I was very fortunate to have 11 participants who were willing to participate in that I was able to complete the required number of interviews and have an additional interview.

Most interviews were held from early July to early September. I mainly used my summer break to finish conducting qualitative research before school started. I contacted each individual prior to a week or two weeks before the date of the interview. This was crucial as there were some individuals who have never seen those films or felt the need to rewatch those films. I initiated the communication through emails and instant messaging and asked if they would be willing to participate in my interviews. I mainly used emails to send consent forms so that they can sign the form and send it back to me if the interview was conducted online. If there were in-person interviews, I still sent the consent forms through email so that I can have their consent forms earlier. Based on the participant's and my schedule, the interview was conducted either online or in-person.

The interview generally lasted from 30 minutes to an hour-long. The interview contained 19 open-ended questions. The questions included their perceptions of their identities, the films, including specific scenes that they can remember, the Hollywood industry, and Asian-American representation. Asking open-ended questions helped the interviewees to feel more comfortable by generating a conversation rather than having a rigid interview. This also allowed me to ask some follow-up questions. I also helped to clarify some questions if the interviewees had a hard time recalling what the question was or needed some clarifications. From each interview, I was able to gain their thoughtful insights and their personal accounts relating to the issue of Asian-American representation in the Hollywood film industry.

### The Participants

As mentioned earlier, the total number of 11 interviews were conducted. Below is the table of the information of all of the interviewees who chose to participate. Each interview was unique in the way that the next chapter will discuss their answers, some common themes and answers shared by each participant and some outstanding answers from each interview.

Name	Age	Gender	Identity	Background
Marie	19	Female	Non-Asian-American	Interracial child from Caucasian father and an African mother
Thomas	21	Male	Asian-American	Interracial child from Caucasian father and Asian mother
Margaret	21	Female	Asian-American	Grew up in both the United States and Korea
Phoebe	22	Female	Non-Asian-American	An international student from an Asian country
Sam	22	Male	Asian-American	Born and raised in the United States. Ethnically Korean
Diana	20	Female	Asian-American	Has Hispanic background
Alice	20	Female	Asian-American	Chinese-American born and raised in the United States
Erica	21	Female	Asian-American	Became a naturalized citizen of the United States after moving from Indonesia
Steven	22	Male	Asian-American	Born and raised in the United States. Ethnically Indian
May	21	Female	Asian-American	Born and raised in the United States. Ethnically Filipina
Harry	22	Male	Non-Asian-American	Caucasian who has no Asian heritage. However, he studied abroad in Japan for a semester before

## Chapter 5: Review of Interviews

In this chapter, I will be reporting the findings from 11 interviews that I have conducted over the course of time. In this portion, I divided into three subsections: Identity, Films, and Asian Americans and Hollywood. The majority of questions that I have asked in these interviews were meant to provoke reflections of themselves, presentation of the films, and projection of Asian Americans in the Hollywood film industry moving forward.

### Identity

*Do you define yourself as Asian-American? Why or why not?*

This was the very first question to everyone that I asked at the beginning of the interview. Out of all 11 interviews, three people including Marie, Phoebe, and Harry all defined themselves as non-Asian Americans. Marie and Harry had no Asian heritage in them that they had no hard time defining themselves that they were not Asian Americans. Marie viewed herself as a non-Asian American as her father is Caucasian and her mother is African American. For Phoebe, although she is Asian and has been living in the United States for quite a while, she identified herself as a non-Asian American because of the fact that she is an international student who comes from China. However, she has begun living in the United States since high school. However, Harry had an interesting case in which he studied abroad in Japan previously that he had a cultural immersion of living in East Asian country despite his no connection to Asian culture.

For those who defined themselves as Asian-Americans, some had an easier time defining themselves that they are Asian-American especially if they were born and raised in the United States for their entire lives. Sam, May, and Alice knew right away that they were Asian-Americans as Sam thought how else he would identify himself if he were not Asian-American if he were not a Korean who was born in the United States and raised in Dallas, Texas. May pointed out that her parents are from the Philippines even though she was born here in the United States and as she has only visited the Philippines twice in her life and does not speak the language. For Alice, she viewed herself as Asian-American with her passport status as American even though her parents were from China and immigrated to the United States in the 90s. For them, defining themselves as Asian-American was not a problem.

There were a couple of individuals who realized that they were technically Asian-American even from the first question of the interview. Erika, who was born in Indonesia but became a naturalized citizen in the United States, did notice herself that she is, indeed, Asian-American as she spent most of her life growing up in Georgia. Steven is an Indian-American who also noticed that from an official standpoint that he is an Asian-American since India is part of Asia. Margaret, a Korean-American, grew up in both the United States for 11 years and in Korea for 10 years. But the fact that she was born in the United States and even if she lived in both of these countries for an equal amount of time, still defined herself as Asian-American.

There was one interesting case of Asian-American from one of the interviews. Her name is Diana.

“I’m a peculiar case actually. And yes, for the most part. It’s more of Latin and Asian-American because my great grandparents are Chinese. My descendants before that came are all Chinese except my mother and my grandmother, who are Latin Americans. But based on the customs that we go through in our household, that is kind of what helps me identify as Asian-American.”

It was interesting to see how she still found a way to define herself as Asian-American despite having some Hispanic influence on her. For instance, Diana is an individual who has a Hispanic last name. But she found a way to balance a variety of cultural influences and did not have a hard time whether if she were Asian-American. It was great to hear that her family continuing to practice Asian traditions at home made it easier for Diana to define whether she is Asian-American or not.

Thomas was also an interviewee that I found quite interesting when it came to defining himself as Asian-American or non-Asian American.

“Yes, I do. I feel like it is kind of complicated though. Because actually growing up, I never really thought of myself as Asian at all. I just thought of myself as white, even though I never realized that I don’t really look like everybody else. So I’ll just give you a little bit of background context. My grandparents, my mom’s parents, moved here from the Philippines in the 1960s. My mom was born in the Philippines, but she came here with them when she was four years old. She was really raised almost entirely in America with an American accent. I guess it passed onto me. I have not really had that much exposure to Filipino culture outside of the family get-togethers that we have on Christmas or during the summer. I would consider myself Asian-American, but I feel like culturally I fall more on the American side of the scale.”

Thomas, who initially defined himself as white eventually realized that he is also Asian-American because of the ethnic background that he also had with the Philippines. He first thought he was white as his father is white. But he found a way to balance his Asian and non-Asian culture, but it seemed like he was willing to accept himself as Asian American as the term

still recognized him as American as he felt like he was more culturally American. Being half white and half Asian, at first, may have been difficult, but it seemed like Thomas was able to define himself as Asian-American at the end.

*How relevant is the term Asian-American in society and to you?*

In the middle of the interview, I also asked all interviewees how they thought of the term “Asian-American” and whether it is a good term or a bad term to be used in society and for individuals to use. The majority of interviewees generally thought the term “Asian-American” was a good term; however, they did recognize the issue of the term. Although the term, “Asian-American” was a great way to find a balance in recognizing an individual who has both Asian background and American background, it also created the issue of simplification. For instance, Marie brought up an interesting perspective when she was asked about how she thought of the term.

“I think it is an okay word to describe, because I think the experiences of different Asian-Americans overlap. But also I don’t think it’s specific enough. Because I’ve had friends who are Asian-Americans who are either Chinese, Indian, or Korean. When they talk about their personal experiences and how that connects to culture, it’s like you can get such a vastly different range of experiences based on culture. Asia is a huge continent. So for me, I’m African American. I feel like the term is somewhat necessary given the history of African Americans is disconnected from different ethnic identities. For me and African American or black, who I know, it’s difficult for us to trace back our actual country or tribe origin because of slavery. But you don’t get that with Asian American populations. You will have people that can very clearly be like, “I am Filipino or I’m Korean.” So I think it’s a word that’s helpful. But I think there definitely should be the talk of like having more focus on like the actual like cultural differences within the Asian community.”

Personally, Marie making this analysis is what still strikes me even today, because she does point out clearly on why African-Americans or blacks do not have a problem when it comes

to specifying what country or tribe they are truly from; it is hard to trace back and extremely difficult. However, as Asians make an effort to preserve their own culture and find ways to stay connected to their roots, this is most likely why the term has been both good and bad for Asian-Americans.

However, many interviewees, especially those who are Asian-Americans, emphasized that although being a specific type of Asian may be different from another type of Asian, some liked how the term still emphasized a unifying experience that Asian Americans go through. For instance, Erica said,

“I do feel that like it's a bit, cause like, you know, being Southeast Asian is going to be different from being Eastern Asian or South Asian. But, at the same time, we do have like a lot of unifying qualities.”

“I like it because if I only had Asian or American to define myself, I would struggle at all over choosing which. I think it's a nice mesh. I think it's very relevant to me. And it just shows how like society respects that there is a mesh of these two cultures and so recognizes it as unique like ethnic group.”

The quote above is what May said. The majority of interviewees did find “Asian-American” is a term that helps individuals who have both Asian and American cultural influences to reconcile their identities.

However, one thing I took away from this interaction was also questioning what is being American. This is what Sam thought.

“Asian American is just a very outdated, nebulous term that really just doesn't have much meaning in today's sociological and anthropological perspective.”



Harry was another interviewee who questioned the term “Asian-American” (more on American part) and how this is really a unique problem in the United States and refutes the idea of the United States as a melting pot.

“I mean that's an interesting term. I find it that it's a unique problem to America in the sense that we're such a heterogeneous group because of so much immigration. The foundation of the country itself was people moving in. That the idea of calling someone, who has a hyphen with American, can only really apply here. If I go to Britain and talk to English, it doesn't matter what they look like. They will still just be English. You don't call them African English or Asian English. Same thing with South Africa. If I go to South Africa, while there is still racial tension, everyone is still South African. With the United States being such a large group of different cultures mixing in, I feel like there's a much stronger need for people to preserve what they have before they came. So the hyphen, I wouldn't say is necessarily a bad thing. But the idea of calling someone Asian-American is like saying they're preserving their previous culture and but still are truly an American. At the same time though, I feel like the term “American” really has no meaning because can you tell me what American culture is? The idea of America as this great melting pot, I feel like it's completely wrong. It's more of a salad where you have all these things that are still maintaining all these groups that still preserve their culture that they have formed before they moved. But we're just kind of all living together in one area. And it's a good thing to have people interact with each other. Don't get me wrong, but definitely again, it gives rise to problems that are unique to this country.”

As Sam and Harry pointed out, it may be important to evaluate how valuable is this term besides the term providing a solution for those who have trouble finding a balance between Asian culture and American culture. The overall tendency among the interviewees was that each person takes the term “Asian-American” for their own different purposes. They may embrace it or they may resist it.

### Films

The other part of the interview was to ask the interviews on their perceptions and opinions of the case studies that I chose for this research. I asked a broad range of questions

regarding films on impressions, stereotypes and positive images of the case studies, and Asian-American representations on these case studies.

*How did you hear about *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians* and what were your impressions of these films before seeing these films? What made you interested to see these particular films?*

While everyone knew about *Crazy Rich Asians* from film trailers or word-of-mouth before it was released in theaters, half of the interviewees did not know *The Joy Luck Club*. For those who knew *The Joy Luck Club*, they either read the book in a class from secondary education or recommended by their parents. However, for those who did know *The Joy Luck Club* prior to the interview, all watched this film to participate in this study. However, May thanked me for watching the film. May also thought because these films portray Asian-Americans, she also felt that there was a need to see these films as Asian-American.

“I actually did want to watch *The Joy Luck Club* before you told me to watch it. But yeah. Because I watched *Crazy Rich Asians*, I didn't know that it has been 20 or something years since an Asian American Hollywood film had been made. So I was interested in watching that. They talked about *The Joy Luck Club* like in interviews with *Crazy Rich Asians*. And of course like everyone knew *Crazy Rich Asians*, so I just saw it. And that's how I knew about *The Joy Luck Club*. Also it's a popular book.”

Alice, on the other hand, took the opportunity to see these films as the cast were all Asians, and it was not quite common to see all Asians on a big screen.

“Well they are all Asian cast, which resonated with me. You don't really see that on big screens. That's one of the main reasons. Like do it for like not for crowd but for myself. My own identity.”

Diana was intrigued by Rotten Tomato scores, especially for *The Joy Luck Club* as it indicated as 93%, and she recalled the time when she got very emotional from watching *The Joy Luck Club* on her very first time. There were few interviewees including Diana, Erica, and Margaret who took this opportunity to rewatch these films. For *Crazy Rich Asians*, some have seen before or also took this chance to see *Crazy Rich Asians* and learn what the “hype” was about. Social media and advertising online definitely helped to grab people’s attention, especially with *Crazy Rich Asians*. However, it was not all too surprising to see that some did not know what *The Joy Luck Club* was since all of the interviewees were born after the film was released in 1993 and if there were no interaction prior to the film.

There was a wide range of impressions that interviewees had for both *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians*. For instance, Steven was not sure or had expectations about how these films would turn out. Erica was not sure how her experience as non-Chinese American would be as watching a film that portrays an experience of life as Chinese American for *The Joy Luck Club*. She even was not sure how good *Crazy Rich Asians*, as a romantic-comedy film, to be as she predicted that it was going to be one of those mainstream romantic-comedies and such. But overall, many found the plot of each film to be interesting that their impressions emphasized that it had an interesting storyline but also interesting to see the majority of the cast all Asian descents.

*What was your perception of Asian Americans before seeing a film? (If an interviewee is an Asian American, how do you see yourself as an Asian American?)*

For non-Asian Americans, most of them said they did not have any particular impression of Asian-American for various reasons. But it seemed like each of the interviewees had his or her own way of understanding who Asian Americans are. For instance, this is what Marie said,

“I think I understood that Asian Americans kind of had rough experiences because everybody would go off of that. Like, oh, Asians are a super-smart stereotype. And I know that like they had like a whole bunch of different groups of Asian people like Chinese people, Korean people, Indian people had a whole vast variety of different cultures. But I wasn't super aware of the details within them.”

“Asian-Americans as they are still Asian, obviously, but, I hate to say this, not as Asian actually from Asia. For example, there are a lot of things that Asian Americans don't do. But at the same time, they are very American and do embrace like different cultures. The diversity is much better than a lot of Asians do.”

The quote above was how Phoebe understood herself on perception of Asian-Americans. Harry, another non-Asian American said that he had a little bit of the first-hand experience with Asian culture despite growing in Georgia and not having any Asian background. He did say he likes the food culture more than that of America and that obviously not all stereotypes of Asian Americans are true.

For Asian-Americans, I slightly asked them a different question on how they see themselves as Asian-Americans as I thought it would be more appropriate to think of their positions as Asian-American. The way how they seem themselves as Asian-American was quite different from all others. For instance, Sam had a very similar response to that of Phoebe.

“Asians and Asian-Americans are two totally different types of groups. Each one with their own ethos, their own customs, traditions, beliefs, religions, etc.”

But for others, they talked about how certain characteristics of themselves may shape who they are as Asian-American. For instance, Thomas, even though he defined himself as Asian-American, he still found out that he does not necessarily fit into all of the traits about Asian-American.

But on the other hand, Diana's characteristics as Asian-American seemed to align with how Asian-Americans are mostly perceived such as having a need to work hard and exceed, be strict, and less social to focus on herself. But, Erica talked about how her seeing herself as Asian-American would often feel pressured by stereotypes about Asian Americans. Although it helped her with school and be a better student, but thought it was quite detrimental to her because of all of these pressure that how people perceive Asian-Americans as Asian-Americans. The perception of Asian-American especially among Asian-Americans is not unanimous, and it shows that it is really about how does one applies this concept to him or herself.

*What was your overall impression of the film? What were the strengths and weaknesses of the film?*

Many interviewees believed each film was a good film. Everyone did not think of these films as unworthy films that should not be considered to be good films. Their overall impression of the film is that each had an interesting story to tell. But, of course, the interviewees provided a wide range of responses on their beliefs of strengths and weaknesses of these films respectively.

For the strengths of *Crazy Rich Asians*, many liked the acting mostly. However, many believed that the film did well in showing not only racial but also social and economic dynamics of different individuals. It was Marie who elaborated more on the concept of social class.

“And I liked that *Crazy Rich Asians* also really brought it into differences in class obviously and how it's not just that you can be an Asian American person or you can be a native Asian person. You're getting the experience of how being a member of the working poor and along with being Asian, how that affects other people and how other people see you.”

A lot of them thought it was a romantic-comedy film that was better than other romantic-comedies that they could think of. Many believed it was a pleasant and interesting film to see. There is not much really to report in terms of strength as many had a very similar response when it came to discussing the strengths of *Crazy Rich Asians*.

However, for the weaknesses of *Crazy Rich Asians*, many believed that *Crazy Rich Asians* was a difficult film for many Asian-Americans can relate to. Because *Crazy Rich Asians* was showing a very small demographics of uber rich Asian population that it was difficult for the audience to be able to relate to their lifestyle and only “admire” things that they could do. Sam also pointed out the fact that there is really only one eighth of character being Asian-American that there are not many portrayals of experience to be empathetic. Thomas also points out that there is not much character development of Rachel that it does not truly reveal Rachel's experience as an Asian-American in the United States.

Margaret also pointed out that the ending was quite unrealistic; she did not like the way how the film ended. She did not think that Asian mothers would have given up so easily on their sons, especially if a family had accumulated so much wealth that carrying on the family business was more important. But due to the status that Nick and Nick's family possessed, she did not think the ending was realistic enough that Nick and Rachel were able to be together at the end.

Diana did not like how Singapore was portrayed in this film. She was concerned with the fact as now Singapore has been portrayed as a very rich and luxurious country; she did not think there was an accurate representation of Singapore country itself. Also, the luxurious lifestyle that mainland Asians had was also concerning to Diana because some aspects of that lifestyle seemed to be true to her by being obsessed with expensive products like Gucci, Guess, and Louis Vuitton. It was good to hear that there was at least one individual who had mixed feelings of portrayal of Singapore in *Crazy Rich Asians*.

To discuss the strengths of *The Joy Luck Club*, many did enjoy how there were many compelling stories to be told. The film does excellent in terms of explaining why the mothers are the way they are rather than emphasizing a tiger mom stereotype. Thomas also elaborated more on how the mothers' hardships also affected their daughters. In fact, some thought *The Joy Luck Club* had richer and more profound content than *Crazy Rich Asians* did. Many did like the structure of the film in which the audience can learn the stories of Chinese American daughters and Chinese mothers.

Yet, the weaknesses of *The Joy Luck Club*, was the fact that it seemed to reinforce stereotypes of Asian American images such as chess prodigy, learning to play the piano, and so forth. However, this may have been important to get to the point of understanding why these Chinese mothers the way they were. Interestingly, while the storyline of *The Joy Luck Club* was mainly a strength, I also found that it serves as a weakness depending on who you were asking this question. At least for Diana and Alice, they thought the storylines were comprehensive. In fact, Diana thought this film helped her appreciate her parents even more and be more

understanding of them. However, for Margaret and Thomas, they found the experiences unfamiliar to them. For instance, the film plot line was more sympathetic for Thomas' mother as it was more a struggle between first generation Asian-American and immigrant mother whereas Thomas considered himself as a second generation Asian-American. For Margaret, the fact that she grew up in both the United States and South Korea may not have had a very similar struggle to that of Chinese American daughters. But overall, these are the things that the interviewees commonly talked about.

*How do these two films portray Asian-Americans differently from other films that you can think of that have Asians or Asian Americans?*

Many interviewees liked how the characters in *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians* portrayed less stereotypical Asians. But the most valuable answer from this question was that many liked how Asian-Americans in these films show more dimensions and characterizations. They pointed out that other films that do have Asian-Americans in the past used to be portrayed in one dimension; for instance, many Asian-Americans would simply be sidekicks or best friends that the audience does not really get more insight of these characters. This will be further elaborated more on the next section on the relationship between Hollywood and Asian-Americans. But overall, the interviewees enjoyed seeing Asian-Americans with more dimensions.

“A lot of times, like the Asian character, is like the best friend or a sidekick, I think. Or there's like the token nerdy Asian character. Normally I think if it's like a movie with like this many Asians and it's usually like a martial arts movie or some kind. It's weird to see like, like an Asian person at the front, especially an Asian woman. And these were both movies that had main character, Asian women. There wasn't just kind of like one, like a personality type. Like



everyone was three-dimensional. They each had their own motivations, their own wants and needs and their identity wasn't constructed just being an Asian person.”

This is what Erica said, and it does summarize well on what the interviewees mean on how Asian-Americans were portrayed before. Again, this is what many other interviewees believed as well. Interestingly, the bottom quote is from Alice. It was interesting to see that many films that have Asian-Americans seemed to not try in portraying the culture accurately. This does raise a question on how does this happen. Thankfully, I did prepare a question that does address the issue later in this chapter.

“ I feel like other films don't even try. They don't even like touch on the culture. You have other films like basically they are the only part of the it that addresses, like I guess, martial arts. They usually like Jackie Chan. Or like Chinese massage parlors. I don't know. I feel like very few films delve deeply more of what defines Asian culture. Like filial piety. You know kind of like conservative traditional way of life.”

For someone who is very proud to be Asian-American and is concerned with the representation, it was understandable to have this insight. After all, this may actually reflect on how Hollywood operates when it comes to demonstrating a culture that is not familiar to the producers of the films.

*Was there any theme that resonates with Asian or Asian American culture?*

The majority of interviewees thought these films heavily focused on the idea of family, especially putting one's family first rather than oneself. The concept of filial piety was very prevalent throughout the film, and this was a concept that was also brought up by non-Asian-Americans. Harry emphasized that the dichotomy of trying to reconcile what is best for an

individual and what the family wants is both present in *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians*.

“As I mentioned before, definitely the filial piety- respect. Yeah. And the idea of while you, especially the dichotomy between the idea of an Asian-American who had much more individuality, much more like goals for their own individual life instead of the progression of their family versus the in *The Joy Luck Club*, the mothers who came from China and they were much more like they wanted to make their families happy. In the case of the last mother, she went with her mom because she wanted to prove to her that she could do stuff she loves and she was on her side with the grandparents. And just the idea of being yourself but also remembering home. I feel like it was the strongest theme for both of them. Even though I said Nick really truly reconciled with this one. The idea that I feel like, in the very end, he still respects her, especially since he used her ring to propose. But it's just kind of that, as I said, a dichotomy.”

The example that he used was Nick’s mother eventually allowing his son to marry Rachel while Nick’s mother was very concerned of the family name and the family business. However, others also talked about there seems to be a theme of trying to strive for the best, which was mentioned by Phoebe, seems to be prevalent as well. But Thomas also adds the fact that even though if one wants to succeed, there is also a pressure to do well.

“You know, the pressure that you need to succeed. I guess family and putting family ahead of yourself...that was obviously present in *Crazy Rich Asians*. Nick’s mother trying to pressure him to put the family business ahead of Rachel and pursuing his own happiness. And then in *The Joy Luck Club*, I think that was also the case with mothers while they lived back in China. So I guess that's not necessarily an Asian-American thing, because even though the mothers had their own expectations for each of their daughters, they all still like wanted happiness for their daughters to pursue. What they wanted and their own happiness and we're still like proud of them for that. Like I'm thinking of at the end when June’s mother is talking about how June always had the biggest heart. I don't really know if that applies actually, but, I guess that's one that's one team with like sort of, “oh, putting family first.””

For instance, in both of these films, Nick’s mother was pressuring Nick to put his family business first rather than his own happiness with Rachel, and, very similarly, mothers from China

had high expectations on their own daughters. From this question, I got an answer that balancing one's interest and family's interest seemed to be the most common theme to be talked about.

*When were some scenes in a film that seemed to emphasize the negative images, so-called stereotypes of Asian Americans in those two films respectively?*

From *The Joy Luck Club*, the majority of the interviewees found it inevitable to discuss the character of Waverley to be very stereotypical by being a chess prodigy. Even her mother showing a Times magazine that had Waverley's face on it to show around to people on the streets was stereotypical in which showing how Waverley's mom, Lindo, is one of those tiger moms who want to make sure her daughter succeeds. Many characters in this film who play the piano were also something that founded to be stereotypical, especially among Asian-Americans as they could relate to their own personal experiences.

From *Crazy Rich Asians*, many actually believed Rachel, the protagonist of the film is an Economics professor at New York University, was actually stereotypical that even though Rachel worked hard to become an Economics professor, they thought it was quite too obvious of a profession that an Asian-American would go for.

“Just like general attributes more than specific scenes. I think one of the characters was like a professor at NYU. I mean there seems to be enough of an emphasis on academia and study. That general attribute being there. And then another character being like a banker in Hong Kong. Just kind of portraying Asians as model minority, if you will. Even though the stereotypes are there, it doesn't necessarily detract from the films or film itself. Because it just happens to portray in natural context and in a way, you almost have to give a nod to society and kind of acknowledge like what their perceptions are. But then it's your job as the director or anybody involved in the making of the movie to kind of suffer some of those expectations.”

This was from an interview with Steven who provided a different perspective when it comes to noticing stereotypes in films. The issue of stereotyping in these films does not come from a specific scene but rather the general attributes of Asian American, relating to more of characteristics. Steven brings a different idea that stereotype does not necessarily have to come from a character acting out, but rather the presentation itself of Asian-American character seems to emphasize the negative image, so-called stereotype in these films. From this section, many interviewees tended to share the aspects of characters that they possessed as stereotypical and not focusing on specific scenes.

*When were some scenes in a film that seemed to go against the stereotypes of Asian Americans?  
What are positive images in *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians*?*

“Well for one thing, I thought it was interesting that a couple of the daughters in *The Joy Luck Club* married white men or were dating white men, which I thought was a stereotype is that that's sort of looked down upon or like stay within your own culture or whatever. For example, it was at the hair salon, I think it was at Lindo and Waverley. I think Lindo was talking about how she actually likes Rich and approves of him or whatever. I thought that was one scene where it sort of went against the stereotype. That's all I can think of though.”

“I definitely say the interracial dating in *The Joy Luck Club* was very like, against the stereotype, especially since the mothers, even though they weren't happy that at least in the sense that. During the dinner scene, how he didn't know customs. But in the end, they exact accepted them”

I was quite surprised to hear that interracial dating from *The Joy Luck Club* was an image that many interviews thought that portrayed Asian Americans positively. The first quote came from Thomas, and the second quote came from Harry. It was interesting how it was two male interviewees who discussed interracial marriage was something that went against the stereotype.

Additionally, For those who talked about this concept thought it went against the stereotype of feeling a need to stay within your culture and marry within your culture. But as *The Joy Luck Club* showed some interracial dating and marriage especially with men with different racial status, mostly white. This was probably the most unexpected answer I ever heard from these interviews.

But the response that needs to be highlighted in this section is the fact that many interviewees liked seeing Asian women standing up for themselves and defending themselves in both *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians*, and this was talked upon in both Asian-American and non-Asian American interviewees.

“In *The Joy Luck Club*, the character Rose. I'm not sure if it was her. Basically, there was one female character, a daughter, that gets divorced with her husband or she just leaves him. Like how Rose's claims are strong that she stands up to Ted by telling him to leave the house and that on to not take their daughter away from her. It was pretty strong and powerful. Usually, it is known that Asian American females are very submissive; they're silent and that's how her mom lived. But the scene was where like the woman takes a stand up for herself and she really powerfully expresses the way she feels honesty. And it really showed that she too can be independent without the husband figure, which is not a common like way of thinking in Asian society, how the woman needs the husband to sustain her life. I think that's one stereotype that was in a way like challenged through the movie and then *Crazy Rich Asians*, I would say, same thing. Remember what Astrid did to her husband. I guess that's a similar theme for both films.”

Margaret said when Rose, one of Chinese American daughters, stood up for herself while she was facing a marriage issue with her husband, Ted, that was it went against the stereotype of Asian Americans. She liked how Rose, rather than being a submissive Asian wife, was assertive and be able to stand up for herself such as telling Ted not to take her daughter away. After the confrontation, the audience is also able to see that their marriage, in the end, also worked out that they were still together. This example is also very similar to some examples in *Crazy Rich*

*Asians*. Diana also said very similar thing except she used an example of Astrid, who found out that her husband was having an affair. However, she still found a way to stand up for herself, showing an opposite image of Asian woman known to be submissive. As many talked about Asian women standing up to herself, combating the stereotype, this was very important to be highlighted.

*Following up with positive images that were discussed, can these still be found negative? Why or why not?*

Everyone unanimously agreed that these positive images that these films portray can still be found negative, but many believed that it depends on who is seeing these positive images. For instance, if these were viewed by native Asians, they may have been very critical and not in favor of some aspects of Asian-Americans. For instance, Steven, who also talked about Asian women elaborated the idea of Asian women being able to stand for themselves was going to take a while to be more prevalent.

“So I think the shift from Asian women being considered submissive, that's a bit of the cultural change that might take a while in order or perceptions to change. It's not that the idea of being able to stand up for yourself is inherently negative, but it's that in the context that currently exists like it almost is viewed as somewhat of a rebellion against like the old guard, if you will. And sometimes like within the culture itself, it takes a while for it to kind of like move forward.”

Depending on who from what background sees this, it can be viewed negatively. This is also very similar to what Erica talked about. She also discussed that mothers being concerned with their children and putting their families first than individuals can be portrayed negatively that it could deliver a wrong message that one is only concerned with reputation and image.

Again, depending on who sees what, everyone agreed that these positive images can still be found negatively, questioning whether the reach of audience is quite fewer than many of us think.

In addition, Thomas was also concerned that having a high expectations was also going to be portrayed negatively in a different perspective. He said,

“So I think the stereotype of high expectations is always going to be. I'm thinking particularly about *The Joy Luck Club*. I mean that should be a good thing, right? Like to have high expectations for your children, but I feel like people are always going to see that negatively, because like in America, it's all about like personal freedom and whatnot and doing what you want to do. But I feel like people are always going to see that as like enforcing or like forcing your children into the things that they don't necessarily want to do, like the piano or chess or whatever. So I feel like that's a stereotype that won't necessarily go away even though it's not so black and white.”

The fact that what can be accepted as something positive, it may not be, again by people who may not come from or be familiar with that culture. Again, there was no single person who thought these positive images will not be viewed negatively at all.

*How well is the Asian-American experience portrayed in these so-called, Asian Wave films in Hollywood?*

Like mentioned earlier, especially from the section that talked about the weakness of the films, *Crazy Rich Asians*, one of Asian Wave films, founded to be a film that does not fully portray Asian-American experience. As mentioned earlier, especially with the fact that *Crazy Rich Asians* only has one or two Asian-American characters while everyone else is native Chinese of Singaporean, it is actually hard to talk about what are some Asian-American

experiences that are portrayed here and even especially if the film mostly took place outside of the United States.

“It's interesting. At least with *Crazy Rich Asians*, they didn't portray Asian-American life. They went on automatically abroad. So outside of the fact that she, her mother ran from China to get to America and the whole like horrible husband is escapes And then her daughter doing really well for herself by just hard work. That's about all you get.”

“I think that it's a start for the portrayals because even with these movies that have casts full Asian and American characters and actors, it's only still gonna be like one slice of that experience. You get experience of American born Chinese people and then native Chinese people. But also you want to think about how Asia is not just China. Asia is Japan, Korea, India, and all these different places with vastly different cultures. And I think Hollywood, even though we are having these really fantastic Asian led films, still hasn't even scratched the surface of experiences that Asian Americans have. So I think it's a good start, but not good enough.”

The first quote was from Harry and the second quote was from Marie. Again, the storylines were something that some had a hard time to relate to for both *Crazy Rich Asians* and *The Joy Luck*, especially if the main plot-line is about learning about these Asians who have an extravagant lifestyle and one of them was released 25 years ago, and even before all of the interviewees were born. From this question, I learned that even if the films have the majority of cast as Asian, there is no guarantee that it fully portrays ordinary Asian-American experience that can be found here in the United States.

*How does Asian American representation in this film impact you?*

I asked this question to all interviewees on how the Asian American representations, especially in these two case studies, impacted them. Again, this has to do with storylines, and there were definitely interviewees who did not think had an impact or who did think it had an



impact. For instance, Sam was also one of the few people who thought the films had no impact because it was not interesting enough to be memorable, especially with *The Joy Luck Club*. But for those who thought it had an impact, they heavily emphasized seeing more in-depth in relationships in family, and that was quite reflective. Marie said,

“So I think for me, obviously I'm not Asian American. I think it'll have a different impact on me than it would for somebody that is actually Asian or Asian-American. But I think for me it really does give you more insight into the sort of depth of relationships that can come within Asian family groups and how relatable it is. I think it is relatable for me as a woman of color to see films like *The Joy Luck Club* where there is this dynamic of women who have undergone a terrible things. Both because of the fact that they are women and because of their race. Seeing that they have to navigate this very difficult space between acknowledging how the rest of the world sees them and still wanting their children to have the best lives possible. And I think it's nice for me to understand that there are shared experiences that people have, even though of course they are colored by a lot of different impacts on the world; a lot of different like social categories. I think there's similarities, but I also think for me, it's really fantastic just to see a variety of different cultures and just to be exposed to worlds that I wouldn't even necessarily like the gun to have thought of and understood myself without seeing that.”

From this it was nice to see that she was able to relate and felt the impact by connecting her racial status to experience that Asian Americans went through especially in *The Joy Luck Club*. Many talked about how they felt like *The Joy Luck Club* was more impactful in terms of trying to find things that were more sympathetic experience while *Crazy Rich Asians* was more of hearing an interesting story but nothing further than that. Even Erica said that,

“But still, the Asian American experience wasn't really well known. So watching, well not exactly mine, but a close approximation of it did feel like, it felt really good to see that.”

Even if you were not Chinese American while *The Joy Luck Club* was portraying Chinese American women's experience, the audience still found a way to bring an impact in themselves.

It felt like many of the interviewees were trying to convey that *The Joy Luck Club* was more impactful rather than *Crazy Rich Asians*.

### Asian-Americans and Hollywood

*Did your perception of Asian American change after watching this film?*

I was curious to know if these films were very strong enough to change the audience's perception. However, not many people, especially non-Asian Americans, believed these films did not change their perception of Asian Americans after watching these films. Phoebe, who recognizes the fact that everyone is very unique and different, that the films themselves did not really do anything to change her perception. Of course, for those who had a strong sense of identity as Asian-American did not find that their perception of Asian American did not change. However, there were few cases in which the interviewees' perceptions changed. Maragaret said,

“Because I feel like they helped me understand that Asian Americans are really, like their actions, different ethnic group than just Asians. There's a lot of different traits about them that makes them unique from like native Asians. That's one thing. And I think both films show how like all these main characters struggle with identity in between, but by the end of the movie you'd like be fine who they are and that defines what an Asian American is to these characters.”

Some Asian American interviewees embraced these films as a way to find their own ways to reconcile their cultural blend of being an Asian and also an American.

*What is your opinion about Asian American representations in the Hollywood industry? How well are they represented?*

Everyone agreed that Asian American representations are becoming much more sophisticated and more apparent, but it is simply a beginning. For instance, there are not enough films about Asian American characters in Hollywood to say that they have completely changed perception of Asian Americans. All of the interviewees are definitely calling for action that there should still be a continuation of producing films with more Asian-American representation. Although the audience notice that characters

Of course, it was inevitable to mention the concept of whitewashing during this portion of the interview. Many especially talked about how Hollywood tries to replace an Asian character with someone who does not come from an Asian background or even look like Asian. For instance, *Ghost in the Shell*, Marvel's *Doctor Strange*, and *Iron Fist* served as examples to discuss whitewashing. For instance, Marie said,

"I don't think that they're represented enough at all. Like outside of these movies, it's hard for me to think of a whole lot of other Asian American led films. I think we have this interesting issue of whitewashing where you have films and TV shows that kind of rely on Asian culture. Like "oh we want to have a movie about martial arts or sort of like Asian myths based mythology," but at the same time you're casting white people for these important roles still in Hollywood. I think with *Dr. Strange*, I felt what there were Asian influences and it felt a little bit weird to see like white people almost acting like it's theirs, I guess. I think it's not really a film, but you get another Marvel thing in *Iron Fist* where you have a white guy learning all this crazy, cool Asian influenced martial arts. Well if it's based on in some sort of Asian culture. Like "why are you not seeing more Asian Americans like involved or more focus on Asian American?"

Marie did bring up a very good point of saying why are people seeing Hollywood casting non-Asian Americans to play certain Asian roles, while it also promotes this issue of whitewashing. Also, especially if people believe that Asian-American representations are becoming more varied and nuanced, should whitewashing still be present even today? It is

unfortunate that whitewashing still seemed to exist, and if, especially, the audience is noticing more Asian-Americans appearing in the media, there is really no reason for whitewashing to exist.

Others also pointed out how Asian American characters have been mostly represented as caricatures. Thomas said,

“Now that I think about it, a lot of Asians or Asian-Americans that are in popular TV and movies are almost like caricatures and portrayed comedically because they are so much like stereotypes, I guess.”

Even though there may be some Asian-American characters who are becoming popular and more well-known in the media, he believes that is because these characters are portrayed to be funny, but only funny because they are so much like stereotypes. I find this such a dangerous representation for Asian-Americans to do even though people are noticing that Asian-Americans are more prevalent now than ever today.

Another topic that was discussed during this section was the characterization of Asian-American characters. Although many liked how the case studies developed characters in a positive light, many thought even if Asian-American characters go through character development, the audience usually see that happening in Asian-American actors who play villains.

“And when they do show inside, all it has to do with villains or something that's very stereotypical that we all know.”

This is what Margaret said when she was talking about Asian-American's lack of dimensions presented in films, but that seemed to only exist when it comes to introducing villains. This was one of the things that was not brought up by others, so it was interesting to see how one had this kind of perception through the interviews.

Yet, on a positive note, some interviewees did talk about how Sandra Oh's winning Golden Globe perhaps is a hopeful thing to encourage more Asian-American representations in the future. But Sandra Oh's winning can also encourage more Asian-American children and young people to enter Hollywood industry. Again, there are some things to be celebrated, and many of the interviewees are feeling very hopeful that this is truly the beginning of new Asian-American era in Hollywood.

*How do you think Hollywood has been shaping Asian American identity in recent years?*

Although this question is very similar to a previous one, everyone did emphasize that there has been small advancements, but still the goal has not been reached yet. For instance, Marie said,

“I think that there has been some small advances. I don't think there's necessarily been enough movies and films about Asian and Asian-American characters in Hollywood to say that it's like completely changed perception. Because I think, if you think about old Hollywood, you get these long history of like these very stereotypical images of Asian people. Like sometime it would be literally white people painted with like yellowish skin with slanted eyes. And you get that heavily accented and you get that in Hollywood for such a long time. And then I think you have these more recent movies like *The Joy Luck Club* and like *Crazy Rich Asians* that are certainly having an impact in definitely giving people, like western people, a fuller perception of Asian American people as like fully rounded people with their own identities and their own systemic issues to deal with. But I don't know if it's necessarily been enough to completely erase the old of Hollywood, I think there just needs to be more.”

As Marie said, this is what a lot of people agreed on. There are certainly improvements, but it's not fully yet there. And again, that is what my thesis is concerned of. Many people are aware that the Asian-American representation are more varied and sophisticated, but there is still a long way to go.

However, this is also where many interviewees made some references to some popular culture. The majority of interviewees mentioned how shows like *Fresh Off the Boat*, which portrays an Asian-American life experience in the 90s, demonstrates more representation in the film. Some also talked *Always Be My Maybe*, a new film that was released on Netflix as how it demonstrates that the race was not the most important aspect of the film, but rather telling a story of two childhood friends who used to have feelings for each other, and got connected once again. Many interviewees also talked about some famous Asian-American actors and actresses such as Constance Wu, Randall Park, Ken Jeong, and more. It does show that there are more Asian-American actors and actresses that people can talk about as the audience sees more actors and actresses who have Asian background.

There was also a case in which the films that were used for the study was also compared to Marvel's *Black Panther* as having a majority of cast as black. However, Diana pointed out that people should not only be concerned with Asian-American representation themselves but also the diversity as well. Recently, she noticed that Asian-American representation is not going to be genuine if the production decides to have a diverse cast to simply generate profit. The main key of Diana's answer is that recently, Hollywood has been actively promoting more diversity, which is good, but it is not a good thing if the sole purpose of doing so is to generate profit from films

that they will produce. She is concerned with Hollywood exploiting diversity, and that is something to keep in mind for sure.

*As an Asian-American, do these portrayals speak to you?*

Again, mentioning the storylines that some interviewees thought that these storylines did not speak to them, there were few who did not find that these portrayals speak to them. However, for those who had very similar experience, such as May and Alice, found that these portrayals spoke to them because they had very similar experiences. Many tended to talk about when it comes to relating Asian-American portrayals in *The Joy Luck Club*.

“Yeah...I think so. I feel like wow that happened to me exactly before.”

“ I do, especially music. My brother hated music, so I guess he could relate to it more than I can. I, most Asian when people, start off with piano. I started on violin because they didn't want to play piano. My mom was like, “okay, you can play violin.” And then I picked up in a later saying maybe learning a piano may be nice. But another thing is like, especially when it comes to, your child's significant other, like my mom is very traditional in that aspect. So I can relate to that. Kind of like not accepting, cause my brother's girlfriend, they've been dating for six years. And my mom is still kind of not accepting her after not because of her family or anything kind of like how that was portrayed in *Crazy Rich Asians*. But like more like other stuff like physical looks. Right. I mean, that's like still the same, but that's like every parent. I feel like they're like not as open. So like you're kind of more clear.”

The first quote was by May and the second quote was by Alice. Alice was able to elaborate more in terms of portrayals being relevant to her as she was able to talk about some of her personal experience as Asian-American.

To be frank, it does show that not every single Asian-American is going to go through the same experience that there will be some individuals who find these portrayals do speak to them and those who do not.

“With *The Joy Luck Club*, I actually feel like it's more like my parent's generation that is portrayed. In the film, it sometimes the kids and then sometimes it's the parents as kids. So I told you my grandparents came here from the Philippines, and they're kind of like the mothers in *The Joy Luck Club*. And then the daughter is a sort of like my mom. First-generation experience isn't necessarily the same as each parents that I have as a, I guess second generation Asian American. I definitely feel like I related to some of the daughters in *The Joy Luck Club*. I had to like learn piano growing up and my parents had still have very high expectations for me. It can be pretty judgmental when it comes to my life decisions. But, overall I felt like that first generation experience isn't something that I can really relate with. But, I definitely see the relation to my parents experience and so I think I did a pretty good job.”

This quote is from Thomas, and he does provide a good explanation on how these Asian-American portrayals did not speak to him because of generational gap. From this section, there were not too many surprising answers. It seemed like most of them generally found these portrayals speak to them, even though it may not have been as specific as it seems like. But however, Steven does well in terms of summarizing this section.

“I find it relatable, like I said, in a general sense. But, I mean, obviously going down to specifics, probably not. That's pretty much where I say like in terms of how it portrays the general Asian American category, if you will, that I could definitely see.

In most cases, these portrayals in general sense do speak to many of the audience. However, when it really comes into specific things such as the conflict between mother and daughter and things that Asians have to do in general, that becomes debatable whether those aspects can be relatable or some portrayals that can speak to the audience.



*What do you personally think Hollywood should be doing next for more apparent and nuanced representations of Asian-Americans? What do you wish to see about Asian American representation in the future in the Hollywood industry?*

This is probably the most important question to ask, and this was also the last question that I asked before concluding the interviews. There was a great diversity of responses for this question. For instance, the most popular ones were finding a balance in telling original stories that are both ethnically specific to Asian and universal that can be told by any ethnicities. It would also be a good idea to incorporate some Asian cultures in standard Hollywood films as well rather than solely producing films that are about Asian cultures. In terms of characterization, many interviewees hoped to see the continuation of portraying characters with more dimensions so that the audience can learn more about these characters throughout the story. In fact, Sam really wanted to see some Asian-American characters who have very different stories than most Asian-Americans.

“I'd love to see more people who have really screwed up in life just to make it more balanced. Like if we're doing polar opposites here, like, let's go for the other opposite. Like, let's get China Mack. Let's see some Asian people with face tattoos and barely have a high school education grew up in the hood with every single disability.”

But many also pointed out that there should be more Asian-Americans playing lead characters rather than continuing to play supporting roles and sidekicks. For instance, this is what Thomas believed.

“Because I feel like a lot of the time now when there are Asian Americans in films, they are just characters or they have been added parts.”

If one truly wants to see the portrayal, it will definitely be favorable to expand more on these characters and show the development of these characters within two hours of films. Like Erica, she said,

“I want them to be like three dimensional characters. I want them to be people who happen to be Asian, but at the same time, their experience as an Asian, you should still kind of speak to who they are because you can't separate that. You can't ignore it either. I guess for them it's, again, it's balance. It's balancing.”

Many did find a need to have more Asian-Americans in Hollywood production not only as actors and actresses but also writers and directors. For instance, Harry, who knows that Hollywood is mainly ran by old, white men said,

“Just the idea of having more variety in the people making the film. And especially in the case of producers, you need to have much more variety and producers.”

However, Steven also pointed out that the parents of Asian-American children should encourage them to enter this industry.

“We should see Asian parents actively guiding their kids in that direction.”

Maybe this will help continue tackling more stereotypes about Asian-Americans. Some even talked about expanding the audience not only in the United States, but also outside of the United States to continue representing Asian-Americans in Hollywood.

Overall, from this question, the audience is hoping to see more Asian-Americans be more involved in the production, finding a balance between delivering original stories that can be told by a character with ethnic specific or without ethnic specific, and provide more characters with

more in-depth development and also casting Asian leads. To me, these were significant answers for this investigation.

## Chapter 6: Summary of Findings

This chapter will summarize the findings from the interviews that were conducted for this dissertation. In this chapter, there will be three sections, which will be organized by the research questions. Using the same method, this chapter will continue to have subsections and discuss what are the key findings, what these findings mean, and how this is important. Additionally, this chapter will also have sections called the significance of these findings and the limitations of the study.

### What are the changing portrayals of Asian-Americans presented in Hollywood films?

To address this question, the major finding was the fact that the changing portrayals of Asian Americans were mainly positive. For instance, starting in 1993, these Asian-American characters seemed to be more dimensional with in-depth character development. These changing portrayals also helped Asian-Americans to be the main lead in films, taking roles that were not considered to be conventional; for instance, many Asian-American characters in films were portrayed as supporting roles.

The changing portrayals, of course, seem to counteract the stereotypical images such as Asian women being submissive and Asians engaging in romantic relationships with non-Asians. Every interviewee was able to detect positive portrayals of Asian-Americans in two case studies from this study, so the study was able to draw that that these portrayals that have been shaping differently compared to before the 1990s, and it resulted in positive critical responses. Furthermore, these changing portrayals of Asian-Americans have been assisting in providing more Asian-American characters appear in Hollywood films as these portrayals are continued to

be viewed as positive that Hollywood is perceiving this effect as if the audience wants to continue seeing these portrayals of Asian-Americans.

How are the changing portrayals of Asian Americans affect the audience?

In this second research question, it was important to learn that changing portrayals of Asian-Americans may have been both effective and not effective in depending on the audience's background. The audience discussed their responses to these changing portrayals of Asian-Americans in my interviews. For instance, some interviewees found these portrayals of Asian-Americans aligned with their own experiences. However, if an audience member who did not have any similar life experience as that of Asian-American characters, then he or she has a harder time relating to these portrayals. This is actually quite significant because it implies that not every Asian-American's experience is all same or can be unifying in every aspect. Since each individual is different from each other, this concept also applies to Asian-Americans. Although if one defines oneself as Asian-American, there is no guarantee that he or she will have a very similar or exactly the same experience as other Asian-Americans.

For those who did not have any Asian background, they felt that there was nothing new that that they learned about Asian-Americans. However, if certain portrayals of Asian-Americans were repeated throughout in various films, then non-Asian-Americans would most likely to confirm those portrayals to be realistic. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, every Asian-American is not going to have the same experience as that of other Asian-Americans. Non-Asian-Americans also acknowledged that same notion of not every Asian-American has the same experience. In this case, it is not right to say that these changing portrayals fail to affect the

audience positively. Often times, some of these experiences that were portrayed by Asian-Americans in Hollywood films found to be limiting for some Asian-Americans. Rather, it is safe to conclude that perhaps there may be a lack of diversity of stories about Asian-Americans in Hollywood films that some have not encountered stories that they can mirror their experience to the portrayals of the characters.

Within the expansion of Asian American representation, how can Hollywood engage with the audience more productively in presenting Asian American portrayals?

The last research question was provided with a wide range of answers that there was no single answer. This was also easy to be answered as one of the interview questions did directly ask how should Hollywood engage for more varied and sophisticated representations of Asian-Americans in Hollywood films. Many of the answers that were provided for this research question covered a wide range that there was really no one single answer. In this case, the results indicate that there should a balance in telling original stories that are both ethnically specific to Asian and universal that can be told by any ethnicities by incorporating some Asian cultures in standard Hollywood films as well rather than solely producing films that are about Asian cultures. Next, there should be a continuation of portraying characters with more dimensions so that the audience can learn more about these characters throughout the story, and also having more Asian-leads than Asian sidekicks. Lastly, the results also indicate that there should be more Asian-Americans in Hollywood production not only for actors and actresses but also writers and directors, and the Asian-American parents should encourage their children to enter this industry as well.

This is probably the most important part of the research because it implicates that there need to be several solutions proposed to help Hollywood engage with the audience more productively when it comes to presenting Asian-American portrayals in the future. It also shows that this issue cannot only be viewed from one dimension but from multiple perspectives to propose more solutions on ensuring more varied and sophisticated representations of Asian-Americans, especially in Hollywood films. It was quite surprising to learn that not many interviewees talked about that the audience should speak up more in terms of demanding more Asian-American characters in Hollywood films. However, it was still satisfying to hear these solutions from these interviews.

#### Possible Counterarguments

Some may argue that the portrayals of Asian-Americans were changing because there has been an increasing number of Asian actors in Hollywood films. The increase of Asian-American actors, especially the rising prominence of these actors, may play an important role in affecting the portrayals of these Asian-American characters. However, this issue also needs to consider the quality of portrayals rather than quantity only. From these interviews, even though some interviewees talked about there have been more Asian-American actors and actresses who earned the spotlight, some were still concerned about how some Asian-American characters were portrayed. For instance, if the portrayals were too comedic, it was not the best portrayal to be drawn as, oftentimes, in order to be funny, characters would often showcase the stereotypical images. This investigation is concerned with both the quantity and quality of Asian-American character portrayals in Hollywood.

Other may insist that it is hard to conclude whether if it's more common for Asian-American audience members to say these portrayals have a positive influence or whether there is only a minuscule amount of Asian-Americans who say these portrayals have a positive impact on them. Due to time constraints and the need to gain more consent not only within one college campus, the interviews were conducted with many people as the study could organize. Originally, the goal was to have 10 interviews so that it will be easier to calculate how many interviewees would say what. This may be one of the weakest arguments to make, but this was something that could still be knowledgeable. Of course, the quality of study would have improved if more people participated, but the number of interviewees is still significant that it exceeded the goal amount.

Lastly, some individuals may fear that Hollywood trying to find a balance to tell stories that are both ethnically specific to Asian and universal that can be told by any ethnicities are going to be problematic. That really should not be an issue if Hollywood can attract more writers and producers who are Asian-Americans, and they themselves who can write from their own experience, whether it's related to their ethnicity or not. This concern can be addressed very easily by simply having more Asian-Americans involved in all aspects of production including decision-making of what films to be produced next. This can also be addressed if Hollywood can find out what films want the audience to see next, and this should also facilitate in decision-making progress that Hollywood engages in as well. It is very crucial for Hollywood to be able to attract Asian-American film writers and producers to start producing films with Asian-Americans and be able to listen to what the audience demands in terms of seeing more Asian-Americans in films in the future.



Why does this matter? Recalling from an earlier chapter that discusses the history of Hollywood, Hollywood is a business that is interested in both creating artistic products and generating profits. Although Hollywood has its own power of producing films with interesting content and strong characters, Hollywood also need to recognize the fact that the audience also has the power, especially in generating profit. This film business needs to be attentive in the audience's opinions on what films that the audience would like to see next so that it can continue to contribute in increasing the revenue, most importantly the profit, for Hollywood. At the end, Hollywood's priority is to continue to practice its business model, which all depends on the amount of revenue that it has. Hollywood, again, is an unusual industry that needs to work in two-ways: both the business structure and the audience are parties that allow Hollywood to generate.

### Significance

After all, this study is very crucial because it also considers what the audience, through interviews, want to see in the future for Hollywood to engage in providing more portrayals of Asian-Americans in films. By relating interviewees' responses to Hollywood, many believe today is probably the time when it is more of a beginning for Asian-Americans to have more representations in American media. Every interviewee acknowledged that the Asian-American representations are becoming more varied and nuanced, but there could still be improvements to be made. By having interviewees' input into this study, this dissertation becomes more meaningful as it includes answers from the interviewees on what they nowadays demand Asian-American representation for the future. These interview answers matter because they either

supported the previous findings regarding Asian-American portrayals in Hollywood films or provided a different insight that the previous work not have addressed. This is also going to be very interesting that the audience is actively demanding to the industry in which it is concerned with providing artistic products but also generating profits. This study, after all, becomes significant that this issue should be viewed in multiple perspectives socially and economically.

### Limitations

However, it is critical to discuss some limitations of this study. For instance, this study was only able to conduct 11 interviews, and all of these interviews were completed by college students on Emory University's main campus aging mostly in the early 20s. Since the interviews were not able to be conducted beyond Emory University college students, this can be marked as one of the limitations of the study. Another limitation of the study is that because there has been a rapid development of Asian American representations in American media; for instance, more films that had Asian-Americans such as *To All the Boys I Loved Before* and *Always Be My Maybe* that the literature review may need more updates. Additionally, both *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians* were originally written as books; however, this research was only interested in studying the films not including the books as well. Therefore, there is no part of a study that compares the literature and the film for each story. The last limitation of the study was that the original aim of the interviews was to have an equal number of Asian-Americans and non-Asian Americans. However, it became the case in which there were more Asian-American interviewees than non-Asian Americans. However, this could also be interpreted as a positive effect, but it

depends on how one views this result if one is concerned about equality in terms of the number of opinions to be heard.

## Conclusion

This investigation addresses the three research questions that were proposed in the beginning. For the first question, drawing on case studies and my research evidence, it suggests that changing portrayals of Asian-Americans are shown positively that there seems to be more in-depth character development and more dimensional that the audience can learn about these Asian-American characters more. Often times, the Asian-American characters are more dimensional that Asian actors and actresses often become the lead in Hollywood films more often.

For my next question, it can be argued that the effects of changing portrayals of Asian-Americans are not always effective depending on the audience's background. There will be some audience members who find these changing portrayals positive because the audience can relate to the experiences that are portrayed in certain Hollywood films. However, some may not be able to fulfill that. In that case, the changing portrayals of Asian-Americans are both positive and negative, hinting that there should still be more stories to be told from the Asian-Americans' perspectives.

Then the last question challenges Hollywood as a business, not a social project. Considering that fact that within the expansion of Asian-American representation, how can Hollywood engage more productively with the audience in presenting-Asian American portrayals? The possible solutions include creating both ethnic-specific stories and universal stories, providing in-depth characterizations, having more Asian-leads, and encouraging Asian-Americans to be involved in the production not only in acting, but also in writing and producing.

For Hollywood to continue to generate profit, it also should listen to the audience's demands on what the audience wants to see next to keep the audience's interest and bring in their disposable income.

This study is concerned with the minorities' representations in Hollywood films and how Hollywood can ensure more varied and sophisticated representations, especially for those who are ethnically Asians. After all, based on the literature review and interviews, it overall reveals that Asian-Americans have such a complicated relationship with American media, especially Hollywood, and it seems to be the beginning for Asian-Americans to become more apparent and display more nuanced and dimensional portrayals of themselves.

What are some future steps that this study can take into? To make some recommendations on how this study can be shaped in the future, there should be studies on how different forms of American media, such as how television shows and Youtube channels affect the audience's perception of portrayals of Asian-Americans. In fact, it would be interesting to have a comparative study in which different media are used as examples and determine which medium seems to be the most effective way of portraying Asian-Americans in popular culture. As this study was only focused on Hollywood films, it may be interesting to investigate how similar and different portrayals of Asian-Americans are and determine the best method of portraying Asian-Americans.

This is significant in the anthropology field to ensure that even a minority group, especially Asian-Americans, is able to tell the story of its own. The objective of anthropology is to learn and understand people from different cultures. Anthropologists are concerned with

identity and representations, so, therefore, it is essential to ensure that whichever medium is utilized to tell the story or to promote one's culture, it is the best interest to be told in the most accurate or favorable way. Since the story of Asian-Americans is told in the western medium, it becomes more important than the usual as Asian-Americans feel the need to avoid distortions and defamations that could be caused by others who are not familiar with Asian-American culture. In the end, many people, not only westerners, are exposed to Hollywood. Hopefully, the year of 2019 may be the new turning point to call for more minority representation and with more consideration of the way how the minority group is portrayed.

## Appendix

### Sample Interview 1

Interviewer: Do you define yourself as Asian American? Why or why not?

Marie: I do not define myself as Asian American. I personally do not have any ties that I know to Asia. Um, my parents are white and African American, so I don't have any ancestry in regards to that.

Interviewer: So how did you hear about *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians*? And what were your impressions of those two films like before actually seeing them?

Marie: So, yeah. Um, the first time that I actually heard about *The Joy Luck Club* was when I was a little kid like a preteen or a teenager or something because it's one of my mom's favorite movies. So she tried to get me to watch it with her when I was younger. With *The Joy Luck Club*, I think like my initial impression of it before I'd actually watched it was just that like, "oh, it's based on a book that my mom likes and it's about Asian Americans and their experience. With *Crazy Rich Asians*, I feel like the first that I'd heard of it was probably from the trailers that first came out. And I think my initial impression was just that I was really excited for it cause I had seen Constance Wu's acting performances and I like her as an actress. So I was interested in that regard. And I also thought that it was nice to actually see a movie that had an all Asian cast. And actually like focused on something that I don't necessarily know that much about considering that I'm like pretty Westernized.

Interviewer: What made you interested to see this particular film?

Interviewer: Yeah, I think I could also speak to *The Joy Luck Club* cause I watched it with my mom initially when I was younger. But I did watch it again later on just cause I felt like I didn't really understand sort of the intricacies with it. And I think the family dynamics in *The Joy Luck Club* that like I remembered when I first watched it like really brought me to watch it again and hopes that I could like understand that more, especially given that the whole film like revolves around these relationships between mothers and their daughters.

Interviewer: So what was your perception of Asian Americans before seeing these films?

Marie: I would say that it was just pretty standard. I don't know if I had any particular impression of Asian Americans outside of what I had known from some of my friends who are Asian. I think I understood that like Asian Americans kind of had sometimes have like rough experiences because everybody would, you know, go off of that. Like, oh, Asians are super smart stereotype. And I know that like they had like a whole bunch of different groups of Asian people like Chinese people, Korean people, Indian people had a whole vast of variety of different cultures. But I wasn't super aware of the details within them I guess.

Interviewer: After watching these films, like what was, what was your overall impression of the film? What did you think were the strengths and weaknesses of each film?

Marie: I would say with *The Joy Luck Club*, I think the strengths of the film were definitely in the relationships and connections that these mothers have with their children and really getting to explore that. I really didn't see them like as much as like actors as like as actual people. Like it felt like those stories could really happened. And I'm sure it's based off of some true stories that have happened to people. So I think with *The Joy Luck Club*, I really think the strength of it was how it looked into relationships between Asian American women with their immigrant mothers and how it can be difficult when you want the best for your child, but also your child grows up in an entirely different culture than on your own. I'm not sure about any particular weaknesses for *The Joy Luck Club* that I can think of at the

moment. I think it would've been interesting to see a difference in relationships including fathers versus sons. But I also feel like that would have been way too much for them to have covered in a single movie.

For *Crazy Rich Asians*, I feel like the strengths of that film aside from the fact that, technologically, you can see that they had an advantage of putting a lot more stylistic elements and just bringing different aspects of a culture in Asia, especially in Singapore versus a culture in America with like Asian-Americans and actually seeing how technology can affect that and how technology affects like the network of people that sort of know each other. And I liked that *Crazy Rich Asians* also really brought it into differences in class obviously and how it's not just that you can be an Asian American person or you can be a native Asian person. You're getting the experience of how being a member of the working poor and along with being Asian, how that effects other people and how other people see you. And also there I think in the very like beginning scene of *Crazy Rich Asians*, I think you get a little touch of how just the rest of the Western world kind of views Asian people regardless of whether or not they're American or native to Asia. And I think in *The Joy Luck Club*, you don't really see that as much. We see it a little bit, but I think it's nice that *Crazy Rich Asians* is like that. At the very start is like, "hey, the Western world sees Asian people in a certain way regardless of their actual class status, but within the Asian community, there's a whole bunch of other dynamics as opposed to just how white people sort of see you.

Interviewer: How do these two films portray Asian Americans differently from other films that you can think of that have Asians or Asian Americans?

Marie: It's almost a hard question to answer since so many films that you see don't really touch on Asian Americans at all. I feel like there's not a whole lot of Hollywood movies that highlight Asian American actors. So I feel like films I have seen Asian-Americans in don't get the personality. It's more so just focusing on the fact that the character is either like very smart or generally very skilled at what they do. And I think you'll, in some of the films that I've seen, it's like, "oh, you see an Asian American character and if it's like a period film or something, you'll see like some mention of like perhaps say like the Japanese in internment camps or something like that." Just like brief mentions of history and like different Japanese and Chinese people in history. But other than that, I feel like they are more so like Asian-American characters or more so portrayed as either really smart and skilled, but with no like personality aside from that or serving as like a historical reference. And I feel like with a book, *Crazy Rich Asians* and *The Joy Luck Club*, you get to see like these very fleshed out three dimensional characters that are more than just their skills. And also these skills that that a lot of the daughters had in *The Joy Luck Club* are not shown as like necessarily innate or simple. Like it's shown that even if you're skilled at something, there's a lot of pressure and sometimes you just don't feel like cut out for it. And there was just like a lot of emotional depth to the character that I feel like I wouldn't otherwise see.

Interviewer: Was there any theme that seemed like resonate with Asian or Asian American culture?

Marie: I know in a *Crazy Rich Asians*, it's a tension between Americanized identity and not really feeling like that's the case for Chinese Americans in *Crazy Rich Asians* like the sense of feeling like they don't really see me as like a real Chinese person. I think they make a reference to like the idea of like the banana for Asian American people. I think that did remind me of some of my friends discussing identity struggle, I guess. Yeah the thing that showed up was like identity struggle. And also the sort of like the feeling that you are obligated towards success like you have to make yourself successful in order to be liked and respected within the community.

Interviewer: While you're watching both *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians*, what are some scenes in a film that you thought it actually emphasizes stereotypes of Asian Americans? What are some negative images like that are known as stereotypes? Are you able to notice any stereotypes in these two films?

Marie: I think with *The Joy Luck Club*, the instances where the daughters were learning how to play piano and then the other daughter is a chess prodigy. I felt like in that sense that probably felt like a little bit stereotypical in that. Like "okay, there's an Asian American kid that's super good at chess or super good at



like a certain skill along with a mother that's being incredibly overbearing with it. When one of the characters, as a kid, was supposed to be learning how to play piano, but she doesn't want to do it. So her mom like pretty much picks her up and drags her the piano. I was like, "you're gonna play." I think in that regard, that's sort of the, um, tiger mom stereotype I suppose. In *Crazy Rich Asians*, I think the film poked fun of it where Rachel is like "I'm a Chinese American Economics professor" and you can't get much more Asian than that. Like that sort of was a bit stereotypical. I think when we meet Peik Lin's parents, again, the film plays with these stereotypes, where the mom like always speaks with very accented English. But the dad, at first, pretends to speak with the super accented English and he's like, "oh, I'm just kidding. I studied in America." I feel like, stereotypically, you see portrayals of Asian American as people all have the accents like have heavy accents regardless of whether or not they were born and raised in America or what. I think in regards to that, I think those were the stereotypes that I noticed.

Interviewer: What were some scenes that you thought actually went stereotypes of Asian-American? What are some positive images that helped the Asian American representation from *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians*?

Marie: I think in *The Joy Luck Club*, I feel like the scenes in which the daughters were sort of reconciling with their moms and sort of understanding why they were the way they were, even though it was like hurtful to them as kids. I feel like that goes against the whole stereotype of the quote on quote tiger mom. I feel like in those relationships, you really just see a mom being really harsh toward their kid. But I think in *The Joy Luck Club*, you will see a scene with May and her daughter where you get this idea of learning of the mother, trying to teach her daughter to learn how to respect herself and not put up with other people trying to put her down. And I feel like seeing scenes like that and I'm seeing scenes where these mothers, even though they've gone through hardship and they push their children, they really do want the best for them. In *Crazy Rich Asians*, I think there's a lot of things where stereotypes are kind of debunked. Like, I think the initial scene with Eleanor and the kids in the hotel and then she basically calls her husband. The husband buys the whole hotel and she's like, "don't pretend like you know me just because I'm Asian. Don't pretend that I'm just super poor or anything." I think that sort of like breaks down stereotypes of, um, like Asian immigrants or like Asians being like "oh, these are people like heavy accents than they think they can just like come in and do whatever they want." I think the scene with Astrid. I think Astrid is actually a really fascinating character like how she has to deal with her husband's infidelity. And at first she's like, "well, I'm not causing a scene because I want to sort of make this not like a shame on the family, especially when the whole wedding is going on." And of course the husband's basically coming up with whole idea of like, "oh, you care about the reputation of your family more than you actually care about yourself." And I kind of feel like that is a little bit of a stereotype that people have that like Westerners would have of Asian people. Just this idea of upholding to family and upholding to tradition as opposed to a more westernized ideal of like individualism and, pursuing your own success over all else. But I think, by the end, when Astrid pretty much tells her husband off and says that her family isn't the problem and that she can be a strong person while supporting her family, I think is really important to see. Because I don't think that it's necessarily positive to discount the importance of keeping to your family and keeping to some traditions. So I'm glad that they didn't discount that in favor of like totally westernized ideal. But instead they showcased a woman who could be strong and loyal to her family while still like caring about herself and being willing to put herself first, I guess.

Interviewer: Do you think those positive images like that are portrayed in these films can they still be negative?

Marie: I think in some regard, there's always going to be people who aren't willing to understand the depth past of whatever stereotypes they initially see. Like I think there will always be because *Crazy Rich Asians* has a bunch of very funny moments in it. And I think there will always be some people that don't see past just the funny. Like Rachel's such an American born Chinese person, wow. But I think that overall it's better to have these movies that focus on Asian American and like native Asian stories. Because I think that's better to the alternative even if there are some stereotypes presented that even, so they're portraying a wide variety of experiences I think.

Interviewer: Knowing that *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians* are categorized as Asian Wave films, how well is the Asian-American experience portrayed in Asian Wave films in Hollywood?

Marie: I think that it's a start to the portrayals because even with these movies that have casts full Asian and American characters and actors, it's only still gonna be like one slice of that experience. You get experience of American born Chinese people and then native Chinese people. But also you want to think about how Asia is not just China. Asia is Japan, Korea, India, and all these different places with vastly different cultures. And I think Hollywood, even though we are having these really fantastic Asian led films, I think they still haven't even scratched the surface, um, experiences that Asian Americans have. So I think it's a good start, but not good enough.

Interviewer: How does Asian American representation in this film impact you?

Marie: So I think for me, obviously I'm not Asian American, I think it'll have a different impact on me than it would for somebody that is actually Asian or Asian American. But I think for me it really does give you more insight into the sort of depth of relationships that can come within Asian family groups and how relatable it is. I think it is relatable for me as a woman of color to see films like *The Joy Luck Club* where there is this dynamic of women who have undergone a terrible things. Both because of the fact that they are women and because of their race. Seeing that they have to navigate this very difficult space between acknowledging how the rest of the world sees them and still wanting their children to have the best lives possible. And I think it's nice for me to understand that there are shared experiences that people have, even though of course they are colored by a lot of different impacts on the world; a lot of different like social categories. I think there's similarities, but I also think for me, it's really fantastic just to see a variety of different cultures and just to be exposed to worlds that I wouldn't even necessarily like the gun to have thought of and understood myself without seeing that.

Interviewer: Did your perception of Asian American change after watching this film?

Marie: I would say yeah, in the sense of I didn't really know much. I think prior to coming into those films, like I really didn't know about cultural intricacies. And then after watching these films, of course, it's not a perfect understanding of the different culture. It definitely provides a better understanding and at least an understanding that these are cultures that even though you can relate to them, they are different and like deserve to be paid attention to.

Interviewer: What is your opinion about Asian American representations in Hollywood industry?

Marie: I don't think that they're represented enough at all. Like outside of these movies, it's hard for me to think of a whole lot of other Asian American led films. I think we have this interesting issue of whitewashing where you have films and TV shows that kind of rely on Asian culture. Like "oh we want to have a movie about martial arts or sort of like Asian myths based mythology," but at the same time you're casting white people for these important roles still in Hollywood. I think with *Dr. Strange*, I felt what there were Asian influences and it felt a little bit weird to see like white people almost acting like it's theirs, I guess. I think it's not really a film, but you get another Marvel thing in *Iron Fist* where you have a white guy learning all this crazy, cool Asian influenced martial arts. Well if it's based on in some sort of Asian culture. Like "why are you not seeing more Asian Americans like involved or more focus on Asian American?"

Interviewer: How relevant is the term Asian-American in society and to you?

Marie: I think it's an okay word to describe cause I think the experiences of different Asian-Americans overlap but also I don't think it's specific enough. Because I've had friends who are Asian American who are Chinese versus they're Indian or Korean. And when they talk about like their personal experiences and how that connects to culture, it's like you can get such a vastly different sort of range of experiences

based in culture. Asia is a huge continent. And I guess for me personally, so for me, I'm African American. And I feel like the term is somewhat necessary given the history of African Americans and sort of that disconnect from different ethnic identities. Like for a lot for me and people that I know who are African American or black, it's difficult for them to trace back their actual like country or tribe origin because of slavery. What you don't get that with Asian American populations is that you will have people that can very clearly be like, "yeah I am Filipino or yeah, I'm Korean." So I think it's a word that's helpful. But I think there definitely should be talk of like having more focus on like the actual like cultural differences within Asian community.

Interviewer: It makes sense. I was really mind blown by that.

Marie: I've had conversations like with other black people and like discussing African identity versus African American identity and then I was like, "Huh. You know, I've never necessarily thought about how this could like relate to like other people of color like differences between like different groups of Asian people."

Interviewer: How do you think Hollywood has been shaping Asian American identity in recent years?

Marie: I think that there has been some small advances. I don't think there's necessarily been enough movies and films about Asian and Asian American characters in Hollywood to say that it's like completely changed perception. Because I think if you think about old Hollywood, you get these long history of like these very stereotypical images of Asian people. Like sometime it would be like literally like white people painted with like yellowish skin with slanted eyes. And you get that heavily accented and you get that in Hollywood for like such a long time. And then I think you have these more recent movies like *The Joy Luck Club* and like *Crazy Rich Asians* that are certainly having an impact in definitely giving people, like western people, a fuller perception of Asian American people as like fully rounded people with their own identities and their own systemic issues to deal with. But I don't know if it's necessarily been enough to completely erase the old of Hollywood, I think there just needs to be more.

Interviewer: What do you personally think Hollywood should be doing next in terms of next steps for a more frequent and better representations of Asian Americans? What do you wish to see in the future in Hollywood industry?

Marie: In the future I'd like to see representation not just in film, solely based around, um, Asian cultures but also just in your standard film. Just moving away from only having white protagonists but like Asian and Asian American protagonists in just standard everyday films. I think definitely having the films that are based around all or mostly Asia casts those continued would also be good and expanding them to different cultures within Asia. And I think as well as much as we can talk about the visual representation of actors in these movies, I think what's also important in having these characters written respectfully and with depth is having Asian and Asian American people involved in not just acting but having more of them involved in production and screenwriting and like directing of these movies, so that you're not having like a non Asian person trying to write the experience of an Asian American or a native Asian person. And then having Asian or an Asian American actor, act that out. And then being like, "wait, this isn't, this doesn't seem right. This feels like an outsider has like kind of written this experience." So I think having that representations in all aspects of the film industry, not just acting is important.

Marie: Yeah. I mean, it's cool, but think about honestly, and it's just like, it's, it's important to like when you think, I just, just in general, like if it's important when you think about like race and about like people of color to just think about the experiences of all people of color and like not, and not just focus on one, just like focus on the multitude of issues that people have.

## Sample Interview 2

Interviewer: Do you define yourself as Asian American? Why or why not?

Diana: I'm a peculiar case actually. And yes, for the most part it's like more Latin and Asian American because my great grandparents are Chinese and descendants before that, all Chinese, except like my mother and my grandmother, who are Latin Americans. But based on the customs that we go through in our household, that's kind of what helps me identify as Asian American.

Interviewer: So how did you hear about *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians*? And what were your impressions of those two films like before actually seeing them?

Diana: *Crazy Rich Asians* was something I saw on the YouTube trending number one on the trailer. It looks cool, I'll go see that movie. I don't know, it's like it reminds me of *The Great Gatsby* because I liked the whole a LA themes and I've read the book. But yeah, I've read the book beforehand. Then for me it's just like a habit of seeing it. And I thought it was like a really good representation for the most part, like on the mother's side and the grandmother's side of how things happen. But when you think of like the children side, the millennials side, I felt like there were not a lot of accuracies until it actually happens in Singapore or just an Asian in general. And in terms of *The Joy Luck Club*, it's something that my mother watched when I was little and I remembered seeing it because like I cried a lot based on like the tough life of the parents that they had. And how children kind of weren't grateful for what their parents had done for them and how they became more American. You can say. And I guess you can see with their partners and also the lifestyle that they're living.

Interviewer: What made you interested to see this particular film?

Diana: Basically book adaptations. I like to read a book and then watch the movie afterwards. But also it helps me learn about my own culture since I grew up in America because I didn't grow up with family and I got to meet them as I grew up. So just for me, learning bits and pieces can give me like a good presentation of what I kind of was missing out or what I can get myself into eventually.

Interviewer: So what was your perception of Asian Americans before seeing these films?

Diana: I have to exceed the standards. Like even my family everyday. Sometimes what I did and if I did something good, it was usually never enough and I always have to do more. Like the standards were always high and you cannot anything else but perfect. Cause my mom at home obsessed with having the best of everything and when people complimented her, she'd always be like, you see it's the best. And things like that just ticked me off a little bit. But because of that I got in the habit to try to always reach for the stars and always try to impress my parents because that's like when they usually are most proud of me is when they had those achievements. And aside from that, it's just, there's a lot of pressure puts you like usually people would be like, Oh she's like a math genius. Like go like you guys go ask her questions. I'd say usually, Oh they're smarter. That's something that I'd always get. I'm usually not very athletic. I kind of broke the mold cause I did soccer since I was seven. Usually kind of strict, maybe a little less social because I've always like supposedly at the library reading books and stuff like that.

Interviewer: After watching these films, what was your overall impression of the film? What did you think were the strengths and weaknesses of each film?

Diana: Okay, so let's start with *Crazy Rich Asians*. Um, it lacked a lot compared to the book. I guess in regards to real life, like couple issues that happened particularly with Astrid I believe and her husband, I feel like it's something that could have gone more in detail cause that's what happens with some sense traditional Asian families because I believe uh, she ended up cheating on her because he was never good

enough, you know, for the family. But like Astrid also never like she loves him but like never stood up for it or like never kind of gave the warning of what her family was like. And my cons I guess also adding onto like *Crazy Rich Asians* is like how people like now associate Singapore luxurious lifestyles. And like, honestly, that's only some part of it that's not like the lower income parks. And it's just like, it's giving people like go wrong vision. Like most people think now that Asians have like a lot of money and then they always go shopping. Like Louis Vuitton and Guess, like just the bougie brands. And that's not the case for most people. Like some people have the luxury, others don't have that privilege. And they're probably like working at like farms or something like that. Something that people wouldn't consider like medium or high income. So that was something that I found a little disappointing. In terms of how good it was to some extent, it was kind of like showing that family structure, like the filial piety and how usually people respect their elders, their parents specifically and how usually family is tight. That's something I like five crazy rotations, but in comparison to *The Joy Luck Club*, it was uh, trash, but it was a good movie. I liked it a lot. Like, cause it appealed more to millennials and it's also something that I felt like is what made it lack a little bit more. But *The Joy Luck Club* kind of went through everything. It went through the perspective of each family. So it gave you a different taste of different problems that families can go through in terms of um, like June, I think when she lost her mother, I didn't know that her mother had two other kids and stuff like that. Those are hardships that people went through in their own country before they came to America. And that's something, it didn't cover as much and *Crazy Rich Asians*, but it was nice to see like how people ended up the way they were and also the struggles that parents had and concerns they thought their children would have as well. And like the connection between the daughters and their mothers was there. You can see they all had that family. Then it went from the another before sending June way to go see twins and I felt like, I don't know, it's just, it gave me more of a sense of home and not like, Oh, some movie that is high budgeted.

Interviewer: How do these two films portray Asian Americans differently from other films that you can think of that have Asians or Asian Americans?

Diana: I guess the problem is there's a lack of Asian representation, specifically Hollywood or just in popular media in America. But *The Joy Luck Club* was more close to the accurate. I mean they're rotten tomatoes. 96% says other like it proves my point. But um, I feel like that for me is the high standard of like representation if I'm like in Asian American families. Cause a lot of my friends that I mean that are like from China or from different areas in Asia. A lot of the struggles that they taught me, most of the things that I actually saw reflected in that movie and I was pleasantly surprised, but then I realized it was 93. That's like the advent of like our modern technology and just flashing things was not there. And that's like the purest form that you'll see of Asian American families. The struggles were there. You could see how every person learn from their mistakes or just try to fix things on their own. Then they went very into detail about those issues. Like, literally, it came from one apparently making a mistake of like not getting raped. She herself kinda condemned her fate for like having a baby with someone that ended up leaving her. And then there was another mother who I think they didn't think she was worthy enough. And then another mother who went through like got herself out of a marriage and then they all moved to the United States for better lives for their children. And then their children ended up doing other things. So like, it kind of goes into that change when you live in America. Like you're trying to stay hard and teach your kids, you know, stay with them custom, but like, it's America, there's so many external forces that kind of make you a bit more of Americans in the least. Like even me sometimes I forget about like culture, but I kind of didn't grow up with that sometimes. So like I ended up playing soccer, you know, things that my school provided me, it ended up just adapting to, and they got to give myself my own identity to an extent. But yeah, and in terms of *Crazy Rich Asians*, let's see, it linked so much to American culture basically. Just the whole social media presence as slow and compared to other Asian movies that I've seen in Broadway....none in Broadway, in Hollywood. I don't think there's like, I feel like the end of the sector, like the top brains, for like most close to reality would be *The Joy Luck Club* and more towards bottom and not necessarily the bottom. Maybe like 25th percentile would be crazy rich Asians, although it was a really good storyline.

Interviewer: Was there any theme that seemed like resonate with Asian or Asian American culture?

Diana: Filial Piety is the big theme because even though in *The Joy Luck Club*, you can see the mothers and the kids in the photos. But I felt like it was just more centered on the moms and like the sacrifices they've made for their children. And in terms of *Crazy Rich Asians*, all I thought about was luxury. And it's because it's more of a modern day movie. So because of that, that's kinda like the new age stuff like that or appeals to millennials. But I also kind of thought of like individuality/filial piety because like Nick fact that he was already abroad and stuff, he was never at home. I never stayed at home, depending on, was never used to that pay attention and be obedient and plus like behavior that goes on. Yeah. And for him, uh, I felt like the individuality aspect, let him grow and be more of an independent person. And then in terms of the, uh, filial piety is like with other members of the family, they kind of pay attention to what their parents say because I think one of the brothers and then of marrying some girl from Hong Kong, his parents owned like a trading company and that benefited him. And then in terms of Ashton and the other guy, well I guess it was true love, but then it got way out of hand with the whole like the family not acknowledging him and just saying, Oh, he's the tech guy. And like find your pastor and stuff like that, but never actually giving him the credit he deserves cause like they're old money, but he was someone that developed a startup and made money from there. You know, it's very different. The whole old money, new money situation.

Interviewer: What were some scenes in the film that you thought it emphasized stereotypes of Asian Americans? Like what are some negatives?

Diana: Piano

Interviewer: From *The Joy Luck Club*?

Diano: Yeah. When they forced a little child. June, I think, to play the piano. Also Waverley, who was the chess champion. She was embarrassed by her mom, cause like when she won the chess championship, the mother carried the Life magazine and she was boasting her kid. Like, Oh, you know, my daughter was like the chess champion, stuff like that. And it reminded me sometimes it's something my dad would do when I was a child. I'm just like kind of, I got embarrassed sometimes and I didn't want to admit it, but at least can you guys, or we could use the word back. But um, yeah, it was like we kinda hurt a little, cause I feel like the only time I do something good, uh, like my parents would post about it. But that's one thing that I found that people were just like, "Oh, they just like to boast their achievements, you know, and they're overachievers" and stuff like that. In terms of *Crazy Rich Asians*, it could be, um, partying, I guess. You know, like the bachelor's park or stuff like that. But it probably doesn't happen in any way in there. So it's kind of a weird thing to see, but it's just like people, they probably have that assumption that oh to spend a lot of money for fun. You know, they don't help people out. They don't care. I mean Astrid is a like exception I guess cause she was like all about charity and stuff. Right. But in general everyone that's just wasting money for the good of it for the sake of it. I feel like Asian Americans or just Asians in general like to spend a lot of money. I live in New York and when they go to upstate New York, I always go with my family to go to Woodbury common outlets. And as I walked around, a lot of people were like, this is like the new hotspot for Asians because all the stores from Louis Vuitton, Guess, you know, Gucci from there. Everyone always goes in buy like all you see all the Asians have bags, my parents included and there was just a says just come here to spend money. Like that's all they do.

Interviewer: What were some scenes that you thought actually went stereotypes of Asian-American? What are some positive images that helped the Asian American representation from *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians*?

Diana: For *The Joy Luck Club*, parents. The parents journey and how they got there, and also the fact that they were there for their daughters through their tough times. That was one thing that even like sometimes I kinda don't feel like I'm good enough from my parents, but like at like they think like, or I think that they thought that I was in meeting up the scan of it, but they're proud of me. And that's something that even June's mom, like never expected things off her. But June thought otherwise. That's kind of like

reminded me of what I thought. But I was never good enough for my mom always wanted me to be happy to try my best. Never had like something like Waverley's mother had for her, you know, a certain standard like that. So seeing like that perspective of the mother's and what they went through to like get their daughters, give their daughters a better life and also how they supported the daughters or something that I feel like goes against the stereotypes. In terms of other things in the movie, it could even be the fact that they were all together, like the fact that they got that reunion together for everyone that made it think it was possible. I feel like shows whole friendships stuff. Yeah. The fact that people will be there for one another. Usually people think that they compete like families compete against one another. Like put their children up to the test. That's what happened with Waverley and when they were children. But in reality, people are always different. That's why they started that Joy Luck Club. You know, I feel like that goes against that stereotype being competitive. In terms of *Crazy Rich Asians*... I'm not sure if this will qualify, but I guess take those more from, what's his name? Nick the other girl, Rachel and Nick, just like your name. The fact that Nick didn't necessarily listen as much, you know, this like typical hierarchy standards, but Nick was in the afraid to fight for some he loved, he did for Rachel and the fact that he defied, you know, his mother and his grandmother who was telling him like, "Oh, he's gonna degrade himself. And he goes after her and stuff like that." The fact that like your mother went behind their backs and like hired a private investigator to go search on the family and it's probably things that Rachel didn't even know was true. And then from there, like, then they had the audacity to stand up to his grandmother and mother and possibly even give up that fortune of his. Something that the light wasn't against the stereotype. They wasn't afraid to be himself, but also it's the fact that he studied abroad. That's something that you see for a lot of Asians that study abroad. Their perspectives change a lot. And that's something that I feel like maybe America, like people like us don't think actually happens.

Interviewer: Do you think those positive images like that are portrayed in these films can they still be negative?

Diana: There's always a prescriptive that deems that, yeah, how can I positive things that I said is like the perseverance, the third terminations that mothers went through to give their children a better life in terms of that there is a negative out of that because the fact that the mothers also could think that, Oh, like I went here for a better opportunity and they want their daughters to be something they never could have been. That happened to me when I was a child. Because I never had that individuality aspect. Like my parents kind of controlled my life when I was in elementary school. They forced me to do musical lessons. They forced me to take extra math. I didn't want any of that. But because my mom didn't have a chance to like pursue her educations over there. She ended up doing it in the United States. But that was at a later point. But for then when I was a child, she wanted me to be a professional. You know, supposedly if I want there to be a singer, she wouldn't let me because it's something that's not certain. She wanted me to have like that path that will lead you to a greater future and something that I wouldn't have to be in the situation she ever wasn't her life. So I'd be like, in that situation, like some parents would feel like they would want their kids to be something that they wanted it to once be in their lives and not even think about their daughter's feelings, which I believe happened many times. And I mean that's why I had some of their relationships ended up being a little rocky. But when they acknowledged both of each other's like mistakes are both of each other's perspectives and ended up working in the end. So I guess there's a negative to a positive, to positive, to negative, to a positive again. And in terms of *Crazy Rich Asians*, I guess the aspect of individuality, it's the fact that you're going from like, cause Asians kind of mostly conservative. So when you're trying to create change, it can be seen as act of defiance and seeming on how like who is actually looking at that because I'm like the grandmother for example. It can be very disrespectful and can lead to negative outcomes in the end. Like family arguments or confrontations with stuff like that.

Interviewer: Knowing that *The Joy Luck Club* and *Crazy Rich Asians* are categorized as Asian Wave films, how well is the Asian-American experience portrayed in Asian Wave films in Hollywood?

Diana: *Crazy Rich Asians*... I don't feel like it accurately describes in that everyone has the ability to randomly get their private plane and fly into like a cargo box to have a party full of explosives and stuff

like that. That just those a movie just to show someone a different perspective of the luxurious life that you probably will never have. That's like people watch it anyway. So stuff like that. But *The Joy Luck Club* as I put it in the high standard, 96% rotten tomatoes. So is that, it was probably the thing that started this Asian Wave. I think there could've been something before, but this is a well known movie that it did like all the hardships. They're human, like people go through it. My friends that come here and study abroad said the same exact things. Well my bosses said about the Asian American friends that I have here say the same thing about like their parents hardships. They went through some talk about like the Vietnam War. Some people talk about their parents being part of the military and trying to escape that life. And I feel like they have that bruise to be here and they're taking the best advantage they can have it. So because of the, yeah.

Interviewer: How does Asian American representation in this film impact you?

Diana: Well, I'm actually happy that they're showing things like that because usually when you think of Asian movies, you kind of think of white washing a lot of times. Like with *Ghost in the Shell*, Scarlett Johansson perfect example. This is like, you never feel like Asian Americans acknowledged, you know, and it's something that I feel like we struggle with, like there's a lot of minorities but like regardless of all the achievements we've made, because if you look at the amount of people that are low income on debt, we're all the way at the bottom. We're doing better than Caucasians yet no one ever acknowledges that stuff. Yeah. And in terms of Hollywood feel like Sandra Oh kind of broke the barrier like winning the golden globe and it's like that was like the movement. But like in the past 1993 I think it was just something that people were like, "wow, this is a good perspective. It's nice. And then they got over" like probably a month after and there was no continuity. And with that, that's something like with Asian representation in terms of Hollywood specifically, that's a big issue. And like now you see it, but I feel like other people use it for comedy cause like *Fresh Off the Boat* I think, you know, stuff like that too. They kind of show a creative plan that you don't have funny to show the hardships of locals on that.

Interviewer: Did your perception of Asian American change after watching these films?

Diana: It did. It made me appreciate what my parents did for me cause I remember me and my brother, well wasn't me as much, but I kind of added onto it is that I'd always asked for a more, you know, I'd never considered how other people felt or how other people work. And then when they saw this movie I was like, I never asked my parents, how did they get here? You know, how like what was your childhood? Like, stuff like that. And then like now as I'm going into the adult seeing how like what my parents are doing to help me afford pay college. Like I don't pay anything. They always give me money. I never think of what they go through. You don't give me that money. And it made me value everything I have, you know. And like, even though like I work, I don't make 20% of my paycheck to charity because like if otherwise I spend it on food, you know, stuff like that. I try to help people as much as possible and I feel like it kind of shaped me into the person that I am and every watched it as well. Like I lost you on those little, I've remembered has it had an impact. In terms of *Crazy Rich Asians*. It had like no impact on me whatsoever. It was just like the luxury life. It's not like it's not something I want to achieve. Maybe like one day, like go to a week long trip in Singapore, but it's not my life.

Interviewer: What is your opinion about Asian American representations in Hollywood industry?

Diana: Not well. In the past with this, with *The Joy Luck Club*, it was very well presented. But after that it was like, come on, like there was no other people coming up and if it wasn't like a made mainly led Asian cast was like probably that one Asian person. It's time people usually wouldn't remember in that. Like now in this advent of like the first city, you know, breaking barriers and stuff like that. People start coming out like Sandra Oh as I mentioned before, you know, she's got her all deserves Golden globe. I believe it was a golden globe and then now a lot of other movies with diverse casts coming out. But that's the issue. It's not all because of Asian Americans. No, it's diversity. *Black Panther* came out at the same time and stuff like that. It's all just clumping minorities in there. So I feel like the Asian representation is not genuine. It's more of a like, "Oh we have to, you know, everyone's now aware of diversity. You gotta



like get on the client and make money off of this stuff.” And just like, that's it. There was nothing else to like, this is just a movie. They spent a lot of money making this really to make more money. And because it was like maybe they took this advantages, there's not a lot of Asian movies out there. Let's throw something that, a nice storyline; do something nice. It's eye catching, good looking afters and stuff like that. And then we'll put it to the test and it did well, but it was just, I can do for millennials, you know, nothing. Not as genuine. Like it was a little bit there, but it's not something you see everyday.

Interviewer: How relevant is the term Asian-American in society and to you? Do you like that term?

Diana: I guess I'm a peculiar because I kinda... I don't mind what labels put on me cause I don't let myself define. I don't let people define me by that label. Like Hispanic or like the Asian American, Hispanic, Asian American, stuff like that. It doesn't bother me at all. And usually when they think of other fellow Asian Americans, I think of hard workers. Usually typical people would think about like high achievers, hard work in that book. I mean it's just like everything else is just a label that people put on you. And I feel like people shouldn't let that define you, but personally for me it doesn't have a negative of that as something that like I can be proud to say that I am.

Interviewer: Do you think it has like good term where like other Asian Americans, do you think it's still a good term? Like do you think it's good or bad?

Diana: I'm not sure. Like maybe because I don't associate myself as much as the culture, but like people who study abroad, Asian with Asian Americans usually don't blend. I know that because people usually think of Asian Americans is more Americanized and that's why people don't blend. I'm just more open minded so I'm pretty good at making friends on both sides but usually within one than the other. There's like even like through meme videos or stuff they see like the Asian Americans, Asian born, um, growing up in Asia versus Asian born girl in America, they're completely different people. So maybe within there there might be some issues with that based on like the values that they uphold or how their parents raised them.

Interviewer: How do you think Hollywood has been shaping Asian American identity in recent years?

Diana: Not well. Diversity awareness is so popular now. It's just something that they tossed on the table in my opinion. But like I don't know, we have to wait to see, cause I feel like this is just the beginning. I mean considering that there's only a few films that are led by a majorly Asian cast, it's just that Hollywood has a lot of work to do and Hollywood's known for like paying attention to predominantly white people. You know a lot of the movies that gross well are like predominantly white in terms of the casting. The only exceptions in my opinion is The Rock Dwayne Johnson, he's the highest paid actor ever in terms of that. But he's like, he did a lot like he actually earned his way since he was very young.

Interviewer: Do these portrayals speak to you?

Diana: With *The Joy Luck Club*, yeah, it's just experience. All the problems that go through. Like even myself when I said it related to like how sometimes I felt like I wasn't living up to the expectations my parents had of me, something that she went through. I felt that. And then I feel like some of the experiences that the mothers went through, I'd be like, my parents go through it and they just never knowledge it. And they really kind of taught me of a way to approach it and kind of... I guess put my emotions to the table as well as have them put their emotions to the table to come up with a better resolution. In terms of *Crazy Rich Asians*... I guess taking a trip and traveling resonated with me, but everything else is something just like, it's nice to see, but it's not memorable.

Interviewer: What do you personally think Hollywood should be doing next in terms of next steps for a more frequent and better representations of Asian Americans? What do you wish to see in the future in Hollywood industry?

Diana: Stick with originality. Stick with what people actually went through and not with like the luxuries on the like something probably less than 1% have access to stick with what the general public actually went through. You know, stuff like that. Be more accurate with your representation because with *The Joy Luck Club*, it's something that a lot of people resonated with. It might not be as popular because people don't like hearing um, people, other people being vulnerable and you know about their life. You know, divorce issues is a boring topic I guess for the media here in America. But that's a lot of hardships that people in Asia go through, you know? In terms of like the rich luxuries and that it's something that catches attention here. Like you could see *Fast and Furious* and you know, action movies like just had budgeted stuff that just shows off, which is the, I guess the vibe American gives some times like that's something that you shouldn't do. Like it's not accurately representing it. And then you kind of giving people false hope. Like when they go over there like is there going to be a mission, and going to go party and a manager or something like that. And less likely no, but you know, something like that to leave a just showcasing more of real I guess issues that people go through. Maybe don't look documentary style but more like I like the um, flashbacks that people went through and the different scenarios that like they jumped between the different mom and daughter parents. I think it was nice to see and just getting that perspective that everyone can relate to. Not just that 1%. It's just the beginning. I feel like Hollywood has a lot to go through and with this admin of diversity awareness, hopefully things go on along and every ethnicity embraced it as being bundled into this one diversity aspect can desegregate and have its own path chosen. The true culture. I know that belongs there, and if this is just a phase, then I don't know Hollywood's doing.

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