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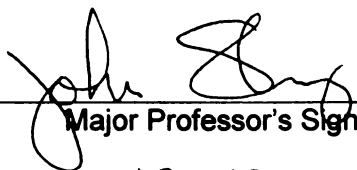
ASIAN STEREOTYPES IN THE MASS MEDIA:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ASIAN MINORITY
PORTRAYALS IN U.S. FILMS

presented by

TIANSHI XIE

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**ASIAN STEREOTYPES IN THE MASS MEDIA:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ASIAN MINORITY PORTRAYALS IN U.S. FILMS**

By

Tianshi Xie

A THESIS

**Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

ASIAN STEREOTYPES IN THE MASS MEDIA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ASIAN MINORITY PORTRAYALS IN U.S. FILMS

By

Tianshi Xie

This study aims to examine Asian stereotypes in U.S. films. The purpose of this study is to compare minority portrayals of Asians in contemporary films to stereotype images in early 20th century media. The second goal is to evaluate these stereotypes in their exemplification effect. A quantitative content analysis is used in coding these minority portrayals. Nine films are selected based on the box-office revenue and production year. A total of eighteen Asian major and minor characters are selected to code in their various traits retrieved from stereotype literatures and previous study. The result indicates that Yellow Peril stereotypes still dominate the overall Asian images in U.S. films. Model Minority stereotypes are in lack of portrayals throughout these top box-office films that are mainly Action films.

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Asian Stereotypes in the Mass Media:

A Content Analysis of Asian Minority Portrayals in U.S. Films

Introduction

Stereotypes have been considered a sensitive topic in the United States ever since the Civil War in the 19th century. With more immigrations and the booming international trade business, various races and ethnicities are blending into American culture. Among these minority groups, Asians have become one of the largest immigrant groups in the past 20 years, increasing in number to make up 4.3% of the overall U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). At the same time, political conflicts between Asia and the U.S. have occurred throughout history. Several racist and discriminatory incidents towards Asian Americans in the mid 20th century have evoked protests and diplomatic negotiations (Fong, 2002).

Meanwhile, stereotypes in the mass media have been frequently analyzed, under the belief of the power of the media, by scholars. Most prior research has covered African American stereotypes, due to the many discriminatory incidents that have occurred against them. Among the recent research on Asian stereotypes in the media, many studies have focused on commercial media by examining advertisements in magazines and television, while most of the rest analyzed character coverage in news reports (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Taylor & Stern, 1997; Mastro & Stern, 2003). Studies that focused on Asian images in film have been primarily conducted qualitatively using a textual analysis of a particular film (Park et al, 2006). Not enough quantitative studies have been done assessing the overall frequency of Asian

stereotypes in films.

This research takes a comprehensive approach to both the mass media and cultural perspectives in analyzing the media content depicting Asian minorities in the U.S. Literature on previous stereotype studies and mass media research will be reviewed in the following section. Exemplification theory was selected to guide this study; thus, its theoretical factors will then be illustrated. The procedure for this quantitative content analysis, including its coding categories and measurements, will be explained.

Literature Review

Formation of Stereotypes

Stereotypes are defined as widely recognized beliefs about characteristics, traits and behaviors of members in a specific group (Hamilton & Sherman, 1989). Some of these perceptions come from personal experiences, some are speculations made by the public, and the others are simply vague generalizations based upon the most distinctive differences between groups (Nelson & Miller, 1995). Stereotyping is one of the most complicated social phenomena that people strive to understand (Ditto & Lopez, 1993). Although stereotypes are sometimes based on real group differences, the formation and supporting processes are complex and often difficult to determine. The causes of stereotypes include both micro (individual experiences, psychological factors, etc.) and macro aspects (social reasons, economical influences, cultural backgrounds, etc.). Depending on the definition of stereotype and the direction of context, causation varies from situation to situation.

Psychologists associate stereotypes with cognitive mechanisms and individual self concepts. Past research has shown that people tend to perceive people they dislike to be unintelligent and that the people they dislike perceive them to be unintelligent. The probability of cognitive processes becoming primary increases due to motivational factors. Group homogeneity is enhanced under these factors while stereotypes are formed, maintained, and applied with cognitive shortcuts using existing information (Spencer & Fein, 1994; Stroessner & Mackie, 1992).

Self-esteem is also considered important in forming stereotypes. When

people's self-esteem is threatened, stereotypes will be activated through downward social comparisons that will make them feel superior (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990). One frequently researched model among psychologists is the exemplar model, which has recently been applied to media in the Exemplification Theory proposed by Zillmann in 1999. *The Exemplar Model* states that stereotypes originate from concrete exemplars that represent the overall group (Anderson & Cole, 1990; Linville, 1989). The exemplar may be from a celebrity or a significant individual that belongs to the group. For example, African Americans are often perceived to be athletic because of the large number of black athletes, such as Michael Jordan and Carl Lewis. Asian Americans are considered to be brilliant in Math because the best student at mathematics in school has often been an Asian. Whether stereotypes are applied is determined by the characteristics of the exemplar and associated environments. Thus, the effect of exemplars varies in different communication processes and among different communicators (Smith & Zarate, 1992).

On the other hand, stereotypes are needed for people to play different social roles and to have power status (Eagly, 1995; Fiske, 1993; Sidanius, 1993), but also function as particular social identities (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Social scientists raised the concept of “out-group homogeneity”, which asserts that people tend to perceive out group members as less desirable and to differentiate them from in-group members (Hilton & Hoppel, 1996). As a result, individuals from out-groups are frequently perceived to be unfavorable and to share the average group characteristics attributed to their groups. Context factors are also influential in exacerbating or

attenuating group homogeneity. Group competition can aggravate the perception of out-group homogeneity (Webber, 1994) when minority groups are perceived to be more homogeneous, even by members within the minority group (Bartsch & Judd, 1993)

For Asian stereotypes particularly, historical and economic factors have had immense affects on shaping and enhancing the overall “evil” generalization of Asian Americans (Hoppenstand, 1983). The fear of Asians taking over Americans’ jobs and their cozy lives is not new. Before America was founded, the land of China was described as mysterious and rich, where people lived in “a virtual Utopia” (Billington, 1981). When trade between European countries and China began in the 19th century, Europeans started to covetously stare at the wealth of Asia. Years after, when Chinese labors were shipped to America, those Chinese immigrants began to develop their own ethnic communities on the west coast of America and later formed great merchant families with the control of areas collectively called “Chinatown”. These merchants were hostile and unfriendly towards Americans, which stimulated the maturation of the “yellow peril” (Hoppenstand, 1983). The attack on Pearl Harbor exacerbated this fear of Orientals with feelings of hatred and indignation. The stereotype of “evil Asians” started to spread faster than ever, and, as a result, Executive Order 9066 banished more than a hundred thousand Japanese from the United States.

In recent years, the sharp automobile sales war against Japan has forced General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler to lay off thousands of employees; with the three

American automobile giants still finding it difficult to win. Hatred towards Asians exploded, and several incidents occurred. In downtown Detroit, Japanese cars were destroyed and it was reported that Asians were physically harmed. The U.S. Department of Defense releases military reports about China annually. They monitor Chinese military expenses and are preparing for possible defense. Given the facts of China's booming economy and great market potential, economical factors play an essential role in forming and maintaining Asian stereotypes in public.

Stereotypes of Asian Americans

Inauthentic representations of Asian Americans did not receive much attention until recently. Nevertheless, stereotype of Asians dates back to the 60s and 70s with the idea of *Yellow Peril* (Thompson, 1978). This notion refers to the fear of oriental faces taking over the United States that started to spread with the rise of the potential threat from China and the economic competition from Japan back in the 1980s. The rush of immigration from Asia in the late 19th century, in some sense, intensified the panic that "Asians would eventually take over the nation and cause social and economic havoc" (Fong, 2002, p. 189). The large population size and emerging imperial power of Asia evoked such stereotypes and resulted in political prohibition of Asian immigrants into America and its colonized countries (Lee, 1999; Kawai, 2005). With trade deteriorating between America and Asia and the massive impact of Asian low price commodities on the American job market in the late 20th century, fear of the *Yellow Peril* was revived and stereotypes of Asians were renewed as unfair economic competitors (Kawai, 2005). With the stagnancy of the automobile

and other manufacturing industries, Americans blamed Asians for their cut-price merchandise and cheap labor. Metaphors such as “Honda, Toyota, and Pearl Harbor” were frequently used to refer to the so-called “invasion of Asians” (Tuan, 1998, p.44).

Another typical Asian stereotype is the notion of being a *model minority*, putting the Asian group in the spotlight, where they, as a minority group, gain success with their own efforts and competitiveness (Okihiro, 1994). Compared to Latin-Americans, African Americans, and other minority ethnicities, Asians were more frequently portrayed as hard-working, family oriented, and law-abiding, with education highly emphasized (Kawai, 2003). These portrayals describe Asians as independent achievers succeeding by their own almost non-aided efforts in American society (Peterson, 1966, p. 21). These stereotypes promote Asians as possessing inherited intelligence and cognitive abilities. They rarely consider Asians’ family support and encouragement, work ethic, or drive in the pursuit of higher education (Yee, 1992). Although these are seemingly constructive portrayals of Asians, (for example, “academic and economic high achievers”), they imply the notion of dividing racial minority groups ----- the colorblind ideology (Kawai, 2005). In a social and historical context, the term ‘colorblindness’ downplays institution effects and attributes racial inequalities to the under-performance of individuals (Guinier & Torres, 2002).

Ironically, the *yellow peril* and *model minority* stereotypes seem to be opposite of each other, with one being negative and the other being positive. Nonetheless, these two types of stereotypes shape public opinions symbiotically. With

the *model minority* stereotype identifying Asians as quiet and competitive achievers, this image of Asians may bring about a new, modified concept of the *yellow peril* (Kawai, 2005). Although these two notions are contradictory, the very nature of stereotypes is ambivalent. Stereotypes are defined as ways of making differences in order to make sense of the world and categorize pre-existing cultures (Berg, 1990) by simplifying and exaggerating differences (Hall, 1997). When the paradox of stereotypes is to be portrayed in the media, the narrative is usually framed in a binary system with an amalgamation of contradictory beliefs (Cloud, 1992). For example, Latin women are portrayed as both sexually attractive and intelligently incompetent in Hollywood films, acting as the overt sexual threat (Berg, 1990).

It is essential to examine Asian stereotypes with the combination framework of the *yellow peril* and *model minority* stereotypes in order to take into consideration the political and historical circumstances. In order to understand the political connotations of the superficial “positive” model minority stereotypes, it is beneficial to examine media contents using the two stereotypes as a whole (Kawai, 2005).

Stereotypes in Mass Media

Minority portrayals have been of great concern in previous mass media studies. Minorities are frequently portrayed as criminals or gangsters (Barber & Gandy, 1990), drug pushers, poverty-stricken and homeless people, (Fleras, 1994) and other negative figures. Minorities are rarely portrayed as people who have important words to deliver or as essential figures (Fleras, 1994). Underrepresentation of minorities has also been reported by numerous studies (Williams, 1999; Fleras, 1994;

Taylor & Stern, 1997, Anderson & Harwood, 2002). With a sharp statistical difference, minority groups have appeared in a significantly smaller proportion in the mass media compared to the real world.

Among these media studies, a sizable amount of research has been conducted on African Americans in film, television, and advertisements (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Taylor & Stern, 1997; Atkin & Fife, 1993-1994). Stereotypes of African Americans in the media were also the earliest examined in academia. Results revealed that African Americans were overrepresented as lawbreakers (Dixon & Linz, 2000), athletes, and rappers (Bowen & Schmid, 1997) in media messages. As a result of such portrayal, African Americans are considered to be dangerous and harmful in the public opinion (Romer et al, 1998). Extensive criticism of the media was then aroused for their creating such stereotypes; however, improvements have been sluggish and insignificant.

Comparatively, even fewer studies have been conducted on television and film portrayals of Asian Americans with similar depth, especially using quantitative approaches. Within the small amount of quantitative research that has been done, most have been in the context of news reports and advertisements (Taylor & Stern, 1997, Mastro & Stern, 2003). Asians are overrepresented in business settings and underrepresented in relationship contexts. Asians are also more likely to appear as background characters in advertisements than other racial groups (Taylor & Stern, 1997). Technology commercials are more likely to employ Asian characters. In activity levels, Asians are portrayed as more passive and quiescent than other

Americans. Asian females are identified as very affable and emotional in relational affairs and are extremely thin in body figure (Mastro & Stern, 2003).

On the other hand, some qualitative analyses have been conducted by examining manuscripts of particular movies and television shows. Park et al. (2006) analyzed the role of stereotypes in the popular action comedy series “Rush Hour” and “Rush Hour 2” using textual analysis. A descriptive narrative analysis was conducted on the stereotype jokes in the film and a critical analysis followed, examining the racial ideology implied by them. Characters and narratives, two indiscernible categories of textual analysis, evaluated both ideological values and audiences’ cognitive perceptions (Fiske, 1987; White, 1982). Numerous racial jokes between the two leading characters, Lee and Carter, were filed and analyzed. The results disclosed several reasons why the popularity of the film was in both minority and mainstream groups. The two leading characters were both minorities and were portrayed as heroes instead of racial victims. The racial jokes did not appear to hurt the friendship between the characters. Stereotype jokes flew naturally in the film and were presented based on each character’s personality. On the other hand, racial jokes crossed ethnicity lines in the film, implying that all races are subject to stereotypes. Park et al. concluded that racial status quota “was subverted by strategically promoting the acceptability of such racial stereotypes in the *Rush Hour* series” (Park et al., 2006). The sense of realism in the film affects audiences in a way because the exaggeration of racial differences is covered by humor and promoted to acceptance.

Exemplification Theory

Exemplification theory (Zillmann, 1999; Zillman & Brosuis, 2000; Bryant & Zillman, 2002) proposed a relationship between portrayed exemplars and population opinions. The theory highlights how representation and exemplification shape overall insights into portrayed populations in media messages. The theory describes how the process of categorization of events stored in the memory is powerful in guiding people's attitudes and behaviors towards the described events. As a result, once the representations of these events are distorted, public opinion could be easily misled, and this brings about stereotypes towards the group. The theory illustrates two types of information sources, including "base-rate information" and "exemplar information," in the mass media. Base-rate information refers to a numeric statistical summary of population facts and is usually indirectly accessible to public audiences. Exemplar information is developed from media messages that depict an individual to exemplify the overall population group. It is argued that exemplars outweigh statistical base-rate information when audiences process media messages through heuristic mechanisms.

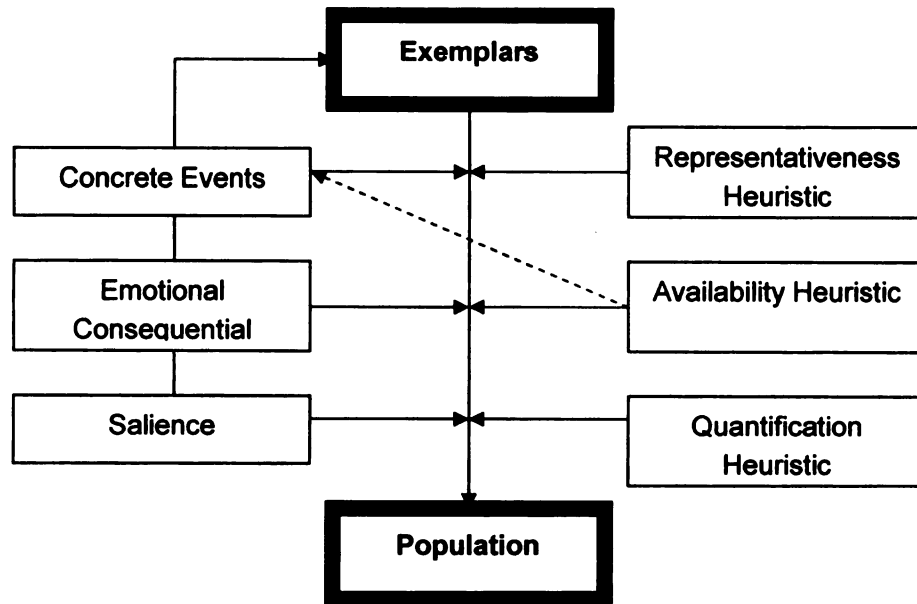


Figure 1. Model of Exemplification Effects

The three cognitive mechanisms, based-on assumptions in Exemplification

Theory, are *representativeness*, *availability*, and *quantification heuristics*.

Representativeness heuristics indicate that people's judgment on event populations is based on representative exemplars with necessary concrete quantitative information.

The "base-rate fallacy" (Bar-Hillel, 1980) is a related phenomena of such heuristics that illustrates the devaluation of abstract statistics and attention to concrete events.

Availability Heuristics refer to the fact that people retrieve judgments of event populations when they are available for cognitive manifestation. This retrieval mechanism is considered a "function of ease" (Bryant & Zillman, 2002, p27) by which exemplars in memories will ultimately determine the evaluation of event

populations. *Quantification Heuristics* designate that events or exemplars are categorized and grouped in memories. Despite an argument for the awareness of such quantified assessments, it is presupposed that exemplars and their relative

distributions yield incident assessments in ordinal terms (Bryant & Zillman, 2002).

Zillman & Bryant (2002) further defined the criteria of exemplars and asserted that some were more powerful than others (P. 28).

(1). *Concrete events*: Exemplars that use vivid descriptions or visual stimuli are much stronger and more persuasive. The relative sleeper effect (Gruder et al., 1978) asserts that exemplars increasingly dominate people's memories while base-rate information will diminish over time due to varied retention rates between the base-rate and exemplar information. Exemplars possess much stronger retention than abstract information does, under most circumstances. When concrete events are expressed iconically instead of symbolically, the exemplification effect intensifies, adding the power of visual stimulation. Once judgment of the exemplar and the target population are exhibited with imagery assistance, the information becomes more persuasive and prominent (Nisbet & Ross, 1980, Brosius, 2003).

(2). *Emotional Consequential*: Exemplars that are emotional arousal and perceived to be consequential by audiences are more powerful. A number of studies have verified the relationship between emotion and media message recall (Kety, 1970; Heuer & Reisberg, 1990; Spear & Riccio, 1994). Events or conditions that evoke emotions are more intense and memorable than non-consequential messages. Emotional arousal information serves the role of repeating itself in audiences' memories and is far easier to recall during *availability heuristics*. This argument lies on solid neuroendocrine theory

and the notion of emotional reactivity (Bryant & Zillman, 2002). Detailed biological and psychological instruments for emotional reactivity were confirmed with explanations of excitatory and hormone effects (Bower, 1992; LeDoux, 1992).

(3). *Salience*: exemplars that are perceived to be more salient receive more attention and, therefore, are more convenient to recall. Individuals perceive media messages with different levels of salience according to the notion of selective attention (Duncan, 1984). It is argued that retention fades with time for low-salience events; however, high-salience exemplars will be grouped and coded. According to *quantification heuristics*, events that are perceived to be consequential and related to audiences are easier to retrieve though attitude and beliefs.

These three criteria, in defining exemplars, are all attributed to the cognitive heuristics discussed earlier. Concrete events are derived from *representativeness* and *availability heuristics*. The emotional consequential characteristic is based on the *availability heuristic*, and salience is taken from *quantification heuristics*. When exemplars satisfy some or all of these criteria, exemplification effects occur and public opinion is very likely to be shaped by media portrayals.

As one of the most controversial misrepresentations in mass media, stereotypes are worth examining under the exemplification framework. With the categorical portrayals of minorities in media that were discussed earlier, research was conducted using several different theories. Self-categorization theory was applied in

the certification of affiliation between media stereotypes and policy reasoning (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006). Social cognitive theory was chosen to guide the implications of race representations in television commercials on audiences' self-perception (Mastro & Stern, 2003). Realistic group conflict theory offered an alternative explanation in examining minorities in local news by analyzing media stereotype from the group interest level rather than using an ethnocentric approach (Romer et al, 1998). Nevertheless, the three criteria of exemplars and the corresponding cognitive mechanism of Exemplification Theory are contextually correlated with this research topic. Neither audience perception nor profound implications are the goal of this study, though both are extremely vital in mass media studies. This study aims at building a quantitative foundation by statistically estimating Asian stereotypes in U.S. films so that future research can analyze audience perceptions based on these categorical propositions.

A content analysis will be conducted on films that are directed by U.S. directors aiming to identify stereotypes in the U.S. The coding scheme will be based on the three criteria that an Exemplar is defined by in Exemplification Theory. Distribution and box office rates are also considered as recruiting standards, based on the argument that audiences have to be overwhelmingly exposed to exemplars (Brant & Zillman, 2002). Short films and personally recorded video clips will be disqualified from this analysis because they fail to reach a large audience. Films produced and launched in theaters or for video rental agencies from 1995 to 2006 will be included in the sample.

Since the three variables have been verified by previous research and are supported by quantitative evidence, it is appropriate to infer that character portrayal or verbal manuscripts that satisfy these requirements are powerful influences on audience perceptions of the overall Asian population. It is reasonable to analyze exemplars that are influential for audiences based on theory. Based on this induction, three general categories of Asian exemplars will be identified, grouped, and coded:

(1) *Dramatic or appealing story line*: This category is derived from the definition and characteristics of *concrete events* in the model. *Vividness* is satisfied by the very nature of film in impressing audiences with visual stimulus and presenting imagery persuaders. With the assistance of modern technology and audio facilities, image quality and special effects will enhance audiences' attention towards the visual stimulus. Secondly, documentaries and educational programs will be excluded due to their factual groundwork and relatively low distribution. According to the concrete definition in Exemplification Theory, Asian characters will be selected as exemplars only if they are leading actors/actresses, supporting actors/actresses, or tertiary actors/actresses.

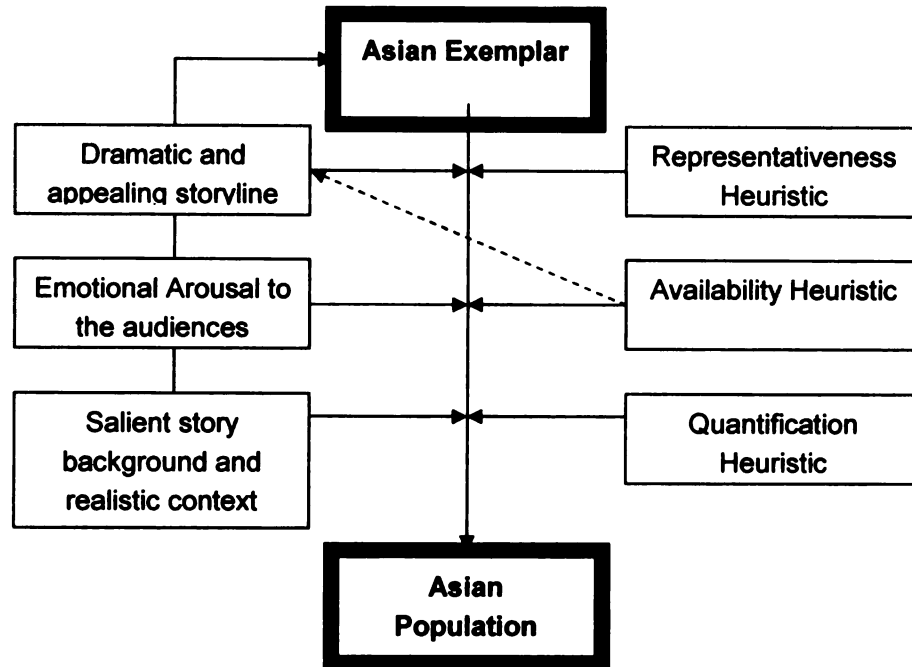


Figure 2. Media stereotypes of Asians and their exemplification effects

(2) *Emotional arousal*: This category is taken from the emotional consequential definition of the exemplar. Motion pictures are emotionally arousing in nature, in addition to being visual and aural stimulations. In the coding process, it is interesting to examine the percentage of Asian characters that are portrayed in positive versus negative roles. This ideology may also trace back to the *yellow peril* and *model minority* stereotypes mentioned earlier. Since exemplars are emotionally arousing, it is appropriate to infer that images of Asian characters will influence audience perceptions of the population. This case will be reinforced if there is a quantitative assessment.

(3) *Salient story background*: This category is inferred from the criteria of *salience* in Exemplification Theory. Asian exemplars will be coded in terms

of their familiarity to real life contexts. Character salience will be considered in terms of their occupations, costumes, personalities, languages, difficulties in life, social connections, etc. If these factors deviate from real-life situations or go beyond audiences' idea of common sense, exemplars will be low in salience and the exemplification effect will decrease. Nevertheless, previous studies have indicated that negative portrayals of Asians include unprofessional outfits and uncultured behaviors (Park et al., 2006). These portrayals are commonly conducted under familiar contexts and sharply contrast with other characters. Therefore, exemplars that deviate from common situations will be coded only if comparisons or background introductions exists to increase their salience levels.

Research Question and Hypotheses

A majority of the research on Asian stereotypical portrayals in the media, particularly in film, have been established on a wide time scale, ranging from the 50s to now. Nevertheless, there were great changes among the Asian population in the 1980s and 1990s. The second and third generations of Asian immigrants from the early 20th century have blended into larger American society. In addition, perceptions of Asians have altered significantly due to increasing communication between Asian countries and the US. As was discussed in the earlier section, Asian stereotypes include both old and new images of Asian Americans. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine recent films and observe any possible variations from prior stereotype categories. Thus, the research questions are:

RQ¹: Do Asians in U.S. films still experience similar stereotypical portrayals as they did earlier in the 20th century? What are the differences, and what are the ground rationales behind these changes?

Based on the two types of stereotypes of Asians mentioned earlier in the paper, the following expectations are developed:

The Yellow Peril: Asians are overrepresented as action/martial arts masters, gangsters, police inspectors and other roles that frequently deal with weapons and violent conduct. Asian females are overly portrayed as sexually attractive and seductive to white males. Asian characters are more likely to be portrayed as deceitful and astute.

The Model Minority: Asians are generally portrayed as family oriented,

educated, and high-achieving individuals when their professional or academic performances are disclosed. Asian characters' intelligence and mathematical abilities are overly emphasized. Asians are homogeneously portrayed as submissive, shy, and low in verbal ability. Asians are also highlighted for their politeness in both verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

RQ²: Are the stereotypical characteristics of Asians in U.S. films powerful enough to serve as exemplars to represent the larger population? In other words, are these characteristics concrete, emotional, or salient?

According to Exemplification Theory, exemplars must satisfy these three criteria in order to be influential enough to represent the population group.

Therefore, it is essential to examine the power of these potential exemplars.

Characteristics will be measured from three aspects: whether they are concrete, emotional, or salient. Being concrete refers to the level of vividness of the portrayed characteristic being exhibited in the media message. Coders will measure whether the particular characteristic is being exposed in a verbal or visual manner. Zillman asserts that visual exposure to an exemplar is more powerful compared to hearing another person's verbal description. Being emotional implies the level of emotional involvement that an Asian character demonstrates about a particular characteristic. The more emotional involvement he or she exhibits, the more powerful the exemplar is. Coders will be asked to rate whether the

characteristic is emotional, evolving according to plot design, consist of non-verbal behaviors and demonstrates a comprehensive theme of the film. Being salient indicates the level of association of the trait to the overall film story and the character. A trait salient to the character will be much more influential than those that are irrelevant. Coders will decide the level of salience, depending on the plot flow and character's reaction towards the trait.

Method

Sample Selection

The source of data for this study consists of a total of 43 U.S. films directed by U.S. directors and distributed from 1995 to 2007 with at least one leading Asian character. Only those with box-office revenue of over \$100,000,000.00 will be collected as samples because of their extensive contact with audiences. A list of these films was compiled using the International Movie Database (IMDB) and gross box office websites, like www.boxofficemojo.com. Animated films are excluded due to their narrow target audiences and vague boundaries in defining character appearance or costume issues. Genres that are narrative-appealing and scenario focused will be recruited, including dramas, comedies, and action, science fiction, crime, and horror films. A list of nine films were then narrowed down to be coded: Pirates of the Caribbean 3; Die Another Day; Rush Hour; Rush Hour 2 Rush Hour 3; 2 Fast 2 Furious; The Last Samurai; Charlie's Angels; and Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle.

Coding Categories

Due to time and resource constraints, the researcher performed content analysis in categorizing Asian characters herself. All Asian-looking major and minor characters were included, despite of their places of birth, though Asian and Asian Americans were separated for coding. This decision was made because audiences tend to rely more on exterior information from exemplars when processing messages sent out by characters (Brant & Zillman, 2002). As a consequence, American born Asians and native Asian characters should have equal exemplification effects on audiences in

representing the overall Asian population. Only major and minor characters that are listed as primary and secondary on the cast list will be included in the coding process. Cast members that are incidental, without lines to speak and stand-ins will be excluded. Characters' appearances and dialogue will both be included. A coding sheet was developed to keep track of the coding process. Selected characters will be coded on traits that are generated from stereotype literature and guided by similar studies that code Indian Americans and elders in films (Magoffin, 2007; Ramasubramanian, 2005). Based on yellow peril stereotypes, characters will be coded regarding whether they are astute, deceitful, good at martial arts and other destructive weapons, mathematically intelligent, or technological competent. Females will be coded particularly regarding whether they are sexually seductive. On the other hand, as indicated by Model Minority stereotypes, characters will also be analyzed to see if they are family oriented, hard working, polite, or quiet. Refer to Appendix A for the coding sheet and coding manual.

Once the coder concluded that a particular character satisfied any of these traits, she then judged if the specific trait was concrete, emotional, or salient enough to serve as an exemplar. Concreteness was determined by the visual and aural appearance of the exemplar. Frequency of concreteness was measured scene by scene (Zillman & Brosius, 2000). Given the possibility of the simultaneous presence of both visual and aural stimulus, the coder coded both, if possible. Emotion was coded if the character showed strong feelings for their attributed traits. Nonverbal behaviors (facial expressions, body languages, etc.) and verbal statements were included in

judging this concept. Positive and negative emotions were coded separately because of the heavy influences of emotion valence on audience judgments. Positive and negative emotions are applicable concurrently for complicated characters, who struggle with both sides under certain circumstances. Salience was determined by its importance to the plot design and the development of the character's overall image. If the coded trait was essential to the film theme or was an essential part of the character portrayal, the trait was coded as salient. Background information, like gender, approximate age, marital status, occupation, role type, and nationality were also assessed.

Coding Process

Every film was viewed more than one time during the coding process. The first round of viewing provided the coder with general understanding of the storyline. Possible characters to be coded would be identified by the end of the first round. Each character would be coded on their own information sheet including all the coding categories discussed above. In the second round of coding, each character was coded separately given the high volume of information to be examined in these fast pace Hollywood films. In order to fully examine the portrayals of each character, information was coded scene by scene throughout the entire film.

Traits such as Deceitful were determined primarily and the coder would code its exemplification effect in Concreteness, Emotional and Salience. Frequencies of concreteness were counted as the trait being portrayed every scene in the film. Emotion valence was coded in response to character's self-response towards their

traits. For example, a positive emotion of Deceitful will be a positive reaction, including satisfaction or assent responses towards lying. A negative emotion of Deceitful can be feeling guilty or regretful of the deceitful behavior. Salience was then determined by how importance the trait is to the overall story. Data were then kept in order and stored for future analysis.

Results

Film and character descriptions

Among nine of the coded films, seven were action films (77.8%); one belongs to the historical genre (11.1%) and the other one is a fantasy (11.1%). At the same time, these two films (*Pirates of the Caribbean 3* and *The Last Samurai*) also fit within the action category. A total of eighteen characters were selected and coded, of whom fifteen are Asians (83.3%) and three (16.7%) are Asian-Americans. Eight characters had major roles (44.4%) and ten characters had minor roles (55.6%). Ten actors/actresses played positive roles (55.6%) and seven played negative roles (38.9%). Only one character was not clearly indicated to be either positive or negative (5.6%, Captain Shao Feng in *Pirates of the Caribbean III*). Thirteen of the eighteen characters were male (72.2%) and five were female (27.8%). Nine of the characters were in their 20s (50.0%) and seven were in their 30s-40s (38.9%). Only one of the characters portrayed was in his 50s-60s (5.6%), and one other's age was unidentifiable (5.6%). Eight of the characters portrayed were single in the film (44.4%) and it was difficult to identify the marital status seven of the others (38.9%). Two of the characters were portrayed to be married with children (11.1%) and one was widowed (5.6%). Six of the characters were portrayed as martial arts experts or body guards (33.3%). Five were police officers or FBI/CIA agents in the film (27.8%). One was a car racer (5.6%) and another was a business man (5.6%). The rest of the five characters held the occupations of a samurai (11.1%), an ambassador (5.6%), and a homemaker (5.6%).

RQ1- Traits portrayed

Yellow peril traits- As is indicated in Table 1, several traits were portrayed extensively throughout the films and characters. All eighteen characters were portrayed as astute (100%), and sixteen of the 18 characters engaged in deceitful behaviors (88.9%). Similarly, martial arts and harmful weapons were in the spotlight, especially in action films. Fourteen of the characters were portrayed as experts in martial arts or other destructive weapons (77.8%). All five female characters were portrayed as sexually seductive (100%) Therefore, the yellow peril stereotype is still dominantly portrayed among Asian characters in the media, although with less of a focus on mathematical competency (0%) and technology ability (27.8%).

Model minority traits- On the other hand, the model minority stereotype was moderately portrayed by Asian characters. The most frequently portrayed trait was hard-work among Asians. Nevertheless, ten of the characters were portrayed as family-oriented (55.6%), nine of the characters were portrayed as polite (50.0%), and only four of the characters were portrayed as quiet (22.2%).

RQ2- Exemplar strength

Yellow Peril traits were presented in a way that is most likely to create stereotypical exemplars in the audience. Astute portrayals were all concrete (100%), with eighteen visual stimuli and three aural descriptions (16.7%). Sixteen of the characters were portrayed as emotional, involving with their astuteness (88.9%), including self-awareness and being proud of their shrewdness. Two characters were

portrayed as robotic in reaction towards their astuteness (11.1%). Astuteness was salient to the film for sixteen of the characters (88.9%) and it was unimportant to the plot design in two of the cases (11.1%). As indicated in Table 2, the frequency of concreteness was distributed greatly in the characteristics of astuteness and use of martial arts or weapons. There were a total of 118 scenes portraying the characters' astuteness, with an average of 6.6 scenes per character. Astute behaviors include being quick-witted in emergencies, flexible under bad situations, and agile in thinking. All sixteen deceitful characters were visually portrayed in their deceitful behaviors and seven of the sixteen were portrayed both in behaviors (88.9%) and in other people's depictions (38.9%). Twelve characters' deceptive behaviors were salient to the film theme (66.7%) and four were unrelated to the major story line (22.2%).

A total of 107 scenes were coded for behaviors using martial arts or other harmful weapons with an average of 5.9 per character. All fourteen characters who engaged in martial arts did so visually (77.8%) and seven of them were both visually and aurally portrayed (27.8%). Twelve of the characters showed emotion in their use of martial arts and weapons (66.7%), and two behaved robotically (11.1%). Thirteen of these incidences were important to the story (72.2%) and only one was unimportant to the film theme (5.6%). Sexual seductiveness of Asian females was visually portrayed in all cases (100%). Although only two were emotionally involved (40%) and four of these instances were important aspects of the film (75.0%).

Model minority traits were not typically presented in a manner that is likely to

result in the creation of exemplars. Of the fourteen characters that were portrayed as hard working in their profession (77.8%), twelve were visually portrayed (66.7%) and all were emotionally involved (66.7%). Eleven showed the importance of hard-workingness in the film theme (61.1%). There are less frequent portrayals of deceitfulness ($n = 53$, 2.9%), family orientation ($n = 54$, 3.0%), and hard work ($n = 54$, 3.0%).

Emotional salience- Table 3 shows the distribution summary of emotion salience for all coding traits. A high tendency exists for feeling positive towards astuteness ($n = 16$, 88.9%) and deceitfulness ($n = 13$, 72.2%). Moderate portrayals of positive emotions are coded towards family orientation ($n = 9$, 50%), hard work ($n = 11$, 61.1%), and martial arts/weapon ($n = 12$, 66.7%).

Discussion

The yellow peril stereotype is more common than the model minority stereotype in the portrayals of Asian characters in the nine films studied. Although mathematical intelligence dropped in the frequency of portrayals, Asian characters still experience yellow peril stereotypes in a larger scope. Asians are mainly engaged in dangerous and threatening occupations, like body guards or martial arts masters. Physically threatening behaviors, such as martial arts actions and gun or sword use also intensify these perceptions of hostile Asians. Portrayals of Asians and Asian Americans as evil also tend to establish dishonesty and astuteness as aspects of their personalities, including cheating to save face, lying to prevent hurting other people, being insidious and politic in business transactions. Nevertheless, flexibility in thinking and building personal relationships is rooted deep in depictions of the culture. Asian culture values ambiguity, as a high-context culture, and astute individuals are commonly admired for their swiftness in responses. This reflects the fact that stereotypes are not necessary wrong, but are usually evidence of truly distinctive traits.

Despite the large increase in successful Asian immigrants in real life, the overpowering of the yellow peril stereotype over the model minority stereotype may rest on several reasons. Firstly, enormous influences come from the intense economic competition between the United States and several Asian powers, as was mentioned earlier in this paper. With an increasing number of powerful Asian merchants growing in the U.S. these days, it is easy for people to lay their perceptions on their

surroundings. Tight economic bonds also lead to the awareness of guile Asian businessmen and Asia's cheap labor for manufacturing. The tragic destiny of the American auto industry made a memorable impression of the yellow devil image of Asians and Asian-Americans. Secondly, political background highlights the yellow peril Asian image. While the military power of China and North Korea has developed amazingly fast in recent years, with the President of the United States specifying three Asian countries as the "Axis of Evil". Meanwhile, nuclear weapons continue to be a sensitive topic for the U.S. and key Asian players. The worries of devil Asians taking over America have become more visible to many. Thirdly, because the sample selection was based on box-office revenue, which was overly representative of large action films and male characters, hazardous situations and occupations are more likely to occur and characters are forced to make quick and powerful responses to survive. This is likely to increase the frequency of threatening and hostile behaviors.

Despite less of a portrayal of model minority stereotypes, they are still moderately portrayed throughout the films in the study. As was the case with the yellow peril stereotypes, the films' genres and coded characters may have influences on the frequencies of model minority portrayals. Firstly, mathematics abilities are rarely attributed in contexts other than school, especially in action films. Secondly, traits like quietness are difficult to portray in films when characters have no lines to speak. As major characters are usually actively engaged in behaviors that reflect the film's theme, they are unlikely to perform any arbitrary activities. Thirdly, the traits that are suggested by model minority stereotypes would more frequently occur during

a peaceful daily life instead of the dramatic events of Hollywood films. It is also worth to mentioning the changing trend of Model Minority stereotypes within a larger societal or political environment as time shifting. It is apparent that negative portrayals of evil Asians are diminishing as the U.S. establishing a more friendly diplomatic policy with the Asian countries. The similar trend is observable in this study as well: the percentage of positive roles is increasing in new films that are produced after 2001 and the percentage of negative roles is decreasing at the mean time.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study is theoretically driven and referenced to previous references, it is still limited in a few areas. Firstly, the short number of coders limits the study in its reliability and may be influenced by the coder's subjective perspective. Despite of the detail definition of the variables in the coding menu, the reliability of the data needs further enhancement. Secondly, the study is also limited in its small number of samples that are narrowed down for coding, including both the number of films and the selection of major or minor characters. The sampling process based on box-office achieves the most viewed films in cinema; however, some low revenue films may produce profound influences on audiences' perception. This may include independent films and short films that are not commercialized and truly reflects the society without economical concerns. The character selection is another limitation in this study. Although the selection is guided by Exemplification theory, there are still a large number of Asian characters are portrayed as supporting roles or background images in Hollywood films, e.g. newspaper seller or restaurant server. Therefore, some interesting yet cumulative information may be missed due to the coding of only major and minor characters.

Future research may include all possible characters as coding subjects to make comparisons with the results from this study, which only coded major and minor characters. In this way, it may be observed whether types of characters can significantly influence the stereotypes that are portrayed. Scaled questionnaires may also be used to measure the intensity of each trait to be coded; however, it is essential

to have high inter-coder reliability. Regarding the film genres, future research may target different genres, like drama, to further examine model minority stereotypes. It is only when the details of daily life are drawn that traits in model minority stereotypes may become more observable and powerful.

This study is established solely for the purpose of building a quantitative foundation for future studies. There are vast amount of information to be further explored in the area of Asian stereotypes or any kind of stereotypes in films. Possible directions of future studies include: audience response to stereotype portrayals; differences of stereotype portrayals between Chinese films and Hollywood films; stereotypes differences within the Asian population, gender differences in Asian stereotypes, etc.

List of Tables

Table 1. Portrayal summary of content analysis

	Percentage		Concrete		Emotional		Salient
Astute	100%	See	100%	Emotional	88.9%	Key	88.9%
		Hear	16.7%	Robotic	11.1%	Unimportant	11.1%
Deceitful	88.9%	See	88.9%	Emotional	88.9%	Key	66.7%
		Hear	38.9%	Robotic	0.0%	Unimportant	22.2%
Family Oriented	55.6%	See	55.6%	Emotional	55.6%	Key	44.4%
		Hear	16.7%	Robotic	0.0%	Unimportant	11.1%
Hard Working	77.8%	See	65.7%	Emotional	66.7%	Key	61.1%
		Hear	50.0%	Robotic	11.1%	Unimportant	16.7%
Martial Arts Weapons	77.8%	See	77.8%	Emotional	66.7%	Key	72.2%
		Hear	27.9%	Robotic	11.1%	Unimportant	5.6%
Mathematically Intelligent	0.0%	See	0.0%	Emotional	0.0%	Key	0.0%
		Hear	0.0%	Robotic	0.0%	Unimportant	0.0%
Polite	50.0%	See	44.5%	Emotional	44.4%	Key	16.7%
		Hear	22.3%	Robotic	5.6%	Unimportant	33.3%
Quiet	22.2%	See	16.7%	Emotional	11.1%	Key	0.0%
		Hear	5.6%	Robotic	11.1%	Unimportant	22.2%
Sexually Seductive	100% ¹	See	100.0%	Emotional	40.0%	Key	75.0%
		Hear	0.0%	Robotic	60.0%	Unimportant	25.0%
Technological Competent	27.8%	See	27.8%	Emotional	22.2%	Key	27.8%
		Hear	9.9%	Robotic	5.6%	Unimportant	0.0%

Note: Top number in each box represents frequencies; the bottom number is a percentage

¹: All five female characters were portrayed as sexually seductive.

Table 2. Frequencies of concrete representations distribution

		Concrete	Average
Astute	See	118	6.6
	Hear	3	0.2
Deceitful	See	53	2.9
	Hear	11	0.6
Family	See	54	3.0
Oriented	Hear	3	0.2
Hard	See	54	3.0
Working	Hear	15	0.8
Martial Arts	See	107	5.9
Weapons	Hear	6	0.3
Mathematically	See	6	0.3
Intelligent	Hear	0	0.0
	See	41	2.3
Polite	Hear	4	0.2
	See	11	0.6
Quiet	Hear	1	0.1
	See	20	4.0
Sexually	See	20	4.0
Seductive	Hear	0	0.0
Technological	See	21	1.2
Competent	Hear	0	0.0

Table 3. Emotion valance frequency distribution

Emotional			
Astute	Positive	16	88.9%
	Negative	0	0.0%
Deceitful	Positive	13	72.2%
	Negative	3	16.7%
Family Oriented	Positive	9	50.0%
	Negative	2	11.1%
	Both	2	11.1%
Hard Working	Positive	11	61.1%
	Negative	2	11.1%
Martial Arts Weapons	Positive	12	66.7%
	Negative	0	0.0%
Mathematically Intelligent	Positive	7	38.9%
	Negative	1	5.6%
Polite	Positive	7	38.9%
	Negative	1	5.6%
Quiet	Positive	1	5.6%
	Negative	1	5.6%
Sexually	Positive	2	11.1%
Seductive	Negative	0	0.0%
Technological Competent	Positive	4	22.2%
	Negative	0	0.0%

APPENDIX
Asian Stereotypes Coding Manual

Purpose

In analyzing Asian characters in these films, we are interested in reliably coding the following:

1. Compare the Asian images in these films to old stereotypes in the literature, including the “Model Minority” and “Yellow Peril”
2. Examine whether these stereotypes are qualified as exemplars in influencing audiences
3. Whether they are concrete
4. Whether they are emotional
5. Whether they are salient

Instruction

To help you in the coding process, we have developed some ground rules based on previous studies and literature. There may be some extra rules that need to be added from the summary in the coding process. That is to say, we expect you to contribute your ideas and suggestions to these rules.

Following is a coding sheet and its coding key. You will be asked to watch a number of films that were pre-selected by the experimenter. You are strongly recommended to read through the coding sheet and coding key prior to the film watching so that you will be familiar with the variables that are to be coded. We are interested in only major and minor leading roles in the film who are Asian

American (this excludes Indians and Mid-Easterners). You will spot these characters and code their characteristics according to the coding sheet.

All films will be on DVD or tapes so you will be able to stop and replay scenes. Subtitles will also be available for clarification purposes. It is estimated that it will take you 1 hour to code each 2 hour film. Some may take longer, while others may take shorter. It is accuracy and reliability that we are most concerned with, not speed.

Variable Definition

Film: Give the title of the film you are coding.

Character: Give the name of the character you are coding

Major/Minor: Code the status of role the character is playing in the film. If he or she is the leading actor/actress, put Major. Otherwise, put Minor.

Age: Identify the age range of the character according to the suggested category.

Give the exact age if mentioned in the film (e.g. 21 Birthday Party). If it is still difficult to identify the character's age, choose Unobservable (05).

Note: this age estimation is based on the character in the film, not the actor/actress.

Sex: Identify the biological gender of the character. Transgender characters will be coded by their birth gender.

Marital Status: Code the marital status of the character. For those that are unmentioned or unidentified, choose unidentified (06).

Occupation: Code the profession that the character is doing as a career and write down the title of the position as well. We tried to group similar occupations into categories. If the occupation is not in the list, choose Other (08) and identify. If the character was not disclosed on his or her occupation, choose Unidentified (09).

Concrete: Decide whether the coded characteristics are narrated in a visual or audio manner. Circle *See* if the characteristic is portrayed in a visual manner, that is to say the character exhibited this characteristic in the picture and audiences witnessed by their own eyes. Circle *Hear* if the characteristic is only distributed from rumors, which means the characteristic is only distributed from people talking about it. It is possible that the characteristic is both seen and heard by the audiences. In that case, circle *See* and *Hear*.

Emotional: Decide whether the coded characteristics are emotional involving or not. Circle *Emotional* if the individual contribute emotions to the characteristic, for example, passions, hatred, interest, etc. Emotional involvement also exists in goal oriented behaviors (e.g. saving people, etc). Circle *Robotic* if the characteristic is considered to be dull and aimless. Be cautious to check character's verbal and nonverbal behaviors in expressing emotions.

Salient: Decide whether the coded characteristics are essential to the character's role in the film. Circle *Key* if it is an extremely important part in portraying

the character in the film. The characteristic is salient if it is significant in advancing the plot and shaping the character's personality. Circle *Unimportant* if it is only showing as an unrelated scene.

Note: All descriptions below are for coders' references. The characteristic is satisfied if at least one of the described categories is found in the film. That is to say, if any of the examples given is found in the film, code Yes for the suggested characteristic.

Family Oriented: Code if the character is family oriented. Family oriented is considered to put family before individual; making effort to provide a better life for family; willingness to sacrifice anything for his or her family.

Hard Working: Code if the character is hard working in his professional career. Hard working may include criteria like: is busy at work scene; is working overtime in the office; is doing an extra job for colleagues; shows willingness to sacrifice personal time for work, etc.

Quiet: Code if the character is rather quiet in personality. Quiet includes criteria like: remains quiet during discussion with others, is shy in nature, is incapable of or has difficulty in explaining thoughts, has a lack of words, prefers spending time alone, etc. Note: Do NOT compare between characters. Code the character individually.

Mathematically Intelligent: Code if the character's mathematic ability is highlighted. Mathematical intelligence includes criteria such as: extraordinary academia performances in mathematic related subjects; highly

educated with advance degrees; fast responding to complex calculation;
being referred to by others for help in math, etc.

Technological Competent: Code if the character is portrayed as competent in handling technology. Technological competent includes criteria like: profession in high-tech industry (e.g. computer engineer, program writer, etc.); capable of controlling complex machines; etc.

Astute: Code if the character is astute in the film. Astuteness includes criteria like: quick-witted in emergency; fast responding and flexible under bad situations; politic; agile in thinking, etc.

Deceitful: Code if the character is deceitful. Deceitful includes criteria like: cheating with partner and friends; deceive in order to obtain individual interest; betrayal; sneaky; including white lies; etc.

Martial Arts/Weapon: Code if the character's martial arts ability and weapon usage ability is highlighted in the film. Martial Arts/Weapon includes criteria such as: highly expert in martial arts and kongfu which cause physical harm to others; extraordinary in using guns and other weapons.

Polite: Code if the character exhibits apparent politeness in the film. Politeness includes criteria like: virtuous; respectful; frequent verbal apologies or appreciations; apologies or appreciations under unexpected circumstances; open the door for others, etc.

Sexually Seductive: Code if the character exhibit physically/sexually seductive behavior. Sexually Seductive behavior includes: verbal and physical flirting;

erotic seduction; seducing the other sex with sexual behaviors; etc.

Asian Stereotype Coding Sheet

Day/Date _____

Film _____

Character _____

Major/Minor _____

Genre _____

Nationality _____

	Y/N	Concrete		Emotional		Sallent	
Astute		See		Emotional		Key	
		Hear		Robotic		Unimportant	
Deceitful		See		Emotional		Key	
		Hear		Robotic		Unimportant	
Family Oriented		See		Emotional		Key	
		Hear		Robotic		Unimportant	
Hard Working		See		Emotional		Key	
		Hear		Robotic		Unimportant	
Martial Arts/Weapon		See		Emotional		Key	
		Hear		Robotic		Unimportant	
Mathmetically Intelligent		See		Emotional		Key	
		Hear		Robotic		Unimportant	
Polite		See		Emotional		Key	
		Hear		Robotic		Unimportant	
Quiet		See		Emotional		Key	
		Hear		Robotic		Unimportant	
Sexually Seductive		See		Emotional		Key	
		Hear		Robotic		Unimportant	
Technological Competent		See		Emotional		Key	
		Hear		Robotic		Unimportant	

Gender _____

Age Range _____ Your Estimation: _____

Marital Status _____

Occupation _____ If other, please identify _____

Coding Key

Sex

Male = 01

Female = 02

Age Range

20 or younger = 01

20s = 02

30s - 40s = 03

50s - 60s = 04

70s or older = 05

Unknown/Unobservable = 06

Marriage Status

Single = 01

Married without children = 02

Married with children = 03

Divorced = 04

Widowed = 05

Unidentified = 06

Occupation

Laundry worker/ Café Servant/ Other Unskilled Labor = 01

Professors/ Doctor/ Lawyer/ Scientists = 02

Computer Engineer/ Technology Assistant = 03

Martial Arts Master/ Body Guard = 04

Police Inspector/ CIA or FBI officer = 05

Car Racer = 06

Business man/woman = 07

Other (Please Identify) = 08

Unidentified = 09

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