

Stereotypes and Prototypes: An Analysis of the Disempowering and Empowering Portrayals of
Asian and Asian American Identity in American Film

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Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

Communication

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May 4, 2023

Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: stereotypes, prototypes, Asians, Asian Americans, identity

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ACADEMIC ABSTRACT

Popular culture texts such as films have become increasingly prevalent and powerful in dictating what we believe and know to be true. Throughout history, Asians and Asian Americans have been represented through disempowering portrayals that have evolved into stereotypes perpetuated in films. However, Asians and Asian Americans have worked to reclaim their identities and transform how they are portrayed in movies. Thus, this thesis examines four American films including “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961), “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005), “Minari” (2020), and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022). By conducting a modified critical discourse analysis of how these films portray Asian and Asian American identity, this thesis depicts how disempowerment in films is connected to negative stereotypes and representations, and how empowerment in films can provide prototypes that are more authentic representations of Asian and Asian Americans.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This study uses a modified critical discourse analysis to examine the representation and portrayal of Asian and Asian American identity in four popular films, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), *"Memoirs of a Geisha"* (2005), *"Minari"* (2020), and *"Everything Everywhere All at Once"* (2022). In the past, Asians and Asian Americans have been featured in stereotypical roles to disempower them. However, Asian and Asian American actors, actresses, writers, and filmmakers have joined Hollywood on and off-screen to rewrite their stories, reclaim their identities and portray themselves in holistic and empowering ways. A modified critical discourse analysis is used to look at these four films and how these films portray Asian and Asian American identity. The thesis shows that negative stereotypical roles lead to the disempowerment of Asians and Asian Americans, while authentic representation leads to the empowerment of Asians and Asian Americans further providing prototypes that are more strong, authentic portrayals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Logan, Dr. Watkins, and Dr. Woods for their kindness, support, and feedback during this thesis project. I could not have done it without them and greatly appreciate the time they took to guide me through this process.

Thank you to my mom and dad for all their love and encouragement throughout this program. I love you both. Also, thank you to Stephen and Christopher – the best brothers out there.

A final thanks to Peyton. Thanks for being my best friend and dealing with me. I could not have done it without our three-hour nightly facetime calls.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

While an argument can be made that the United States has moved into a post-racial era, it is imperative to recognize the reality that racial issues continue to plague our society (Donner & Billings, 2018). For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant increase in anti-Asian racism (Ho, 2021). From March 19, 2020, to June 30, 2021, the organization Stop AAPI Hate reported over 9,000 hate incidents against Asians and Asian Americans (“National Report”, n.d.). A post-racial perspective of society is problematic because it tends to overlook enduring issues such as demeaning, stereotypical representations of race in popular culture. Many racial and ethnic groups continue to be misrepresented in television, movies, and social media (Ross, 2019). My thesis advances research in this area by focusing on Asian and Asian American representation because, historically, they have been portrayed in ways that are riddled with racism. However, scholarly interrogation of such depictions is scant (Yuen et al., 2021).

Popular culture texts such as films are important to analyze because they are influential in society (Kubrak, 2020). Films are vehicles through which various perspectives of racial and ethnic groups are shared, and therefore, they affect how those groups are treated in society (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009). The purpose of my thesis is to reveal how Asian and Asian American identity are represented in American film in ways that are both disempowering and empowering. My thesis shows how stereotypical representations are disempowering and, by contrast, how holistic, authentic portrayals within film are empowering and can provide positive prototypes of Asian and Asian American identity. My thesis also addresses the societal implications of these representations.

Asian Americans are one of the largest and most diverse racial groups in the United States (Trinh-Shevrin et al., 2015). There are over 22 million Asian Americans who have roots in

more than 20 different countries, depicting the great diversity of this group of people (Budiman & Ruiz, 2019). Despite this rich diversity, reflecting complex and layered identities, Asians and Asian Americans have historically been represented as the Other, the yellow peril, or through yellowface portrayals. Asian and Asian Americans are also depicted in ways that conform to common stereotypes such as the model minority, perpetual foreigner, emasculated male, or hypersexualized female. These stereotypes are harmful because they inaccurately represent the depth, breadth, and authenticity of Asian and Asian American identity (Yuen et al., 2021). Stereotypes also overshadow the other layered identities Asian and Asian Americans possess ranging from sexual orientation, religion, country of origin, occupation, age, or economic status.

In the United States, Asians and Asian Americans tend to have little control over their media representations because they are underrepresented as owners and producers of media content (Yuen et al., 2021). Asian and Asian American people in the U.S. have not been in positions of power to control their representations, which has led to inaccurate, stereotypical portrayals (Ross, 2019). Overtime, media representations of Asians and Asian Americans have fostered assumptions that are not always true. However, because the media is so pervasive, people fall for the illusion that the media is unquestionably accurate and encompasses all there is to know about a group of people or a subject. Thus, what we see in the media becomes what we believe, and what we do not see in the media simply does not become part of what we know to be true. Collectively, these circumstances suggest that it is important to study how the media represents Asians and Asian Americans because misrepresentations often come to stand as forms of truth, justifying discriminatory and derogatory treatment (Ono & Pham, 2009).

My thesis will examine popular American films that address Asian and Asian American identity. It will employ a modified critical discourse analysis (CDA) of four films including

“Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961), “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005), “Minari” (2020), and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022). CDA was selected as a method because, as an analytical lens, it allows for a critical reflection of the language, interactions, and implications of the representations of Asian and Asian American identity within the films. CDA’s emphasis on critical reflection facilitates a focus on resolving social problems to achieve positive change, and it will be used to analyze how anti-Asian racism that stems from disempowering representations of Asians and Asian Americans in films can be overcome through empowering and well-rounded representations.

Each of the four films selected was chosen because it displays an important aspect or aspects of Asian and Asian American identity. “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) was selected because it was an early and influential representation of Asian identity in American film. The movie likely had little significant Asian input and portrays the disempowerment of Asian and Asian American identity through its reliance on yellowface representations of Asian identity and the emasculated Asian male stereotype. “Minari,” on the other hand, (2020) is an example of a recent, Asian American-directed film that depicts Asian and Asian American identity, more holistically, in empowering ways. “Minari” (2020) resists the static identity of Asians and Asian Americans and juxtaposes disempowering representations and stereotypes by telling a rich narrative of a Korean American family. The film does not rely on common stereotypes such as Asians as the model minority or Asians as the perpetual foreigner for entertainment. Instead, the film focuses primarily on the family’s story and depicts the economic, intercultural, and intergenerational struggles they endure, thus working in opposition to disempowering stereotypes and representations. Lastly, “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) consists of problematic portrayals of Asians females through the use of the oversexualized Asian female stereotype. In

contrast, “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) provides prototypes of strong, holistic Asian characters through depicting the story of the Asian immigrant experience and the struggles that come from it.

The four films selected for analysis also provide a means to productively analyze how Asian and Asian American identity is represented in disempowering and empowering ways. Disempowerment can be defined as when “individuals lack the ability to create a faithful public representation of themselves due to others’ failure to provide them with the means of doing so” (Valentini, 2021, p. 471). Within this thesis, disempowerment is juxtaposed against the concept of empowerment to analyze how Asians and Asian Americans are stereotypically portrayed in the selected films. Empowerment is a unique idea that stems from social movements in which subordinated groups liberate themselves rather than being subdued by dominant groups (Drury et al., 2015). Empowerment encapsulates the idea that subordinated groups recognize the power to change their situation and become “agents of their own transformation” (Drury et al., 2015, p. 4).

This thesis begins with a literature review about cultural identity, representation, stereotypes, and extant scholarship on Asian and Asian American representation in society and in film. The literature review represents the first step of my modified critical discourse analysis. Next, the following two steps of my modified critical discourse analysis will be employed, and the analysis of the four selected films will be discussed. The fourth and final step of my modified critical discourse analysis, the critical reflection and discussion, will follow. After the methods section, I will compile my findings in the conclusion chapter. Given the limited research that has explored both the disempowerment and empowerment of Asian and Asian American identity and representation in film, this thesis is positioned to make a unique contribution to scholarly conversations about race and communication.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Identity & Representation: Cultural Identity Theory

At its core, representation describes how certain subjects are portrayed or depicted (Fürsich, 2010). Identity is a more complex concept that is defined as the “traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is” (Oyserman et al., 2012, p. 69). These concepts are intertwined and further explained in cultural identity theory. Cultural identity theory was first formulated by Collier and Thomas (1988) in which they defined cultural identity as “identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that has shared systems of symbols and meanings as well as norms/rules for conduct” (Collier & Thomas, 1988, p. 113). This theory asserts that during interactions, messages exchanged among group members and those extended outside of the group may include “dynamic multiple identities” of race, gender, ethnicity, and nationality, which all interact with one another (Collier & Thomas, 1988).

Scholars have continued to build upon the foundations of cultural identity theory. In his 1989 piece, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation,” Stuart Hall strengthens the concept of identification from Collier & Thomas (1988) in relation to cultural identity by contending that cultural identity can be seen from two different perspectives that both relate to acceptance within a certain group. The first perspective is that cultural identity can be defined as the idea of one, shared culture – rather, a collective “one true self” (Hall, 1989, p. 69). In this perspective, the one, authentic self is hidden among layers of superficial “selves” or egos. This “self” is shared by people of the same race who have a common ancestry, thus providing them with a continuous identity and with a perceived acceptance with a shared system of meanings throughout history, and in accordance with Collier & Thomas (1989). In this first perspective,

Hall (1989) asserts that the identity within a cultural identity comes from a shared history, experience, and “one” culture (Hall, 1989, p. 70). However, this perspective primarily holds that cultural identity comes from the past and is rather a “fixed” notion, which seemingly contradicts Collier & Thomas’ (1988) concept of dynamic multiple identities. Hall (1989) argues that the West has ultimately ascribed a fixed, cultural identity to oppressed people which works to hide and disfigure their authentic identities.

Fanon (1963) describes how Western power distorts identity, writing:

Colonization is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. (Fanon, 1963, as cited in Hall, 1989)

Fanon (1963) makes the distinction that cultural identity is intertwined with the concepts of power and privilege. His work reveals how Western discourse has operated to fix cultural identity for colonized and oppressed people in ways that disfigure and destroy their genuine identities. However, oppressed groups have continuously worked against this fixed identity to configure their own authentic identities (Hall, 1989). These concepts represent how power plays a large role in the concept of cultural identity as cultural identity can be a means of disempowerment or empowerment. Empowerment thus allows the oppressed to reclaim their identity and strip themselves of the superficial. Hall (1989) maintains that the “hidden histories” or hidden identities are at the core of social movements including those that have pushed for more accurate portrayals of racial identity (Hall, 1989, p. 69).

Hall’s (1989) second perspective positions cultural identity as a “matter of becoming” and of “being” that transcends space and time. This perspective depicts cultural identity as

transforming with the “play of history, culture, and power” (Hall, 1989, p. 70). While different from the previous perspective, the two perspectives work in tandem. The second perspective of cultural identity as a “matter of becoming” building upon the foundation of the first perspective. Cultural identity, as asserted by a “matter of becoming”, is a combination of the past and the future. Hall (1989) states that, in this perspective, “identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (Hall, 1989, p. 70). In this perspective, we can understand colonization, and how it has influenced the way the oppressed have been portrayed and represented through Western discourse. Specifically, Hall (1989) references Orientalism to make the argument that the West has historically held the power to position cultural groups and the oppressed to experience themselves as the “Other” (Hall, 1989, p. 70). This perspective depicts cultural identity as both grounded, yet changing through vectors, or axes, of continuity and ruptures. Continuity is represented by the grounding of the past. Ruptures are represented by broken and traumatic changes throughout history. Hall (1989) asserts that when we can recognize both the continuity and differences in cultural identity, we can reclaim and reconstruct our identity for ourselves.

Hall (1989) ends with a call to action to recognize our differences and histories and to construct for ourselves the “points of identification” through media and entertainment. He concludes with another quote by Fanon (1963),

We must not therefore be content with delving into the past of a people in order to find coherent elements which will counteract colonialism's attempts to falsify and harm... A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover a people's true nature. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in

the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. (Fanon, 1963, as cited in Hall, 1989)

Consistent with Hall (1989) and Fanon (1963), I also argue that cultural identity is an ever-changing process that is influenced by dominant perspectives and resisted by oppressed individuals who work to create their own authentic, empowering identities. Hall's (1989) two perspectives work together to create a complex overview of cultural identity. His first perspective of cultural identity as being a "fixed notion" of the oppressed relates to the idea of disempowerment, while his second perspective of cultural identity as a "matter of becoming" relates to empowerment. Thus, the first perspective establishes the historical background of cultural identity and relates it to power, while the second perspective builds upon the first perspective by discussing how the "fixed notion" can become a "matter of becoming" through the concept of empowerment.

Later, scholars identified two primary aspects of cultural identity as being ascribed or avowed. For example, Sha's (2006) "Cultural Identity and Intercultural Public Relations" references Collier's 1994 and 2003 work in which avowed and ascribed identities are described. Avowed identity is an identity that is accepted by an individual who asserts membership with a certain group (Sha, 2006). Ascribed identity is the identity assigned to an individual which may not be the individual's avowed cultural identity (Sha, 2006). Avowed identity thus represents the concept of empowerment by individuals choosing for themselves how they are to be defined and reflects Hall's (1989) perspective of cultural identity as a "matter of becoming" in which individuals reconstruct and redefine their identity. Ascribed identity reflects Hall's (1989) first perspective of cultural identity as a "fixed notion" in the sense that an ascribed identity is one

that is chosen or fixed for an individual, which therefore portrays the concept of disempowerment.

Sha (2006) also breaks down the concept of cultural identity into two different perspectives. The first, the traditional perspective, asserts that cultural identity “is a personal characteristic that affects the self in its relation to society” (Sha, 2006, p. 50). The second perspective, the communication perspective, looks at identity as “the enactment of cultural communication” (Sha, 2006, p. 51). In the latter perspective, cultural identity can be altered, challenged, or reinforced through the use of communication. My thesis uses both perspectives. First, my thesis asserts that, historically, the cultural identity of Asians and Asian Americans has been a fixed notion positioned by the majority and ascribed to these communities, disempowering them. Second, my thesis asserts that Asians and Asian Americans are empowering themselves by reconstructing and redefining their cultural identities, encapsulating cultural identity as a matter of becoming.

Jameson’s (2007) “Reconceptualizing Cultural Identity” works to broaden the concept of cultural identity and describes five primary components of cultural identity including vocation, class, geography, philosophy, language, and biological traits with cultural aspects. Jameson (2007) also asserts that there are five main attributes of cultural identity. These include that cultural identity is affected by close relationships, changes with time, is intertwined with both power and privilege, may evoke emotions, and can be negotiated through communicating with others (Jameson, 2007). This builds upon the previous definitions of cultural identity in the sense that it provides new layers of what cultural identity entails, and how different components within cultural identity can affect a person’s identity. Jameson’s (2007) work furthers Collier and Thomas’ (1988) concept of dynamic multiple identities interacting with one another as Jameson

(2007) asserts that his five main components of cultural identity intertwine with one another. Jameson (2007) also argues that cultural identity is closely related to power and privilege, once again emphasizing how cultural identity can either be a means of disempowerment or empowerment and building upon Hall's (1989) perspectives of cultural identity as a fixed notion or a matter of becoming. Relying on an argument from Shin and Jackson (2003), Jameson (2007) argues that cultural identities have been imposed by those in power. This suggests, then, that cultural identities must be reconstructed and replaced to depict a more authentic self, once more echoing Hall's (1989) point about the importance of oppressed people reclaiming their identities and encapsulating the idea of empowerment.

Representation

Based upon cultural identity theory, representation refers to the way in which certain cultural groups are portrayed in a particular way. With relation to avowal and ascription, cultural groups may choose to accept a certain identity and portray it in a specific manner. However, cultural groups may also be ascribed a particular identity by the majority that is portrayed through certain representations. In this section, historical representations that were ascribed to Asians will be explored. Representations of Asians as the Other, the yellow peril, and through yellowface portrayals will be discussed.

Asians as the Other

Racial identity plays a major role in all areas of life (Verkuyten, 2016). Racial prejudice, discrimination, and xenophobia have long dominated the lives of racial minorities due to the perception of minorities as the "Other" (Khan, 2006). Representations of Asians encapsulate the Western perception of Asians as the "Other." Historically, the West has defined the "Other" as "different, inferior, and worthy of subjection to colonialism" (Khan, 2006, p. 1). Othering occurs when the dominant group in society negatively and stereotypically perceives minorities and

imposes an “Other,” exclusionary identity upon them. This process is often racialized and functions to alienate those who are “othered” by the dominant and more powerful group. In the United States and elsewhere in the Western world, a White majority has categorized racial minorities as the Other, characterizing them as inferior and threatening (Modood & Thompson, 2020).

Historically, Asians have been “othered” because of their physical differences from a White majority in Western societies. This dynamic is explained through the concept of Orientalism. The concept was formulated by Edward Said, who defined it as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, 1979, p. 3). Orientalism positioned the “Oriental,” or those of the East, as “irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, different” (Said, 1979, p. 40). Yet, it positioned Europeans, or the Westerners, as “rational, virtuous, mature, and normal” (Said, 1979, p. 40). Orientalism also captures the idea that the West creates knowledge, including stereotypical perceptions, about those from the East. These stereotypical perceptions ultimately create assumptions for the West that the East was inferior. Because of these perceptions, some Westerners assume that the “Orientals”¹ are not one of “them,” positioning them as the “Other”.

The concepts of Orientalism and othering also extend to the media and contribute to the creation of stereotypes and misrepresentations, which influence how people learn, understand, and perceive those different from themselves. Media representations of racial groups work to maintain cultural dynamics between Western culture and “Other” cultures (Said, 1979). Asian and Asian American representation, as shaped by Western discourse, is often a static, fixed ideal that mainly encapsulates the Western perception and assumptions of Asians as the “Other”.

¹ The term “Oriental” has a negative, derogatory connotation and should not be used in everyday language as a means to describe people (Niles et al., 2022).

However, the actual avowed and authentic identities of Asian and Asian Americans are much more diverse. With these dynamics in mind, it is helpful to continue to explore how Asians and Asian Americans have been represented, historically, as the yellow peril and through yellowface portrayals.

Asians as the Yellow Peril

Some of the earliest representations of Asians within America framed them as a danger to the United States' safety. Chinese laborers first arrived in America in the 1840s for several reasons including a rice shortage, the Taiping Rebellion, and China's defeat in the Opium Wars (Park, 2013). The rice shortage, due to high prices and a scarcity of grain, resulted in riots and was one of the most common forms of conflict during this time (Wong, 1982). The Taiping Rebellion, fought in 1850-1864, was a radical civil war that led to the weakening of the Qing Dynasty and caused great political distress within China ("Taiping Rebellion", 2022). The Opium Wars, fought in 1839-1860, were a result of a trade dispute over opium between China and Britain. China lost both wars, and as a result, was further weakened ("Opium Wars", 2022). Due to this political and economic unrest, Chinese immigrants went in search of better opportunities in America. Many came to California in search of work and to escape war. At first, the Chinese were welcomed due to the need for cheap laborers. However, as time progressed, Chinese immigrants began to face increasing amounts of anti-Asian sentiment (Park, 2013). Called "coolies," Chinese laborers soon faced hostility that was rooted in the need to "preserve racial purity and Western civilization" (Park, 2013, p. 7). This resulted in mobs, anti-coolie clubs, attacks, and anti-Chinese movements (Park, 2013).

The California Gold Rush of the 1880s was a frenzied time because precious metal was discovered in the state, attracting more Chinese immigrants to America in search of a new life.

They were soon seen as a threat and labeled as the “yellow peril,” a depiction of the Chinese as a danger to White Americans (De Leon, 2020). Perceiving Chinese people as the yellow peril is an example of Orientalism that positioned Chinese immigrants as dangerous, inferior foreigners who did not belong in America due to their differences from the White majority (Li & Nicholson, 2021). Racist cartoons portraying Chinese immigrants as unclean, unassimilable aliens became prevalent in San Francisco newspapers. These early media representations of Chinese people as the trope of the yellow peril were racist, causing a greater divide between White Americans and Chinese immigrants (Lee, 2007). Thus, these early representations of Chinese people as the yellow peril perpetuated racist ideals, grounded in Orientalism and othering, creating harmful implications for the Asian community as a whole. Because the media creates easily believable, yet often incorrect, perceptions of minorities, these early representations of the yellow peril were much more dangerous than simple cartoons.

Anti-Asian sentiment was fueled further when the United States government passed the Chinese Exclusion Law in 1882. The law was passed due to the growing perception of Chinese immigrants as a threat to American safety. The law stated,

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that from and after the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and until the expiration of ten years next after the passage of this act, the coming of Chinese laborers to the United States be, and the same is hereby, suspended; and during such suspension it shall not be lawful for any Chinese laborer to come, or having so come after the expiration of said ninety days to remain within the United States. (“Chinese Exclusion Law”, 1882)

With this, the Chinese Exclusion Law banned Chinese individuals from coming to the United States for the following decade after being passed in 1882. This was the first executive law in the United States that banned immigration based on a racial basis (De Leon, 2020). However, while the first executive law discriminated against Chinese immigrants, this was not the first instance of legal discrimination. In 1852, the California legislature enacted a discriminatory license fee that only applied to Chinese miners. In 1854, the California Supreme Court ruled that Chinese individuals were not legally allowed to testify against White citizens (Park, 2013). In 1878, a California federal court ruled that Chinese immigrants were not eligible for naturalization and were thus unable to become American citizens.

Throughout history, Chinese immigrants were excluded and disenfranchised in several ways on both local and national levels. Discrimination against Chinese immigrants helped to define the terrain of racial Whiteness and reinforce its exclusionary terms. Exclusionary laws against the Chinese and other Asian ethnic groups continued into the next century (Lowe, 1996). These laws demonstrate how erroneous representations of Asians as the yellow peril have had dire consequences in terms of discriminatory legislation and public hostility toward Asians in America. Making matters worse, these negative representations have been perpetuated throughout history and throughout the mainstream media through the use of stereotypes (Ono & Pham, 2009).

Asians through Yellowface Portrayals

Following the California Gold Rush, the use of racist tropes of Chinese people became increasingly popular within music, theater, and film. Songs produced about Chinese immigrants first began in California, before spreading throughout the rest of the country (Moon, 2006). These songs perpetuated specific stereotypes of the Chinese as inferior and unassimilable. A

common trope within this music was John Chinaman, a caricature of a Chinese laborer in traditional Chinese dress with a “coolie” hat in a mocking manner (Moon, 2006). This trope was used to highlight the differences between White Americans and the Chinese.

Early theatrical performances representing Chinese immigrants largely used yellowface to mock them (Moon, 2006). Yellowface is a practice that “features white performers who use dialect, makeup, posture, and costuming to figure the “Oriental” as temporally backward, strange, and diabolical for the purposes of entertainment” (Phruksachart, 2018, p. 97). White performers donning yellowface primarily used “English gibberish” and harsh accents to mock the Chinese, thus reinforcing the foreignness of the Chinese immigrants (Phruksachart, 2018). These portrayals led audiences to believe that yellowface was an authentic representation of Chinese individuals. These false assumptions solidified negative stereotypes of Asians—based on the caricatures seen on stage—in the minds of many Americans (Moon, 2006). This practice of cultural appropriation, defined as “the taking—from a culture that is not one's own—of intellectual property, cultural expression or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge” (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p.1), driven by a White majority’s ideas of what constituted the Asian identity, was sold to audiences in the United States and worldwide, as entertainment that depicted facts. This ultimately reinforced stereotypical misconceptions of Asians and Asian Americans (Ono & Pham, 2009).

The use of yellowface progressed from theater to film throughout the early 20th century. Yellowface in film represents the invisibility of Asians within Hollywood’s early days and depicts the “desire for the particular effects of a yellowface performance over a 'real' Asian performance” (Phruksachart, 2018, p. 97). Lastly, the use of yellowface in film helped to solidify

false stereotypes about Asians and Asian Americans because the content in movies is often accepted as a form of truth, as at least somewhat factual (Ono & Pham, 2009).

Due to the perpetuation of these representations, stereotypes of Asian and Asian Americans began to emerge.

Stereotypes

Bordalo et al. (2016) defines stereotypes from a sociological point of view as “fundamentally incorrect and derogatory generalizations of group traits, reflective of the stereotyper’s underlying prejudices or other internal motivations” (Bordalo et al., 2016, p. 1754). Because of the perpetuation of disempowering representations, disempowering stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans have emerged. In this section, sexuality stereotypes, the perpetual foreigner stereotype, and the model minority stereotype will be discussed to provide context for the analysis of this thesis.

Asians and Sexuality

A significant category of stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans pertains to sexuality. From the beginning of the first Asian roles within Hollywood up until now, Asian and Asian American women have continuously been portrayed as submissive, exotic, and oversexualized (Ono & Pham, 2009). For example, Anna May Wong made headlines as the first Asian American actress, however, she was cast into her first prominent roles as a scantily clad “lotus blossom” in sexually charged scenes in films such as “Toll of the Sea: (1922), “The Thief of Bagdad” (1924), and “Shanghai Express” (1932). While Wong certainly pioneered the way for Asian Americans in Hollywood because she was cast as a lead in films, the oversexualized roles she took on were problematic because they left a harmful legacy. Modern-day Asian and Asian American actresses must now consistently navigate if and how to take on oversexualized roles if they want to work in Hollywood films (Shimizu, 2007). Wong’s typecasting into

oversexualized roles framing Asian and Asian American women as sexual objects has societal implications. For example, a 2018 study found that the history of the oversexualized stereotyping of Asian and Asian American women has “increased the risk of sexual harassment for Asian American women” (Buchanan et al., 2018, p. 263). The oversexualization of Asian and Asian American women within film and television has continued into modern times in movies such as “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) and “The Handmaiden” (2016). These and similar films have continued to typecast Asian and Asian American females into oversexualized roles as innocent young girls serving as sexual objects to men (Shimizu, 2007).

In contrast, Asian and Asian American men have continuously been portrayed as emasculated individuals (Ono & Pham, 2009). Emasculation of Asian males can be traced back to the early days of anti-immigration laws banning Asians from entering the United States. Traditionally defining Asian males as the “Other” denied them of both their manhood and full humanity (Park, 2013). Moreover, stereotyping Chinese men as a threat to job security, contributed to ethnic antagonism which drove Chinese immigrants from mines, fields, and factories by White workers. As a result, Chinese men were forced into “feminine” professions including becoming tailors and laundrymen. These racialized labor dynamics reinforced the emasculated Asian and Asian American male stereotype. Thus, this emasculation worked to perpetuate the contrast between the feminization of Asian and Asian American males and the “manliness” of White males (Park, 2013). The emasculation that separates manliness from Asian and Asian American men reinscribes them as the “Other.” These disempowering stereotypes have been perpetuated in film throughout the past century.

Asians as Perpetual Foreigners

Perpetual foreigner is another common stereotype of Asian and Asian Americans. The historical representation of Asians as the “Other” has created the idea of Asians and Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners. They are perceived as individuals who are unassimilable aliens and are not truly American. Perhaps one of the greatest examples of the perpetual foreigner stereotype being actualized is the Japanese American internment period during World War II in 1942 to 1945.

After Pearl Harbor was bombed in 1941, Executive Order 9066 was passed which forced the removal of the Japanese to relocation centers as they were considered a national threat. Executive Order 9066 stated,

Now, therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, and Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy, I hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of War, and the Military Commanders whom he may from time to time designate, whenever he or any designated Commander deems such action necessary or desirable, to prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he or the appropriate Military Commander may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate Military Commander may impose in his discretion. (“Executive Order 9066”, 1942)

Executive Order 9066 was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, -- shortly after the Pearl Harbor bombing by Japan. This order stripped away the rights of those of Japanese descent and removed them by force from their homes due to their racial identity (“Executive Order 9066”, 1942).

Anti-Asian discrimination like this relied upon durable, negative representations of Asians and Asian Americans as foreigners and as the yellow peril. Thus, anyone of Japanese descent, even those who were American citizens, were forced into internment camps. This shows, in stark terms, the dangers of deeming a certain group the “Other” (Nagata, 1990). Even after Executive Order 9066, Asians and Asian Americans continued to face the discriminating effects of othering. Huynh et al. (2011) wrote, “Even when ethnic minorities are explicitly judged to be American, implicitly, in the minds of both European Americans and some ethnic minorities (Asian Americans and Latino/as), being “American” is equated with being White” (Huynh et al., 2011, p. 134). Even today, Asians and Asian Americans are perceived as perpetual foreigners and aliens within America.

Asians as Model Minorities

After World War II, media representations of Asians and Asian Americans began to evolve. Specifically, Japanese and Chinese Americans were seen as “rising up out of the ashes.” To encapsulate the idea of Asian American success in everyday life, the model minority myth was created in 1966 (Chow, 2017; addressed in greater detail later in this literature review). However, representations of the model minority myth have posed many dangers to Asians and Asian Americans. The model minority myth portrays Asians and Asian Americans as high achieving individuals and racially exceptional. As a stereotype, it has encapsulated all Asians and Asian Americans as quiet, successful, rule-abiding citizens of high intellect. Although a seemingly “positive” stereotype as it attributes characteristics of intelligence, civility, and achievement to Asians and Asian Americans, the model minority stereotype has several drawbacks and is a threat to these communities. By attributing the model minority stereotype to

entire groups of people, the extensive diversity of Asians and Asian Americans is completely overshadowed (Ono & Pham, 2009). Specifically, the model minority stereotype does not consider the disparities and differences among Asian ethnic groups in America. According to a 2018 Pew Research Study, Asians in America are the “most economically divided racial or ethnic group,” indicating that not all Asians and Asian Americans are as successful as the model minority stereotype positions these communities to be (Kochhar & Cillufo, 2018). Thus, the great danger of the model minority stereotype is that it ignores the diversity of the over twenty different ethnic groups that make up the Asian population within America and overlooks the struggles that many Asian ethnic groups face.

Another issue with the model minority stereotype is how it has historically been used to create a racial wedge, dividing Asians and Asian Americans from other racial groups including Black and African Americans (Ono & Pham, 2009). In 1966, William Pettersen coined the term “model minority” within an article written for *The New York Times*. The opening lines of the article depict the weaponization of the model minority stereotype,

Asked which of the country's ethnic minorities has been subjected to the most discrimination and the worst injustices, very few persons would even think of answering: 'The Japanese Americans,' ... Yet, if the question refers to persons alive today, that may well be the correct reply. Like the Negroes, the Japanese have been the object of color prejudice When new opportunities, even equal opportunities, are opened up, the minority's reaction to them is likely to be negative — either self-defeating apathy or a hatred so all-consuming as to be self-destructive. For the well-meaning programs and countless scholarly studies now focused on the Negro, we barely know how to repair the

damage that the slave traders started. The history of Japanese Americans, however, challenges every such generalization about ethnic minorities. (Pettersen, 1966, p. 180)

Through this, it is evident that the model minority stereotype was created with anti-Black sentiment. While the model minority stereotype historically has uplifted Asians and Asian Americans, it simultaneously denigrated Black and African Americans.

The model minority myth has also continuously been used as an exclusionary device. It has been perpetuated in the media throughout time by portraying Asians and Asian Americans in “nerdy,” “quiet,” and subordinate roles (Yi & Museus, 2015). This stereotype has worked to disempower Asians and Asian Americans as it attempts to create a fixed, static identity for them as a “homogenous” group (Yi & Museus, 2015). Asians and Asian Americans in the film industry have been challenging this stereotype by rewriting the way in which their identities are portrayed (Yuen et al., 2021).

My thesis extends scholarly conversations about how Asian American identity is represented in film and contribute to this under-examined, but growing, area of research.

Scholarly Perspectives on Asians in American Film

Scholars are beginning to explore how Asian Americans are represented in American movies. For example, Yuen et al. (2021) performed a study with both quantitative and qualitative components. A quantitative analysis of the top 1,300 films produced in 2007 to 2019 was first performed. Then, a qualitative analysis of the top films of 2019 was conducted to analyze the types of roles held by members of the Asian American community. The authors state that “to our knowledge, this is the most comprehensive analysis of Asian Pacific Islander (API) characters in film” (Yuen et al., 2021, p. 1).

Quantitatively, Yuen et al. (2021) investigated the prevalence of all API actors, actresses, producers, casting directors, and executives in the top 1,300 films from 2007 to 2019. In their

qualitative assessment, Yuen et al. (2021) analyzed the various stereotypes used to portray the Asian American community. As one of the most prominent studies within this specific field of research, Yuen et al.'s (2021) mixed-methods study primarily focuses on the disempowerment of Asian American identity by asserting the following conclusions: the API community is erased, silenced, and stereotyped in popular storytelling films. While the study provides solutions, including casting more API characters and moving toward more holistic representations, the study in itself does not focus as much on the empowerment of Asian and Asian American identity in film, which leaves the door open for further study in this area.

Tiffany Besana's (2019) mixed method study, "Asian American Media Representation: A Film Analysis and Implications for Identity Development" analyzed American films from the past 25 years. This study employed quantitative research methods to measure the frequency of the roles played by Asians and used qualitative research methods to study the various stereotypes used to depict Asian characters. Besana's (2019) research examined several stereotypes including the model minority, perpetual foreigner, and sexual stereotypes of Asians, and it found stereotype-resisting and stereotype-confirming representations. Besana's (2019) study mainly examined disempowering stereotypical representations of Asians in film. The findings of her study "illuminate the shortcomings of American media and the potential damage done when members of dominant groups write and direct the experiences of minority groups" (Besana, 2019, p. 205). Besana's (2019) work encourages more empowerment of Asian Americans to "tell their own stories" in a genuine manner, however the bulk of her study focuses on disempowering representations (Besana, 2019, p. 207).

Other studies have looked at specific frames for Asian characters in film including the Fu Manchu frame ², the yellowface frame, and the frame of oversexualization. For instance, Phrucksachart's (2017) study looks specifically at the yellowface frame put forth by "Breakfast at Tiffany's", while Paner's (2018) paper looks at the frame of oversexualization.

While several of the aforementioned studies primarily focused on disempowering representations, recent studies have examined the empowering roles of Asians and Asian Americans in American film. For instance, Nguyen (2022) looks at the empowerment of Asian identity within two recent films, "Minari" (2020) and "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" (2021). The study also examines the subsequent Reddit commentary on the films through content analysis. Nguyen (2022) provides one of the few studies that explores empowerment in tandem with Asian identity in American film, without directing significant attention to disempowerment. Jessop (2021) uses a textual analysis to study the empowering roles of Asian American identity within two films "Always Be My Maybe" (2019) and "The Half of It" (2020). The research primarily focuses on gender and sexuality, and the author concludes that the films reconstruct Asian American identity by rejecting stereotypes.

This review of extant literature about the representation of Asian and Asian American identity in film shows that while older studies primarily have focused on the disempowerment of Asian and Asian American identity in film by examining stereotypical portrayals and demeaning representations, newer studies have focused on the empowerment of Asian and Asian American identity in film by focusing on more holistic portrayals. My research for this thesis project has not yet identified a study that extensively examines both the disempowering and empowering portrayals of Asians and Asian American identity in film. Thus, my thesis fills an important gap

² The Fu Manchu frame has roots within the Yellow Peril stereotype and portrays Asians as mysterious, dangerous, and ominous characters with mystic powers (Chan, 2001).

in previous literature by extensively analyzing both disempowering and empowering representations and portrayals of Asian identity in film. My thesis juxtaposes these representations and portrayals to provide a better understanding of the representations, their impact on Asian American identity and their broader societal implications. While disempowerment in film often transpires in the form of stereotypical portrayals and degrading representations, empowerment in film not only breaks through these stereotypes but provides positive prototypes to create more holistic and well-rounded representations of Asian and Asian American identity.

Chapter 3: Method

To explore how American films represent Asian and Asian American identity in ways that are disempowering as well as empowering, my thesis will use a modified critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze American films with Asian and Asian American roles. CDA began first as critical linguistics and evolved into CDA over the years. At its core, CDA is an interdisciplinary practice that looks specifically at how power and language interact (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 1). In 2001, CDA was used to refer to the “critical linguistic approach of scholars” who look at “institutional, political, gender and media discourses” and how “relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 1-2). Fairclough (2001) further asserts that CDA focuses on language within the material social process.

CDA is a flexible analytic approach used by scholars from a variety of disciplines including leadership (Irwin & Rosselt, 2022) and public relations (Ciszek & Logan, 2018), for example, to examine an array of textual forms (Caldas-Coulthard et al., 1997; Luke, 1997). Because of its critical approach that maintains an explicit focus on power, CDA also has been used to analyze the concept of race within a multitude of fields. For instance, CDA has been used

to observe racial themes in children's literature, to look at race within the field of speech and hearing sciences, and to analyze racial violence in South Carolina (Rogers & Christian, 2007; Yu et al., 2021; Duffy et al., 2018).

My thesis draws upon CDA method because of its analytical emphasis on power and language which will facilitate my analysis of disempowering and empowering representations of Asian and Asian American identity within American film. Specifically, I employ a modified CDA approach to analyze four films including "Breakfast at Tiffany's" (1961), "Memoirs of a Geisha" (2005), "Minari" (2020), and "Everything Everywhere All at Once" (2022). I take a modified CDA approach to explore how representations such as Asians as the Other, Asians as the yellow peril, and Asians through yellowface portrayals, and stereotypes such as the emasculated Asian male, the oversexualized Asian female, and Asians as the perpetual foreigner and model minority are used to portray Asian and Asian American identity in the films "Breakfast at Tiffany's" (1961) and "Memoirs of a Geisha" (2005). Close attention will be paid to the films' disempowering representations and stereotypes in their portrayals of Asian and Asian American identity. Additionally, the modified CDA will be conducted to analyze the empowering portrayals of Asian and Asian American identity within the films "Minari" (2020) and "Everything Everywhere All at Once" (2022), and how these portrayals work in juxtaposition to disempowering representations and stereotypes.

The film, "Breakfast at Tiffany's" (1961), was chosen for analysis due to its representation of Asian and Asian American identity through the use of a yellowface portrayal. Mr. Yunioshi, a Japanese character, is played by a White actor using yellowface as a source of entertainment which works to mock Asian features and culture, disempowering Asian and Asian American identity. Additionally, Mr. Yunioshi's role is quite minor and is only featured in a total

of four scenes throughout the entirety of the movie. With limited screentime in a supporting role that depicts Asians through yellowface, this depicts a larger issue: the invisibility of Asians and Asian Americans in film. “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) was also chosen for analysis due to its use of the emasculated Asian male stereotype to portray Asian and Asian American identity. Mr. Yunioshi is belittled and emasculated throughout the entirety of the movie, signifying disempowerment. Lastly, “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) was directed by Blake Edwards, a White male, who chose to portray Yunioshi’s character through yellowface (General, 2022). This analysis of the film will explore and unpack the use of a yellowface portrayal and emasculated Asian male stereotype, as well as the representation of Asians as the Other and stereotypes of Asians as the perpetual foreigner, and I will discuss the implications of this.

“Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) was selected for analysis for the film’s problematic portrayal of Asian females using the oversexualized Asian female stereotype. Specifically, the film focuses on the story of the lives of Japanese geishas. However, the film was directed by Rob Marshall, a White male, whose directorial choices for the movie resulted in an oversexualized and inaccurate portrayal of the geishas in a disempowering, stereotypical manner. Additionally, Chinese actors and actresses were cast for the roles of Japanese characters, signifying the invisibility of the diversity of the Asian identity. By using the oversexualized Asian female stereotype to portray geishas, The film creates a disempowering and stereotypical portrayal of Asian and Asian American identity.

As time has progressed, Asian and Asian Americans have worked to reclaim their own identities as asserted by Hall’s (1989) “matter of becoming” perspective of cultural identity. These communities have worked to create for themselves films that empower and uplift their identities. Asian and Asian American filmmakers, directors, and actors and actresses are at the

forefront of the mission to rewrite their identities and tell their own stories and have recently made significant strides towards this.

The 2020 film, “Minari”, was chosen due to its upholding of a genuine portrayal of a Korean American family. “Minari” tells the story of the Yi family and depicts the authentic struggles the family faces. By avoiding disempowering representations and stereotypes such as Asians as the Other or Asians as the perpetual foreigner, “Minari” paints a more holistic, empowering picture of Asian American identity. “Minari” (2020) was written and directed by Lee Isaac Chung, an Asian American filmmaker and director, and features five main characters all played by Korean American actors and actresses, depicting the movement to create empowering Asian and Asian American films from the creative lens of these communities rather than from others.

“Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) was chosen for similar reasons to that of “Minari” (2020). An absurdist-comedy, science fiction film, “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) tells the story of a Chinese immigrant family and a multiverse adventure. Within the film, the main lead is played by Michelle Yeoh, a Malaysian actress (“Everything Everywhere All at Once”, n.d.). Yeoh’s character breaks through stereotypes commonly used to portray Asian women, such as the oversexualized Asian female stereotype, and instead is depicted as a strong female lead that must confront familial issues and save the world simultaneously. Additional stereotypes that are juxtaposed within the film include Asians as the model minority and Asians as perpetual foreigners. Directed by Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan, a Chinese American film director, “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) is a movie holistically portrays the Asian American immigrant experience while empowering the Asian and Asian American identity.

Methodologically, CDA includes five main steps. The first step is to focus on a social issue with a semiotic aspect. The second step is to identify obstacles, and the third step is to consider the social order. The fourth step is to learn how to overcome the obstacles, and the last step is to reflect critically on the analysis within steps one through four.

My thesis will capitalize on the inherent methodological flexibility of CDA and employ a modified CDA approach. More specifically, the first step of CDA was already completed through the literature review as the literature review has extensively laid out the social problem with a semiotic aspect: anti-Asian American racism evidenced in society and in media discourses, such as American film. The second step of CDA examines the obstacles that stand in the way of solving the social problem, and the third step of CDA includes exploring ideologies and social order. Because racially discriminatory ideologies in the form of negative stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans shape the social order that serves as an obstacle to solving the social problem of anti-Asian American racism (described in step one), my CDA approach will combine steps two and three into a single analytical step, which will be designated as step two for the purposes of my thesis. In this step, step two, I will analyze four scenes from “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) and six scenes from “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) to identify the obstacles to be overcome. My analysis of these films will focus on examining disempowering portrayals and negative stereotypes as well as the potential influence of the director’s background.

The third step³ of my modified CDA examines how to overcome obstacles to resolve the social issue. In this third step, I will conduct the same type of examination of films used in step two to analyze “Minari” (2020), and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022). However, this time, my analysis will focus on empowering representations and holistic depictions of Asian

³ In a traditional CDA, this would be the fourth step. However, since I am doing a modified version, this will be the third step of my CDA.

and Asian Americans that are not stereotypical. I will also address the influence of the director. Six scenes from each film will be analyzed. The scenes were chosen because they depict empowering portrayals that can be juxtaposed to disempowering representations and stereotypes.

The last CDA step, step 4, reflects on the prior analysis. In this step, I will juxtapose disempowering and empowering representations to compare and contrast how Asian and Asian American identity are portrayed in harmful or helpful manners and address the implications of these portrayals as well as the directorial influences. The discussion section will elaborate my argument that creating empowering representations of Asian and Asian American identity is imperative to establishing positive prototypes. I will reflect critically on my analysis and the media discourses they illuminate.

Table 1 lays out the steps of a traditional critical discourse analysis. Table 2 lays out my modified critical discourse analysis approach.

Table 1: Critical Discourse Analysis

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Identify social issue	Identify obstacles	Consider Social Order	Overcome obstacles	Critical Reflection

Table 2: Modified Critical Discourse Analysis

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Identify social issue and semiotic aspect: anti-Asian racism and the meaning-making of Asian and Asian American identity in media. *Completed in literature review	Identify obstacles in the social order: disempowering portrayals *Combines 2&3 of traditional CDA	Identify solutions: empowering portrayals	Critical Reflections & Discussion *Old Step 5

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) • “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic portrayals in “Minari” (2020) and • “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) 	
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Combining steps 2 & 3 provides a context for the obstacles in the social order; it allows us to see the obstacles in relation to the social order.

Research Reflexivity

I, Megan, identify as a Generation Z, Korean American adoptee. My family identifies as Caucasian, and my upbringing was Christian and incredibly conservative – which has allowed me to recognize the privilege my upbringing afforded me. For my entire elementary, middle, and high school education, I attended a private Christian academy in which I was the only Asian within my grade, forcing me to internalize my racial differences. After I graduated high school and started college at North Carolina State University, I began to recognize diversity in the world and began my personal journey of self-acceptance and self-discovery of my Asian identity. Learning more about myself led me to acknowledge the struggles of my community and has inspired me to focus my research interests on these struggles in order to bring awareness and help ideate solutions, of which this thesis is a part.

Chapter 4: Modified Critical Discourse Analysis

Step 1 - Identify Social Issue and Semiotic Aspect

Step 1 of my modified critical discourse analysis, identifying the social issue and the semiotic aspect, was completed in my literature review. The social issue focused on in this thesis is anti-Asian racism, and the semiotic aspect is the meaning-making of Asian and Asian American identity that occurs through a variety of media discourses and throughout society. My literature review outlined the prevalence of anti-Asian sentiment and discrimination perpetuated

through these stereotypical and racist representations within cartoons, law, and entertainment since the arrival of the first Asians in America. First, my literature review looked at the discriminatory representation of Asians as the other, Asians as the yellow peril, and Asians through yellowface portrayals. Then, my literature review looked at the evolution of anti-Asian discrimination into stereotypes such as Asian males as emasculated and Asian females as oversexualized. Other stereotypes explored include Asians as perpetual foreigners, and Asians as model minorities.

Asian and Asian American identity have been portrayed through these discriminatory representations and stereotypes within the media and entertainment. They have functioned to limit the scope of the stories that are told about these communities and have worked to disempower them. As the literature review discussed, Asian and Asian American representation within entertainment first began within music and film after the California Gold Rush. It then progressed within Hollywood beginning in the 1920s (Shimizu, 2007). Portrayals of the Asian and Asian American identity within film have evolved ever since. This thesis focuses on four films representing Asian and Asian American identity as film is an incredibly powerful medium and an important part of the semiotic aspect of meaning-making that can work to disempower or empower individuals and whole communities.

Within the remaining steps, I analyze four films including “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961), “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005), “Minari” (2020), and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022). I analyze “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) and “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) for their use of disempowering representations and stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans in step 2. Then, in step 3, I analyze “Minari” (2020) and “Everything Everywhere All at Once”

(2022) for their use of empowering and holistic representations of Asian and Asian American identity.

Step 2 - Identify Obstacles in the Social Order: Disempowering Portrayals

“Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) is analyzed for its use of disempowering portrayals of Asian and Asian American identity using an emasculated Asian male stereotype and the discriminatory representation of Asians using yellowface. This analysis of this film differs from the other three films because “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) is the only film of the four that does not feature Asians or Asian Americans within lead roles. Instead, the film only has one minor Asian character who is played by a White actor using yellowface. Thus, due to the limited screentime provided to this Asian character, this analysis of “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) will only include four scenes, while the analyses of the other films will include six scenes. “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) was selected for analysis to show the disempowerment that comes from only having one Asian character as comedic relief through the use of yellowface, signifying the invisibility of Asian and Asian American identity in film. It was also a very popular American film and one of the few to feature an Asian character at the time.

Each of the four scenes analyzed are important to this thesis as they depict the limited, stereotypical, and discriminatory portrayals and representations of Asian and Asian American identity within “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961), mirroring the larger social issue of anti-Asian racism. The analysis begins with a short summary of the plot and discusses the use of Asian representation through yellowface and the use of the emasculated Asian male stereotype.

“Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961)

Movie Plot. “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) is a classic, romantic comedy featuring Audrey Hepburn. Based on the book by Truman Capote, this film follows the life of Holly

Golightly, a farm girl turned into an “elegant socialite”, who falls in love with her new neighbor, Paul, a writer (“Breakfast at Tiffany’s”, n.d.).

Representation: Asians through the Use of Yellowface Portrayals. Mr. Yunioshi, the film’s only Asian character, is portrayed through yellowface. Played by a White actor, Mr. Yunioshi is portrayed with glaringly yellow skin, big buck teeth and glasses, and a mockingly fake Japanese accent. The implication of the representation of Asians through the use of yellowface includes perpetuating the foreignness of Asians and Asian Americans that leads to the alienation of these communities (Phruksachart, 2018).

Stereotype: Asians and Sexuality -- Emasculation and Asian Males. A prominent theme within this film is the use of the emasculated Asian male stereotype, which works to deny Asian males of their manhood and humanity, portraying them as weak and feminine (Park, 2013). In each of the four short scenes where Mr. Yunioshi appears, he is emasculated and constantly depicted as weak, feminine, and obnoxious.

Scene 1 (Edwards, 1961, 0:00:00-0:04:40). In the beginning scene, Audrey Hepburn’s classy character, Holly Golightly, is dressed in a beautiful black evening gown with dazzling pearls and a diamond hairpiece walking outside a Tiffany & Company jewelry store.

Holly, who has forgotten her keys once again, buzzes into her apartment building. She wants to get the attention of her neighbor, Mr. Yunioshi, so that he can open the door for her. Mr. Yunioshi wakes up and stumbles all over the place in a clumsy fashion. This depicts that he is unable to even have control over his body. With his unnaturally yellow skin, big prosthetic teeth, and thick glasses, Mr. Yunioshi begins to shout in a fake Japanese accent at Holly.

MR. YUNIOSHI: “In 30 seconds I going to call the police! All the time disturbance! I get no sleep! I got to get my rest! I'm an artist! I am going to call the vice squad on you!”

HOLLY: “Don't be angry, you dear little man, I won't do it again. If you promise not to be angry, I might let you take those pictures we mentioned.”

MR. YUNIOSHI: “When?”

HOLLY: “Sometime.”

MR. YUNIOSHI: “Anytime.”

This scene encapsulates the disempowerment of Asian and Asian American identity. First, the unnatural Asian appearance of Mr. Yunioshi is due to a yellowface portrayal by White actor, Mickey Rooney. To mimic and mock a Japanese man, Rooney donned fake protruding teeth, thick glasses, and a fake accent. Juxtaposing Holly Golightly's beautiful, fun, and flirty character, Mr. Yunioshi is used as comedic relief. Yellowface is used to portray this Asian character as more of a trope rather than an actual human being. Both his language - broken English - and ridiculous appearance are used to entertain the audience and represent Asians as minor characters who do not add to the plotline but instead are there for amusement. This scene also establishes a racial dynamic, with Holly seen as superior to the inferior, Asian Mr. Yunioshi.

Mr. Yunioshi is also stereotyped as an emasculated Asian male through his interactions with Holly. For example, she refers to him as “dear little man,” stripping his masculinity from him. Holly's demeaning comment indicates the assumed frailty of Mr. Yunioshi. She further emasculates him by teasing him with an opportunity to take pictures and flirting with him. However, because of Mr. Yunioshi's joke of an appearance that intends to mock Asians, it is clear that he would never get a chance with Holly, thus perpetuating the idea that Asian men do not get the girl.

The gender dynamic in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* also contradicts traditional norms of gender and power. From the beginning, Holly holds the power within the dynamic of the two as Mr. Yunioshi is rather submissive. This scene also portrays an idea of female empowerment over male empowerment as Holly, the main character of this film, is represented as the one with the power. While men typically are represented as the ones who wield sexual power, in this film, Holly wields the sexual power due to her being White and Mr. Yunioshi being Asian – an interesting dynamic that also portrays the idea of Asians as the other, deeming Asians as inferior in comparison to the White, Western world.

Scene 2 (Edwards, 1961, 0:14:36-0:15:20). In a following scene, as music is playing loudly in Holly's apartment, Mr. Yunioshi emerges from his apartment and begins to yell loudly and obnoxiously once again for Holly to turn off the phonograph.

MR. YUNIOSHI: "Once again, I must protest! If you don't stop that phonograph right this minute, I'm going to call the police department!"

As the music stops, Mr. Yunioshi turns toward his door to go back into his apartment. However, he clumsily runs into the door.

Thus, in this scene, Mr. Yunioshi's obnoxious and clumsy character is once again portrayed in an emasculated way. Masculinity is related to, and often associated with, the concept of control (Canham, 2009). Mr. Yunioshi is emasculated because he is depicted as being unable to be in control of himself or his environment. First, by clumsily running into a door, Mr. Yunioshi is portrayed as unable to control his own body. Additionally, by threatening to call the police instead of handling the problem himself, Mr. Yunioshi is once more shown as weak and emasculated because he cannot control the situation.

Scene 3 (Edwards, 1961, 0:34:40-0:37:42). In one of the following scenes, Mr. Yunioshi meditates in a kimono alone as Holly parties loudly with friends. Disturbed by the noise, Mr. Yunioshi angrily calls up Holly and yells into the phone.

MR. YUNIOSHI: “Miss Golightly? This time I’m warning you. I am definitely this time going to calling the police!”

Just a few minutes later, Mr. Yunioshi calls the police to end the party.

Through his overly angry, buzzkill character, Mr. Yunioshi once again represents Asians in an unflattering manner. Additionally, wearing a kimono and attempting to partake in meditation is an incredibly offensive representation of traditional Asian wear and practices – especially when used in a yellowface context and intended to “mock” Asian culture and identity. By making good on his threat of calling the police, Mr. Yunioshi is represented as a man who cannot control a situation, and as a result, he is considered weak.

Scene 4 (Edwards, 1961, 1:26:10-1:28:50). In one of the final scenes featuring Mr. Yunioshi’s character, Mr. Yunioshi is bathing in a bathtub when he hears the door buzzer. He looks up with a confused look upon his face and his prosthetic teeth protruding out, dumbfounded and in silence. As the scene pans to Holly going up to her apartment accompanied by a suitor. Holly is in an intricate pink gown and tiara, and the suitor is in a suit. Holly and the suitor both look up as they see something dripping from above. As they look up, they are faced with Mr. Yunioshi’s character disapprovingly looking down at them, dripping water on them.

In this scene, Mr. Yunioshi is portrayed as awkward, creepy, and incapable of doing ordinary tasks such as drying himself off after a bath. As he looks upon Holly and her suitor from above in silence, the characters are juxtaposed. While Holly is with her attractive suitor

who are both portrayed as well-dressed and as having social awareness, Mr. Yunioshi is portrayed as a silent, dripping wet man incapable of even speaking or drying himself off – indicating he does not have social awareness or basic social skills. With Mr. Yunioshi juxtaposed against the suitor, it is once again suggested that Mr. Yunioshi would never get a chance with Holly and the idea of the emasculated, Asian male is reinforced.

Directors/Actors. “Breakfast at Tiffany’s (1961) was directed by Blake Edwards, a White male, who chose Mickey Rooney to play Mr. Yunioshi because he was a “comedy director” and thought the audience would find it comical (General, 2022). However, this indicates one of the large problems of the film – Asians as comedic relief through yellowface representation which disempowers Asian and Asian American identity. As a minor character only portrayed for comedic purposes, Mr. Yunioshi is given limited screentime to perform one task: make people laugh. Mr. Yunioshi’s story is not told, nor is his portrayal expanded past the yellowface representation and emasculated stereotype. The yellowface portrayal is used to mock Asians and Asian Americans by erroneously dramatizing Asian features and even Asian accents – disempowering Asian and Asian American identity – it works to portray Asians within a limited, discriminatory scope.

Instead of relying on an Asian or Asian American to play this role, Edwards chose to cast a White actor in this part for entertainment purposes, overshadowing the talent of Asian and Asian American actors of the time. Moreover, Mr. Yunioshi was portrayed in an offensive manner. The lasting impacts of Edwards’ decisions are recounted by many. Jeff Yang, in a 2014 *Wall Street Journal* article, describes Rooney’s portrayal as “the godfather of the ‘Ching-Chong’ stereotype” (Yang, 2014). Even Edwards himself said he regretted his casting choice: “Looking back, I wish I had never done it. I would give anything to be able to recast it ...” (General, 2022).

This depicts the impact of directorial choices for how characters are portrayed and who was chosen to portray them. When White writers and directors depict Asians and Asian Americans with little to no input from Asian and Asian Americans, the voices of these communities can be lost amidst the prevalence of stereotypes, disempowering them, and limiting their visibility.

Awards/Acceptability/Criticism. Overall, “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) found great success. The movie had several Academy Award and Golden Globe nominations and won two Oscars for Best Original Song and Best Scoring of a Dramatic Picture. Throughout the years, the film has been revered as a Hollywood classic (“Breakfast at Tiffany’s, n.d.). However, as time has progressed, controversy has arisen over the movie due to Mr. Yunioshi’s role and the use of yellowface. Groups like the Council of Asian Pacific Islanders Together and other activists have denounced the film. In fact, in 2009, the protests led to Paramount, the studio that helped create the film, releasing “Mr. Yunioshi: An Asian Perspective”. This documentary “features Asian American performers and advocates in conversation about the role's lasting cultural impact and the broader context of Asian and other racial stereotypes in entertainment” (Yang, 2014). It is evident that while “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) has long been revered as a classic, it disempowers Asian and Asian American identity. The film uses erroneous representation of Asians through a yellowface portrayal and the use of an emasculated Asian male stereotype, and as such, has been the subject of ongoing criticism for the perpetuation of negative representations and resulting stereotypes of Asian and Asian American identity it fuels.

Conclusion. Mr. Yunioshi is a minor character, providing little to no substance to the film itself, aside from comedic relief. Authentic Asian representation within this movie is essentially nonexistent. However, this singular Asian character is used in a stereotypical fashion to juxtapose the protagonist within the movie. While Holly Golightly, as portrayed by Audrey

Hepburn, is a smart, elegant character with numerous male partners throughout the movie, Mr. Yunioshi is quite the opposite. Annoying, ugly, and clumsy, Mr. Yunioshi is emasculated, ridiculed, and disempowered through this yellowface portrayal. Yunioshi's yellowface portrayal depicts dramatized features such as intense yellow coloring of his skin, large glasses and prosthetic teeth, and a choppy, fake accent. These features not only mock Asians and Asian Americans but work to otherize them as distinctly alien to the White majority within America. His fake accent also represents the use of the perpetual foreigner stereotype as it indicates the "foreignness" of Mr. Yunioshi. Additionally, Mr. Yunioshi is portrayed through the use of the emasculated Asian male stereotype that stripped his character of any "manliness".

Within this modified critical discourse analysis, this examination of four scenes in "Breakfast at Tiffany's" (1961) portrays the obstacle to anti-Asian racism: stereotypical depictions of Asian and Asian American identity. By representing Asians through a yellowface portrayal and using an emasculated Asian male stereotype, the film strips Asians and Asian Americans of authentic identity and overshadows their stories with an inaccurate and offensive portrayal, further disempowering Asians and Asian Americans and limiting their visibility. Stereotypical depictions such as this represent the obstacle at hand that must be addressed to combat anti-Asian racism.

This analysis of the film "Breakfast at Tiffany's" (1961) has shown the disempowerment of Asian and Asian American identity. These identities are disempowered through the representation of Asians as the other and Asians through yellowface. The emasculated Asian male stereotype and the perpetual foreigner stereotype also function to demean Asian and Asian American identity. Mr. Yunioshi's character limits the scope of what the audience sees and perceives as Asian. Mr. Yunioshi's role as the comedic relief comes at the cost of ridiculing and

disempowering Asian and Asian American communities through harmful representations and stereotypes. The next part of this analysis explores the film, “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) and its use of the oversexualized Asian female stereotype – a large contrast to the emasculated Asian male stereotype.

“Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005)

I analyze “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) for its disempowering portrayals of Asian and Asian American identity using the stereotype of the oversexualized Asian female. This film was chosen for the erroneous depiction of the geishas as prostitutes and sex workers as opposed to their actual employment as high-class entertainers (Pedersen, 2018). Six scenes featuring the oversexualization of Asian females will be analyzed to discuss their harmful implications. All six of these scenes depict the stereotypical and oversexualized portrayals of Asian and Asian American female identity and will be explored further to examine how these portrayals contribute to the issue of anti-Asian racism.

Movie Plot. The film “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) centers around the life of Chiyo, a Japanese geisha, who defeats all odds to become the “most captivating geisha of her day” (“Memoirs of a Geisha”, n.d.).

Stereotype: Asians and Sexuality – Oversexualization of Asian Females. In “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005), Asian females are portrayed as oversexualized objects rather than human beings. Traditionally, geishas have played an important role within Japanese culture, and the word itself translates to “art person” (Pedersen, 2018, p. 2). Throughout history, geishas were “parlour performers” who sang, dance, and entertained clients. Additionally, geishas were considered “high-class and costly courtesans” as opposed to sexual workers and prostitutes as they were wrongly framed in Western discourses (Pedersen, 2018, p. 2). However, the geishas

within the film are portrayed as sex workers and complicit, complacent servants trapped within their profession. The power dynamics between men and women are often emphasized within the film, depicting the women as weaker, submissive counterparts. Lastly, the perpetuation of the oversexualization of Asian women within film has become an issue due to the ongoing violence against Asian women, indicating a large obstacle in combating anti-Asian racism and disempowering Asian and Asian American women through their portrayal as sex objects (Pham, 2021).

In contrast, Asian males within the film are not emasculated (in contrast to their portrayal in “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961)). Instead, they are seen as powerful figures who are the ones who “purchase” the services of the geishas and who “own” them. This introduces an interesting complexity and dynamic of the portrayal of Asians and Asian Americans in film. However, it is important to note that “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) takes place within America, while “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) is set in Japan – meaning that the context and culture within both films must be considered. Within America, Asians and Asian Americans have historically been othered due to their cultural and physical differences from the White majority, leading to the emasculation of Asian males. However, the Japanese culture vastly differs than that of America, and males do not experience the same emasculation or treatment as the other. Yet, “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) still has several issues with disempowering, stereotypical representation as the movie itself relies on the use of the oversexualized Asian female stereotype for entertainment for a Western audience.

Scene 1 (Marshall, 2005, 0:00:00-0:11:46). The movie begins with a 9-year-old and a 15-year-old pair of sisters being sold off to become geishas to a local businessman by their father because he was unable to raise the daughters alone due to their mother’s severe ailment.

However, the sisters are separated, and the narrative becomes centered on the 9-year-old sister, Chiyo, and her journey through her young adulthood as a geisha. The film is narrated by an older Chiyo looking back on her life.

As Chiyo arrives at the geisha house, she is locked inside a room with another young girl, Pumpkin. From that point, it is evident that Chiyo's freedom has been eradicated, and she must submit in order to survive.

CHIYO: "Let me go! Let me go! Let me go!"

PUMPKIN (grabs Chiyo and pulls her from the door): "Shhhhhh! Mother will hear you! She's got a bamboo stick."

CHIYO: "I want my sister!"

Chiyo begins to cry.

PUMPKIN: "I cried too at first. You know, it is easier if you just forget everything that happened before you came here."

This depicts the limitation of freedom and the submission of Asian women in tandem with the lotus blossom stereotype.

During the first few days of her arrival, Chiyo becomes friends with Pumpkin, and the girls work together to perform chores around the geisha house. Then, Chiyo notices Hatsumomo, an older geisha.

In the scene, Hatsumomo is getting dressed in a beautiful and elegantly decorated kimono. Her hair is done in an intricate updo, and her makeup is done as well to make her look pale. Chiyo stares in awe of Hatsumomo's beauty.

Already, the ideal of geishas as beautiful and elegant Japanese women is established. The use of intricate clothing and hair, as well as skin painted to be fair and pale represents the idea of geishas as the lotus blossom stereotype: fair, feminine, and passive.

Scene 2 (Marshall, 2005, 0:28:30-0:30:41). In a later scene, Chiyo accidentally walks in on Hatsumomo in an intimate moment with her lover, Koichi. After the fuss and noise, the Mother of the geisha house comes. At this moment, Hatsumomo lies to put the blame on Chiyo.

HATSUMOMO: "I caught her stealing. She was running away with her sister, the whore."

The Mother of the geisha house then beats Chiyo.

CHIYO: "She is lying! I saw her with a man. Right there. His name is Koichi."

The Mother of the geisha house slaps Hatsumomo across the face.

MOTHER: "You are never to see him again. What do you think? A geisha is free to love? Never. Bolt the gate. No one is leaving this okiya (house)."

Within this scene, the film portrays once again that the geishas do not have freedom of choice. Instead, they are trapped within their professions. Additionally, the scene portrays the hierarchy of women within the film. The Mother is positioned as the head of the geisha house and a powerful female character who controls and exploits the geishas which poses an interesting power dynamic within the film. Hatsumomo has more power than Chiyo but still does not have the choice of love. Thus, the scene portrays geishas as objects of men, bound to submission.

Scene 3 (Marshall, 2005, 0:45:40-0:53:18). In a later scene, Mameha, an older geisha, comes to the geisha house to take on Chiyo as her mentee. Mameha begins to train Chiyo to be a geisha.

Chiyo then asks when they get to choose their clients.

CHIYO: "Mameha, when does a geisha choose her danna?"

MAMEHA: "I'm afraid it's the other way around."

In these two lines, it is important to recognize the power dynamic between geishas and their "dannas" (clients). The power solely remains within the danna to choose who they want. Thus, this represents the intertwining dynamic of power and gender.

Scene 4 (Marshall, 2005, 0:52:14-0:55:57). A scene portraying Chiyo getting her makeup and hair done as a geisha in training reminds the audience of the pain that comes from the geisha's beauty.

Chiyo grimaces in pain as a brush with hot wax is used on her hair. To preserve her intricate hairstyle, Chiyo's pillow is replaced with a wooden stand on which she must sleep on.

Mameha highlights the pain of a geisha.

MAMEHA: "Agony and beauty, for us, live side by side. Your feet will suffer. Your fingers will bleed. Even sitting and sleeping will be painful. You cannot call yourself a geisha until you can stop a man in his tracks with a single look."

These lines and the scene of going to painful extremes to "beautify" oneself portrays how the film chooses to show the great lengths in which the geishas would go to be presentable to the

men as the goal of the geishas was to please men physically and sexually. Additionally, Chiyo is renamed Sayuri – indicating the erasure of her own identity prior to becoming a geisha.

Scene 5 (Marshall, 2005, 1:13:40-1:14:19). In a further scene with Mameha, Sayuri is perplexed at Mameha’s actions. Mameha explains she is helping Sayuri in ensuring her future.

MAMEHA: “I am trying to ensure your future.”

SAYURI: “But tell me how!”

MAMEHA: “I am trying to orchestrate a bidding war.”

SAYURI: “What for?”

MAMEHA: “Your most precious attribute.”

Mameha then explains mizuage.

MAMEHA: “Your cave is untouched. Men like that. It is quite valuable. We call this mizuage. And to become a full geisha, you must sell it to the highest bidder.”

Through this scene, women are oversexualized, and their virginity is described as the most “precious attribute”. Selling off one’s virginity to the highest bidder depicts the want for a “pure”, young lotus blossom. This depicts the imbalance of power between men and women, specifically geishas and their clients, within the film and perpetuates the oversexualization of women through the lotus blossom stereotype.

Scene 6 (Marshall, 2005, 1:43:20-3:06:50). Later, the movie progresses to World War II. Sayuri and Mameha are sent away. However, Nobu-San, a powerful, political male character of the movie, later visits Sayuri and says that he has a contract for her agreed to by a man named Colonel Derricks of the American army. Here, we see the dangerous transition into a power

dynamic between an Asian woman and a White American man beginning to form as Colonel Derricks has signed a contract essentially buying Sayuri for the pleasure of himself as well as for other soldiers.

When meeting Colonel Derricks, he refers to Sayuri as “...one of the mysteries of the Orient...”, thus perpetuating the idea of Asian women as mysterious and exotic.

Later, Sayuri and other geishas entertain Colonel Derricks, Nobu-San, and other American troops in a hot tub by flirting and serving them drinks.

Sayuri and Nobu-San step away to talk. However, Nobu-San makes uncomfortable advances toward Sayuri.

NOBU-SAN (grabs Sayuri): “I do not like things held up before me that I cannot have.”

This one line iterated by Nobu-San depicts his perception of Sayuri as a “thing” or object rather than as a human being, further oversexualizing and demoralizing her character.

This scene transitions to yet another uncomfortable sexual scene between Sayuri and Colonel Derricks. In this scene, it is clear through her body language that Sayuri does not want to have sexual relations with the colonel, yet the colonel does not stop his advances.

Directors/Actors. The film is based upon a book by the same title by Arthur Golden. First, we must note that Golden is a White American male trying to tell the true story of a real geisha from his own perspective (Smith, 1998). In fact, this issue eventually led to a lawsuit from the geisha, Ms. Iwasaki, as Golden had included information that she did not want to be included within the novel that was later carried on throughout the film. Specifically, the novel focuses mainly on the exploration of the geisha’s sexual relationships and the tradition of selling off one’s mizuage which are not roles of a geisha. Instead, a geisha was to provide entertainment

through song, dance, or conversation as they were considered “art persons” (Pedersen, 2018). This, in turn, led to several issues within the United States specifically as Americans largely began to perceive geishas as sex workers from Golden’s novel. In an interview with CNN, Ms. Iwasaki comments on the erroneous portrayal, “We are artists. We dance and perform music -- this is how we earn our living. It is not about sex” (“Author Betrayed Me”, 2001).

Thus, due to the breach of confidentiality and other issues, Ms. Iwasaki filed suit in United States District Court in Manhattan against Mr. Golden and the publisher, Alfred A. Knopf. Iwasaki sued Golden and Knopf for defamation, breach of contract and copyright violations (Sim, 2001). In 2003, Golden’s publisher settled the lawsuit outside of court with Ms. Iwasaki (Yumi da Silva, 2022).

Because the film is based on the book, the issue of inaccurately oversexualizing the geishas and their roles is prominent within the film. Other issues regarding the film are the selection of director and cast. Specifically, the director of the film, Rob Marshall, is a White American male who took the book and made it into a film that was made for a Western audience. In a *New York Times* interview about the film, the following quote was said by a fellow director venturing into the Asian American film industry, “American films are less American every day, because you have to please a world audience. There's less authenticity, so it's more accessible” (Ang Lee as stated in Halbfinger, 2005). It is particularly interesting to recognize how the film industry must diminish parts of Asian culture and hypersexualize females to entice more of the American audience to watch and engage in it. It depicts the idea of White America not wanting to associate or acknowledge the complexities of the “Other”, and thus, the differences of Asians must be diminished to assimilate to the White American culture.

Lastly, an issue with the film's creation is the cast. Specifically, Chinese actresses were cast to play the three main geishas (Halbfinger, 2005). This further depicts the idea that Asians are all one singular identity. By ignoring the cultural implications, this perpetuates the dangerous perception of Asians as all the same, disempowering their unique, diverse identities and highlighting the invisibility of the Asian and Asian American identity within film.

Awards/Acceptability/Criticism. While "Memoirs of a Geisha" (2005) was rated highly for costume design, music score, and cinematography, the film is highly criticized for its many issues. Film critic, Robert Ebert, states that the film "depends on the romanticism of female subjection. The heroines here look so very beautiful, and their world is so visually enchanting as they live trapped in sexual slavery" (Ebert, 2005). Thus, Ebert (2005), a White American male, acknowledges the oversexualization of these women within the film as perceived from his perspective.

Other opinion pieces have been recently published identifying concerns over the oversexualization of Asian females in films such as "Memoirs of a Geisha" (2005). Sociologist Nancy Yuen says the following about films including "Memoirs of a Geisha" (2005), "They're objectified, right? So if they're thought of as prostitutes and sex workers, then they're objects to be purchased, to be had, but not subjects to know and respect and understand" (Pham, 2021). Author Nathaly Yumi da Silva describes "Memoirs of a Geisha" (2005) as a "reinforcement of fetishist imaginaries" that perpetuate "one-sided narratives, reconstructing an oriental figure in order to suit Western expectations and ideals (Yumi da Silva, 2022).

Conclusion. Overall, the entire film oversexualizes Asian women as objects and fantasies, catering toward the Western perspective. This use of the oversexualized Asian female stereotype fixes Asian females as quiet, submissive, and in need of saving (Pham, 2021). By only

portraying the geishas within the film with this erroneous stereotype instead of providing them with more holistic identities, the Asian female identity is stripped down to a stereotype of a submissive, oversexualized individual – thus depicting the image of disempowered Asian women. Instead, a more holistic representation of geishas and Asian women in general would be that of portraying them in a more accurate, empowering manner that expands upon their actual work as entertainers and artists.

Within the film, oversexualization often occurs in tandem with age and race. The film shows the young girls as objects to older men. Other scenes depict these older men overpowering the girls, resulting in sexual assault. With relation to race, the concept of international sex workers and military bases is explored in which the White male, Asian female power dynamic can be seen. According to Pedersen (2018), it was during World War II and the occupation of Japan that the erroneous fallacy of the “geisha girl” began. “This fallacy leads to a general mis-categorization of the geisha herself as a prostitute or a nightclub performer” (Pedersen, 2018, p. 3). This misconception led to the Western world viewing geishas as “the female orient”, as well as “submissive, passive, and compliant” (Pedersen, 2018, p. 3-4). Yuen (2021) indicates the issue with international sex work and military bases, “The uneven power dynamic between American soldiers and Asian sex workers mean that these relationships are generally exploitative, premised on the idea of unlimited sexual access to Asian women” (Pham, 2021).

Through the oversexualization stereotype used to define Asian and Asian American females, they are constantly disempowered as sexual objects, reinforcing negative stereotypes and representations such as Asians as the other – exotic and mysterious Orientals.

This analysis will shift into step 3 which focuses on identifying solutions for the issue of anti-Asian racism. Step 3 will examine the empowering portrayals of Asian and Asian American identity in the movies “Minari” (2020) and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022).

Step 3 - Identify Solutions: Empowering Portrayals

“Minari” (2020)

“Minari” (2020) was selected for this analysis because it is a modern depiction of the Asian immigrant experience and a holistic portrayal of Asian and Asian American identity. In contrast to stereotypes of Asians as the model minority and representations of Asians through yellowface portrayals, common in American film, “Minari” (2020) instead tells the rich, authentic narrative of a Korean American family. It features expansive emotions, struggles, and feelings of the characters. The film depicts generational conflict and the hybridity of Asian and Asian American cultures. Six scenes were chosen and analyzed for empowerment and holistic portrayals of the Asian and Asian American identity.

Movie Plot. “Minari” (2020) is a recent, Academy Award and Golden Globe winning film encapsulating the Korean American identity. This movie tells the story of a Korean American family, the Yis, that moves to an Arkansas farm to follow the American Dream. The American Dream, defined by James Truslow Adams as, the “dream of land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with the opportunity for each” (Adams, 1931, p. 404), encapsulates the idea of equal opportunity for all. In “Minari” (2020), the Yis are in pursuit of the American Dream, and the film tells the rich story of the roots of a Korean American family and the hybridity of cultures (“Minari”, n.d.) they represent.

Prototype: Fluidity and Hybridity of Language. In this film, language demonstrates the fluidity of Korean American identity and the hybridity of Korean American culture. These

representations stand in contrast to the stereotype of Asians as perpetual foreigners and the representation of Asians as the other. Most of the characters speak varying levels of English and Korean. All characters with the exception of the grandmother, Soonja, are depicted as “code-switching” back and forth from English and Korean depending on the situation and context. Code-switching can best be defined as “the spontaneous switching from one language to another within a single speech event, is often performed by bilinguals who have mastered a communicative competence in two languages” and is strongly linked to bicultural identity and hybridity (Yim & Clement, 2021, p. 1370). The family’s switching back and forth between both Korean and English depict both their Korean heritage as well as their acculturation and assimilation as Americans. These depictions stand in opposition to Asian and Asian Americans being showcased as perpetual foreigners and outsiders.

Prototype: Generational Conflict. In “Minari” (2020), generational conflict is a commonality throughout the film. Due to the generational gap between family members, conflict often arises. Immigrating to America often means forgoing parts of one’s culture to assimilate. Language is a primary example. Grandma Soonja, a Korean native, speaks only Korean and does not speak English, while David, the youngest child who was born and raised in America, is resistant to his Korean heritage and primarily speaks English. These language differences exemplify generational differences. In doing so, they display the complexity of Asian and Asian American identity. Thus, the way the characters’ generational differences are portrayed indicates a more holistic Asian representation when juxtaposed against the stereotype of Asians as the model minority.

Scene 1 (Chung, 2020, 0:00:00 – 0:14:47). In the first 15 minutes of the film, the Yi family is introduced to the audience. The family has just moved to a large plot of land in

Arkansas to follow the father (Jacob)'s dream of having a large farm, where the family will grow Korean fruits and vegetables – indicating the hybridity of cultures. Conflict arises when Monica, Jacob's wife, seems unsure of their decision to move due to financial issues and the couple is seen arguing that night.

JACOB (in Korean): “We said we wanted a new start. This is it.”

MONICA (in Korean): “If this is the start you wanted, maybe there's no chance for us.”

This depicts a layer of complexity of their identity by portraying the family experiencing financial and marital issues in juxtaposition to the model minority stereotype that insists Asians are financially successful and conflict adverse.

The following morning, the youngest child, David, pours himself a glass of Mountain Dew and remarks: “My favorite, my favorite” in English, while his older sister, Anne, eats a bowl of cereal with milk. Then, the camera pans to a front view of Monica speaking to the children, while behind her, the audience can see a multitude of Korean ingredients in large bottles with Korean descriptions on the front. This simple scene depicts the hybridity of the Korean American identity - equally Korean, equally American.

Scene 2 (Chung, 2020, 0:20:59-0:35:47). In a following scene, Jacob makes friends with a local farmer, Paul, who teaches him how to prepare his fields the “Arkansas way”. They spend the day preparing and planting the fields, depicting the hybridity of cultures in juxtaposition of representing Asians as the ostracized other.

That night, the scene shifts to Monica and Soonja preparing a cup of herbal medicine brought from Korea for David to help with his heart murmur. Later, David refuses to sleep in his room as he must share it with Soonja.

DAVID (in English): “There’s a Korea smell!”

ANNE (in English): “You’ve never even been to Korea!”

DAVID (in English): “Grandma smells like Korea.”

Both parents are incredibly upset with David’s comments. It is interesting to see the generational gap occurring between David and his parents. Although young, David speaks English the most out of the family and seems resistant to his Korean heritage and culture.

The next day, during lunchtime, David asks Soonja a series of questions.

DAVID (in Korean): “Grandma, you can’t cook?”

SOONJA (in Korean): “No, I can’t.”

DAVID (in Korean): “Can you bake cookies?”

SOONJA (in Korean): “No.”

DAVID (in Korean): “Then what can you do?”

David’s dialogue with Soonja depict his disappointment with his grandmother’s abilities as a “grandma”. In his mind, he believes a grandmother is that as depicted from a Western perspective: someone who cooks and can bake cookies. However, to his dismay, Soonja is unable to perform these tasks– portraying generational conflict between David and Soonja.

The scene also depicts hybridity of both cultures. The children are seen eating spaghetti from a can and Mountain Dew, and after, the children and Soonja play a Korean card game.

Scene 3 (Chung, 2020, 0:38:35-0:41:40). In a later scene as Anne and David walk outside with Soonja, they express their dissatisfaction with their grandmother in English. They know Soonja cannot fully understand.

ANNE: “Did you know she can’t read?”

DAVID: “She isn’t like a real grandma.”

Because of her strong Korean heritage and because of their perception of an American “grandma”, the children are once again disappointed in Soonja as she does not match up to their perception of what a grandmother should be like.

However, on their walk, Soonja tells the children that she has brought minari seeds and wants to plant them. Minari is a Korean watercress plant, and thus, is a fitting title to this movie due to its metaphorical meaning that will be explained further in this analysis.

That night, during dinner, the family is gathered watching Korean television as a man and woman begin singing a Korean love song together.

SOONJA: “Hey, this is your favorite song.”

MONICA: “This song?”

SOONJA: “Anytime anyone asked you two to sing, you would sing this looking at each other all lovey-dovey. It’d make our skin crawl.”

MONICA: “Is that so?”

SOONJA: “They come to America and forget everything...”

Soonja’s comment brings forth relevance for Korean American immigrants. Although they may not forget every part of their Korean heritage, assimilating within the United States often means forgetting parts and pieces of one’s culture to fit in. It is most interesting to see this in the language. Specifically, Soonja speaks the least amount of English as the oldest member of the family, while David speaks the most amount of English as the youngest member of the family.

Scene 4 (Chung, 2020, 0:51:00-0:54:40). David's detestation for his grandmother continuously shows throughout the movie. Soonja asks David to bring him a cup of Mountain Dew, and instead, David urinates into a cup and hands it to her to drink and runs away. Later, Monica and Jacob make David apologize to Soonja for which he does so half-heartedly.

DAVID (in Korean): "Sorry."

JACOB (in Korean): "You call that an apology? Do it properly."

DAVID (in Korean): "She's not even a real grandma."

JACOB and MONICA: "David!"

SOONJA: "It's okay, it's okay! Just don't do it again, okay? I'll try to be a real grandma for now on. Okay?"

Thus, the divide between Americanized David and traditionally Korean Soonja is clear. Soonja herself even recognizes that she does not meet David's expectations of what a "grandmother" ought to be due to his Western acculturation.

Scene 5 (Chung, 2020, 1:05:54-1:15:10). In this scene, David and Soonja are depicted as becoming closer. Interestingly enough, Soonja continues to pick up English words and tries to connect with David in English. Yet, David begins to speak more Korean as he grows a closer bond with Soonja and even begins calling her by the Korean word for "grandma" – halmeoni. This shows the hybridity of cultures through the power of language. The scene begins with David accidentally hurting his foot. After helping him tend to his wound, Soonja remarks his strength and courage.

SOONJA (in English): "David, you're a strong boy!"

David smiles proudly.

The pair walk together to observe the minari's growth near the river. In a short conversation, David and Soonja's hybridity of language is seen.

SOONJA (in English): "Minari is wonderful, wonderful! Wonderful, wonderful minari ... thank you very, very much!"

DAVID (in Korean): "Halmeoni, look at that!"

As David points to a snake, Soonja tells him to leave it alone and to not throw a stone at it. The scene then pans to David dropping the stone at his feet and an interesting contrast is once again made regarding footwear: Soonja is seen wearing long, white socks with Korean woven slide sandals while David is seen wearing his cowboy boots – a scene showing the hybridity of Korean and American cultures together in one place.

Later that night, when David is scared, Soonja comforts him like any grandmother. She sings him to sleep in English. Although she does not speak English like what David perceives a grandmother to speak and although she may be different culturally, Soonja is represented as a grandmother, the same as any other. Thus, family breaks the boundaries of culture through their display of hybridity.

Scene 6 (Chung, 2020, 01:42:14-01:54:32). At the end of the film, disaster strikes as the barn full of produce goes up in flames accidentally caused by Soonja. Because of this, Soonja tries to leave forever. However, Anne and David run after her to convince her to stay.

DAVID (in Korean): “Grandma! Grandma! Don’t go! Come home with us! Grandma! Come home with us!”

This scene demonstrates that David has formed a great love for Soonja and wants her to remain at home as part of the family.

At the very end of the film, the camera pans to Jacob and David picking the minari. Grandma had found a good place for minari to grow near the river, and thus, they had an abundance of the produce. Although they had lost all of the other produce Jacob had grown in the barn fire, they were left with minari growing strong alongside the river.

This is symbolic for a few reasons. Jacob grew the other produce trying so desperately to follow the American dream. When all else fails, the Korean minari grows strong, firmly rooted in the Arkansas soil. Minari is symbolic. Minari is grown by the family after Soonja brings the seeds from Korea. Minari, a pinnacle Korean plant, grows within the ground with roots in America- just like the Yi family, depicting the hybridity of cultures and the assimilation that both the minari and family experienced.

Directors/Actors. “Minari” (2020) was written and directed by Asian American director, Isaac Lee Chung. Chung was inspired by his own experiences, “A lot of this film is me putting myself in many of the characters” (Chan, 2021). The Yi family are all played by Korean and Korean American actors and actresses – an appropriate casting choice for a story about Korean American immigrants. By writing the story from his own perspective as an Asian American, Chung is able to tell the story of the Yis in an authentic manner that provides a complex perspective of Asian and Asian American identities.

Awards/Acceptability/Criticism. Overall, “Minari” (2020) was a highly rated and well-accepted movie. The movie currently has a 98% rating on Rotten Tomatoes and has been reviewed positively by many critics (“Minari Review”, n.d.). For instance, the *New York Times* calls “Minari” (2020) “lovely” and “revelatory” saying, “It all seems simple and straightforward. “Minari” (2020) is modest, specific, and thrifty, like the lives it surveys. There’s nothing small about it, though, because it operates at the true scale of life” (Scott, 2021). *New York Times* writer, Michelle No, discusses “Minari” (2020) in relation to her own experience as a Korean American: “Because “Minari” (2020) doesn’t lean on stereotypical ideas of immigrants, some of these nuances might have been harder to notice. As in reality, hope and suffering occupy the same scenes” (No, 2021). The struggles and emotions that “Minari” (2020) expands upon help to portray Asians and Asian Americans in a more genuine manner, thus empowering them past their stereotypes.

The film received seven Oscar nominations and won for Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role, thus proving that films can find great success even when written and directed by an Asian or Asian American director and when Asians and Asian Americans are casted to play the main characters (“Awards”, n.d.) Interestingly enough, during the 2021 awards season for films, there was much controversy as “Minari” (2020) was considered a foreign film at the Golden Globes. Although made in America and centered around an American family, “Minari” (2020) was ultimately labeled a foreign film from a language perspective due to the movie being over 50% in Korean. Yet, this problem ought to be addressed. While it is true that over half of the film is in Korean, one cannot represent Korean American identity without bringing into account the languages spoken.

Conclusion. “Minari” (2020) is a film that tells the story of a Korean American immigrant family from a Korean American perspective. It depicts the complexity of the Korean American identity by highlighting the struggles the Yi family faces as they try to live the American dream – humanizing the family. In doing so, the film empowers Asian and Asian American identity by depicting the complicated layers of identity such as generational barriers, financial troubles, health issues, and even racism. Rather than relying on stereotypes such as model minorities or perpetual foreigners, “Minari” (2020) exposes the complexity of Asians and Asian American identity. By expanding the perspective of what constitutes the Asian and Asian American identity, “Minari” (2020) shows the beautiful story with this “incredibly honest portrayal of life” (No, 2021). In juxtaposition of the use of disempowering representations of Asians through yellowface portrayals or Asians as the other, “Minari” (2020) depicts Asians in an empowering manner by having Korean American actors and actresses portray the characters and by portraying the Yi family as a truly “American” family, rather than outsiders.

Lastly, the overall success of the film shows how Asian and Asian American filmmakers, actors, and actresses are pioneering their way in Hollywood to create and portray more holistic and empowering prototypes while telling their own authentic stories.

“Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022)”

“Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) was selected for analysis because it is a recent film that empowers Asian and Asian American identity. It empowers Asian and Asian American identity through its use of holistic depictions that contrast discriminatory representation such as Asians as the other and yellowface portrayals. Similarly, the film rebukes common stereotypes of Asian sexuality and the model minority myth. Instead, the movie

displays the complexity of Asian American identity by addressing the immigration experience, LGBTQIA+ representation, generational trauma, and mental health.

Six scenes were chosen for analysis. Most of these scenes are longer in length than the scenes from the three previous films. This is due to the complexity of the film itself as it centers around the concept of the multiverse, “a collection of different universes that are thought by some people to exist at the same time (“Multiverse”, n.d.). Additionally, each of the selected scenes has an abundance of rich dialogue that is important for the analysis. Like several recent films about Asian and Asian American identity such as “Crazy Rich Asians” (2018), “Searching” (2018), “Parasite” (2019), “Always Be My Maybe”, and “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings” (2021), the length and complexity of “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) indicates the evolution of the visibility and depth of Asian and Asian American representation in American movies.

Movie Plot. “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) is described by the *New York Times* as both a “metaphysical multiverse galaxy-brain head trip” and “a bittersweet domestic drama, a marital comedy, a story of immigrant striving and a hurt-filled ballad of mother-daughter love” (Scott, 2022). As an absurdist, science-fiction film, “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) plays upon the metaverse concept while exploring the complex emotions, feelings, and struggles of an Asian immigrant family.

“Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) focuses on Evelyn Wang and her strained relationships with her husband, Waymond, and her daughter, Joy.

Together, Evelyn and Waymond run a laundromat. As a young woman, Evelyn left China to move to America with Waymond – much to her father’s dismay. As a result, her father, referred to as “Gong Gong” throughout the movie, was disappointed in Evelyn and he

disowned her for many years. The film begins with a tired and stressed Evelyn working to prepare for an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) audit. Gong Gong has come to visit the family. In the meantime, Evelyn's husband, Waymond, attempts to discuss divorce with her and struggles to get her attention. Joy, her daughter, also tries to talk to Evelyn about her (Joy's) relationship with her girlfriend, Becky (Scott, 2022).

The couple bring Gong Gong to the IRS audit meeting with their agent, Deirdre. During this meeting, Evelyn encounters Alpha Waymond. He is from an alternate universe and a bolder and different version of her husband, Waymond. Accompanied by Alpha Waymond, Evelyn must harness the powers of the multiverse to defeat the villain of the movie, Jobu Tupaki.

Prototype: the Asian American Immigrant Experience. The multiverse within the film is a metaphor for the Asian American immigrant experience (Cheng, 2022). Jumping from universe to universe is symbolic of Asian immigrants having to “jump” or switch from between multiple identities – depending on the situation. This is depicted in the characters' constant code switching from Cantonese, to Mandarin, and to English. The film shows the struggles of Asian American immigrant life including language barriers and generational trauma. Within “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022), the language barrier divides the family in an intergenerational manner. While Joy does not speak Cantonese or Mandarin very well, her mother, father, and grandfather do not speak English well, depicting the kinds of misunderstanding and miscommunication that can occur when family members have different linguistic knowledge and abilities. This raw and authentic portrayal of what it is like to be an Asian American immigrant family challenges the limited scope of Asians depicted as perpetual foreigners because the movie shows the family working to assimilate into the American culture through language.

Prototype: LGBTQIA+ Representation. “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) explores sexual identity and the struggles that may arise through the depiction of Evelyn and Joy’s strained relationship. The strain revolves around Joy’s queerness, and Evelyn’s inability to fully accept her daughter because of this. However, the film also celebrates queerness as Evelyn learns to find joy and pride in her daughter.

Prototype: Generational Trauma and Mental Health. One of the largest themes within the film is generational trauma, which is at the core of the conflict and struggles that the characters face. The Asian and Asian American cultures have high expectations, and many individuals may face family pressure that results from generational trauma. Generational trauma is passed from generation to generation as a result from the stress, loneliness, and isolation that is often associated with the immigration experience. Alongside generational trauma, the high expectations parents may have of their children due to cultural values results in an increased amount of stress and mental health issues. (“Expectations and Family Pressure”, n.d.) “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) portrays generational trauma in a genuine manner showing the struggles both Evelyn and Joy face as they must face the disappointment of their parents as they have not met the high expectations placed upon them. However, most importantly, “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) shows the healing process from generational trauma that takes place as the women learn to accept their mistakes and live their lives authentically and without regret. This theme portrays Asians and Asian Americans as imperfect people. Instead of depicting them as model minorities who are high-achieving individuals, “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) shows the struggles of what Asians and Asian Americans face such as mental health issues and generational trauma resulting from

the inability to meet expectations. With these understandings, the analysis will commence and unfold across six scenes.

Scene 1 (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022, 0:3:55-0:10:15). Evelyn is seen walking up the stairs to the family's apartment above the laundromat as Waymond makes dinner for the family.

EVELYN: "It's Joy. She brought Becky."

WAYMOND: "Remember? We told Ms. Deirdre that Joy would come to avoid any more miscommunications, so Becky is going to help watch Gong Gong."

Becky, Joy's girlfriend, and Joy enter the apartment

BECKY: "Hi Mr. Wang!"

WAYMOND: "Thank you for coming! You can call me Waymond!"

As Waymond and Becky embrace in a hug, Evelyn is overheard speaking to Joy. In this scene, the issues Evelyn has accepting her daughter's sexuality begin to arise.

EVELYN: "You know, he doesn't have to stay."

JOY: "Who's 'he'?"

EVELYN: "Becky."

JOY: "Becky's a 'she'."

EVELYN: "You know me. I always mix up 'he', 'she'. In Chinese, just one word, so easy. And the way you two are dressed, I'm sure I'm not the only one calling him 'he'. I mean, her 'him'. Ugh! Anyways, my English is fine, and we have Google. So, you don't have to come and be a translator. You can stay here (motions to Becky), and she can go."

JOY: Look, I honestly think it's weird, okay? But Becky wants to help.

Shortly after, Evelyn runs downstairs to help manage the laundromat, and Joy follows her in hopes of discussing Becky meeting her grandfather Gong Gong. However, Evelyn is clearly against the idea.

EVELYN: “You are very lucky your mother is open to you dating a girl...But Gong Gong, his heart cannot take it...You want him to come to China to die like that?”

JOY: “We’ve been together for three years, don’t you think Gong Gong would want to know?”

As Joy continues to try to discuss the situation with her mother, Evelyn clearly ignores her daughter as she tries to help customers throughout the laundromat. Then, Joy expresses her frustrations to Becky.

JOY: “I don’t know how to be any fucking clearer. It’s like she (Evelyn) can choose. Either you come to the party with me, and Gong Gong is eternally ashamed, until he forgets it all, and then he dies, or you don’t come with me, and then he still dies.”

Then, Gong Gong comes downstairs, and Joy greets her grandfather in poor Chinese. As she struggles to remember the word for “girlfriend” in Chinese, Evelyn steps in and introduces Becky as Joy’s “good friend”. Joy looks incredibly upset with her mother as Evelyn is unable to tell Gong Gong that Joy is dating another woman due to her own fear that Gong Gong would be even more ashamed of Evelyn.

This entire scene depicts several important themes in the film, overall. First, it depicts a toxic trait attributed to older generations of Asian immigrants: discrimination and distaste toward the LGBTQIA+ community. It also depicts queerness and sexual identity as Joy is depicted as a lesbian. With these clashing themes, a main point of conflict arises: Joy and Evelyn’s relationship. On the outside, Evelyn tries to accept Joy’s sexuality. However, as a more

traditional Asian woman, internally, Evelyn does not respect or accept her daughter's queerness and is disappointed in her daughter's choices, because it violates her expectations of Joy and the expectations of herself as a mother. However, Joy's queerness is an important part of her identity, and she stands up for Becky and herself. This conflict represents a common issue amongst immigrants and first-generation Asian Americans: generational trauma, which works in contrast against the disempowering stereotype of Asians as model minorities. Joy must continuously battle the idea that she cannot live up to Evelyn's expectations of her, which is foreshadowed in this scene.

Lastly, another theme shown in this scene is language. First, the scene depicts the language struggles some Asian immigrants' experience. Evelyn must often rely on Joy to help her understand and communicate in English due to the language barriers she faces, an issue commonly faced by many immigrants. Joy, the youngest of the family, struggles to talk to her grandfather, the oldest of the family due to the language barrier. While Joy speaks primarily only English, her grandfather only speaks Cantonese and Mandarin – depicting a barrier that separates the two.

Scene 2 (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022, 0:13:22-0:22:26). After an encounter with “Alpha Waymond”, a version of her husband from a different universe within the multiverse, the scene flashes to the Wang's meeting with Deirdre, a grumpy IRS agent, who audits expenses of the family's laundromat business.

As Deirdre drags on, Evelyn looks at the paper of instructions to activate the multiverse Alpha Waymond provided her earlier. As she looks down at the instructions, Evelyn takes the first step and activates the multiverse and begins to panic.

Next, Alpha Waymond attempts to calm Evelyn down. The pair jump into an alternate universe, and Alpha Waymond explains that he himself is an alternate version of her husband and is searching for Evelyn's help.

ALPHA WAYMOND: "I'm here because we need your help... There is a great evil that has taken root in my world and has begun spreading its chaos throughout the many verses. I have spent years searching for the one who might be able to match this great evil with an ever greater good and bring back balance. All those years of searching have brought me here to this universe. To you."

This foreshadows that Evelyn will be the heroine of the film, which will allow for Evelyn's character to break through several stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans such as Asians as the yellow peril. Instead of portraying Asians and Asian Americans as a danger or a threat to the public safety, "Everything Everywhere All at Once" (2022) portrays Evelyn as the heroine of the story – the one who will save the world.

Evelyn then continuously slips back and forth between the alternate universe with Alpha Waymond and her appointment with Deirdre in her own universe.

ALPHA WAYMOND: "My dear Evelyn, I know you. With every passing moment, you fear you might have missed your chance to make something of your life. I'm here to tell you every rejection, every disappointment has led you here. To this moment."

This line from Alpha Waymond portrays the emotions Evelyn has felt throughout the entirety of the film thus far. A failing marriage with Waymond, a failing relationship with her daughter, and a failing business has caused Evelyn many negative, exhausted emotions. A dreary picture of Evelyn feeling as if she has missed her chance of greatness and cannot live up to the

expectations set for her was painted. However, the line from Alpha Waymond portrays that every moment leads to something greater. This scene depicts themes of generational trauma as Evelyn has been unable to achieve her life's goals and live up to her father's expectations and serves as a juxtaposition to the stereotype of Asians as model minorities. In addition, depicted as the heroine who will achieve greatness, Evelyn is once again juxtaposed against representations of Asians as the yellow peril.

Scene 3 (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022, 0:53:12-1:01:30). In this scene, Jobu, the antagonist of the movie and an alternate version of Joy, makes her first appearance to Evelyn. Decked in an Elvis-like pantsuit with pink hair and a pig, Jobu makes a memorable impression. Throughout this scene and the following scenes, Jobu changes outfits constantly, and each outfit is colorful and crazy. As a vessel of pure chaos, Jobu's many chaotic costume changes depict her chaotic identity, her expression of herself, and the "destructive highs of mania" (Cherelus, 2022). Here, it is important to note the difference between Joy and Jobu's clothing choices. Joy wears clothes that depict "the depths of depression" that come from the feelings of not meeting her mother's expectations. Stephanie Hsu, who plays Joy, says in an interview, "Joy is so despondent and so lost and has so much despair and carries that ugliness with her" (Cherelus, 2022). On the other hand, Jobu wears loud, chaotic statement outfits.

It is interesting to see how costumes alone depict the emotional range the characters are portrayed with instead of creating them as flat, minor characters with no emotions as many films typically portray Asian and Asian American characters.

After making her first appearance to Evelyn, Jobu is confronted by several security guards who were called due to a disturbance. Jobu fights off the guards with pure chaos and with

a dramatic flair. As a guard shoots at her, the gun turns to confetti. Jobu and Evelyn then battle and interact in dialogue.

EVELYN: “It’s you. You’re the reason my daughter doesn’t call anymore. Why she dropped out of college and gets tattoos. You are why she thinks she is gay.”

This dialogue shows Evelyn’s displacement of disappointment of her daughter’s choices onto Jobu. Rather than accepting her daughter for her identity and her queerness, Evelyn chooses to blame Jobu instead of herself.

To battle Jobu, Evelyn jumps into an alternate universe where her alternate self is a gay woman who is lovers with an alternate version Deirdre – both have fingers of floppy hot dogs. The weirdness and the expression of queerness depicts the complexity of the film, with a humorous take. After her failed attempt to battle Jobu with her powers, Jobu helps Evelyn to open her mind to show her the “Bagel” she has created – a black, swarming vortex of nothingness.

JOBU: “I got bored one day, and I put everything on a bagel. Everything. All my hopes and dreams, my old report cards...And it collapsed in on itself. Cause you see, when you really put everything on a bagel, it becomes this. The truth.”

EVELYN: “What is the truth?”

JOBU: “Nothing matters.”

EVELYN: “No Joy, you don’t believe that.”

JOBU: “It feels nice, doesn’t it? If nothing matters, then all the pain and guilt you feel from making nothing of your life, it goes away.”

This emotional scene depicts several recurring themes of the film. Jobu's nihilism mirrors the despondent feelings and depression of Joy, emphasizing the theme of mental health in juxtaposition to the stereotype of Asians as the model minority. Additionally, generational trauma is largely emphasized in this scene. Both Joy/Jobu and Evelyn feel the weight of making nothing of their lives and not living up to the expectations of their parents. They both feel the guilt, the shame, and the pain of failure. Jobu's emotions can be traced back to Joy in the sense that Joy dropped out of college, has tattoos, and is queer – a disappointment to her mother in which she is constantly reminded. Evelyn feels similarly due to her failing familial relationships, her tense relationship with her father, and her failing business. Lastly, nihilism is a strong idea within the movie as the Bagel begins to represent the nothingness Jobu/Joy feel due to her believing that she has made nothing of her life.

Scene 4: (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022, 1:08:25-1:09:45). A following scene reveals Alpha Gong Gong, Gong Gong's alternate self, who tells Evelyn that she herself created Jobu Tupaki after "pushing her too hard". This once again shows generational trauma of expectations that are unable to be lived up to. In this scene, Evelyn stands up to Alpha Gong Gong who is seeking to destroy Jobu. Instead, Evelyn wants to save her.

EVELYN: "If I can become like her (Jobu), maybe I'll be strong enough to save my Joy."

A twist – instead of having her daughter become what she wants, Evelyn must become like her daughter to save Joy and must stand up to her father in order to do so.

Scene 5 (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022, 1:45:33-1:48:07). An alternate version of Waymond shares dialogue with Evelyn.

MOVIE STAR UNIVERSE WAYMOND: “When I choose to see the good side of things, I’m not being naive. It is strategic and necessary. It’s how I’ve learned to survive through everything... I know you see yourself as a fighter, well, I see myself as one too. This is how I fight.”

In the Alpha Verse, Alpha Waymond is trying to get the alpha jumpers and Evelyn to stop fighting.

ALPHA WAYMOND: “I don’t know. But the only thing I do know is that we have to be kind. Please, be kind, especially when we don’t know what’s going on.”

All while this is happening, in the Bagel Universe, Jobu is trying to convince Evelyn to put everything else behind.

Back in the Alpha Verse, Evelyn grabs Alpha Waymond’s hands, and flashbacks of scenes of Waymond laughing, smiling, and being his true happy self are shown. Evelyn smiles and is reminded of the love she has for him.

In the movie star universe, Waymond says a memorable line:

MOVIE STAR WAYMOND: “Even though you have broken my heart again, I wanted to say, in another life, I would have really liked just doing laundry and taxes with you.”

These scenes depict Waymond as an empowered strong, loving character. He is shown with many emotions and devotion to Evelyn. Although Evelyn constantly wishes she would have chosen a different path due to her perception that she has ultimately failed, Waymond’s alternate selves all would still wish to be with her doing mundane, everyday tasks such as laundry and taxes. This scene adds on a layer of complexity to Asian and Asian American identity: romantic

love. Instead of relying on Asian sexuality stereotypes such as the emasculation of Asian males or the oversexualization of Asian females, this scene shows love at its simplest form. Waymond and his alternate selves are portrayed powerfully without relying on toxic masculinity to “battle.” Instead, the scene focuses primarily on Waymond’s superpower: his kindness and love. This scene works to add dimension to these characters without the use of stereotypes or discriminatory representations.

Scene 6 (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022, 1:48:37-2:08:16). In her own universe, Evelyn embraces Waymond in an emotional hug. This embrace gives Evelyn the strength needed to choose more than the path of nothingness and to not enter the Bagel – indicating the power of love.

However, Jobu decides that she will enter the Bagel with or without Evelyn. The next scenes show a mother’s love – she will continue to chase after her daughter.

As Evelyn must battle Jobu’s evil followers to get to her before Jobu enters the Bagel, Alpha Waymond reminds her to use kindness instead of violence.

Then, in the real universe and in the Alpha Universe, Evelyn must confront Gong Gong – perhaps one of the most difficult challenges.

In the Alpha Universe, Gong Gong tells Evelyn to let Jobu go.

EVELYN: “I am no longer willing to do to my daughter what you did to me. How did you let me go? How on earth did you do it so easily?”

In the real universe, Evelyn proudly stands up to Gong Gong as he denounces her as his daughter once more.

EVELYN: “It’s okay if you can’t be proud of me. Because I finally am. You may see in (Joy) all of your greatest fears squeezed into one person. I spent most of her childhood praying she would not end up like me. But she turned out to be stubborn, aimless, a mess. Just like her mother. But now I see. It’s okay that she’s a mess. Because just like me, *looks to Waymond* the universe gave her someone kind, patient and forgiving to make up for all she lacks *looks to Becky* Father. This is Becky. She is Joy’s girlfriend. Girlfriend.”

In the multiverse, Evelyn chases desperately after Jobu before she can enter the Bagel. Instead of fighting Jobu, Evelyn battles her with love and kindness – as taught by Alpha Waymond.

JOBU: “It’s all just a pointless swirling bucket of bullshit. That bagel is where we finally find peace, Evelyn.”

As Jobu is almost at the point of entering the Bagel, Evelyn embraces her.

EVELYN: “I am your mother.”

Alpha Gong Gong and Alpha Waymond grab on to Evelyn to help pull Jobu back in.

In Evelyn’s universe, Joy tells Evelyn to stop.

JOY: “I’m tired. I don’t want to hurt anymore, and for some reason, when I’m with you, it just hurts the both of us. So, let’s just go our separate ways. Just let me go.”

As Joy tries to leave, Evelyn stops her.

EVELYN: “Maybe it’s like you said, maybe there is something out there, some new discovery that will make us feel like even smaller pieces of shit. Something that explains why you still

went looking for me through all of this noise. And why, no matter what, I still want to be here for you. I will always, always, want to be here with you.”

The scenes flash to Gong Gong and Becky as Gong Gong grabs Becky’s hand.

GONG GONG: “Girlfriend.”

As the movie comes to an end, it shows Evelyn saving the day with kindness in love in her other universes. The film closes with joyful scenes of Evelyn, Becky, Joy, Waymond, and Gong Gong.

Directors/Actors. “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) was directed by the “Daniels”, a duo made up of Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan. While Scheinert is a White director, Kwan is an Asian American director, whose father is from Hong Kong. Together, the duo worked to tell the story of the Asian American immigrant experience holistically. Behind the scenes, the directors also worked to cast Asian and Asian American actors and actresses in roles. The directors strategically chose both seasoned Asian and Asian American actors and actresses as well as up-and-coming actors and actresses.

Evelyn is played by Michelle Yeoh, a well-known Malaysian American actress known for her roles in “Crazy Rich Asians” (2018), “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings” (2021), and several other movies (Feldman, 2022). Yeoh was also recently announced as *Time’s* Trailblazer Icon of the Year in 2022 for her role as Evelyn. Joy is played by Stephanie Hsu, an Asian American actress that was named AP’s Breakthrough Entertainer for her stellar performance (Kennedy, 2022). Waymond is played by Ke Huy Quan, a Vietnamese American actor most well-known for his roles as a child actor in the Indiana Jones series. After a 20-year hiatus due to roles for Asian males being quite scarce and stereotypical, Quan was inspired to

return to acting after seeing “Crazy Rich Asians” (2018) which is one of the only American films with an almost entirely Asian cast (Warner, 2022). Quan recently won 27 different awards in 2022, making him the season’s “most honored actor”. Other notable actors and actresses include James Hong and Harry Shum – two Asian American Hollywood stars known for their many roles in a variety of film and television shows (Warner, 2022).

It is evident that the directors’ clear mission to portray Asian and Asian American identity holistically while providing Asian and Asian American actors and actresses the platform to break through stereotypes in empowering roles shows the importance of directorial choices.

Awards/Acceptability/Criticism. Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022) was one of the year’s most critically acclaimed films. The film crossed over \$100 million in global ticket sales and amassed numerous awards and award nominations and has a 95% rating on Rotten Tomatoes. The film had a total of 14 Critics’ Choice Awards nominations, 6 Golden Globes nominations, and 11 Academy Award Nominations (Davis, 2022). Most recently, at the Critics’ Choice Awards, the film won Best Picture, Best Supporting Actor, Best Director, and Best Original Screenplay – a huge win for the film. Additionally, at the Golden Globes, the film won Best Performance by an Actress in a Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy and Best Performance (“The Winners”, 2023). These highly revered awards depict the success of the film and continue to show how Asians and Asian Americans within the film industry are rewriting their own stories in an empowering manner and are dominating the industry while doing so. Additionally, the film won two Golden Globes for Best Supporting Actor and Best Actress – a huge win for Asian Americans within Hollywood (Lussier, 2023). Lastly, the film took home seven Oscar Awards. “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) not only dominated this awards season, but it also shattered the perceptions of Asian and Asian American identity within film (Barnes, 2023).

“Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) is a clear indication that empowering, holistic portrayals of Asian and Asian American identity succeed. Hollywood does not need to rely on stereotypes to find success.

Conclusion. “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) does not only tell the story of a Chinese laundromat owner. It also tells a rich, science-fiction based narrative packed full of comedy, action, romance, and conflict. By portraying the Asian American immigrant experience, LGBTQIA+ representation, generational trauma, and mental health, the film expands upon how Asian and Asian American identity is portrayed in film by pushing past representations of Asians as the other (whether yellowface or yellow peril), as well as stereotypes such as Asians as perpetual foreigners, Asians as the model minority, and sexuality stereotypes.

Without relying on common stereotypes for Asians, “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) offers one solution for battling anti-Asian racism – true, genuine, and empowering depictions of Asian and Asian American identity. The characters of Evelyn, Joy, and Waymond provide positive prototypes for Asian and Asian Americans as they empower the Asian and Asian American identity as strong, main characters portrayed holistically. These three characters are not depicted as static or one-dimensional. Instead, they portrayed as multi-dimensional with struggles, feelings, conflict, and pain. By showing redemption, joy, and love, the characters are humanized. They are not mere caricatures. They are the heroes of the story. “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) provides an empowering foundation for stories about Asian and Asian American identity that authentically represents culture and people.

Step 4: Critical Reflection and Discussion

After careful analysis of “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961), “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005), “Minari” (2020), and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022), this thesis will now employ

the fourth step of my modified critical discourse analysis: the critical reflection and discussion. This step will look at the main points of disempowering representations and stereotypes within “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) and “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005). Then, the empowering portrayals of Asian and Asian American identity in “Minari” (2020) and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) will be juxtaposed against these disempowering representations and stereotypes. The implications for future scholarly literature and the contributions this thesis makes will also be discussed.

“Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) and “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) are similar in the fact that they perpetuate disempowering representations stereotypes of Asian and Asian Americans. While “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) represents Asians through the use of a yellowface portrayal, as well as the emasculated Asian male stereotype, “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) relies on the oversexualized Asian female stereotype for entertainment. Similarly, both films were written and directed by White males and had problematic castings. “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) casted a White actor, Mickey Rooney, to play Mr. Yunioshi, a Japanese character in a mocking manner through the use of a yellowface portrayal. This depiction works to disempower Asian and Asian American identity as it shows the limited visibility of Asians and Asian Americans in the earlier days of film and the inaccuracy of Asian portrayals in film.

“Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) tells the story of a geisha through misrepresentation. First, the entire film erroneously portrays geishas as sex workers. However, historically, geishas worked as high-class entertainers. As such, the film relies on the oversexualized Asian female stereotype for entertainment. Additionally, the film’s director casted multiple Chinese actors and actresses to play the Japanese characters. These erroneous casting decisions portray the invisibility of Asian and Asian Americans within Hollywood. Because the director of the film,

Rob Marshall, is a White male, this choice to cast Chinese actors and actresses for Japanese characters signifies invisibility and ignorance. With no input from the Asian community, and with no intention to empower the Asian and Asian American identity through the film, Marshall's directorial choices with casting led to further misrepresentation in the movie through the use of the oversexualized Asian female stereotype. In opposition, the directors' choices in "Everything Everywhere All at Once" (2022) to have various Asian ethnicities to play Chinese characters was acceptable due to their goal to highlight Asian voices and expand the Asian and Asian American narrative while telling the story of the Asian immigrant experience. To be sure, the main issue with directorial choices for films with Asian characters comes from eliminating Asians from telling their own stories. Multicultural collaborations, such as Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan's co-directorial choices for "Everything Everywhere all At Once" (2022) depict that other races are able to create films with Asian characters but should allow for Asians to provide input in writing their own narrative.

Lastly, within the "Memoirs of a Geisha" (2005), language is an interesting aspect of the movie as, although set in Japan, the characters all speak English with an accent and only speak a few, sparse Japanese words such as "okiya" meaning "geisha house" and a few other words. This depicts, once again, the inaccuracy of the film's depiction of Asian and Asian Americans. Similarly, in relation to language, "Breakfast at Tiffany's" (1961) also depicts the erroneous depiction of Asian and Asian Americans by having Mr. Yunioshi's character speak in broken English in a mocking manner. However, on the other hand, language within "Minari" (2020) and "Everything Everywhere All at Once" (2022) portrays the beauty of the hybridity of languages as the characters consistently code-switch. In doing so, the films push past the perpetual foreigner stereotype. Overall, both "Breakfast at Tiffany's" (1961) and "Memoirs of a Geisha" (2005)

show the disempowerment of Asian and Asian American identity through the use of representations such as Asians through yellowface portrayals and sexual stereotypes. In addition, the perpetuations of these main representations and stereotypes work to otherize Asians as perpetual foreigners.

“Minari” (2020) and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) depict a recent evolution of Asian and Asian American identity within American film. Specifically, both films tell the stories of Asians and Asian Americans from the lens and perspective of Asians and Asian Americans writers and directors. Additionally, both films use predominantly Asian casts and were critically acclaimed, award-winning movies, depicting the success that can come from portraying Asian and Asian American identity in empowering, holistic manners rather than depending on stereotypical representations for entertainment.

Both films tell the authentic stories of two separate immigrant families. While “Minari” (2020) tells the story of the Yi family, Korean American immigrants who move to Arkansas to own a farm, “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) tells the story of the Wang family, Chinese American immigrants who run a laundromat. Both films are written and directed by Asian Americans and feature appropriately casted Asian and Asian American characters. With Asians and Asian Americans behind the camera, the stories of the Yi and Wang families come from a more empathetic, genuine perspective. Both films depict how empowering, holistic portrayals of Asian and Asian American identity provide positive prototypes of strong Asian and Asian American characters. In contrast to the use of representation of Asians as the other, both films depict these Asian American families living a life of hybridity – a mix of both American and Asian cultures and languages. In opposition to the use of representation of Asians as the yellow peril, “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) in particular portrays Asians as the

heroes of the story. Lastly, juxtaposed to the representation of Asians through yellowface portrayals, both “Minari” (2020) and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) portray Asians in a genuine manner using appropriately casted Asian and Asian American actors and actresses that were chosen intentionally to highlight Asian voices and expand their narrative rather than solely for entertainment purposes.

In addition, as opposed to the use of sexual stereotypes, neither “Minari” (2020) and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) rely on these for entertainment. Instead, the primary focus of both films are the families’ stories. “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022), in particular, depicts both strong Asian female and male leads without the oversexualization or emasculation of these characters. Next, in contrast to using the stereotype of Asians as perpetual foreigners, “Minari” (2020) and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) work to dismantle this stereotype by depicting Asian and Asian Americans as those who are truly a part of the American culture and who blend both Asian and American cultures and languages seamlessly together. Lastly, by depicting the financial, emotional, and generational struggles that both the Yi and Wang families face, both “Minari” (2020) and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) break past the model minority stereotype in their portrayals of Asian and Asian American identity.

Thus, “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) and “Memoirs of a Geisha” portray the obstacle to anti-Asian racism – stereotypical, disempowering depictions of Asian and Asian American identities in a singular lens from a White perspective. These depictions reinforce racist and discriminatory ideals of Asians.

However, “Minari” (2020) and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) provide a solution – empowering representations of Asian and Asian American identity that uncover the

complexities, struggles, and emotions of this community. By having Asians and Asian Americans behind and in front of the cameras telling these stories, these communities are empowered through narratives and holistic prototypes that depict Asian and Asian Americans as strong, human, and complex, with struggles and emotions.

This analysis contributes to scholarly literature as it provides critique and direction for the portrayals of Asian and Asian American identity in film. First, it provides critique for depictions using disempowering representation and stereotypes and discusses the implications for these. Second, this analysis provides future direction through discussing empowering portrayals and the prototypes they provide. Film is a powerful medium through which Asian and Asian American identity can be disempowered or empowered through limited or holistic portrayals. Thus, it is essential that Asian and Asian Americans be the voice for their communities, depicting their own identity in a genuine manner in their own films or in collaboration with others.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis analyzed four American films, “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961), “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005), “Minari” (2020), and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022). Scenes in “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) and “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) were selected and examined for portrayals using disempowering representations and stereotypes. “Minari” (2020) and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) were selected for analysis to explore their use of empowering representations and prototypes of identity based on authenticity.

Throughout the history of Asians within America, as minorities, Asians and Asian Americans have had little control over media representations of themselves. As such, stereotypes and erroneous representations have resulted, and the cultural identity of Asians and Asian

Americans has been wrongfully ascribed for them. Yet, because cultural identity is an ever-changing process, over time, Asians and Asian Americans have worked to overcome oppression and reclaim their own empowering identities. Within film, Asian writers, directors, actors, and actresses, have worked to be a part of their narrative to write their own stories, expanding past common stereotypes and creating well-rounded portrayals.

The purpose of this thesis was to reveal the disempowering and empowering ways in which Asian and Asian American identity are portrayed in American film. My modified critical discourse analysis showed how representations and stereotypes used in “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” (1961) and “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2005) are disempowering and reflect an ascribed identity. Additionally, my modified CDA also showed how, by contrast, “Minari” (2020) and “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) use authentic portrayals, depicting how Asians and Asian Americans are reclaiming, empowering, and avowing their own identity, providing positive, strong prototypes of holistic Asian characters.

This thesis furthers the scholarship on the topic of Asian and Asian American identity within film by analyzing both disempowering and empowering portrayals, while past studies have primarily only focused on one or the other. The analysis and discussion of the four films teach readers that a limited narrative eliminating the voices of Asians and Asian Americans on and off-screen perpetuates stereotypical portrayals and disempowering representations. However, including and highlighting the voices and perspectives of Asians and Asian Americans in filmmaking help to empower them to reclaim their identity and tell their own stories. Additionally, my thesis expands upon cultural identity theory by applying it to the Asian and Asian American experience. My thesis portrays the importance of recognizing that the media has historically worked to uphold the fixed, ascribed identity of oppressed groups, but, over time,

oppressed groups have reclaimed their identities to expose their authentic selves by rewriting their own narratives. While much progress has been made, we do not live in a post-racial society, and it is vital to recognize that instances of racism and discrimination against the Asian and Asian American communities still occur. Thus, because of the pervasiveness and prevalence of the media, we must continue counter misrepresentations of Asians and Asian Americans within media as these misrepresentations often stand as truth and further harm these communities.

Future research could expand upon this thesis by continuing the analysis of films that depict that disempowering representations and stereotypes of Asian and Asian American identity and juxtapose these with newer films that depict the reclamation and empowerment of Asian American identity. Future studies could also explore the intersectional nature of Asian and Asian American identity in films. Ultimately, it is encouraging that recent films have shown the evolution of Asians and Asian Americans in film.

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Notes

1 The term “Oriental” has a negative, derogatory connotation and should not be used in everyday language as a means to describe people.

2 The Fu Manchu frame has roots within the Yellow Peril stereotype and portrays Asians as mysterious, dangerous, and ominous characters with mystic powers (Chan, 2001)

3 In a traditional CDA, this would be the fourth step. However, since I am doing a modified version, this will be the third step of my CDA