

# Chinese as 'otherness' in Fleming's Doctor No



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Ian Fleming's *Doctor No* was published in 1958, nine years after Mao Zedong and his communist party formed the PRC (People's Republic of China). While the formation of the PRC united the long-time warring states within China itself, it also added another large communist country to the global community and thus intensified many fears of those in the West; these fears are both subtly and vividly expressed in Fleming's sixth 007 novel *Doctor No*. Utilizing a post-colonial lens, Fleming's depiction of the Chinese people and their culture in *Doctor No* corresponds with Edward Said's recognition that the Western cultures have a "long-standing way of identifying the East as 'Other'" (Barry 193); Fleming's Chinese characters are represented as "anonymous masses, rather than individuals," and the "cruelty, sensuality, [and] decadence" of their personality traits then becomes "the repository or projection of those aspects of themselves which Westerners do not choose to acknowledge" (Barry 193-94). The first mentions of Chinese people in the novel are the three blind men who are associated with an "oddness" and 'anonymous otherness'. The three men, walking down Kingston by the Queen's Club "walked in file... they said nothing...except [for] the soft tapping of their sticks" (Fleming 002-03); "...in this quiet rich empty street, they made an unpleasant impression" (Fleming 003). The physical actions of the three men are both fluid and harmonious: they walk speechless in single-file, their arms on one another's shoulders, all while tapping their white canes in unison. When Strangeways gives them a florin, the first 'Chigroe' in line says "Bless you, Master,"—"Bless you," echoed the other two" (Fleming 006). The three men are depicted as an anonymous group; they are defined only in terms of their 'odd mixture of bloods' and their identical movements. They not only echo each other in terms of their "Bless you" to Strangeways,

but also when it comes to his killing they again act as a single unit: the tapping of their sticks stops all-at-once, and “ with disciplined precision the three men aimed at different points down Strangeways spine – one between the shoulders, one in the small of the back, one at the pelvis” (Fleming 006). This first scene comments on the dangerous anonymity of the three, and Strangeways miss-underestimation of their “ odd” group (as Strangeways puts it) ends up being the cause of his own demise. This “ hybridity” or “ cultural polyvalency” (Barry 199) of the Chigroes is defined as abnormal and unwanted near the vicinity of the Queen’s Club which Fleming describes as the “ social Mecca of Kingston” (002), one of the last few remnants of British authority and class. This mixing of Chinese and Jamaican blood is viewed as undesirable, and biracial peoples like the Chigroes are not just viewed as “ odd” by characters like Strangeways, but they also come to constitute an immediate threat and menace to the Western ideology. Pleydell-Smith tells Bond that the Chinese are “ solid, compact, discreet – the most powerful clique in Jamaica” (057-58); and that in the future, the Chigroes “...may become a nuisance. They’ve got some of the intelligence of the Chinese and most of the vices of the black man” (Fleming 058). With the ending of WWII just over a decade prior to the publication of Fleming’s Doctor No, the fears expressed through Pleydell-Smith about the Chinese people’s power and their inter-racial births on Crab Key are exemplified in the genetic make-up and physicality of Dr. No. His “ half Chinese and half German” heritage (Fleming 28) makes him not only unusual, but a suspicious character to James Bond. Bond can be seen as the Western figure locked in an arduous struggle against these ‘ Other’ or ‘ Oriental’ (Barry 193) behavioral traits which both Bond and the larger Western community wish to deny. When

James Bond finally meets Dr. No, his appearance is all the more reason for Bond (and the reader) to be frightened: " Doctor No was at least six inches taller than Bond, but the straight immovable pose of his body made him seem still taller" (Fleming 155); " The bizarre, gliding figure looked like a giant venomous worm wrapped in tin-foil" (Fleming 156). The hybridity of Dr. No is characterized as pure evil; he tells Bond "...I am, a maniac. All the greatest men are maniacs" (Fleming 161). His mechanical steel-pincers and his towering height transform him from a human being, into a monster; Fleming even places his heart on the opposite side of his elongated body to dramatize this effect (164). This bizarreness or ' otherness' of Dr. No's character threatens the Western ideology; it is only James Bond, the Christ-like figure, who can put a stop to Dr. No and save the Western world. After detailing the outlines of his diabolical plot to control airborne missiles and sell the information to " the Russians" or " Communist China" (Fleming 176-77), Dr. No reveals his " cruelty" and " decadence" that the " Westerners choose not to acknowledge" (Barry 193). He subjects Bond and Honeychile to scientific research whereby their limits of physical and emotional strengths will be tested before they are supposed to be killed during the experiments. Although Honeychile is unaffected by Dr. No's test with the black crabs, Bond is sent through an obstacle course of extreme tortures: he is electrocuted, the skin on his hands and knees is burnt-off, and he is almost ripped in half by a giant squid. During Dr. No's series of tests for " scientific purposes", Bond passes out four times only to then regain consciousness and be symbolically reborn. His resurrection signifies his resilience against this " odd" and " cruel" doctor whose violent natures and dictator-like strangle hold over his people on Crab Key must be stopped. Apart from these

depictions of Chinese men as anonymous masses, strange 'others', and cruel and threatening, the Chinese women in Fleming's novel are portrayed as sensual and exotic. The first Chinese woman we meet is Annabel Chung as Bond steps-off the plane into Jamaica. She is described as mysterious, and "pretty" with a "tinkling voice" (Fleming 034), and later, she wears "a tight-fitting sheath of black satin slashed up one side almost to her hip" (Fleming 041). Chung becomes violent towards Quarrell, smashing a camera flash-bulb in his face when he holds Chung against her will. In a masochistic act, Quarrell squeezes Chung's "Mount of Venus" before Bond allows her to leave. Quarrell tells Bond "boy, was dat a fat Love Moun'...When him fat like wit' dat girl you kin tell her'll be good in bed" (Fleming 044). Like Annabel Chung, every other Chinese woman met by Bond in the novel is described as attractive. When Bond and Honeychile are captured by Dr. No's men, they are led into a giant corporation/hotel-like reception area where they are greeted by two Chinese women who show them to their rooms; "The door opened at once. An enchanting Chinese girl in a mauve and white flowered kimono stood smiling and bowing as Chinese girls are supposed to do" (Fleming 138). She even speaks in a "low, attractive voice" (Fleming 138), and later, Bond states that he must brush aside her gentleness. Both Annabel Chung and the Chinese women servants are exotically dangerous to Bond. Bond finds himself in trouble from his very first step onto Jamaica with Chung, and the beautiful servants in Doctor No's lair briefly distract Bond from the situation he is in; they even serve him a drugged breakfast which he and Honeychile willingly accept. Like the Chinese women who threaten Bond's mission with their sensual natures and exotic appearances, Ian Fleming utilizes a strategic "hybridity" of genes (Barry 199) in his writing of

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Doctor No; by intentionally combining Chinese blood with various other nationalities, he creates characters who become odd, “ anonymous masses” (Barry 193)—masses of killing machines who are at the disposal of the archetype Dr. No, who is Fleming’s own creation from German and Chinese blood. Playing off of the memories of WWII and the fears of expanding communism in China, Ian Fleming’s depiction of the Chinese people strongly correlates with Edward Said’s classification of the Western view of “ orientalism”. By employing this concept of “ orientalism” or “ otherness”, Fleming deliberately defines his Chinese characters as extremely intelligent, cruel, odd, and exotic in order to strike both suspicion into Bond’s mind and inject sources of conflict into the plot of his novel. Works Cited Barry, Peter. Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002. Web. 27 Sep. 2009. Fleming, Ian. Doctor No. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1958. Print.