

Essay on asian americans representetion in modern films

[Parts of the World, Asia](#)



Our society has been influenced by television since its invention in 1920's. Likewise, film production, being a part of magnificent TV empire, seems to manipulate people greatly without them realizing it. Namely, it may impose and establish stereotypes of racial-ethnic groups, thus, perpetuating strong, more often negative, images of a specific racial group in society's consciousness. On the contrary, films can also impose positive attitude towards racial issue, making people feel themselves as a comprehensive whole, disregarding race, gender and age. This makes film industry very helpful in getting rid of stereotypes. It may seem paradoxical, but it is media that establish stereotypes and at the same time can help to get rid of them.

Asian American community has always been a significant part of American society. The representation of Asian Americans in movies is rooted in military actions and issues with Japan, Korea, China, the Philippines, and Vietnam as well as in the history of Euro-American colonial occupation. It is vitally important to differentiate Asian Americans, who have live in the USA and have been absorbing American culture mostly since birth and Asian national, who know little about this country and may not be connected with it at all. In fact, there was a lack of Asian Americans' representation after World War II. Moreover, having a little access to film industry Asian community was even more neglected than African Americans. However, there was a significant reason for underrepresentation - the image of Asian people seemed the image of enemy to Americans due to the war with Japan which caused a lot of casualties among American army. As the matter of fact, filmmakers couldn't but avoid shooting Asians which were mostly associated with Japanese, thus, bringing negative context to the movie. Usually, they were

represented as servants, people of lower class, very often strange, uneducated or criminal people – altogether these characteristics were forming unpleasant image of Asians in Americans' consciousness. I personally think that actually those people who knew little about Asian Americans tried to create such an antagonist image on the silver screen (and are still doing it). Unfortunately, it was really hard to conquer mainstream so filmmakers had to become a part of it themselves.

I believe that the Asian American movement in the 1960s-1970s had its reflection on film industry. At least, it was a perfect chance for Asian community to claim their rights and liberties and to take their position in American society to higher level. Thus, changing their position in the US society (even it was not a great change) had its impact upon their film representation. I can't affirm that this change can be characterized as absolutely positive one, although any progress means steps for improvement. Unlike previous decades, at this period Asian Americans are considered to be obsessed with education, not individual success, consequently, having little chance to succeed in life. Namely, they are compared to computers what is unacceptable for Americans who value strong individualities first of all, not the grade at any educational institution. It is worth mentioning that at this very period Asian culture is viewed through the lens as a very unique one in contrast with American. To my mind, this fact makes Asians even more marginalized from Americans than before as two cultures are opposed. At this point the name of Bruce Lee has to be mentioned, the most successful actor of Asian origin at that time, who

represented Asian martial arts as one of the differences between two cultures.

If we turn to the image of Asian Americans at the end of 20th century, one can easily recognize that almost nothing has changed about it since 1970s. Still they are presented in cinematography as an opposition to Americans, being so much different and so unable to be integral part of American society. To be more precise, films are mostly focused on a strange culture of Asians and their remoteness from any common US citizen. As a result, bias and stereotypes about Asian Americans are supported by films, making reputation of the latter even more miserable. Despite the fact that till the end of the 20th century there were some Asian Americans playing main parts in films and represented as protagonists, it is clear as a day that they still are viewed as very different nation compared to Americans, as people that are not a part of American society.

As far as I am concerned, it is possible to define several most widespread stereotypical images of Asian Americans that have been presented in films since post-war period till now. Firstly, Asian accent, racial features, mannerism have been always depicted as something inherently comic, non-American and something that American people cannot assimilate. Therefore, Asians have been restricted to limited clichéd parts in film industry.

Secondly, one can easily find movies where inherently predatory aspects of Asian cultures are shown. Thirdly, what seems to me very offensive is how Asian women are represented – they are often portrayed either as ‘China dolls’, being exotic, compliant and eager to please, or as ‘dragon ladies’,

scheming, troublesome and unreliable. If we talk about Asian men, their position in cinematography is even worse than women's - they are usually represented as non-romantic, what is more, asexual or having negative sexuality (threatening for white women). Furthermore, even martial arts, in which Asians are professionals, are not in favor of them in many films - practicing them by Asians represent the latter as villains. On the contrary, if martial arts are practiced by whites, it is likely to be positive.

Currently we are able to observe positive changes in the way American Asians are represented in modern films. Despite the fact that most of stereotypes inherently or evidently presented in fiction cinematography, I strongly believe that nowadays' documentaries are helping to get rid of negative attitude of Americans towards Asians. Unlike fiction, documentaries are willing to reveal objective view on Asian Americans, providing us with their stories, starting from birth till now. Thus, viewers are able to be in their shoes, live their life and understand their true feelings. Hopefully, observing all the obstacles Asian Americans had to overcome, Americans realize all the difficulties immigrants have to face when in different country with different traditions. As follows, establishing stereotypes about Asians makes their life almost unbearable, in other words, such oppression is even harder than just employment, accommodation, educational problems they have in the USA. Additionally, the ' eye' behind the camera and the documentary voice evoke sympathy and understanding in viewers. Consequently, Asian Americans are more likely to be integrated into American society, to be not as ' alien' as they used to be, they are being absorbed by Americans who are able to

realize their troubles in foreign country easier nowadays. The only thing I do not like about documentaries is that they evoke only sympathy and, unfortunately, do not portray any achievements done by Asian Americans. To my mind, in order to fully assimilate Asians into American society, American people need to see reasons to be proud that they have fellow citizens like these, who have made great contribution to country's culture or science. As a result, documentaries should also represent the image of Asian American who helps his country, the USA, does something for it, and, thus, is full member of its community.

To conclude, I would like to mention that there are still a lot of things to be improved in the way Asian Americans are represented in films. Likewise, Americans' consciousness has to be improved as well. American people need to be able to reject stereotypes and think critically in order to accept Asian Americans as an integral part of American society and its culture. Obviously, film industry is a powerful tool for changing point of view of any person and we need to use it in a positive way if we want to live in peace and harmony.