

= Ling Woo =

Ling Woo is a fictional character in the US comedy @-@ drama Ally McBeal , portrayed by Chinese @-@ American actress Lucy Liu . A Mandarin @-@ speaking Chinese @-@ American lawyer , Ling has been described as cold and ferocious and knowledgeable in an art of sexual pleasure unknown to the Western world . At the time , she was the most famous and only significant representative of Asian women on US television ( besides news anchors and reporters ) . Thus , the portrayal of Ling Woo attracted much scholarly attention in the US .

= = Background = =

Ally McBeal is an American television series created by David E. Kelley which ran on the Fox network from 1997 to 2002 . Set in the fictional Boston law firm of Cage , Fish and Associates , the series explores the relationships among various lawyers working at the firm , often as they relate to gender @-@ specific issues raised in court cases . Ling Woo was a character written by Kelley specifically for actress Lucy Liu after she failed to secure the role of Nelle Porter in the show .

Woo appeared for the first time in the second season as a client suing a Howard Stern @-@ like talk show host named Wick . She was suing because Wick 's programs contributed to sexual harassment in her workplace . Wick claimed Woo brought suit because she had a " slutty little Asian thing going " , and Woo said that she wanted to sleep with Wick because if she did , she would kill him . The character proved to be a hit , and Liu was signed on as a regular for the series .

Ling became a lawyer with the firm by pressuring Richard Fish , the firm 's senior partner , to hire her services as counsel . She remained a regular on the show until 2001 , when her role was reduced to four episodes in the upcoming season . Ling 's employment history changes that season when the Governor of Massachusetts offers Ling a job as judge after Ling complimented her twin babies . Woo is a graduate of Cornell Law School where she was editor of the Law Review .

Asian women are rarely given prominent roles on American television . In 1994 Margaret Cho had a brief prime @-@ time show called All American Girl , which was not popular with audiences and did not last a full season . When the show aired , there had not been another Asian @-@ American @-@ centered show or an Asian main character at the time the Ling character was created . Unlike the 1970s depictions of docile East Asian women on TV , Ling 's character was the opposite , but still a classic stereotype , that of the Dragon Lady . At the time , she was the only significant representative of Asian women on television in the United States ( besides news anchors and reporters ) , leaving no one else to counteract this prominent stereotype . She remains the most memorable Asian TV character of the 1990s .

= = Character = =

Ling Woo 's character has been described as the antithesis of Ally McBeal 's . For example , Woo is portrayed as evil , McBeal as good ; Woo growls , McBeal purrs . At the same time , Woo 's verbal assaults present a fantasy of authority that appeals to even McBeal . " She 's my hero " , says McBeal , " she 's vicious , I disagree with almost everything she says , she treats me like dirt , and somehow she 's my hero . "

The character 's main function was to inject into the show " sensuality , promise , terror , sublimity , idyllic pleasure , intense energy " - elements long associated with the Orient in Western culture , according to Orientalism author Edward Said . Ling brings to mind the geisha , the unreadable Oriental , and the dragon lady . Describing her as " fearsome , devouring , vicious , cool , " and with an " exotic sexuality " , Georgia State University professor Greg Smith sees Woo as a stereotype of Asian women , a " Dragon Lady " .

Her character was frequently used to examine matters related to gender definition and topics . Ling is the only major character in Ally McBeal who does not have a story for the origin of her particular neurosis . She is exempt from the psychoanalytic focus given to others in the series , which Smith attributes to her Asian " mysteriousness " .

= = = Cold and vicious = = =

Woo is cast as a villain , underscored by her frequent appearance to the theme music that accompanied the Wicked Witch of the West in the Wizard of Oz . Unlike a melodramatic villain such as J. R. Ewing , Ling was cast as a remarkably heartless character until well into the second season ( Season 3 of the show ) , when she begins to befriend other characters .

She harasses people with physical handicaps . When visiting a hospital , Ling accidentally collides with a man in a wheelchair , and shouts , " Watch where you are going ! It 's bad enough that you people get all the parking spots ! " To an individual with Tourette syndrome , she says , " I think Tourettes is so cool . It would be great to be able to annoy people like that . You get to whoop and twitch . Any other good ones ? " A passing blind man accidentally taps her with his cane , and Ling cries , " OW ! They 're not weapons ! ... I so prefer the deaf to the blind . " Ling will even impersonate the blind to get her way . In one episode she puts on sunglasses , extends a telescoping white cane , and walks across a busy street , tires squealing as she hits a couple of cars with her cane . Ling is unapologetic for these affronts . When pointed out that " there are real blind people in the world " , Ling retorts , " It 's not like any of them saw me . "

Ling is concerned with petty annoyances that disrupt her pleasure or inconvenience her . When a colleague is stuck in an elevator with his feet dangling out of the doors , Ling asks , " Does this mean I 'm going to have to take the stairs ? " She is impatient in getting what she wants , for example snapping at a judge to " hurry up " as he read a verdict . She frequently announces that she is uninterested in proceedings that don 't affect her personally . As her co @-@ counsel questions a witness in court , Ling objects to the judge , " I 'm bored ! As an officer of the court , I have a duty to be open and forthright . I think the witness is tedious and I 'm concerned for the jury 's attention span . "

Smith sees Ling 's attacks as pointed and consciously vicious . She attacks because her words have consequences , clearing a path for her own selfish interests . Nelle Porter says , " I admire the way you don 't let yourself be pushed around . Too many people when they think they 've been wronged just walk away . " Jeff Yang , founding publisher of A Magazine , a New York @-@ based publication on Asian American culture , sees Ling as " a strong Asian woman who 's clearly potent , clearly has control . She 's not a victim , not somebody who lets anyone come even close to victimizing her . "

Even though she coldly tyrannizes virtually everyone around her , she is sometimes hurt and confused over being disliked . She admits , " It 's lonely on the bench . I thought I 'd like a place where people can 't get to you but once in a while ... " A colleague completes her thought : " you need to have somebody who can get to you . "

= = = Hypersexual = = =

University of Wyoming Associate Professor Tracey Patton sees Woo as the embodiment of the Asian fantasy woman , the seductive temptress expert in eroticism who is knowledgeable in the art of sexual pleasure unknown to the Western world . In one episode , she agreed to have sex only after her partner signed a health waiver and confidentiality agreement to protect her sexual secrets . In another episode , Ling is hired by Richard Fish as an attorney in his firm , in exchange for sexual favors . Ling 's sexual foreplay with Richard Fish included sucking his fingers , dropping hot wax on him , and performing a " hair @-@ tickling massage " on his bare chest . " What she offered was not too far from an Oriental massage - hair splayed across his chest , his stricken face , the whole interracial thing " , said Yang . " It 's clearly something that plays off so many deep @-@ seated fantasies about Asian American women . "

Ling 's attitude to sex is cold and uninterested . While depicted as a sexual predator , she nonetheless " doesn 't like sex ; it 's messy " " and overrated " . She is able to keep her boyfriend interested without having to have intercourse with him because she does not like sweat . To Ling , according to Smith , sex is just another arena for her to exert control . To her , " Sex is a weapon " ,

and " a woman hasn 't got true control of a man until her hand is on the dumb stick " . She enjoys using the weapon , as she says " there 's nothing I enjoy more than seeing a happy couple and coming between them . " As with the " vicious " personality , most of this hyper @-@ sexuality is gone by Season 3 ( Woo 's second season on the show ) .

Darrell Hamamoto , Professor of Asian American Studies at the University of California , Davis , describes Ling as " a neo @-@ Orientalist masturbatory fantasy figure concocted by a white man whose job it is to satisfy the blocked needs of other white men who seek temporary escape from their banal and deadening lives by indulging themselves in a bit of visual cunnilingus while relaxing on the sofa . "

Her liaisons are with white men , but not only men . In a dream sequence of Ally McBeal 's in which the two of them go on a date , they kiss on screen . The kiss was shot in profile , locked lips clearly visible , rather than using the normal angle for same @-@ sex kisses , in which the partner 's head blocks the view of the actual contact . The scene was considered so racy that the episode was banned from being shown in Singapore . The episode won its time slot among young adult viewers during its showing in the November 1999 sweeps , even beating Monday Night Football . Ling made the " damn hot kiss " even hotter because " she 's the exotic , erotic experimenter of the group " , according to Scott Seomin , media director at that time for the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation .

= = = Alien = = =

Patton sees Woo 's actions , attitudes , and portrayal of the evil manipulator make her into the alien of the law firm , and as such many of the lawyers in the firm did not want her hired . Campbell , a Euro @-@ American male at the firm stated , " With her as a lawyer , the whole thing ( the dynamic make @-@ up of the firm ) will change . " Not only is her non @-@ White presence questioned but her competency too . Even though she was the law review editor in law school , the presumption was she got the job mainly because Fish could not say no to Woo and her sexual promises . Woo is seen as an unwelcome addition to the law team despite her expertise and her success in law school .

Her character is the one most often portrayed on the show using animal effects . She frequently responds with a range of animal growls and snarls and breathes fire like a literal manifestation of dragon lady . Smith sees this as reinforcing the bestial undertone of the Asian stereotype , making her appear inhuman . Ling herself admits , " It must be hard being human . I wouldn 't know . I never tried it . "

In one episode , Woo literally turned into an alien , reminiscent of a scene from the movie Alien . Woo 's transformation into an alien was a reference on her not fitting in with the other lawyers as well as a reference on her citizenship . Patton points out that the assumption is often made that a second @-@ generation White immigrant is an American citizen , but that same assumption is not granted to non @-@ Whites - in this case , Woo . Woo is not constructed as American ( because an American is constructed as White ) , nor is she constructed as human . Woo , the only non @-@ Euro @-@ American member of the law firm , is constructed and seen as foreign or alien .

Ling is not above using her ethnicity as a means of gaining advantage . In one episode , as she delivers her closing arguments to a jury , she says " There 's a very old expression in China , " and then begins to speak in Chinese . In the subtitles we see her saying , " It really doesn 't matter what I say here , because none of you speak Chinese . But you can see from my sad face I 'm sympathetic . You hear from my tone it 's appropriate to feel sorry for me . As I drop to a faint whisper ( which she does ) , you 'll feel the sorrow yourself . I 'm going to finish now , pretend to cry " , which she does as she walks off .