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1986	*The Delta Force*	Menachem Golan
1986	*Half-Moon Street*	Bob Swaim
1986	*Hostage*	Hanro Mohr
1987	*Children of Rage*	Arthur Allan Seidelman
1987	*Deadline*	Nathaniel Gutman
1987	*Death Before Dishonor*	Terry Leonard
1987	*Wanted Dead or Alive*	Gary Sherman
1988	*Appointment With Death*	Michael Winner

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The Chinese Syndrome: The Evolving Image of Chinese and Chinese-Americans in Hollywood Films

Dick Stromgren

The Silent Era: Exotic Melodrama

For most of its 90 year history, Hollywood films have been a primary means by which many Americans and other Western cultures have gained an image of China, Chinese people, and Chinese customs. The image had developed in other popular arts and mass media. A Chinese version of Madame Butterfly, Fu Manchu, the Dragon Lady, and assorted house boys and slave girls had become familiar figures in fairy tales, stage melodrama, pulp fiction and even radio. It was in Hollywood, however, that the image of the Chinese was embellished with particularly exotic and forbidding qualities, including white slavery, kidnapping, opium trade, tong wars and heathen rites, all taking place in the strange but compelling atmosphere of China ports and Chinatown ghettos.

The image of China and Chinese culture had, of course, been in part the product of history. China had become an important focus and source of dramatic representation at the turn of the century, when revolution ended the centuries-old Manchu dynasty and Western expansionism met with violent reaction. Recent Chinese history, culture and atmosphere together provided an extraordinarily appealing combination of setting and action for the infant medium of film. The major events to affect the content of films and audiences' reaction to it were those involving the closing era of dynastic rule, the arrival of the missionaries, Western expansion and the resulting "Opium Wars," the Boxer Rebellion, Chinese emigration, and the battle of the Chinese warlords. In the early one- and two-reel melodramas, the portrayal of the Chinese character quickly became stereotyped, even though the frequency of such appearances fell far below that of other minority groups. Typically a male character, he was usually found in either the role of the "Yellow Heathen"—the Godless, uneducated and unprincipled, opium smoking dropout from society, or, paralleling the role of the "good Indian," he portrayed the faithful servant who, as laundryman, cook, farmer or laborer, helped the white man in his struggle against the villain or the elements. It is significant that the Chinese character in the early shorts was not usually cast in the role of the villain. Though a lost soul, he was not made to appear an evil one.

Titles alone suggest the attitude and some of the "allure" of these early single reel films produced by the pioneer American studios:; *Fun in a Chinese Laundry* (1894), *Ching Lee Foo Outone* (1900), *The Heathen Chinese and the Sunday School Teachers* (1904), and *Cutting Pigtails by Force* (1911). In 1908 the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company produced *The Yellow Peril,* an elaborate comic routine which begins to make some early reference to relations between the races. After a husband's flirtation with a French maid, the wife hires a Chinese servant who swallows the family goldfish, is dragged around by his queue by the housekeeper, and thrown out of the window by the cook. In describing the film, the Biograph Bulletin (March 7, 1908) describes the cook's "aversion to anything yellow," and refers to the new domestic as "the Confucian," "the Chink," and the "saffron individual."

The extent to which Chinese settings, characters, and ideas were developed in silent films varied greatly. At times just the vaguest suggestion of Oriental decor provided the desired atmosphere; in other films, the view of Eastern politics, art and culture became the basis for plotting, and the intrigue evolved from the conflict between East and West. Chinese characters were portrayed as inferior in both culture and spiritual life, dependent on the White Man for learning a fear of God and having appropriate humility before his Western liberator. This paternalistic attitude and the gulf between the races were extended to include screenplays with a romantic bent. They often drew their dramatic force from the exotic and erotic appeal of love between the races and the evils of miscengenation.

On occasion a film would emerge in which genuine interest in character and a determination to explore ideas won out over plot machinations. Such filmic statements on Chinese and inter-racial themes were infrequent, but when they occurred, they occasionally allowed for some reflection on what it meant to be Chinese and tried to tie character motivation to cultural heritage and not simply to setting and historical incident.

Hardly a superficial treatment of the relationship between the races and probably the most sympathetic and sensitive screen dramatization on the subject was D. W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919). Griffith had been reviled and haunted by charges of racism for his portrayal of blacks and his romanticizing of the birth of the Ku Klux Klan in *Birth of a Nation.* There is more then a little irony, therefore, in the fact that just four years later he produced a film referred to as the only really sympathetic account of the Oriental in an Oriental-Caucasian love story of those two decades: (1910-1930).[1]

Based on Thomas Burke's *Limehouse Nights,* particularly his story of "The Chink and the Child," *Broken Blossoms* told the story of the growing affection and "pure" love that developed between a London waif and a Chinese boy. The film has been hailed both for its technique and its characterization of the sensitive Oriental youth. It is also significant for the way in which it goes beyond this simple characterization to the point of deifying the boy and contrasting his ways with the "barbarous Anglo-Saxon, sons of turmoil and strife."

Though critics found *Broken Blossoms* impressive in its emotional power and its technical virtuosity, the film was not particularly well received outside the larger cities. For many viewers it no doubt failed because of its lack of erotic quality. As so many of the screen melodramas both before and after were to illustrate, the great appeal in interracial affairs was their consummation, even though the price for such transgressions must ultimately be paid.

Many screenplays in the twenties began to draw from such events as the Boxer Rebellion, traffic in opium and white slavery, immigration of Chinese communities and the ensuing tong wars, and finally the family life of the Chinese in general, to trigger plot conflict, climax and resolution. What was thought to be known of Chinese history, culture and customs became desirable plotting material beyond the simple use of the Chinese or American/Chinese locale as a backdrop for the action.

The futile love of a woman for the white adventurer hero—sometimes referred to as the "Madame Butterfly theme"—had gone beyond the Japanese original, proving its staying power in other arts and media, and quickly became a serviceable and popular design for screen melodrama. In 1918, *The Forbidden City* featured Norma Talmadge as a Chinese girl who falls instantly in love with a handsome young member of the American Consul's staff. Her father brings her to the court of the Emperor in order to gain favor. Here, kneeling before "his royal serenity," she uncovers the child cradled in her arms and reveals the father's identity. The Emperor feigns compassion and pretends to release her to return to her American lover. ("My tiny toy, we go to be with love man.") But guards, stationed behind draperies, run swords through her and the Emperor declares, "The half-American child shall live to be a warning—that between East and West there can be no twain."

Screenwriters had learned early in the game that it was possible to have it both ways—that is, providing the titillation of interracial sex while not violating the taboo against it by a simple matter of plot twisting. The prototype here is probably *Broken Fetters,* which was directed by the pioneer filmmaker Rex Ingram in 1916. Here a Chinese girl is sold to the owner of a gambling house, where she and a young American fall in love. He gambles away all his money trying to buy her freedom. After helping her to escape, he discovers that she is really the daughter of the American Consul in Shanghai, adopted by a wealthy mandarin at her father's death. The upbeat ending here included the happy marriage followed by a honeymoon in China.

By the early twenties the formula for "interracial" romance had been well established: the heroine is presumed to be Chinese and is revealed to be white only after the love affair with the white hero is well underway. The formula very often featured a lecherous Chinese mandarin or Chinatowntong leader who posed a threat to the heroine's purity and innocence. In *A Tale of Two Worlds* (1921) Wallace Berry played a Boxer leader who makes advances to the daughter of an American couple slain by Boxers. The girl, brought up in San Francisco's Chinatown as the daughter

East is West (1922)
Courtesy of National Film Archive/Still Collection (London)

Mr. Wu (1927) Courtesy of National Film Archive/Still Collection (London)

of a Chinese family, is saved from an interracial union by a wealthy young American.

In the melodramas of the twenties, the offspring of mixed Chinese/white parents were caught between two cultures and could be conveniently cast in the role of either hero or villain. In *Pals of the West* (1922) the half-caste, Lee Wong, seeks revenge on the hero who has deserted his sister and their Chinese mother. In 1919, *The Red Lantern* premiered at the Rivoli Theatre in New York, rounded out with an all-Chinese program including a travelogue, a "Chinese lullaby", and a short entitled *The Glow of the Lantern*. In *The Red Lantern* the heroine Mahlee turns to Western ways because she is looked down on by the Chinese as a half-caste. Prevented from marrying the American she loves, she is brought to suicide by poison. Silent screen star Nazimova played both Mahlee and her all-white half sister.

The narrative feature began grooming a range of popular Chinese villains as well as the incidental appearance of various stereotypes to lend local color to the screenplay or to give the plot an Oriental twist. From the evil Foo Chung, who tries to lure the hero of *Shame* (1921) into a life of crime, to Wu Fang, who in *Ransom* (1928) prepares to torture the heroine when she fails to deliver a secret formula, a parade of evil Orientals graced the silent screen. "Nefarious" became a favorite adjective in describing their character and motivation. They reached a zenith in evil in *Old San Francisco* (1927), where Warner Oland plays the cruel and heartless king of Chinatown who attempts to sell the madonna-like daughter of a Spanish aristocrat into prostitution and persecutes the people of Chinatown, though he himself is part Chinese.

As both plot intrigue and scenic dressing, Chinese characters, themes and settings had become familiar to film audiences by the time the movies learned to talk and the image of China for most Westerners continued to be determined, as it had been through the years of silent film, largely by Hollywood's moviemen and the myth they helped to perpetuate.

Hollywood produced just over 100 features between 1931 and 1945 which incorporated China or Chinese as a major theme. The most pervasive and indelible image of both Chinese protagonist and villain came, however, with several popular series films which made up 40% of the films of this period.[2] Many of the characters who further defined and reinforced the stereotypes of the Chinese in these crime dramas came from popular fiction and, through sequels or "further adventures," provided audiences with a string of films that made super-stars of several Chinese types. Most notable among these was the Chinese detective, Charlie Chan, who appeared in a serial and 46 feature films from 1926 to 1952 before moving on to television. None of the six actors who portrayed Chan was Chinese, but it was Warner Oland, cast as a Chinese villain in silent films, who made the most indelible image of Oriental shrewdness and cunning. It was a wholly sympathetic role, and made Charlie Chan the most popular Chinese character in the entire history of film.[3]

The serial films of the thirties also became a haven for an assortment of Oriental types ranging from the houseboy Kato (Keye Luke) in *The Green Hornet*, and the servant Connie in *Terry and the Pirates* (1940), to the evil

Chung-Ho (alias "The Dragon") in *Ace Drummond* (1936) and such villains as the warlord "Fang" and the mysterious "Dragon Lady," also in *Terry and the Pirates*. Among the Chinese villains of the serials, the best known and most despised was doubtless "Ming the Merciless" from the three Universal serials devoted to the exploits of *Flash Gordon*, beginning in 1936.[4] Ming was clearly the most sinister of Flash's adversaries. He had a bald head, long waxed mustache, and long flowing robes with wing-like collar. As portrayed by Charles Middleton, he was a self-proclaimed "Emperor of the Universe," who finally met his end in the "disintegration room" when the serial ended in 1940. With China a staunch U.S. ally by this time, his demise was most timely.

Among the feature films of the period that provide an image of China and the Chinese, a few stand out as having some sense of mission. They are films more committed to exploring the land and its people than using them for dressing or plot intrigue. Although inevitably tied to the traditions and requirements of big business filmmaking—particularly the reliance on the star system—they come within striking distance of reflecting some glimpse of social realism.

The most prominent of these was the 1937 MGM production, *The Good Earth*, based on the novel by Pearl Buck. The care in visual detail and the strong performances of the stars, Paul Muni and Luise Rainer, assured the film stature above the many pot-boiler melodramas with Chinese themes that had preceded it on the American screen. What gave the film some distinction as a social document, however, was not so much the authenticity of setting, as the vivid realization of certain key scenes from the Buck novel. It is perhaps ironic that these very scenes, which gave some dimension to Hollywood's portrayal of the Chinese, were the same scenes which the Chinese Consul required be deleted before the film could be released in China: scenes of extreme poverty, looting, and brutal treatment of refugees by the new Republican Army.

By the end of the thirties some significant changes in Hollywood's image of the Chinese had taken place. The incidental and gratuitous supporting roles of opium eater, laundryman and cook had begun to disappear. In major roles, the warlord had been replaced by the inscrutable detective (Charlie Chan and Mr. Wong, most notably) and a new hero/heroine emerged in the person of the wretchedly poor, but nobly spirited peasant. *The Good Earth* and the *Chan* films are atypical, as in most cases the central characters of the films were usually still Americans; yet, the characterizations of the Chinese, where they did occur, were generally positive and sympathetic.

The Burma Road and Beyond

With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, U.S.-Sino relations and public attitude toward the Chinese took a significant turn. Chinese Americans now became an important and welcome part of the labor force and the U.S. Armed Forces. A large number of the 80,000 Chinese in the U.S. were being absorbed into war-related industry by 1942 for the first time since the Chinese labor exclusion acts of 1880 and 1904.

The armed forces inducted Chinese Americans through enlistment and draft, with Chinese communities throughout the country taking great pride in their contribution to the war effort. Writing on "Chinese in the United States Today," Rose Hunn Lee reported:

> New York's Chinatown cheered itself hoarse when the first draft numbers drawn were for Chinese Americans. Some below-age boys tried to pass on the "Chinese age," which is often a year or two older than the American count. Since their birth certificate told a different tale, they had to be patient and wait.[5]

She goes on to express the hope that with the Chinese community's contributions to good citizenship, racial barriers and prejudices should finally be dissolved.

Aware of long-standing prejudices against the Chinese, and deeply ingrained stereotypes, organizations as diverse as the League of Women Voters and the Office of War Information were now trying to change the image. In California the League passed a resolution accepting its responsibility "for education as to the history and effects of the Exclusion discrimination in immigration laws..."

The Office of War Information was formed in 1942 by the Roosevelt administration to promote the public's understanding of the war through radio, motion pictures and the press. In an effort to eliminate racist and stereotypical images of the Allies, the O.W.I. began screening Hollywood films in 1943. It recommended changes to reflect the agency's views and produced a *Manual for the Motion Picture Industry*, which urged producers to follow its guidelines in the portrayal of minorities and to "avoid disparaging portrayal of Allied types." The agency was particularly concerned with Hollywood's portrayal of the Chinese and tried (with little success) to modify the image of Charlie Chan, who had by this time become a folk-hero to millions of Americans and Chinese.[6] In one communique to Monogram Pictures, producer of the Chan series, the O.W.I. stated, "The screen portrayal given Charlie Chan will contribute nothing to American-Chinese relation. It cannot...be recommended by us for overseas distribution."

The U.S. Army showed particular interest in giving the American servicemen fighting in China lessons in inter-racial understanding. "You'll Like the Chinese" is a guide for American military personnel which urges tolerance of Chinese customs, treating coolies with respect, and admiration for the Chinese soldier—"You have no reason to feel superior because you are better fed or better armed. On the contrary, give the Chinese soldier his due in admiration for his plain, common guts."[7]

Through the early war years (1940-42), Hollywood's attention to the Asian conflict centered on American participation in keeping convoys moving along the Burma Road, the vital supply link between Rangoon and Chungking. *Burma Convoy*, released by Universal Pictures in October of 1941, just weeks before U.S. entry into the war, was essentially a star vehicle for Charles Bickford who portrayed the leader of the "Hell Divers" who ferried supplies and materials to China's Army. Although the film's attention

to Chinese characterization was minimal, it did provide Keye Luke with one of several of his war-time roles representing "our friends the Chinese." Luke began his film career as Charlie Chan's "number two son" in 1934, and has continued in supporting roles for 50 years, appearing most recently as the old grandfather philosopher in the 1984 *Gremlins*. Although released early in 1942, *A Yank on the Burma Road* (MGM) was also made before Pearl Harbor. Like *Burma Convoy*, it is a lackluster melodrama using newsreel events as a setting for American heroics. Twentieth Century Fox joined Universal and MGM on the Burma Road later in 1942 with *China Girl*. Produced and written by Ben Hecht and directed by Henry Hathaway, the film is a cut above the others, but once again centers on American heroics and love intrigue. George Montgomery is cast as a newsreel cameraman who escapes the Japanese and falls in love with a Vassar-educated Chinese girl along the Burma Road. Although the Chinese girl and a Japanese major have key roles, they are played by Hollywood stars Gene Tierney and Victor McLaglen.

Also drawing inspiration from the contemporary newsreels, other Hollywood films dramatized the heroics of the American air ace who had volunteered to join General Chennault's Flying Tigers in the air war against Japan. Republic Pictures' *Flying Tigers* (1942) casts John Wayne as "the serious, loftily motivated squadron leader who realizes full well that the suffering Chinese aren't fighting for the benefit of grandstand pilots." *God is my Co-Pilot*, which Warner Brothers produced in 1945, features Dennis Morgan as a daredevil Colonel who joins Chennault in the air war against Japan. It has repeated scenes of aerial encounters with the Japanese air ace "Tokyo Joe." These air war films are even more closely bound to the Hollywood "service film" formula than the Burma Road films, and although the Chinese are portrayed in a wholly sympathetic light, they are relegated to strictly subsidiary roles: children in a mission run by an Irish Catholic priest, nurses ministering to the wounded, assorted military aids, and peasants laboring to keep the airstrips in repair. Films dramatizing the Chinese resistance movement further emphasized Sino-American friendship, but except for MGM's *Dragon Seed* (1944), the attention is on American heroics. In *China* (Paramount 1943), Alan Ladd plays a tough American oil man who comes to the aid of an American school teacher (Loretta Young) and avenges the atrocities of the Japanese. Most of the remaining principles (except for William Bendix) are of Chinese extraction, but China's struggle is finally subsumed by the formula Hollywood romance. *China Sky* (1945), RKO's contribution to the genre, once again dramatizes the struggle of the Chinese resistance movement as a backdrop for an all-American romance, this time a love triangle with Randolph Scott and Ruth Warwick as valiant doctors repairing the human wreckage of Japanese bombings, and Ellen Drew as the jealous bride. Anthony Quinn is cast as the Chinese guerrilla leader, Chen Ta, who rescues a village from the threat of Japanese paratroopers. The other Chinese characters are "the typical self-effacing types to be found on the screen."[8]

Among the Hollywood war dramas, it was MGM's 1944 offering, *Dragon Seed*, that probably comes closest to making China and the Chinese struggle its central focus. Like *China Sky*, this film was based on a Pearl Buck novel, with the struggle here centering on the scourge of war on a Chinese farming community. The reign of terror inflicted by Japanese invaders, guerrilla warfare, acts of bravery and sacrifice and the inevitable conflict within the community provide moving drama, but it was MGM's stable of stars that filled all the major roles, with Katharine Hepburn and Walter Huston as the leads. Like so many well-intentioned screen dramatizations of Chinese history and culture, the indelible image of the Hollywood star shines brightest and overwhelms any sense of time, place and character that the writer and director might have intended to show. Still, the film does manage to sustain a sensitive, if not always convincing, portrayal of a courageous people destroying their own crops to keep them out of the hands of the Japanese invaders. Though flawed in individual characterization, the spirit of the collective character is honestly portrayed and remains intact.

With a lingering sense of comradeship between American and Chinese allies, films of the fifties continued to depict friendships and loves between American military personnel, and Chinese victims of war who needed rescue from exploitation at home and abroad. In 1952, Paramount produced *Hong Kong*, which told of an American soldier in China after the war who finds a gold idol in the clothing of a Chinese boy he has adopted. After trying to sell the statue himself, he ends up rescuing the boy from kidnappers who want the idol as ransom. Rhonda Fleming, as a missionary woman, and Ronald Reagan, a "worthless soldier of fortune," share custody of the child and provide love interest. *China Doll*, the 1958 United Artists production directed by Frank Borzage, attempts a further display of interracial understanding, this time leading to marriage. Victor Mature is the American airman who, on a drunken spree, buys a Chinese girl as a house servant. Although his initial reaction to the suggestion of marriage by the girl's father is negative—"His daughter? I don't even drink their water!"—he falls in love with her, learns Chinese customs, and when she becomes pregnant, marries her in a Buddhist ceremony. (It is she who hesitates at the "awkward" inter-racial marriage.) To further reaffirm the strength of the love, the film ends with the airman being shot down and killed trying to save their infant daughter, after his Chinese bride is herself killed in a bombing raid. An epilogue has the thirteen-year old daughter, wearing her father's dog tags, being met by members of his old unit at Los Angeles airport. Although the modest film settles for sentimental romance rather than any exploration of its inter-racial theme, it makes the union acceptable though tragic.[9]

Through the sixties, China and Chinatown once again provided the settings and accoutrements for films in search of the exotic, mysterious, and vaguely if not blatantly sinful. Adhering to the time-honored formulas of the early screen melodramas and perpetuating those models of inscrutability, kindliness and wisdom (never quite what could be called heroism) on the one hand, and what clearly had the mark of villainy on the other, films like *Terror of the Tongs* (1961), *Confessions of an Opium Eater* (1962), *White Slavers of Chinatown* (1965), and *House of the Red Dragon* (1969)

provided the basic ingredients of Chinese melodrama: tong warfare, white slavery, and drug traffic. The sixties also marked the release of a group of films with Chinese themes which one is tempted to distinguish from those storybook tales of the romantic commingling of individuals and cultures. They included journalistic accounts of war, plague, self-doubt and heroic rescue which set a more serious, even grim tone to life for both Orientals and Caucasians in an uncivilized land. The sober tone of these films might be identified simply as the kind of realism that is generally associated with the New American Cinema of the sixties, until one realizes that the old Hollywood production values are still very much at work. *The Mountain Road* (1960), *55 Days at Peking* (1963), *Seven Women* (1966), and *The Sand Pebbles* (1966) all impress one initially with a sense of realism and historical mission. Yet they are all cast in the mold of the old-fashioned screen melodrama and provide a showcase for their top stars remaining, like the romances, void of any substantive image of Chinese people and events.

The Red Menace

The struggle between Communists and Nationalists in China led to the Communist takeover by the early fifties. Under Mao, Red China was closed to the West behind the "bamboo curtain" and became a new adversary and a new enigma. As with the "Yellow Peril" melodramas, the new variety was represented by films ranging from the low budget "potboilers" with lesser known talents to the showcase, star vehicles by top directors with high production values and big budgets. *Target—Hong Kong* (1953), which Fred Sears directed for Columbia, represents the former variety. It has Richard Denning and Richard Loo in principle roles and follows the exploits of American adventurers who discover and foil the plot of the Red Chinese to blow up Hong Kong. By the sixties the image of China and the Chinese had become a combination of realism and romance based on the old myths and recent history that had thrust China into a new political alignment and a struggle for identity as a major world power.

The large budget production on the Red Chinese theme came with such films as *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *The Chairman* (1969). The former brought together one of the new breed of American directors, John Frankenheimer, with some old Hollywood stars—Frank Sinatra, Laurence Harvey, Janet Leigh, and Angela Lansbury. The Chinese theme here, though indirect, is no less important in its implication. The son of a U.S. senator has been brainwashed in Korea by the Chinese Communists and programmed to assassinate a presidential candidate with the help of his mother, who is part of the conspiracy. This idea of the insidious control of the mind has long been associated with the Chinese, and was reinforced by brainwashing reports during the Korean War. The wildness of the screenplay does not preclude the film's stimulating, in Bosley Cowther's words, "grave imaginings in anxious minds."[10] The climactic scene, in fact, provides a frighteningly realistic reconstruction of the 1960 Republican convention at Madison Square Garden. The ironic twists and turns of this modern "psycho political thriller" do not prevent an easy association of the Chinese villains

working behind the scenes here, with their screen ancestors. As Paul Beckley points out, we are "deep in Fu Manchu territory."[11]

A New China and Fiendish Old Plots

With the gradual normalization of relations between China and the U.S. came a marked reduction of films dealing with contemporary political themes and the return to time-honored formulas. By the mid 1970s, Chinese-American actor Bruce Lee was extending if not improving the image of the Chinese through his Kung Fu intrigues. Though produced in Hong Kong and therefore not a part of the American legacy, the films had a strong following in the U.S. *Fist of Fury* (1972), *The Chinese Connection* (1973), *Enter the Dragon* (1973) provided an unending series of violent (albeit frequently humorous) black belt confrontations featuring Lee in a physically attractive and generally positive image, even though the films were without any romantic involvement. What had developed as virtually a one-man genre ended abruptly with Lee's death in 1973.

Along with the cult of Kung Fu and such appropriately sinister settings as that provided by Roman Polanski for the concluding scenes of *Chinatown* (1974), there has been a return in recent years to many of the old formulas and villains of the pre World War II days. The 1980s have already provided considerable evidence that the old stereotypes of the Chinese are alive and well and flourishing in films like *The Fiendish Plot of Dr. Fu Manchu* (1980), *Flash Gordon* (1980), *Charlie Chan and the Curse of the Dragon Queen* (1981), *Blade Runner* (1982), *Gremlins* (1984) and *The Year of the Dragon* (1985). The Warner Brothers reincarnation of Fu Manchu has Peter Sellers playing both Fu and his arch enemy, Nayland Smith, of Scotland Yard. It is Sellers' last screen appearance and in the role of Fu, his most grotesque.

In his revival of the popular comic strip and screen serial character, Flash Gordon, Dino DeLaurentiis has brought back another favorite villain with all his traits as evil Chinaman intact. "Ming the Merciless" in this revival imprisons Flash and his female companion, Dale, as part of his plan to marry the girl and populate the earth with his offspring. At the same time that he is planning his own wedding, his nymphomaniacal daughter is pursuing Flash. Although Ming is impaled on the tine of a spaceship, the film hints that the menace of Ming may not be over.

The menace of Swedish actors playing Chinese villains, begun by Warner Oland in 1928, is perpetuated in *Flash Gordon* with Max von Sydow cast in the role of Ming. The most notable Chinese role that Oland helped to create was that of Charlie Chan, which was revived with Peter Ustinov's playing Chan in *Charlie Chan and the Curse of the Dragon Queen.* The film features Richard Hatch as Lee Chan Lupowitz, Chan's half Jewish, half Chinese grandson, a graduate of Shanghai/Yeshiva University who enjoys soy sauce on his lox and eggs. Angie Dickinson revives the role of "the Dragon Lady" while Peter Ustinov provides a parody of a parody in his mimicry of Warner Oland's caricature of inscrutability.

The exotic and mysterious qualities of Chinatown in the U.S., and the incomparable wisdom of its sages, provides the premise for producer Steven Spielberg's *Gremlins* (1984). The film opens in a curio shop where Keye Luke as the aged seer with long white beard, long-stemmed pipe, and glass eye declines to sell the film's gremlin star, Gizmo, to the harebrained father of the film's young human star, Billie. "With Mogwai comes much responsibility, I cannot sell him at any price" he proclaims moments before his own grandson surreptitiously makes the sale outside the shop. Careless disregard of instructions on the care of the Mogwai brings havoc to the peaceful town of Kingston Falls, as the Mogwai multiplies into hundreds of mischievous and ultimately evil creatures. In the film's final scene, Keye Luke appears at Billie's home to reclaim Gizmo proclaiming, "You do with Mogwai what your society has done with all of nature's gifts, you do not understand. You are not ready."

The stereotype here is imbued with a reverence toward ancient Chinese wisdom, reinforced by the contrast drawn between cultures. The opening scene of Chinatown provides a counterpoint to the middle America setting of Kingston Falls. The wisdom the old man speaks is juxtaposed with such offhand crass comments by the hometown yokels as "foreign piece of crap," (in reference to an automobile) and "goddam foreign TV." The contrast seems almost an apology for the gratuitous slipping in of Chinese characters and setting, in order to initiate and resolve the film's story.

Chan is Missing (1982), the first film by Chinese-American director Wayne Wang, and the first feature ever made with an all Asian-American cast, provides the clearest departure from the formulas and stereotypes of Chinese culture and character. "(The film) provided the groundwork for an introduction to the Chinese-American community," says the film's director.[12] With modest budget, technical roughness and simple, utilitarian plot, Wang is able to convey what life in Chinatown is like for a Chinese-American, including humorous impressions of the Chinese-American perception of mainstream American imagery of the Chinese. The complexity of life and diverse and contrasting values are conveyed through the film's two central characters, Uncle Joe and his nephew Young Steve, as well as through the varying descriptions they encounter about the missing Chan (who never appears in the film). Uncle Joe's old world values and Young Steve's Americanized ways, together with Chan's many faces, combine to provide a metaphor for the diversity and complexity of the Chinese character. The film finally says that all that the Chinese really have in common is the way they are perceived by most Americans.

Dim Sum: A Little Bit of Heart (1985) is Wayne Wang's more recent portrayal of Chinese-American lifestyle and culture. It represents, like *Chan,* an important departure from the traditional Hollywood image in its mother-daughter variation on the "silver cord" theme much in the spirit of Paddy Chayevsky's *Marty.*

In spite of such efforts as those of Wayne Wang, there is little to indicate a substantive change in the Chinese image, at least not in the works released through major American studios. A 1985 cause celebre was *Year of the Dragon,* directed by Michael Cimino. The film's focus is organized crime in

Manhattan's Chinatown and police pursuit of a young gang lord, which becomes a one-cop crusade to clean up the hopelessly corrupt and crime-ridden Chinese community. Mott Street becomes a battleground for Chinatown warlords struggling with the Italian Mafia and among themselves for control of the heroine trade.

Cimino's visual style is wildly erratic, excessive, and always fascinating—almost hypnotizing at times. To his credit, there are also such redeeming qualities in Chinese character as the dedicated if weak-willed TV reporter whom Stanley learns to love, and his Chinese-American undercover man who delivers a peroration on the pioneering sacrifices made in the New World by his ancestors—"denied citizenship until 1943." But the image that the film leaves one with is a Chinese-American community that is overwhelmingly sinister, cunning, and brutal.

This image ignited protest within the Chinese-American community in several U.S. cities. The Executive Director of the Organization of Chinese Americans called the film "sexist and racist," and a coalition of Chinese groups filed a libel suit against MGM/UA, the releasing company, to seek damages and prohibit distribution. In answer to charges of racism, MGM/UA provided a disclaimer announcing that the film "does not intend to demean or ignore the many positive features of Asian Americans."

Also helping to keep Chinese stereotypes firmly in place is John Carpenter's realization of the evil empire beneath San Francisco's Chinatown in *Big Trouble in Little China* (1986). The film features the character Lo Pan, a "creature of vast, dark, destructive power," who must marry a green-eyed woman to become mortal and rule the universe. The comic chase and rescue of not one, but two, green-eyed Chinese beauties becomes not only a reinforcing of the good and evil stereotypes, but is a parody of the popular Kung Fu movies as well. With no intent to be taken seriously, such seemingly innocuous entertainment, along with the more "earnest" imagery of the Cimino film, have helped to reaffirm the popular and serviceable myths.

With the normalization of relations between the U.S. and Red China, Hollywood films of the 1980s once again draw their themes and imagery from the allures of the old China and some favorite old icons; from the intrigues and dangers of the "Yellow Peril" both in port cities of China and the American Chinatown.

A few recent productions give promise of change. Stanley Kwan is the director of *New Moon in New York* (1989), produced by a Hong Kong company working in New York. The film is about three modern middle-class immigrant women from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China who meet in Manhattan and face what the film's producer asserts are "real life" conflicts in identity and assimilation.[13] Shirley Sum, a Chinese-American filmmaker born in Shanghai, has completed filming of the Mark Salzman Chinese love story, *Iron and Silk*. Her hope, she says, is that "this and other movies we make will be more authentic about Chinese life."[14] It will perhaps be left to such emigre directors as Wayne Wang, Stanley Kwan and Shirley Sum to break the mold, broaden the image, and explore a more multi-dimensional and real sense of what it means to be Chinese or Chinese-American.

Notes

[1]Richard A. Oehling, "Hollywood and the Image of the Oriental," *Film and History*, 8, No. 2 (May 1978), p. 32.

[2]The term "series film" is used here to identify feature-length works that became part of a group of films, each reintroducing the same central character or characters involved in a variety of intrigues. This is distinct from the "serial," which was a composite of short episodes usually shown individually.

[3]The most durable of Chinese villans, Fu Manchu, was inaugurated on his film career by Paramount Pictures in the early 1930s.

[4]The serialization continued in 1938 and 1940 sequels, along with the Ming villainy.

[5]Rose Hum Lee, "Chinese in the United States Today," *Survey Graphics*, No. 31 (Oct., 1942), p. 444.

[6]For a fuller discussion see Gregory D. Black, "Charlie Chan Meets O.W.I.—Racism in World War II Films," *American Classic Screen*, 3, No. 2 (Nov./Dec. 1978), pp. 13-15.

[7]Prepared for distribution to U.S. Army personnel serving in China as *A Pocket Guide to China* and reprinted in condensed form as "You'll Like the Chinese," *Science Digest*, 13 (March 1943), pp. 32-36.

[8]*New York Times*, May 25, 1945, p. 22.

[9]The long standing taboo against miscegenation in Hollywood films makes this a notable exception. Howard Thompson observes in his New York Times Review (Dec. 4, 1958), "No eyebrows are raised over a Chinese-American Marriage."

[10]*New York Times*, Oct. 25, 1962, p. 48.

[11]*New York Herald Tribune*, October 25, 1962, p. 13.

[12]Wayne Wang, "Dialogue on Film" *American Film*, (July/Aug. 1986), p. 18.

[13]*New York Times*, December 25, 1988, p. 66.

[14]*New York Times*, January 22, 1989, p. H9.

Filmography

The following filmography is a selected listing of American feature films containing prominent or representative Chinese characterizations, settings and/or themes. Except as noted, it does not include the innumerable shorts, documentaries, serials, or series titles (Charlie Chan, Fu Manchu and Mr. Moto are represented by key films). Also excluded (except for two of Bruce Lee's popular Kung Fu films) are non-Hollywood films and those featuring other Oriental nationalities, locations and themes.

1894	*Fun in a Chinese Laundry*	Biograph Co. (short)
1898	*Dancing Chinaman, Marionette*	Edison Co. (short)
1900	*Ching Lee Foo Outdone*	Edison Co. (short)
1902	*Chinese Shaving Scene*	Edison Co. (short)
1903	*The Chinese Rubbernecks*	Biograph Co. (short)
1904	*The Heathen Chinese and the Sunday School Teachers*	Biograph Co. (short)
1910	*The Chink at Golden Gulch*	Biograph Co. (short)
1911	*Cutting Pigtails By Force*	Biograph Co. (short)
1913	*A Chinese Puzzle*	Oriental Films (short)
1915	*Chinks and Chickens*	Edison Co. (short)
1916	*Broken Fetters*	Rex Ingram
1918	*The Forbidden City*	Sidney Franklin
1919	*Broken Blossoms*	D. W. Griffith

1920	*The Red Lantern*	Albert Capellani
1921	*Crooked Streets*	Paul Powell
1921	*Wing Toy*	Howard Mitchell
1921	*Outside the Law*	Tod Browning
1921	*A Tale of the Worlds*	Frank Lloyd
1921	*Where Lights are Low*	Colin Campbell
1921	*Shame*	Emmett J. Flynn
1922	*When East Comes West*	B. Reeves Eason
1922	*Pals of the West*	Film Art Productions
1922	*East is West*	Sidney Franklin
1922	*Shadows*	Tom Forman
1924	*The Pell Street Mystery*	Joseph Franz
1925	*East of Suez*	Raoul Walsh
1926	*Shadows of Chinatown*	Paul Hurst
1926	*Yellow Fingers*	Emmett J. Flynn
1927	*Old San Francisco*	Alan Crosland
1928	*Chinatown Charlie*	Charles Hines
1928	*Ransom*	George Seitz
1929	*Chinatown Nights*	William Wellman
1929	*Shanghai Lady*	John S. Robertson
1929	*The Peacock Fan*	Phil Rosen
1930	*The Return of Dr. Fu Manchu*	Roland V. Lee
1930	*East is West*	Monta Bell
1931	*Chinatown After Dark*	Stuart Paton
1932	*The Son-Daughter*	Clarence Brown
1932	*The Bitter Tea of General Yen*	Frank Capra
1932	*The Hatchet Man*	William Wellman
1932	*The Mask of Fu Manchu*	Charles Brabin
1932	*Shanghi Express*	Joseph von Sternberg
1934	*Limehouse Blues*	Alexander Hall
1935	*Shanghai*	James Flood
1935	*Charlie Chan in Shanghai*	James Tingling
1936	*The General Died at Dawn*	Lewis Milestone
1936	*Charlie Chan at the Opera*	J. Bruce Humberstone
1937	*Daughter of Shanghai*	Robert Florey
1937	*West of Shanghai*	John Farrow
1937	*The Good Earth*	Sidney Franklin
1938	*International Settlement*	Eugene Ford
1938	*Mr. Wong, Detective*	William Nigh
1939	*King of Chinatown*	Nick Grinde
1940	*Charlie Chan in Panama*	Norman Foster
1941	*Singapore Woman*	Jean Negulesco
1941	*The Shanghai Gesture*	Joseph von Sternberg
1941	*Burma Convoy*	Noel Smith
1942	*The Lady From Chungking*	William Nigh
1942	*Flying Tigers*	David Miller
1942	*A Yank on the Burma Road*	George Seitz
1942	*China Girl*	Henry Hathaway
1943	*The Drums of Fu Manchu*	William Whitney
1943	*China*	John Farrow
1944	*Dragon Seed*	Jack Conway
1944	*The Keys of the Kingdom*	John Stahl

1945	*God is My Co-Pilot*	Robert Florey
1945	*China Sky*	Ray Enright
1945	*China's Little Devil*	Monta Bell
1947	*Intrigue*	Edwin L. Marin
1949	*Chinatown at Midnight*	Seymour Friedman
1949	*Boston Blackie's Chinese Venture*	Seymour Friedman
1951	*Peking Express*	William Dieterle
1952	*Macao*	Joseph von Sternberg
1952	*Hong Kong*	Lewis R. Foster
1953	*Target Hong Kong*	Fred F. Sears
1953	*Forbidden*	Rudolph Mate
1954	*The Shanghai Story*	Frank Lloyd
1958	*China Doll*	Frank Borzage
1958	*The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*	Mark Robson
1960	*The Mountain Road*	Daniel Mann
1961	*Terror of the Tongs*	Anthony Bushell
1961	*The Flower Drum Song*	Henry Koster
1962	*Road to Hong Kong*	Norman Panama
1962	*Confessions of an Opium Eater*	Albert Zugsmith
1962	*The Manchurian Candidate*	John Frankenheimer
1962	*A Girl Named Tamiko*	John Sturges
1963	*55 Days at Peking*	Nicholas Ray
1964	*The 7 Faces of Dr. Loa*	George Pal
1966	*Seven Women*	John Ford
1966	*The Sand Pebbles*	Robert Wise
1966	*The Year of the Horse*	Irving Sunasky
1968	*Beware the Black Widow*	Larry Crane
1969	*The Chairman*	J. Lee Thompson
1969	*House of the Red Dragon*	John Donne
1972	*Fist of Fury*	Lo Wei (Chinese)
1973	*The Chinese Connection*	Lo Wei (Chinese)
1973	*Enter the Dragon*	Robert Clouse
1974	*Chinatown*	Roman Polanski
1979	*Saint Jack*	Peter Bogdanovich
1981	*Charlie Chan and the Curse of the Dragon Queen*	Clive Donner
1982	*Chan is Missing*	Wayne Wang
1982	*Blade Runner*	Ridley Scott
1983	*China Rose*	Robert Day
1984	*Sixteen Candles*	John Hughes
1984	*Gremlins*	Joe Dante
1984	*Dim Sum: A Little Bit of Heart*	Wayne Wang
1985	*The Year of the Dragon*	Michael Cimino
1986	*Big Trouble in Little China*	John Carpenter
1987	*The Last Emperor*	Bernardo Bertolucci
1987	*Empire of the Sun*	Steven Spielberg
1989	*New Moon in New York*	Stanley Kwan
1989	*Iron and Silk*	Shirley Sun