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Mockery, Deviants, Aliens, and Asians in Marvel films: A Media Analysis of Asian
Representation

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Table of Contents

Abstract

By doing a content analysis of the large catalogue of Marvel films, this thesis aims to examine how Marvel and by extension Hollywood is perpetuating the narrative of Asian representation. Films produced by Marvel Studios is perpetuating racial stereotypes of people of Asian descent, such as portraying them as model minorities if they are positive characters or yellow perils if they are negative characters. The continuation of these portrayals is reflected by the roles that are given to Asian and Asian descended actors. These actors are given roles that restrict them to their colors. For Hollywood, the skin color of the actors is more important than their capabilities in acting. By examining the films from Phase One to Phase Four through content analysis, the thesis is tracking the development of Asian representation from 2008 to 2021. From Phase One to Phase Two which took seven years to finish, the presence of actors of Asian descent is minimal. Characters are portrayed as stereotypes, given a strictly, limited screen time of two minutes and a lack of dialogue. By Phase Three which began in 2016 and ended in 2019, Asian representation has improved with more screen time and dialogues.

Despite the increased visibility in screen time and more Asian actors being given supporting roles, Marvel is still perpetuating the stereotypes by regulating Asians as foreigners, model minorities or aliens. Additionally, Marvel is selective in the body types of their Asian actors. Actors with a large body structure are given supporting roles. This body image is contrasted with actors with athletic bodies being given antagonistic roles or serving as living props for the white leads to punch. Marvel's selection of Asian bodies connects with how gender and sexualities are portrayed among characters played by Asian actors. For the male characters, there are no interracial relationships between Asians and whites in the films. On the other hand, female characters played by Asian actresses are allowed to have interracial relationships with white men. The Asian women in the films are hyperfeminine and they desire white male bodies. Whether portrayed as aliens or people, characters played by Asian actors are often the target of mockery. Both good and evil characters are the targets of verbal and physical abuse in the films. Verbal abuses are played for comedy which masquerades as positive interactions. Physical abuse is covered by the fast-paced editing which makes the suffering endured by the characters invisible. Additionally, the use of mockery, either through comedy or violence, is done to suppress Asian visibility in the films; thus, limiting the representation of Asians in media. The danger of these effects is the normalization of hate crimes and stereotypes toward people of East-Asian descent.

1.0 INTROUCTION

This thesis aims to examine Marvel's representation of Asians, specifically how actors who are East Asian or of East-Asian descent are represented on screen in the films. Despite being one of the fastest-growing racial groups in the United States, they are continuously misrepresented in the media (Besana 201). The representation of Asian and Asian Americans is about the complex strategy that media uses to characterize them (Ono & Kent ch 1). In comparison to other ethnic groups, Asians and Asian Americans are underrepresented in media, and when they are given roles, they are playing stereotypes (Zhang 1). A common pattern of Asian portrayals in American media is that they are often side-lined (Ono & Kent ch 1). Whether as invisible background characters or obstacles for main characters, they are often victims of subjugation, invalidation, and persecution (Ono & Kent ch 1). These occurrences in media are problematic, not just because of the troubling representation, but because of the psychosocial effect within the society of the United States (Ono & Kent ch 1). Since media consumption is common in the United States, misrepresentation has an impact on people's views and Asians' ability to build their identities (Besana 201). Asians' capability to voice themselves in mainstream culture is limited (Ono & Kent ch 1). Thus, this analysis aims to explore the evolution of Asian representation by examining Marvel films from 2008 to 2021.

How Marvel portrays Asians in their media is a question that has only become more prominent in contemporary times. With the rise of popular works produced by Asians, such as the American made *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), the South-Korean tv-show, *Squid Game* (2021), South-Korean film, *Parasite* (2019) just to name a few, works made by Asians are becoming prominent in mainstream culture. This rise of prominence breaks the stereotype that has been circulating in the collective imaginations of Asians, that they are characterized as either stoic and invisible people or obstacles to the White narrative. These repetitions of Asian stereotypes are problematic, which makes this topic a necessity to examine. The rise of Asian media, where stereotypes are broken and challenged, makes reexamining the Marvel films an ideal subject of analysis because films produced by the film industry reflects society which it operates (Wong 1). The franchise is an influential cultural phenomenon that has an impact on mainstream culture. The dominant cultural industries and social discourses are reaffirming Asians' racial coded status as perpetual foreigners (Mimura 4). Compounding the problem is that much of the narrative about Asians is impacted by a legacy of omission by Hollywood (Mimura xiv). Racism comes in all forms, and to dismantle it requires confrontation (Combs 39). To call out any intentional or unintentional problematic representation of Asians and

people of Asian descent is important to solve and prevent perpetuating a negative narrative that will affect people.

This thesis specifically examines the superhero films produced by Marvel. I will be examining most of the films starting from *Iron Man* (2008) to *Eternals* (2021) in chronological order. Marvel divides their films into phases. Phase One is a series of films that begins in 2008 and ends in 2012. Phase Two starts in 2013 and ends in 2015. Phase Three starts in 2016 and ends in 2019. At the time of this writing, Phase Four is currently ongoing. The current phase consists of mini-series and television shows, but this thesis will only focus on the film aspect.

1.1 The Yellow Peril

The yellow peril is a negative portrayal of Asians in Western narrative. Regarding the yellow peril, Ono & Pham state:

> For Asian Americans, perhaps the longest-standing stereotypical representation is that of "yellow peril." By yellow peril, we mean representation of Asians and Asian Americans as threatening to take over, invade, or otherwise negatively Asianize the US nation and its society and culture. Usually, yellow peril discourse construct Asian-white dialectic emphasizing the powerful, threatening potential of Asians and Asian Americans while simultaneously constructing whites as vulnerable, threatened, or otherwise in danger. (Ono & Pham ch 2).

What they are saying is that Asians are portrayed as a looming threat to western society, while the United States is framed as weak and vulnerable. Ono & Pham state that the yellow peril continues to persist in contemporary times (ch 2). They further state that the discourse is entrenched into the cultural fabric of the United States, which the media helps perpetuate (Ono & Pham ch 2). An example would be the growing tension between the United States and China in contemporary times.

Ono & Pham fault history and media for playing their part in creating the yellow peril (ch 2). In a historical context, the yellow peril discourse can trace itself back to the Mongol invasion of Europe (ch 2). The idea of an alien invasion by a people with hostile intentions and speaking a foreign language is an image that serves as the core of the yellow peril. Not helping the image is that media tend to depict the worst aspect of Asian culture, such as having villainous Asian characters running opium dens, heartens and white slavers (Ono & Pham ch 2). Additionally, famous writers such as Mark Twain portrayed China in a degrading manner and regarded the east as a threat to the west (Ono & Pham ch 2).

The yellow peril is treated not only as an external threat but also as an internal one. Ono & Pham use the silent film *Broken Blossom* (1919) as an example of an implied yellow peril

(ch 2). The film is about an Asian man, who is outrageously named Yellow Man, and his infatuation with a white woman named Lucy (ch 2). Even though the Yellow Man, who is played by a white actor using yellowface makeup, is not the antagonist in the film, he is portrayed as a feminized and desexualized character (ch 2). The portrayal of the Asian character in the film is depicted as alien through his body image such as squinting his eyes and hunching his back, and his effeminized behavior signifies him as a threat to masculinity (Ono & Pham ch 2).

The fictional character of Fu Manchu is the prime example of a figure who represents the yellow peril (Ono & Pham ch 2). The character was created by Sax Rohmer. Despite not knowing anything about Chinese culture, Rohmer created the villainous character based on his imagined understanding of Asia (Ono & Pham ch 2). As much as the character represents the danger to Western society, he is also an example of a character who is created by a misunderstanding of Chinese culture. The presence of Fu Manchu has created a discourse about the yellow peril and serves as an example of the Western's desire for a manifest destiny (Ono & Pham ch 2). Essentially, Asian men are vilified and degraded to maintain the superiority of White men (Ono & Pham ch 2). Befitting the characteristics of yellow peril, Fu Manchu is described as an alien and cat-like man with a desire for totalitarianism (Ono & Pham ch 2). Due to his goals, any conflict between a white protagonist and Fu Manchu represents a struggle between democracy and dictatorship, which echoes the conflict between west and east.

The yellow peril stereotype is not focused exclusively on one group. Before the Second World War, the portrayal of Asian being a threat was focused on the Chinese. After Pearl Harbor, the perception shifted toward the Japanese (Ono & Pham ch 2). The description of the Japanese becomes more villainous and sinister, and animalistic such as having a large set of buckteeth (Ono & Pham ch 2). A famous example of the Japanese being a yellow peril happens in the Superman animated short film series, *Superman* (1940). During the short film named *Japoteur* (1942), a villainous Japanese character plans to steal a bomber for his nation. He fits the yellow peril description, he has narrow and shifty eyes along with buckteeth. In his introduction scene, he looks at a picture of the Statue of Liberty before pressing a button that changes it into the Japanese flag. The message is clear; Japan is a threat to the United States and freedom. The short film was made for war propaganda and depicting the Japanese as the enemy was the point. In their research, Ono & Pham use Eugene Franklin Wong, who writes about Asian portrayal in media. Quoting Wong: "Hollywood was able to manipulate the image of Japanese to create in the process intense and highly racialist attitudes among non-Asian Americans for the Japanese, and ultimately for all Asians." (Wong 146). This observation

shows that the yellow peril is a stereotype that changes groups depending on period and circumstances. After the war, and Japan proves her ability to westernize and adhere to Western influence, the perception toward the country turns positive (Wong xiv). However, this shift links the yellow peril stereotype to model minority. If Asians are a threat, then they are the yellow peril, if they are docile and adhering to the western system then they are allies. This view is supported by Paner who states that "a good Asian" is to serve the white people (11). Rather than a change toward standing on equal ground, model minority is adhering to the idea of Asians must submit to western powers to be respected.

Ono & Pham state that the problem of Asian representation lies in the media being dominant by white people (ch 2). The power to produce images rests in the hands of the white society, and Asians are unable to make their voices heard (Ono & Pham ch 2). Additionally, historically few Asians involved themselves with externalizing images of their culture which meant that the task was left to non-Asians who had little knowledge about Asian cultures, signs, public image, and language (Ono & Pham ch 2). Due to this line of reasoning, Ono & Pham state that the yellow peril is manufactured and does not represent an actual threat (ch 2). Like the yellow peril being manufactured by the west, orientalism by Edward Said can be seen as a produced view by Western countries. Using Said's insight, Ono & Pham state that the idea of orientalism is a view that is constructed without the east's input (ch 2). The western power needed to define their relationship with the east, and that required a characterization (Ono & Pham ch 2).

In their conclusion about the yellow peril, Ono & Pham state that the stereotype does not pay attention to ethical, political, cultural, historical, and social differences (ch 2). The yellow peril imagery links to the notion that all Asians are like, and if they are a threat then they are all a danger (Ono & Pham ch 2). Providing a solution, Ono & Pham state that changing Asian representation require critique (ch 2).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Asian Americans and the Media by Kent A. Ono & Vincent n. Pham is a culture study analysis about Asian American. In the book, they highlight the problematic Asian representation that occurs in American media. In addition to providing an insight on how Asian Americans are presented in media, they provide historical context to types of representations such as the progression from the yellow peril to model minority. Ono & Pham draw upon the Stuart Hall's theory of stereotypes and Edward Said's Orientalism in their research on representation. In their arguments, they use both fictional characters and real-life people to talk

about how they are framed in their respective stereotypes. Finally, the study concludes with Ono & Pham providing an answer to how Asian Americans are changing stereotypes through critiques and a growing presence in media.

The Ghostlife of Third Cinema Asian American Film and Video by Glen M. Mimura provides an overview on the presence of Asians in American cinema. He echoes authors such as Ono & Pham about the problematic representation of Asians in media. He talks about how Asians are likely to be invisible or obstacles. He criticizes model minority as a form of scapegoating that ignores the racial problems in the United States (Mimura 3). He provides an insight on Asian American cinema. In his research, he highlights that works produced by Asian American filmmakers is unacknowledged. He highlights some works produced by Asian American cinema focuses on breaking stereotypes.

The Asian Influence on Hollywood Action Films by Barna William Donovan focuses on Asian popular culture such as martial arts have influenced films produced by Hollywood. He mentions Asian stars such as Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan have solidified the images of Asians as martial artists, which contribute to the stereotypes. Additionally, he provides historical context such as why Asians martial arts films become popular in the west and how it gained the attention of popular culture. In comparison to Mimura and Ono & Pham, he does not focus on the racial problems that happen because of the media. However, he highlights the impact that Asians have done for action films, a fact that is often ignored by Hollywood.

"Promoting Asian American Representation Through Copyright: Moral Rights in The Last Airbender and Fair Use in Ms. Marvel" is an article written by Jon Tanaka. In his text, Tanaka talks about Asian representation in both the film, *The Last Airbender* (2010) and the comic *Ms. Marvel* (2014). Tanaka talks about the lack of Asian representation in media. He states that the population of Asian Americans is growing (Tanaka 91). Yet, despite the growth, Asians do not have a noteworthy presence in the media (Tanaka 92). In his research about the popular films in 2015, he found none of the 2015 films that the study reviewed featured a single Asian actor as the lead or co-lead (Tanaka 92). Compared to Ono & Pham, Tanaka provides a hypothesis on the lack of Asian representation in media. He states that the entertainment industry does not write or cast Asian actors, and that directors tend to favor non-Asian actors (Tanaka 92). Furthermore, Tanaka states that Asian-centric films, naming *The Great Wall* (2016), *The Last Samurai* (2016) as examples, tend to have a white foreigner as a lead character (94). Additionally, Tanaka further state that historically, few Asian-American creators work in the entertainment industry (94). Tanaka concludes his article by stating that the lack of Asian representation continues to be an issue (122).

The Marginalization and Stereotyping of Asians in American Film is a thesis written by Isabel Paner. She explores how Asians are represented in films, and how stereotypes have a detrimental effect on Asians. In her research, she wanted to answer the question on how stereotyping is harmful and why Asians are given limited roles. She recounts the history of Asian actors in Hollywood and their struggle to get main roles. Paner concludes her thesis by stating that the stereotyping of Asian-Americans was born out of fear or desire to separate them from white people or other people of colors (27). She states that the consequence of these portrayal is that Hollywood is depriving Asians from being treated as well-rounded people that are more than just the stereotypes presented by the media (27-28). She ends her thesis with hope by stating that boundaries are being broken and that actors of Asian descents are speaking out against Hollywood's preference toward actors who are white (28).

Asian Americans Beyond the Model Minority Stereotype: The Nerdy and the Left Out is a study written by Qin Zhang. In the paper, she discusses about how Asians and Asian Americans are underrepresented compared to other ethnic groups. The misrepresentation happens despite study has shown that Asian Americans are among the fastest growing among the ethnic groups in the United States. She talks about how men and women are given stereotypical roles and how model minority is a deceptive representation that only seems benign on the surface (22). She ends her article by discussing that study has shown that people align their perception on Asians with how they are portrayed in media (31). She talks about that despite scholarly critic on the myth of Asians stereotypes, the public tends to accept media's misrepresentation as social reality (32).

Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism is written by Nancy Wang Yuen. In her book, Yuen documents how people of color are treated by Hollywood. Similarly, to Ono & Kent, she talks about the influence of the media on racial representation. Yuen states how popular media has a negative impact on whites' perception of people of colors (ch 1). She proves her point by showing studies of an audience substituting stereotypes for reality (Yuen ch 1).

3.0 THEORY
3.1 Representation theory
According to Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, in social identity theory, a social identity is the knowledge of belonging to a category or group (225). It is a matter of having the same identification which makes an individual belong to a specific category. To categorize a social identity is always a matter of a comparison process; if someone has the same identification then

they must belong in the same group, anyone else is an outgroup (Stets & Burke 225). As Stets & Burke clarify: "In identity theory, the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as occupant of the role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with the role of the performance." (225). Through this statement, Stets & Burke make it clear that identity is a construction that other people can inhabit. Much of how people view themselves is reinforced by the interplay between groups (Stets & Burke 226). Essentially, the in-group reinforces the similarities, and the out-group emphasizes the differences. Research has shown that individual who becomes a group member becomes strongly attached to their group (Stets & Burke 226). In this regard, these groups become secular. Regarding identification, it is a broad term that can be narrowed down to sub-categories which could be power, status and race, etc. (Stets & Burke 225). These sub-categories, which themselves can be varied, are the signatures that paint a picture of representation.

To specifically define representation, it is how a group of people or objects are displayed or portrayed (Ono & Pham. Glossary of Key terms). Working on how objects are presented means examining images. According to Karen Alexander, the consumption of images has a powerful effect on people (260). In her discussion about representation, they come in three categories, and Alexander highlights the positives and negatives (260). The first category is a 'reflectionist' argument, which is about the interplay between reality and fiction (Alexander 260). The argument goes that since television or other media is a mirror of society, then society should be mirroring media as well. The problem with this category is achieving a perfect representation does not guarantee a respectful portrayal (Alexander 260). Another problem is that no communities of people are homogeneous, thus the idea of one singular portrayal of ethnicity is still bound to have contradictions. The second category is social engineering which is the acknowledgement that television and media have a constructive role (Alexander 260). The idea is that television must present positive imagery of disadvantaged groups to fuel aspirations and the correct set of behavior (Alexander 260). This theory of television is strengthened by the contemporary view that television has become the main source of information and knowledge about the world (Alexander 260). However, the fault of this model is that consumers are passive and unable to counter repressive and offensive constructions. The third category is the equal opportunities model. This idea goes that quantity is quality and that having a huge number of images will produce a respectful representation (Alexander 260). Study has shown that media has a powerful impact on the minds of people (Alexander 260). Good images can create positive aspiration for disadvantaged groups and

challenge distorted expectation of the majority (Alexander 260). However, the problem links with the initial first category's fault which is the problem that not all communities of people are homogenous.

One of the examples that Alexander uses in her wring is the history of Black people in Britain. Despite having a history that dated back to the sixteen centuries in Britain, they are known specifically for having been slaves (262). If Black people are acknowledged, then it is usually individuals rather than groups. These individuals are usually actors or boxers who managed to stand out in British society at the time (Alexander 262). Accordingly, Alexander states: "We can evoke the presence of such individuals in British history because they stand out as exceptions of this kind, I would argue, that the mainstream media offer 'positive' representation of black people. They are offered for consumption as exceptional cases, unusual individuals, momentarily surprising the white consumers." (262). Alexander is saying that even though the representation of these individuals can be regarded as positive, they are still presented as a form of entertainment.

According to Stuart Hall, identity is neither transparent nor unproblematic (68). For Hall, identity should not be viewed as a historical fact, but as a product that keeps changing and evolving (68). When Hall turns the discussion toward cultural identity, he states that this term is about the idea of oneness and shared culture (69). Regarding history, Hall states that "-…histories have their real and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. …- It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth." (72). What Hall is saying is that history is fickle and not factual, which makes an accurate representation of culture complicated.

According to Hall, what creates this "oneness" is the common historical experience and cultural codes that links people into one singular identity (69). Although he is speaking from the perspective of Caribbean cultures, his views can be applied to other cultures. He states that the idea of cultural and national identity is the source of conflict in a post-colonial world, which continues to be a powerful force in representation for marginalized people (69). In another approach to cultural identity, Hall highlights those differences constitute an identity (70). According to Hall, cultural identity can also be seen as the act of becoming, meaning becoming another identity (70). Since his idea is that identity is a construct, people can use and act on them. Thus, Hall highlights that portrayal of other people is not superficial, but an exercise of power by whoever holds the power to control the narrative (71). The regime that controls story holds the power to make minorities see themselves as "other" (71). Hall states "This

expropriation of cultural identity cripples and deforms. If its silences are not resisted, they reproduce" (71).

3.2 Otherness

Othering occurs when a dominant group marginalizes a non-dominant group (Kagedan 27; Gover, Angela R., et al 649). According to Allan Laine Kagedan: "Othering may be understood as the efforts of members of a politically dominant group to marginalize and subordinate a minority or a politically weaker group" (2). This statement links both to model minority and yellow peril. Both portrayals are linked by the idea of controlling minorities whether as a threat or an invisible group of people. In the yellow peril, the idea is to exaggerate the danger to unite the dominant group against them. In the model minority, while a section of the minorities is lauded, those who failed to live up to expectations are still marginalized. In both instances, both representations are driven by othering. Just like with the yellow peril, being regarded as "the other" relates to the idea of being a danger to society (Kagedan 5).

As a word, othering is used in connotation with diseases (Kagedan 5). When a crisis hit society, whether it is an economic or health crisis, blaming the minorities reduces the powerlessness of the situation (Kagedan 5). Because of this view, minorities become scapegoats for the politically dominant group. Additionally, a social psychology study has shown that three-month infants can distinguish faces from their racial groups and other racial groups (Kagedan 13). To dislike a group for being different is a natural tendency (Kagedan 13). According to Kagedan, at worst, xenophobia leads to genocide (13). On the lesser extreme, the dislike of minorities produces a desire to rid them of society (Kagedan 13). The non-violent methods to get rid of undesired minorities would be to maintain the superiority of the majority group through discrimination and social exclusion (Kagedan 13). Kagedan states that a positive resolution is an acknowledgement of being human and citizenship (13). However, he is ambiguous on whether this resolution is done through peaceful assimilation or forceful conversion of minorities. In either case, for a minority group to be included in society, they must submit to the expectation of the majority group.

At the time of this writing, the ongoing Covid pandemic has caused a rise in discrimination toward Asian Americans, which constitutes the narrative of Asians being the spreaders of diseases, similarly to how otherness is viewed (Kagedan 5). Despite being born in the United States, Asians are still treated as outsiders, regardless of their status (Kagedan 5). This view is caused by the idea that Americans who are neither Black nor Asian regard themselves as the "true American" (Kagedan 6).

In his research, one thing that Kagedan stress about the spread of discrimination is the use of media. Mass media and social media is used to generate conspiracy theories, derogatory categories, and hateful speeches (Kagedan 7). Even though the media reports the incidents of racial crimes, Kagedan state that they are contributing to the anti-Asian discrimination (7). Images of Asian eating practices were spread on the internet, which reignited the yellow peril representation (Kagedan 6). Photos that were not taken in China were still framed to take place in China (Kagedan 6). Although World Health Organization uses the neutral term, Covid-19 for the disease, politicians such as President Donald Trump uses the term "Chinese Virus" (Kuo 1). The term signals Chinese people, and they are the spreader of this ailment. In addition, Facebook and Twitter are used to spread hateful messages and to frame Asians as a threat. In these messages, Asians are characterized as neither Americans nor people, but rather they are treated as diseases to be destroyed. Not only do these views show how Asians are treated as not being native in the country where they are born, but it also shows Americans' obsession with the idea of race and the desire for an external threat.

Kagedan states that although the social status of Asians has improved since the post-civil rights era, they are still living in a conditional position in American society (8). He wanted to challenge the notion of the United States regarding herself as a post-racial society, which the heavy-handed racial attacks against not just Asians but Blacks prove otherwise. He voices the same opinion of how quickly Asians can shift from model minority to yellow peril (Kagedan 8). Despite Asians in the contemporary period having high-ranking positions in jobs, colleges or government, the fact is that Asians are still regarded as a minority and as perpetual foreigners (Kagedan 8). Among his closing statements in his book, Kagedan says that othering is destructive (150). He reasons that when social interaction is compromised when discrimination, marginalization and culturally focused genocide happen (150).

Media is an influential tool to craft a narrative. Whether intentional or not, stories carry an ideology which can be used to othering minority groups such as people of Asian descent. In the cyberpunk genre, Japan and other East-Asia countries are portrayed as the source of technological anxiety (Sohn 7). In these stories, Japanese people are portrayed as people who have been dehumanized by technology, and by extension, they have been othered as aliens (Sohn 7).

3.3 Representation of Asian Genders

According to Ono & Pham, there are common patterns in the portrayal of Asian gender stereotypes. Asian women are passive figures, constructed to be exotic and alluring (Ono &

Pham ch 4). Whereas Asian men are portrayed to be villainous and predatory (Ono & Pham ch 4). According to Ono & Pham, the difference between the portrayal comes from the history of colonialism and its influence on media (ch 4). The implication is that Asian women are free to marry and get into a relationship with anyone, while Asian men are not as desirable (Ono & Pham ch 4). Asian men are portrayed as savages, much like Native Americans who are portrayed similarly in media (Ono & Pham ch 4). This observation shows how America's history with colonialism has influenced their view on race. The white men and women are the enlightened people, and everyone else is inferior savages.

When discussing representation, talking about gender is important because it defines power relationships (Ono & Pham ch 4). To quote Ono & Pham: "In this interlocking system, some are constructed as having power and dominance, and others are depicted as being powerless and submissive, and sometimes subservient." (Ono & Pham ch 4). This statement links back to model minority and yellow peril. When Asians are subservient and passive, they are treated as the model minority. In this case, Asian men are feminized to be regarded as non-threat. When Asian men show masculinity, they are treated as the yellow peril.

Paner describes Asian women as victims of orientalism and colonialist perspective (14). Asian American women are often portrayed as hyperfeminine (Nemoto 3). For Asian women, there are two prominent gendered stereotypes, Madame Butterly and the Dragon Lady (Ono & Pham ch 4). The former is an attractive and self-sacrificing portrayal of Asian women. Their positive qualities do not change the fact that they are ultimately subservient to men (Ono & Pham ch 4). The Dragon Lady portrayal is about a dangerous woman, who is a feminized version of the yellow peril (Ono & Pham ch 4). An early incarnation of the character type appeared in the film, *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931), where the character is the daughter of Fu Manchu (Ono & Pham ch 4). Thus, the Dragon Lady archetype is layered with the yellow peril representation.

For Asian men, their portrayals are limited. In the best portrayals, Asian men are constructed as nerdy, asexual, and non-threatening (Ono & Pham 2009, Huynh 2014, Zhang 2010), in the mold of a positive model minority. Asian American men are often lacking in American ideal of masculinity (Nemoto 3). In the worst portrayal, they are physical threats, such as being villainous martial artists and gangsters (Ono & Pham ch 4). An example would be Leslie Chow in *The Hangover Trilogy* (2009, 2011, 2013). The character played by Ken Jeong is an eccentric but dangerous man who acts both as an unreliable ally and villain to the main protagonists in the films. Leslie Chow is an unsympathetic character who commits a crime and cause trouble for people. He ends the trilogy without receiving any kind of justice,

which carries the unfortunate implication that he will continue to remain a yellow peril to society.

Regarding stereotypes, whether they are played seriously or humorously, Paner states:

> However, harm lies in the dismissal of these stereotypes. When portrayed as humorous, stereotypes can normalize a misinterpretation of people of color, caging them in singular roles when the reality shows them to be well-rounded people with lives and stories of their own. Without critical discourse, stereotypes run the risk of perpetuating ignorance. (20)

What Paner is arguing is that humor does not excuse misinterpretation of people of color, because it is only perpetuating ignorance. This fact is why gender representation along with others such as model minority, yellow peril and otherness must be analyzed critically.

3.4 Yellowface Logic

The practice of yellowface is a media representational practice that controls how Asians are portrayed in media while excluding Asian and Asian-American self-representation (Ono & Pham ch 3) Yellowface logic comes in explicit and implicit forms, and they are both linked with the idea of controlling the narrative of Asians. The idea of yellowface is to maintain the unequal power between the dominant whites and Asians (Ono & Pham ch 3). I would like to argue that this is a form of suppression through media portrayal. Historically, White, and Black actors have played Asian characters, while actors of Asian descent are not given the "masquerading privilege" (Ono & Pham ch 3). Famous Asian archetypes such as Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu have been played by white actors who did their performances using yellowface makeup. The late Sir Christopher Lee played Fu Manchu in *The Brides of Fu Manchu* (1966). In the film, Lee has been given makeup that narrowed his eyes and a mustache to complete his performance as the character. This aesthetic is a form of explicit yellowface where an actor is made to look like an Asian. Mickey Rooney who plays Mr. Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) is an infamous example. In the film, the makeup gave Rooney squinter eyes, along with glasses and foreteeth. His character and his use of accents were highly exaggerated to highlight his "Asianness" to the audience. The factor of an audience is an important point because yellowface is created for the pleasure of white audiences (Ono & Kent ch 3).

Like blackface, yellowface has the psychological function of teaching audiences to distinguish racial traits (Ono & Kent ch 3). An audience is under no impression that the actor is Asian, they know a white actor is masquerading as one (Ono & Kent ch 3). This knowledge has the effect of allowing the audience to play around with races, allow them to learn about the

racial traits and teach them to discriminate (Ono & Kent ch 3). Yellowface is objectifying Asians and Asian Americans by exaggerating features. The consequence of this type of representation is a limiting contact between majority and minority groups in society (Ono & Kent ch 3). Ono & Kent regard this type of representation as a ruse that is done to mock Asians at the expense of genuine social encounters (ch 3)

3.5 Model Minority

Model Minority is the portrayal of Asians as a positive minority, and they are expected to behave within the boundaries of these expectations. The representation of Asians as a model minority is the common portrayal in contemporary times (Kawai 109). If Asians are not portrayed as villains or faceless obstacles, they are likely to be harmless and invisible minorities. Model minorities are characterized as highly intelligent and unlikely to commit crimes, compared to their African American counterparts (Ono & Pham ch 5). The idea is that Asians are successful because they work hard compared to the other minorities (Lee 413). The representation masks itself as a positive view of a group of people in society while diverting attention away from the racial problem within the system. According to Ono & Pham, during the civil rights protest, Asians began to be characterized as a model minority (Ono & Pham ch 5). The stereotype has persisted to the present day, as Asians are still characterized as being studious (Ono & Pham ch 5). In their research, Ono & Pham offer a hypothesis on why the stereotypes continue to persist. They state that the idea of Asians being characterized as immigrants who manage to earn a place in society links to the American Dream (Ono & Pham ch 5). This discourse persists because mass media focuses on Asian Americans who become billionaires, or famous for their achievements in the high-tech industry (Ono & Pham ch 5). They specifically use Tiger Woods, as an example due to his unacknowledged Asian ancestry (Ono & Pham ch 5). However, using Wood as an example among many, Ono & Pham also talk about the suppression of Asian heritage. They talk about Wood's Asian ancestry being downplayed in favor of his African American color (Ono & Pham ch 5). Yet regardless of which ancestry or color that are overtly dominant, Ono & Pham state that Asians and mixed races are still treated as Model Minorities (ch 5).

In her article, Stacey J. Lee examines the notion of the model minority being better students than other minorities. Using writings from John Ogbu, the difference between the attitude of students differentiates on whether they play by the stereotype or not (Lee 413). According to Lee's research, the voluntary students treat the study as necessary social mobility and regard themselves as guests being hosted by the United States (413). Rather than treating the cultural and language barrier as a threat to their identity, they approach it as an obstacle to

overcome (413). The idea is that these minorities have to adhere to the system of the United States, and following it grants favoritism and benefits. However, involuntary minorities do not distrust the system out of choice but circumstances. According to Lee, persistent economic problems and social discrimination are the reason why involuntary minorities do not have faith in social mobility (414). Rather than adhering to the system, these minorities are creating their oppositional culture because they view school as a threat to them (414). Thus, the view is that Asians who are following the system and do not cause opposition are promoted as model minorities. Meanwhile, those who do not are categorized together with the underachieving minorities.

Charlie Chan is a famous example of a character who embodies the stereotype of a model minority. Serving as a foil to the villainous Fu Manchu, a character who personifies the yellow peril stereotype, Charlie Chan is described as a helpful, courteous, and submissive character who does not challenge the societal system (Ono & Pham ch 5). However, Paner states that the positive qualities are attributed to the White actors who play the character, while the accent and eyes are given to the Asian character (16). Besides Charlie Chan, Ono & Pham provide examples of other fictional characters who inhabit the model minority stereotype. They named the fictional character of Connie Chung as an example of a female journalist who causes a typecasting for Asian women who wants to pursue a career in the news (Ono & Pham ch 5). The typecasting of Asian women as news reporters can be seen in movies such as *Street Fighter* (1994), where the character of Chun-Li played by Ming-Na Wen inhabits both the role of a field reporter and a martial artist.

Ono & Pham further talk about Asians being typecast in medical roles. They state that Asians are being both overrepresented and underrepresented as doctors, which the media creates social anxiety about an Asian menace. They state that this racial limitation of Asian actors reduces the ability to present them as diverse human beings (Ono & Pham ch 5). According to Ono & Pham, model minority is the prevailing stereotype of Asians in the present day (Ono & Pham ch 5). I do not disagree with them, because it is a representation that masks itself as a compliment while covertly hiding the negative connotations of Asians being regarded as a threat.

Ono & Pham use Yoko Kawai in their writings. Kawai shares the opinion of the model minority is a pervasive representation. Kawai echoes Ono & Pham's opinion about the representation being a scapegoat for racial problems, by stating that the successes of Asian are used as an excuse to deny the existence of institutionalized racism (114). The stereotype is used as proof that the United States is a fair society that is open to minorities (Kawai 114). In terms

of historical context, Kawai explains that the stereotype is not constructed by the United States. (114). The representation of the model minority emerged because of Japan's willingness to cooperate and comply with the western powers after the Second World War (Kawai 114-115). Thus, the image of compliant Asians was solidified by the Japanese in the 1960s. A brief overview of Japanese culture would reveal that ego and character are secondary to duty (Vos 61). The influence of Japanese culture and history with the United States. explains why behaviors such as compliant and stoic have become lauded in Hollywood's narrative. Kawai further states that the stereotype does not distinguish between skin colors (Kawai 111). In her essay, Kawai states that model minority traces its history back to the yellow peril stereotype (111). To her, the model minority and the yellow peril are inseparable (Kawai 115).

4.0 METHOD

My methods are content analysis and cultural analytic as proposed by Gillian Rose. Rose states that content analysis offers a method for engaging systematically with large number of images (102). Since my data will compromise of analyzing images, this method suits my analysis. However, Rose acknowledges that content analysis does not handle context well (103). But since I will be viewing the Marvel films, I can fulfill this gap by providing the context.

I will be collecting my data by examining most of the Marvel films from Phase One to Phase Four. Specifically, I will be focusing on how Asians, both main, supporting and background characters are portrayed. My data collecting will comprise of how much screen time that they are given within the film, what type of roles that they are given such as whether they are helpful or negative. I will also be analyzing the dialogue of Asian characters for the number of words that the characters get to speak.

While there are official data on how much characters played by Asian actors have appeared on screen, I will analyze specific scenes and examines on long these characters linger on screen. I will be looking at how long these actors are given scene presence before the scene changes. By analyzing how long characters played by Asian actors stay on screen, I can find recurring patterns or disparities.

Furthermore, if a film has Asian actors in supporting roles, I will examine the characters that they play. I will be observing for any characteristics that would resembles the theories of stereotypes that I have picked in my theory section.

5.0 ANALYSIS

5.1 Asians as the foreigner

In Phase One, from *Iron Man* to *The Avengers,* the most prominent supporting characters, played by actors of Asian descent, are Hogun from *Thor* and Jim from *Captain America: The First Avenger.* They are the two characters played by actors of Asian descent who have dialogues in Phase One of the Marvel films. Hogun is a warrior serving the fantastical and alien kingdom of Asgaard. He has the most screen presence with four minutes and six seconds. In contrast, Jim has one minute and forty-nine seconds of screen time. Despite their roles as supporting characters, both characters carry elements of otherness. As Kagedan states that otherness means marginalizing a politically weaker group in society (5), both Hogun and Jim are marked by their difference compared to the other characters who are predominantly white. They are both the token minority within the films, with Hogun specifically being a literal alien from another planet. Furthermore, Hogun's first line of dialogue, not just as a character but also as the first supporting character played by an Asian actor in the franchise, is affirming his loyalty to Thor [00:14:13, *Thor*]. The specific scene goes with Thor saying "Hogun. Who led you into the most glorious of battles?" while towering over Hogun and looking down at him. Meanwhile, Hogun submissively affirms his loyalty by saying "You did.". While Thor was trying to bring a sense of comradery to his comrades to convince them to go to Jotunheim with him, his other scenes with Sif and Volstagg are played differently. With the former, Sif is the prime focus on the frame with Thor's face not being visible. As for the latter, Volstagg stands at equal height with Thor. In comparison, Hogun's scene made him look short and submissive. Rather than Thor affirming his loyalty to friendship, the effect of the scene is that Thor is asserting his authority and white dominance over Hogun. In *Visual Methodologies* written by Gillian Rose, she states that it is crucial to look at images because they have their effects (56). According to Rose, "These effects are always embedded in social practices-…" (56). This statement supports the fact that despite Thor's scene with Hogun is not meant to come off as offensive in context, how the scene has the effects of perceiving Hogun as being different. While the context of the scene is not meant to be offensive, it is important to strip off the dialogues and context to examine what the images are showing (Rose 63). Once Thor and Hogun's dialogues are removed, the image is showing a white man seemingly oppressing an Asian who looks afraid.

Besides the fact that Hogun is played by Tadanobu Satō who is Japanese, the character itself is coded with Japanese aesthetics. His hairstyle is chonmage, which is a style that is commonly associated with samurais. In terms of characterization, Hogun spent most of the first film being stoic, which relates to how Asians are represented in media. Contrasting this portrayal with Hogun's comic counterpart who has Mongol aesthetics and is described as short-tempered, Hogun in the film is predominantly Japanese. This observation suggests that Satō's cultural background influences Hogun's portrayal in the film.

Figure 1. Thor wants Hogun to affirm his loyalty in Thor 1 (2011).

Another example of Phase One's portrayal of Asians as the other is Mickey Rourke's portrayal as the villain, Ivan Vanko whose supervillain name is Whiplash in *Iron Man 2*. The film is about Tony Stark dealing with his late father's action to disgrace the Vanko family. Angered by what Stark's family have done, Vanko began plotting revenge against him. In context, Vanko is from Siberia, and he fights with electronic whips. Rourke's appearance is coded with Asian connotations, specifically the yellow peril stereotype. Although subtle, he has been given yellowface makeup. His long hair and beard connect with how Mongols are depicted in images. The comparison with the Mongols further highlights Whiplash's connotation with the yellow peril, given its historical context (Ono & Pham ch 2). Rourke's portrayal as Whiplash carries reminisces of how John Wayne portrayed Genghis Khan in *The Conqueror* (1956). The use of yellowface and the lack of Asian actors in *The Conqueror* (1956) was criticized.

In his essay about Wayne's portrayal of Genghis Khan, Justin Owen Rawlin provides an answer of why yellowface occurs in films. Using Richard Dyer's insight, Rawlin states that white men carry a primal sexual drive which cannot be eliminated (18). Rawlin means that white men want women, and this desire cannot be controlled. Thus, to show them in filmic representation, this portrayal of sexual lust is attributed to non-white actors who are outside the white man's body (Rawlin 18). This observation also goes back to the idea of narrative control

and setting racial boundaries. The portrayal has the effect of protecting white bodies, making them virtuous, while the non-white bodies are hyper-sexualized, making them perverted. This interpretation can be seen in how Rourke's portrayal as Whiplash contrasts with Robert Downey Jr's portrayal as Tony Stark/Iron Man. During a scene where Vanko/Whiplash is interrogated, he is shown in his underwear, his body is on full display [00:37:51, Iron Man 2]. The camera lingers on the full body for sixteen seconds. Ivan's body is framed to look big and highly sexualized, compared to Stark who looks small in the camera shot. During the scene, the mise-en-scene shows a contrast between Stark's white and Vanko's darker skin. Stark is the virtuous white man who is protecting the white man from the perils of Ivan.

Figure 2. Mickey Rourke as Ivan Vanko/Whiplash in Iron Man 2 (2010). John Wayne as Genghis Khan in The Conqueror (1956).

Rourke's portrayal as Vanko/Whiplash is a form of Yellowface portrayal. In this case, he fits both as an explicit and implicit form of yellowface. In terms of how his portrayal is explicit, he fits the criteria of having been given make-up that darkened his skin and codes that make him look more Asian. Additionally, he speaks with a foreign, Russian accent during the film. Yet he does not look Asian enough to be one. Ono & Pham state that yellowface serves a psychological function because the audience would know that the actor is masquerading as an Asian (ch 3). This function has the effect of allowing the audience to imagine what aspect can be attitude to Asians, while also noticing what aspects that link to the White actor (Ono & Pham ch 3). According to Ono & Pham, this has the negative effect of teaching the audience how to discriminate between white and non-white (ch 3). While Mickey Rourke's portrayal of Whiplash does not reach the offensive level as Mickey Rooney playing Mr Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), it still has the same function of yellowface, teaching people to discriminate.

For the rest of Phase One, except for the implicit fear of yellow peril toward the Japanese character, Jim, in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), the yellow peril representation does not occur again until Phase Two of the Marvel films, starting with *Iron Man 3* (2013).

Iron Man 3 (2013) is about Iron Man dealing with a terrorist organization orchestrated by the enigmatic character known as the Mandarin. Sir Ben Kingsley plays the fake Mandarin for the first half of the film. Although the character is not Chinese, he is playing a persona that evokes yellow peril imagery such as being a danger to the west. Appearance-wise, the fake Mandarin wears a long cloak and has a long beard which evokes Fu Manchu. Additionally, while the character is stating about fortune cookies being an invention of America rather than China, he is still linking himself to Chinese codes by stating this fact. Although Kingsley is not given yellowface makeup, he is still performing the role of an Asian. In the promotional image, the character is shown with Chinese symbols by having a stone image of a dragon behind him. The persona that his character is performing within the film plays closely to the yellow peril stereotype. As stated previously by Ono & Kent, characters being presented as a peril do not have to be someone from East Asia (ch 2). In a historical context, the Mandarin being presented as someone from the Middle East is influenced by United States' involvement with the region at the time. When Kingsley's The Mandarin turns out to be fake, his character whose real name is Trevor is reduced to comic relief. Turning Trevor into a comic relief further links him with the effects of yellowface performance, that it is meant to mock and serve as entertainment for the audience (Ono & Kent ch 1). How the Mandarin character was treated in the film received negative responses from the audience (Nilles 2019). Marvel reacted by releasing a short film called *All Hail the King* (2014) to please the audience by revealing that The Mandarin exists for real in the franchise. This reaction by Marvel shows that they are responsive to how their audience receives their characters.

During Phase One, screen time given to Asian actors are strictly two minutes. Hogun has the most screen time by four minutes. The second prominent character, Jim, who is played by an Asian actor, has a screen time of two minutes. However, counting the seconds in terms of how long they get to speak in the films, both characters have approximately thirteen seconds each. The point is that the filmmakers of these films are consistent with how much screen time that Asian actors are given in Phase One. This observation shows that there is tight control on how much Asians are allowed to be seen and heard. Thus, this fact demonstrates that there is control over how Asians are represented in the film, whether it is intentional or unintentional.

In Phase Three, there is a shift in how Asians are represented in the films. *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) is about the internal conflict between the Avengers due to international fallout. The presence of Asians in the film is minimal. In terms of screen time, there have only been eight seconds where extras with Asian descents are shown. The first scene where Asians are shown happens in a presentation held by Tony Stark. The audiences are mostly students, and it helps to establish the idea of a diversified generation of people. At 00:35:12 another Asian actor is shown, he is seen reporting about the UN meeting, holding a microphone in Chinese language and speaking Mandarin which marks him as a foreign reporter from China. Although the scene is brief, it shows the stereotype of Asians being reporters. Also, he is the first person displayed on the screen when the scene cuts to the reporters talking about the event. While the scene is not inappropriate, that it does not show Asians in an offensive portrayal, it does highlight one among many occurrences where Marvel films display Asians like they are tokens. In general, *Captain America 3* does not overtly display Asian actors like in the previous phases.

Doctor Strange (2016) is about the eponymous character's journey to becoming a magician in the monastery of Kamar-Taj. *Doctor Strange* (2016) is a complicated film for filmmakers to make. The source material is layered with Asian stereotypes that would be offensive in contemporary times. For example, Benedict Wong's character was a manservant for the protagonist in the comics by Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, *Strange Tales* (1963), which is an offensive portrayal. Additionally, the fact that Doctor Strange is white and learns magic quickly would play to the white savior stereotype. Throughout the film, Doctor Strange learns his magic like he is learning martial arts. The film combines mysticism with East Asian culture. Many of the student train and live like monks, akin to monks who practice Tibetan Buddhism. Although most of the orders are Asians, the story also portrays the order as an international one, as the group includes both black and white people among its numbers. Yet, despite the order being primarily Asian, the prominent characters are Karl Mordo played by Chiwetel Ejiofor, a British actor of Nigerian descent, The Ancient One played by Tilda Swinton who is British and white, and the antagonist Kaecilius who is played by Mads Mikkelsen, a Danish actor who is also white. The sole exception is Wong who is played by Benedict Wong, an English actor of East Asian descent. The director of the film, Scott Derrickson, focused on having a diverse group of people when he began casting people for his film. He states: "The issue is diversity and racial sensitivity. Diversity in casting is the responsibility of directors and producers and I take it very seriously. My cast is incredibly diverse in gender and race." (Nilles 2019).

The casting of Swinton as the Ancient One is a contentious subject. Derrickson states that the choice is done to avoid the Fu Manchu and Dragon Lady stereotype (Nilles 2019). He states that if the Ancient One is played by an Asian actress, she would be a Dragon Lady stereotype (Nilles 2019). Quoting Derrickson, "I wasn't going to perpetuate that stereotype. And it would make it all about a Western character coming to Asia to learn about being Asian. It was a minefield. I needed an actress who could be domineering, secretive, ethereal, enigmatic, mystical… Tilda Swinton. She's above all of us. It suddenly made sense." (Nilles 2019). While Derrickson's refusal to perpetuate stereotypes is an admirable intention, he is still excluding Asian actors from having more acting roles in Hollywood. The problem is Derrickson is saying that Asian actors, or in this case actresses, cannot be the character traits that he is looking for. I doubt that Derrickson has bad intentions in his casting of Swinton as the Ancient One, as any casting could have been controversial in the film, but his apprehension shows that the fear of perpetuating Asian stereotypes is also what keeps more Asian actors from landing more roles. If anything, whitewashing, a casting practice where white actors play non-white roles, the Ancient One is used as an excuse to not hire an Asian actress for the role. An Asian actress would have been just as capable of meeting the expectations that Derrickson is looking for in his casting. Wai Ching Ho plays a character named Madame Gao in *The Defenders* series who possesses the traits that Derrickson wanted. Thus, while avoiding stereotypes to prevent stereotypes from being perpetuated, it should not be treated as an excuse to avoid casting Asian actors. But this goes to show how entrenched stereotypes have become, that it has been linked to race. The fact that Asian actors cannot play more diverse roles because they are more likely to be stereotyped. But this fact shows how damaging stereotypes are because whether to avoid them or play them straight, they are keeping actors of Asian descent from acting in more roles. Marvel producers' casting decisions are not an attempt to address the problem, but rather they are avoiding addressing the issue and breaking stereotypes.

In *Guardians of the Galaxy 2* (2017), the story follows the Guardians on another adventure as Peter Quill reunites with his alien father, Ego. The previous film, *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) lacks any presence of Asian actors in supporting roles or as background extras. In the sequel, Mantis is a prominent supporting character played by Pom Klementieff who is of Russian and Korean descent. Mantis has an otherworldly personality, and she is regarded as weird by the characters. She is an empath who can feel the emotions of others and influence them. Appearance-wise, Klementief is given antennas and black eyes which highlights her alien features. Although she is not regarded as an Asian in the film due to being a literal alien, she possesses traits that are reminiscent of an Asian practicing pulse-taking, a

technique in Traditional Chinese Medicine. Additionally, in the comics, the character was written to be of Vietnamese descent. Mantis is treated badly by the characters in the film. She is continuously regarded as repulsive by Drax, one of the Guardians as if she is a disease which fits the description of otherness being seen as a disease (Kagedan 7). The film does not treat Drax's behavior as offensive to Mantis, but rather as comedic moments due to the character's blunt and literal personality being played for laughs. A scene happens at 01:21:20, where Mantis wakes up Drax to warn him about Ego's plans.

[MANTIS]: "Drax, Drax, Drax! Drax! We need to talk!"

Drax assumes that Mantis is there to engage in intercourse with him.

[DRAX]: "I'm sorry. But I like women with some meat on her bones."

[MANTIS]: "What?"

[DRAX]: "I tried to let you down easily by telling you I found you disgusting."

[MANTIS]: "No, that's not what I…"

She gets interrupted by Drax who starts retching.

[MANTIS]: "What are you doing?"

[DRAX]: (Grunting) "I'm imagining being with you physically."

[Mantis]: "Drax…I don't like you like that. I don't even like the type of thing you are."

[DRAX]: (Offended) "Hey! There's no need to get personal."

The focus of the scene was mostly on Drax's reaction to finding Mantis repulsive. When Drax tells Mantis about his opinion of her, the focus is all on him, ignoring the fact that Mantis just got shamed by him. This dialogue is one of two where Mantis and Drax share a scene, and in both instances, Drax keeps telling her that he finds her ugly. In both instances, Drax's remarks are played for laughs. Additionally, Mantis is treated with suspicion by the other characters due to her loyalty to Ego who treats her like a pet. As a character, Mantis is timid and passive. She does not disagree with Drax's remarks that she is ugly, and in fact, she affirms that she is happy to be ugly. While James Gunn, the director of the film, might not have intended for any racist analogy, how Mantis is portrayed and treated in the story is bigotry. She is an alien played by an actress of Asian descent who acknowledges and affirms the fact that she is a pet, weird and ugly. This portrayal is problematic because it is normalizing the idea that Asians should be okay with being regarded as weird and ugly. According to Ono & Kent, mimicry is a performance that makes differences into spectacle and reproduce colonial powers such as marking Mantis as the Other (ch 6). Mantis' insect qualities make her a spectacle, and

a target for Drax's insults. The act of mockery reminds colonial subjects of their unequal status (Ono & Kent ch 6), and Drax's mockery toward Mantis is done to continuously enforce her status as a pet. What makes Mantis a complicated portrayal is a fact that she has more agency and influence in the film than any other established characters played by Asian actors. Her dialogues with the characters, the offensive remarks aside, are an improvement compared to what happened in the previous phases.

In contrast to the previously mentioned character Wong from *Doctor Strange* (2016), all conversations between the supporting character played by Asian actors and the main characters have been one-sided. Using Hogun from *Thor 1* as an example, his first conversation, which happens at 00:14:13 with Thor is just a simple and quiet acknowledgement of his loyalty. Every time Hogun talks with the other characters, he speaks one sentence, which is mostly to move the story further by stating the obvious. Here are Hogun's dialogue in *Thor 1* (2011):

[HOGUN]: "You did." (First line in the film.)

[HOGUN]: "We shouldn't be here."

[HOGUN]: "Laufey said there were traitors in the House of Odin. A master of magic could bring three Jotuns into Asgard."

[HOGUN]: "We must go. We must find Thor." (Last line in the film and with still forty minutes left of the film.)

At no point in the film, did he have a proper conversation with the characters. In fact, the only time where he has a proper conversation with a character happens in *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) where he interacts with the antagonist, Hela who kills him.

In comparison to Hogun, Mantis has more screen presence and dialogue than the other characters before her. In total, Mantis has eleven minutes and eight seconds of screen time in the film. Her maximum presence on screen is forty seconds. Compared with a character in *Avengers 2* named Dr. Cho, played by the Korean actress Claudia Kim, has under two minutes of screen time in the film and her longest screen presence is nine seconds. In this regard, Mantis played by Klementieff is progressive in terms of Asian representation. However how the character is portrayed and treated is still problematic because of the connotations to otherness.

Additionally, how her power is portrayed is still linked with Chinese culture, thus, dissociating from Asian tropes is difficult. Her alienness is emphasized compared to the other characters. She is the only Alien of the supporting cast that does not possess human eyes. Characters such as Gamora and Drax, played by Zoe Saldaña and Dave Bautista who have non-white descent, have human eyes which makes it clear that they are still more human than Mantis. The factor is that she is more alien in a film with cyborg prostitutes, computer-generated aliens and planet-sized eldritch horror played by Kurt Russel. Thus, while Pom Klementieff is given more to do in her role than other Asian actors before her, the character that she plays is still heavily linked with the otherness stereotype.
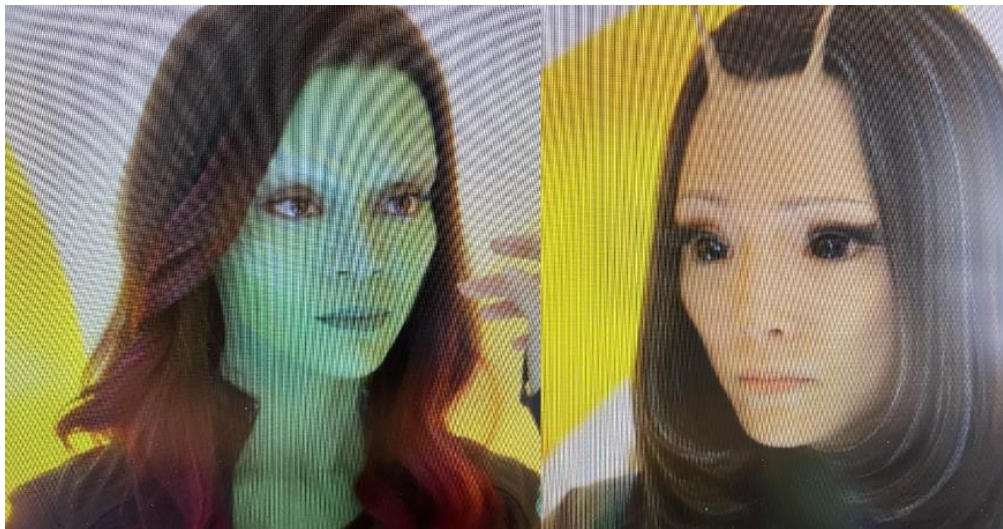

Figure 3. Gamora played by Zoe Saldaña and Mantis played by Pom Klementieff in Guardians of the Galaxy 2 (2017).

This pattern of depicting Asian as aliens continues in Phase Four. *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Five Rings* (2021) is about Shang-Chi facing his past by confronting his estranged father, The Mandarin. The Chinese-born Canadian actor, Simu Liu, plays the main character. In the film, Shang-Chi's mother is from another dimension. His father, The Mandarin, is using a weapon of alien technology. Later in the story, Shang-Chi displays the ability to use a magical fighting style. The film does not focus on this implication of Shang-Chi's heritage. However, the fact of the matter is that Asians as aliens continues in the newer Marvel films. Shang-Chi's ability to use both magic and his father's alien weapon implies that Shang-Chi's skills are within his blood. Unlike Doctor Strange from *Doctor Strange* (2016) who must study and practice to learn magic, Shang-Chi's training lasted half a day in the narrative. The implication is that martial arts and magic are both within his blood which is an 'otherness' narrative as it implies that Shang-Chi's biology is fundamentally different from say, white people.

Additionally, the film is strict about Asian interacting with white people. Over the course of the film, the number of times Shang-Chi interacts with white characters is on three

occasions. The first time was when he fought against the antagonist, Mathias/Razor Fist, played by the German-Romanian actor, Florian Munteanu. The second time is when Shang-Chi interacts with a white, plane attendant. The third and final occasion happens in the post-credit scene where Shang-Chi interacts with the holograms of Bruce Banner and Carol Denvers, played by American actors, Mark Ruffalo and Brie Larsen. Although the focus is on the main Asian cast, the film is woefully separating Asians from any interactions with white characters. As previously stated by Kagedan, othering happens when a non-dominant group is marginalized (27). The focus point of the film is Shang-Chi and his culture. However, it is a form of marginalization when Shang-Chi must undergo his quest outside of the United States and must conclude it in another dimension. This is easily compared to the film, *Black Panther* (2018), which is about Black Panther, a black superhero played by African American actor, Chadwick Boseman. Even though most of the cast is black, the main character interacts frequently with Everett Ross, played by the English actor, Martin Freeman. Additionally, the main antagonist, Killmonger's background as a black person enduring racism in America is a driving force of his character, which is an addressed problem in the film. The factor is that there are proper dialogue interactions between black and white characters. Despite being well-regarded, *Shang-Chi* (2021) falls short when it comes to representation because it does not acknowledge the relationship between Asians and whites. In this regard, while black characters in Marvel are given better representation, Asian characters are still being othered.

Eternals (2021) has an ensemble cast. The story is about a team of aliens who have been sent to Earth by their overlord to protect humanity from a race of monsters known as Deviants. Directed by Chinese filmmaker, Chloé Zhao, the film has a diverse cast of characters. Two of the characters, Sersi and Gilgamesh are played by Asian actors. Gemma Chan, who is an English actor of Chinese descent, plays Sersi. Ma Dong-seok, who is a South Korean American actor, plays Gilgamesh. Right from the start, the main cast of characters is established to be aliens. In the case of Sersi and Gilgamesh, both characters are more connected to the connotations of being aliens than the other characters. When the characters discover the body of Ajak, Sersi is the one who is marked and gets to interact with their alien overlord. Her powers are enhanced, making her functionally different from her teammates. Later in the film, when deviants attack them, Gilgamesh having his essence absorbed by one of the Deviants is what causes it to become humanoid.

Thus, the portrayal of Asian being aliens persists in the newer Marvel films. This fact is an example of how this portrayal has become ingrained in mainstream culture. It shows that

the idea of a post-race society is far from reality. The reality is that racial biases are still present in Marvel films.

5.1.1 Visual erasure of Asians

In many instances during Phase One, Asians, both supporting characters and extras are likely to be blocked out of framed by the lead character. One of the first instances happens in *Iron Man* (2008). In 00:52:45, American soldiers follow the character, Rhodey as he talks to them. One of the soldiers is played by an actor of Asian descent. This specific soldier is towered by his fellow soldiers. At 00:53:03, when Tony Stark comes to talk, a wide shot shows all the soldiers, except for the Asian soldier who is kept out of frame by Rhodey who is positioned perfectly to block the Asian soldier out of the scene. At 00:53:13, the soldier was blacked again by Rhodey, while the rest of the soldiers, who are whites, are shown reacting and laughing with Tony. The effect of these two specific moments is that the Asian soldier is an expendable character. In context, he is there to show the military as a diverse force. But his treatment by the cinematography shows that he is not an important character. If an extra must be taken away from the frame, it is likely to be a non-white character. Kagedan states that when it comes to othering, all groups see themselves as superior while all other groups are considered inferior (27). As this scene with the Asian soldier proves, the white soldiers are the superior group, while the lone Asian soldier is the inferior one. As Kagedan states about othering: "The argument is that the "us" versus "them" tendency, which aligns with othering—the demeaning of a minority group—is seen throughout recorded human history." (149). What happens during the scene with the Asian soldier is a form of demeaning. While none of the characters is actively being hurtful, how the framing of the shots and the blocking is nothing less than a form of suppression through a lack of framing. Othering cannot be constructive. As Kagedan states: "Any and all acts of othering are destructive—of individual lives and of social peace" (150).

The act of blocking continues to occur in the other Marvel films. There are two types of erasure, characters blocking the Asian or rapid scene shift. Both types of erasure are too intentional to be a coincidence. *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) is about Steve Roger's journey to becoming America's first superhero to fight World War Two.

Figure 4. At the center of the picture, Jim, the American Japanese, is walking behind Captain America in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011)

Among the supporting cast, the character, Jim, serves as the main Asian representation in the film. His status as an Asian is immediately remarked on by the other characters, and he must confront this remark by affirming his status as an American citizen. His characterization is like Hogun, such as being stoic and loyal to the white lead. However, unlike Hogun, Jim is often framed as short in comparison to the other characters. During the march in 01:10:15, *Captain America: The First Avenger*, Jim is repeatedly frame blocked by Steve or Bucky. While the context of the scene, Steve returning to camp with rescued prisoners of war, is heroic, the images of Jim repeatedly being blocked, and his height being emphasized show a power gap between him and Steve. Jim is the soldier who loyally follows Captain America, the embodiment of patriotism and strength. It has the effect of conveying that Asians are always subordinate to the Whites. How the actors are positioned further highlights the power dynamic. Captain America is marching closer to the camera. This has the effect of making him appear larger. Meanwhile, Jim is marching behind Captain America, and the framing causes Jim to be reduced in size and thus receive a reduced screen presence. The effect is meant to emphasis that Jim is a supporting character. But the fact that he is specifically placed behind Captain American serves to depower him. In her writing about spatial organization, Rose shows a series of geometrical perspectives (66). Among the examples, there is one geometrical perspective where two rectangles are shown. One shape is near while the other is further away (67). Rose calls this "geometrical perspective: distance". The interpretation of the power gap between Jim and Captain America is supported by Rose's statement on positioning and eye level. Using

writings from Kress and Van Leeuwen, Rose states that heights and distances create a power dynamic (70).

How the actors are placed and positioned to block an Asian actor is intentional. A particular moment happens in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014). During the opening fight scene where Captain America is off to rescue a group of captured agents, at 00:07:23, the audience gets to see the captured group. The focal character of the group is an agent named Jasper played by the actor, Maximiliano Hernández who is of Honduran descent. Coincidentally, the background extra who sits next to him is an actor of East Asian descent. Besides being blocked, this character is unfocused by the camera shot, while Jasper is never distorted by the cinematography. While Jasper's screen presence is justified because he is a supporting character, this is one example among many where supporting characters of non-Asian descent are given more screen presence.

Besides the act of blocking Asians from view, the editing of a scene also serves to visually erase them. In *Captain America 2*, during an action sequence where Captain America infiltrates a ship, he fights a terrorist at 00:06:20. As shown in figure 4, the terrorist is played by an actor of Asian descent, but his ethnicity is hard to spot due to how the fight sequence is edited. As Captain America fights the Asian guard, the face of the guard is obscured and blocked by him. Thus, the rapid-fire editing of the scene covers the fact that Captain America is beating an Asian. This type of editing has the effect of protecting Captain America's moral decency and absolving him from any connotation of racism, that of legal authority is beating someone of non-white descent.

Figure 4. Captain America fighting a terrorist in Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014). In the film, the quick pacing of the action sequence obscures the stunt actor's face.

The blocking of Asians continues in Phase Three. The most noteworthy occurrence happens in *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018). In the film, the character, Mantis is blocked nine times by the other characters. One special occasion happens at 00:32:46 when Mantis' face is obscured by the light of the sun behind her. This example shows that if someone was

expendable to the scene, characters played by actors of Asian descent will be the target for erasure.

Captain Marvel (2019) is about the superhero, Carol Denvers who is on a quest to rediscover her past. At the start of the film, Carol is a soldier for an alien empire. Within the squad, there is a character named Minn-Erva who is played by Gemma Chan, an English actress of Chinese descent. In the film, she is an alien with blue skin which further alludes to the implication of people of Asian descent being portrayed as aliens. Minn-Erva serves as a minor antagonist in the film. Although her character is not meant to be an Asian, the fact that her natural skin color is obscured by blue is a form of visual erasure. This portrayal is not just restricted to actors of East Asian descent. When casting for characters who are aliens, Hollywood's attitude is to look for actors who are non-white. An example is Zoe Saldana, a Black Latina actress who plays the green, alien Gamora in *Guardians of the Galaxy* films. Another example is Lupita Nyong'o who plays Nakia in the Marvel film, *Black Panther* (2018) and performs motion capture for the alien Maz Kanata in *Star Wars: The Force Awaken* (2015). This pattern is commented upon by Kyle Buchanan from the article site, *Vulture*. Buchanan states that Black actors tend to take roles where they either get their skin obscured or they provide voices to animated characters (Buchanan 2019). Additionally, he commented that Saldana has not appeared in a big-budget film without having her skin obscured since 2011. Although the article is now outdated, Saldana has appeared in more big-budget films where she plays roles without receiving a skin painting. Similar to earlier examples, this seems to indicate a common tendency in Hollywood to favor non-whiteness in the process of casting alien characters.

The blocking of characters has the effect of reducing their presence. Some characters who are played by actors of Asian descent have more screen presence than other actors in terms of time. But how they are treated by the cinematography has the effect of limiting and oppressing their influence. By focusing on characters such as Captain America and Thor, their supporting characters such as Jim and Hogun would not leave a lasting impression on the audience. The counterargument is that since the films are focusing on their respective heroes, they should be the main focus. While this is a valid argument, it does not excuse how they are treated based on the cinematography. These films are multi-million-dollar productions with hundreds of people working on them, making it extremely likely that every frame is intentional and approved by the executives. Thus, every act of erasure toward Asians is most likely intentional as well.

5.2 Portrayal of Asian gender roles and pain

5.2.1 Sexism and misogyny

There is a lack of female representation of Asians in the Marvel films until *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015). From Phase One until *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), all the Asian supporting characters, which is only Hogun and Jim, are played by men. While there have been female extras played by an Asian actress, the roles that they play are either as reporters, companions at parties or scientists. The first appearance of an actress of Asian descent happened at the beginning of *Iron Man 1*, where the character, Obediah Stone is sitting before four Asian extras 00:05:55. While one Asian couple is shown, the other two Asian women are accompanied by white men. The next appearance of an Asian extra happened at 00:06:38, when she is shown in a casino. Her appearance, which is a dress that shows a lot of skin, implies that she is potentially an escort. The fact of the matter is that actresses of Asian descent are shown as longing for white male companionship. According to Ono & Pham: "Asian and Asian American women are constructed as both as sexual objects and as lacking power; indeed, the lack of power is intrinsic to the representation of desirability." (ch 4). What they are saying is that Asian women are intentionally constructed as sexual objects who lack the power to resist, which makes them more desirable. This issue is not restricted to how Asian women are portrayed in media. Ambivalent dialectic means a contrasting representation that is opposites but functions together in a problematic manner (Ono & Pham Glossary of Key Terms). The dialectic is about women being portrayed as either chaste or prostitutes, yet these portrayals are united by the fact that they are still longing for men. Putting aside how Asian women are portrayed, characters played by white actresses such as Black Widow, Peggy Carter, and Jane Foster are all shown longing for the white male lead at the expense of their agency. Thus, this issue with how women are portrayed in Marvel films is not isolated to Asian women. However, it is the lack of proper screen presence that makes their absence noticeable.

By the release of *Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015)*, there is a character named Dr Cho, played by Korean actress Claudia Kim, who is the first female supporting character played by an Asian actress. *Avengers* 2 (2015) is about the Avengers dealing with a robot that Tony Stark accidentally created. Among the supporting characters, Dr Cho acts as both an ally and antagonist. In her first scene, she is established to be a doctor and a scientist, which allows her to fit the criteria for a model minority portrayal. During a dialogue with Hawkeye at 00:17:30, where they talk about relationships, Dr Cho was quick to state that she cannot fix Hawkeye's assumed relationship issue, implying that she is not interested in a relationship with him. While the dialogue is meant to be humorous, the fact that the dialogue is there implies that the film's

message is that all women want to be in a relationship with men. Not long after this dialogue and in the same scene, Dr Cho is invited to the Avengers party, and she shows interest to join due to her attraction to Thor. Once her attraction to Thor is established, Dr Cho loses much of her agency and becomes a more passive character whose only characterization is to help the Avengers. From 00:17:47 to 00:34:23 she does not get a speaking line. During the gap, a lot of things happened in the story, and she is not allowed to express her opinion of what is going on. Just like previous supporting characters played by Asian actors before her, during the Avengers private party, Dr Cho was there, and she was blocked from the frame by the characters. Whether by the characters or the camera, her presence on screen is minimal and would have easily been missed if not for a brief reaction frame or the scene where she is targeted by the film's villain, Ultron. During the scene where she is targeted by the villain, she plays the role of a damsel in distress. When she gets to speak again at 00:34:23, where she confronts Tony Stark about his role in creating Ultron, her question gets unanswered and instead Stark goes into a tantrum about his role in creating the robot. Dr Cho's dialogue goes completely unanswered. Her brief dialogue in the scene is not acknowledged by Stark or any of the other characters. In terms of word counts during the scene starting at 00:33:00, Dr Cho has thirteen words of dialogue, with only Hawkeye and Maria each having nine words of dialogue in the scene. In comparison, Stark, who began speaking his dialogue after Dr Cho asks him her question, drowns her out by staggering one-hundred-thirty-five words of dialogue.

Here is a transcribe of the scene:

[DR. CHO] "I don't understand."
She turns to look at Tony Stark.
[DR. CHO] "You built this program."
Tony briefly looks at Cho before looking away.
A medium close-up shot of Cho.
[DR. CHO] "Why is it trying to kill us?"
Cuts to Tony, he is still looking away from Cho and begins to chuckle. The other characters react to Tony's chuckle, but not reaction from Cho. Bruce shakes his head, trying to dissuade Tony from his current behavior.
[BRUCE] "Mmm-mmm."
[THOR] "You think this is funny?"
[TONY] "No. It's probably not, right?"
[TONY] "This is very terrible. It is so…(LAUGH) Is it so… It is. It's so terrible."

[THOR] "This could have been avoided if you hadn't played with something you don't understand."

Tony goes to confront Thor and begins to rant.

As the above transcribe shows, Dr Cho asked Tony a question that gets ignored. Instead, her confrontation with Tony gets taken over by Thor. Any other character could have confronted Stark about his role in creating the robot, but this question is asked by Dr Cho. She functions as the instigator of Stark's tantrum and she is the victim of the fallout, with her screen presence being reduced while the other characters emerge unscathed. Afterwards, the character is not shown again for forty-two minutes until the story turns to South Korea where she gets brainwashed by Ultron. From that moment on, Dr Cho functions as a villain as she assists Ultron in his plans before she got released from his control. Her last scene with dialogue happens at 01:19:35. Although it is assumed that Captain America provides her with medical aid since she is last seen alive by the end of the film at 02:07:15, the scene cuts off so quickly that the story leaves Dr Cho's fate unanswered. Her health and safety were not important to the story, rather her function in the film is to serve as a setup for the final arc by helping the villain and guiding the heroes to their destination. Once her role in the film is done, she is downgraded to serving as a silent background character.

The next prominent female character with an Asian actress in the Marvel film is Mantis of *Guardians of the Galaxy 2*. In terms of characteristics, Mantis is a passive and shy figure who resembles the Madame Butterfly stereotype. The power dynamic between her and the villain, Ego is that of a master and slave. This relationship essentially makes Mantis an object to be used by her master. In this regard, she follows the frequent stereotype of Asian women being treated as obedient pets or dolls (Zhang 20). She shows a self-sacrificial side of her when she decided to betray Ego to rescue the Guardians. As a figure of attraction, Mantis is regarded as weird and hideous by the character, Drax. In this regard, the Madame Butterfly aesthetic is subverted, because she is treated as undesirable. As the character develops in the film, Mantis begins to further subvert from her initial Madame Butterly characterization as she shows her assertiveness toward Drax and rebelling against Ego. While she is portrayed as seemingly frail, she is still strong and capable since forced the antagonist to sleep to buy time for the heroes. In comparison to Dr Cho, Mantis is a more prominent character. While the remark about her appearance is offensive, it can be interpreted as an attempt to subvert the Madame Butterfly characterization. Because Mantis is regarded as ugly by the characters, she can show more than just an expendable aesthetic. Nevertheless, she is still being objectified by

the characters and how she is framed on screen. She sides with Drax because he is providing her with a better alternative than her abusive relationship with Ego. In this regard, she is still very unassertive in personality.

Throughout the film, Mantis' face was emphasized sixty-one times and over twenty of them were close-up shots. Her eyes are always the focus on the composition, and her antennae bring more focus to her face. This has the effect of making the audience focus on her alien features. Rather than a yellowface logic where the audience is aware that the actor is seemingly emulating an Asian, the audience is being made more aware of Klementieff's Asian features, specifically her eyes. This observation fits with Paner's statement on how Asian women are victims of orientalism (14), and Mantis is very much a victim.

The misogyny of Asian women continues in *Shang-Chi* (2021). During the film, the main character is supported by his best friend, Katy Chan, played by Chinese Korean descended American actress, Awkwafina and his sister, Xu Xialing, played by Chinese actress Meng'er Zhang. The film portrays the women as passive figures who support men. Even though both characters are competent, Katy is a driver and Xu is a better fighter than her brother, the focal point of the film is still on Shang-Chi. Katy spends most of the film wanting to assert her independence and not focus on marrying someone, despite her family's insistence. She ends the film solidified as Shang-Chi's partner with the implication that they will become romantically involved. Xu wants to become independent from the shadows of her brother and father. She ends the story by overtaking her father's organization. Despite the scene being framed as an empowering moment, Xu is ultimately doing what her father wanted, having someone of his blood inherit his legacy. The problem is these characters need the men in their lives to have a purpose in the story. Without Shang-Chi, Katy would not have a purpose nor a reason to change herself. Without the Mandarin, Xu would not have decided to become a crime boss.

In *Eternals* (2021), Sersi, played by the actress Gemma Chan, portrays the female lead of the film. Sersi is depicted as a kindhearted person who loves humanity. Her power is to manipulate non-sentient materials. Juxtaposing the female characters in *Shang*-Chi (2021), Sersi is not a physical fighter and prefers diplomacy over violence. Although she is portrayed as a positive character, she is also very passive in her demeanor which is reminiscent of Dr Cho from *Avengers 2* (2015) and Mantis from *Guardians of the Galaxy 2* (2017). Sersi fits the description of a Lotus Blossom, which is all about being sexually attractive, passive and physically non-imposing (Ono & Kent ch 4). Especially on the attraction part, Sersi serves as the object of affection for two men in the film. Sersi's motherly affection toward humanity

demonstrates that she adherences to her feminine gender role, which means that she is characterized as hyperfeminine.

In the story, Sersi has romantic relationships with two men, her teammate, Ikaris played by Scottish actor, Richard Madden, and her colleague, Dane Whitman played by English actor, Kit Harington. Both of her relationships are depicted as positive ones, and she ends up marrying Ikaris after he reveals his affection for her. The film shows Sersi being intimate with Ikaris after his confession. After Ikaris leaves her because he knows about their true goal to destroy the Earth, Sersi remains faithful for a time before she gets into a relationship with Dane. Similarly, Sersi is also intimate with Dane. For both men, Sersi serves as their object of desire and a driving force for their motivations. Sersi is the first main female character portrayed by an Asian actress who is shown as having a physical relationship with men in Marvel films. Although her two relationships are depicted as positive ones, there are connotations to the negative portrayals of the Dragon Lady stereotype. Later in the film, Ikaris is revealed to be an antagonist who serves the will of their true master, Arishem the Judge. He is a man dedicated to his mission to awaken a god. However, Ikaris is deeply troubled because of his love for Sersi. Eventually, he fails in his mission because of his love for Sersi. Unable to deal with his guilt, Ikaris commits suicide by flying into the sun. At the end of the film, Dane decides to wield a cursed sword when he witnesses Sersi getting captured by her master. Thus, although Sersi has a positive relationship with both men, her ties with them put them on a path of self-destruction. Thus, even though Sersi is depicted as a positive Lotus Blossom stereotype, she has connotations with the Dragon Lady who entraps men with her sexuality. This portrayal pushes a narrative that an interracial relationship between Asians and white people is forbidden and dangerous. Besides the segregating narrative that the story is perpetuating, it also pushes the same yellow peril narrative that Asians are dangerous. Additionally, Sersi's relationships with both Ikaris and Dane resemble a white-knight assimilationist love story. About this story trope, Kumiko Nemoto states: "a white man is depicted as the ideal knight for an Asian woman, who is the Cinderella figure, to attain material prosperity, spiritual transcendence, freedom, and salvation – and thus such narratives perpetuate her subordinate position to white men." (22). Thus, while Sersi's relationship are portrayed as positive in the film it is not progressive, and it is perpetuating Hollywood's sexist attitude toward Asian women.

5.2.2 Masculinity and deviancy

From Phase One to Phase Two, Marvel's category of supporting characters with Asian actors can be counted in two. Barring the nameless extras, the only characters played by Asian men

are Hogun from *Thor* and Jim from *Captain America 1*. Both characters share similar characteristics, they are both fighters and they are both nimbler than the main character.

Starting with Hogun, the character does not come off as overtly masculine in his debut. He is stoic and passive in his demeanor. He is a follower who is loyal to Thor. In the first film, when fighting against frost giants, he received an overly exaggerated attack by frost giants at 00:21:56. In terms of how much he is shown during the fight, he gets four seconds of screentime fighting and spends nineteen seconds fleeing the frost giants. In comparison, the characters Fandral and Volstaag receive sixteen and eleven seconds of screentime during the fight. This observation shows a clear disparity in terms of allocation of time. Finally, during the fight before the climax, Hogun is defeated by The Destroyer, an Asgardian construct. Besides his minor contribution during the fights, Hogun's main contribution is to carry his allies to safety. In many regards, Hogun comes off as not a great warrior and equal to his friends, but as a glorified servant to his allies. Hogun's presence in fights stays the same in the sequels. In *Thor 2*, he only receives three seconds in the opening fight. In *Thor 3*, where Hogun faces Hela, he only fought her for five seconds and then gets killed off by Hela.

However, although his performance during fights is underwhelming, Hogun did receive an overall improvement in how his masculinity is displayed. From *Thor 1* to *Thor 2*, Hogun's appearance changed from Japanese to Mongol aesthetic. This change is more in line with how the character looks in the comics, where the character is more inspired by Mongols. He grows a long beard which further strengthens his masculine code. His chonmage changes to a long barbarian hairstyle. In this regard, Hogun has gone from a nimble Japanese aesthetic to a fiercer Mongol look. He becomes more tribal which in turn makes him come off as more masculine than his initial appearance. His change is an overall improvement of his initial appearance because it is breaking the standard portrayal of Asian men being frail. While this change of look is an improvement, it is also a simple shift from one stereotype to another, that of Asians

Figure 6. Hogun's visual evolution from Thor 1, Thor 2, and Thor 3

being a yellow peril. Instead of being presented as dignified, stoic Japanese Samurai, Hogun has become a fierce barbarian.

As a character, Hogun is not problematic or offensive. In terms of how his character in the story is perceived, he is a positive supporting character. The problem is that he is a character associated with many Asian stereotypes. In the first film, he is portrayed as a stoic Japanese archetype. In the second and third films, he has become a Mongol. No matter which role or masculinity he is displaying, the character cannot and did not break Asian stereotypes. This fact is not necessarily the fault of the writers or producers, they may not even be consciously aware of what they are perpetuating, but it goes to show how oriental images of Asians have been solidified in contemporary media. This fact is a problem because if these kinds of images have become expectations, then it will be difficult for people of Asian descent to escape them

In Phase 3, Wong and Ned serve as the new recurring Asian supporting character for the protagonists. Unlike Hogun and Jim who are portrayed as nimble, Wong and Ned are both played by actors whose bodies are bigger and heavier than the male Asian actors before them. In addition to their bodies, their roles are also accommodated. Starting with Wong from *Doctor Strange,* played by Benedict Wong whose parents are Chinese, he is a sorcerer whose role is to be a librarian who safeguards knowledge. When developing the character, the director, Scott Derrickson originally did not plan to include Wong in the film. He states:

> I was going to leave Wong out of the movie at first; he was an Asian sidekick manservant, what was I supposed to do with that? But once the decision was made to cast Tilda, we brought Wong back because, unlike the Ancient One, he could be completely subverted as a character and reworked into something that didn't fall into any of the stereotypes of the comics. (Strauss 2017)

Figure 7. Wong standing next to Doctor Strange and Karl Mando in Doctor Strange (2016)

Thus, Derrickson wanted to subvert Asian stereotypes. Although if he succeeds in subverting the stereotype is a matter of how Wong is shown on screen. Wong displays his masculinity through his assertive and stoic personality. He has a drill-sergeant type of personality as he guides Doctor Strange, the main protagonist of the film. In terms of experience, Doctor Strange looks and listens to him for guidance. If Derrickson intended to subvert stereotypes with Wong, then he failed in terms of how he is displayed on the screen. Wong is still stereotypically stoic and dutiful. Akin to a dutiful model minority portrayal of Asians, Wong is also essentially a librarian which associates him closely with the portrayal of Asians being nerd stereotypes. While his masculinity is not undermined in the sense that he gets upstaged in dialogue like what happened to Dr Cho in *Avengers 2*, the fact that he does not get to show his capability during fight scenes undermines it. In terms of body image, Benedict Wong's body is larger and bulkier than the actor of Doctor Strange, Benedict Cumberbatch. This difference between their bodies has the effect of the character, Wong, never undermining Strange's body. Strange's body is idealized, while Wong's is not. Because the character Wong is never in any danger of upstaging Strange's masculinity, Wong is allowed to interact with the main protagonist. If Wong was played by an Asian actor whose body meets the western beauty standard, then it breaks the power dynamic between white and colored. If Derrickson wanted to subvert stereotypes, having Benedict Wong play the character is working against his efforts. The problem is not Benedict Wong's ability as an actor, but the fact that his body image is undermining the positive Asian representation that could have been shown. His role as a supporting character is only furthering the narrative that Asians should be regarded as subordinates than equals. While the character is an improvement from the comics, where he serves as a tea-making manservant, it does not mean that the character should adhere to other stereotypes.

Spider-Man: Homecoming (2017) is about Spider-Man coming to terms with his life as a superhero and his civilian life as a high school student. Ned Leeds, played by Jacob Batalon who is of Filipino descent, serves as Peter Parker's supporting friend and the comic relief in the film. In terms of the character's personality, Ned Leeds is mainly associated with being a nerd. He is smart as he applies for the national quiz competition, and he helps Peter with unlocking the restriction in his superhero suit. In this regard, Ned is a stereotype of model minority. He serves as a follower and admirer of Peter Parker. The narrative of being a nerd is not a negative one in contemporary times. The rise of technology and media has normalized the stereotype of being seen as a nerd (Huynh 363). However, it has been used by the United States to promote the idea that everyone lives in a post-racial era, which is an exaggeration

(Huynh 364). This view is the same line of thinking that constitutes the damaging effect of the model minority. The idea that Asians who do well in school must mean that there are no racial issues in the United States which serves as a scapegoat for the problem of racial inequality in the United States.

Figure 8. Ned Leeds sitting next to Peter Parker in Spider-Man: Homecoming (2017)

Like Benedict Wong, Jacob Batalon's body is heavy. In comparison to the athletic Tom Holland who plays Peter Parker/Spider-Man, the difference between their bodies is more noticeable on-screen than between Benedict Wong and Benedict Cumberbatch in Doctor Strange. Ned's weight is commented on, on one occasion. During a scene that happens at 01:04:10, Ned cheers being saved by Spider-Man while the elevator is on the verge of collapsing. When the scene cuts to Ned's face, he covers most of the frame. This has the effect of emphasizing his full body and makes him look large. The effect of his weight is further illustrated when the camera shakes as he celebrates. Ned also has many close-up shots. In the film, he has a total of forty-six close shots that focus on his face. This has the effect of making him appear larger. Additionally, he is often positioned closer to the camera which further emphasizes his size. The purpose of these scenes is for comic relief. The effect is to see Ned's facial expression as he either reacts in astonishment to Spider-Man's heroics or is embarrassed. The comedy would not have worked if Ned was played by an actor of a lower weight class. The choice to portray Ned as having an overweight body has negative connotation. Study has shown that labeling people as fat has negative biases (Brochu & Esses 2003). Additionally, the act of fat shaming has a racist edge (Warbrick 1). These negative connotations and making Ned be the protagonist's best friend has the purpose of emphasizing on Peter's status as the underdog in the story. In this regard, Ned's role is to be a function for Peter's story rather than be a character. Thus, there is a power gap between them.

In terms of sexuality, throughout the film, Ned displays attraction toward Peter Parker's aunt. Additionally, he wants to charm people by wearing hats to parties or using Spider-Man's popularity to earn social respect. While these characteristics are meant to show him as a comic relief, they have the effect of showing Ned as an undesirable character who is not considered desirable by the other female characters in the story. Ned is not the only character who is attracted to Aunt May. In a dinner scene that takes place at 00:25:40, an Asian waiter approaches Aunt May and gifts her with free food, as an obvious sign of attraction. Ned's characteristics fit with Ono & Kent's statement on how Asian men are often "constructed as asexual, and nerdy, as delivery boys, computer geeks, and ordinarily unattractive." (ch 4). While he is not asexual given that he is attracted to women, Ned's lack of sexual prowess shows his lack of masculinity, which only further enhances and protects Peter Parker's white masculinity. The scene that happens at 00:23:00 proves this point. After returning home, Peter finds Ned waiting for him and inadvertently learns about his identity as Spider-Man. During the panic, Peter takes off his suit and reveal his athletic build. When their conversation alerts Aunt May, Peter moves to stand next to Ned, which further emphasizes their difference in body type. The actor Tom Holland's body is placed as an ideal in contrast to Jacob Batalon's heavier body type. This composition shot of the two characters being positioned next to each other happens thirty-six times during the film. This observation strengthens Ono & Kent's statement about how "the construction of white masculinity through the impotence of Asians continues to be widespread in media" (ch 4). In this regard, nothing about Ned's characterization challenges the mainstream myth about Asians being nerds, but only further perpetuates it. Despite being of the same age in the story, the relationship between Ned and Peter is not an equal one. Unlike the power dynamic between Wong and Strange who are peers in terms of experience, Ned will always be Peter's subordinate due to his lack of power and good looks. Additionally, Ned needs to be connected to Peter to have an identity, because he has no other motivation besides his academics if he is not his friend. In many regards, Ned is very effeminate in his behavior. He is consistently supportive of Peter by providing emotional support throughout the first film. According to Kenneth Hyuhn who made a study about Asians being viewed as nerd stereotypes: "Nerds are perceived as infantile, effeminate, or just plain inept in comparison with the masculinity considered hegemonic in contemporary Anglo-American culture" (364). This statement shows the inequality of the power dynamic between Ned and Peter. Even though they are both nerds, Peter's masculinity is never threatened because he is always standing in contrast with Ned's.

Ned has a brief appearance *in Avengers: Infinity War (2018)*, which continues to focus on his size. Beginning at 00:18:23, when Peter Parker/Spider-Man notices the alien invasion, he asks Ned to create a distraction because they are sitting on a bus. As shown in figure 8, Ned's reaction is played for comedy. He is shocked and frightened by the arrival of aliens. Without hearing his friend's word due seeing the alien ship, he runs to the back of the bus, pushes classmates aside and causes a commotion that Peter needs to escape. The scene plays out by having Ned act as the comedic relief. The camera makes sure to position Ned in the front to make the audience notice him. Additionally, his close-up reaction to the alien further highlights the comedic effect. He makes an exasperated face. From a storytelling standpoint, the purpose of the scene is to immediately put Spider-Man into the main conflict. However, the scene is achieved by having Ned act like a fool. Despite his minor screen presence in the film, Ned is given an unflattering portrayal which further emphasizes the previous point about Ned always standing in contrast to Peter Parker. The point is that Ned is an undesirable man in comparison to Peter Parker. Ono & Kent state that whiteness is a product of negative difference, meaning that people understand whiteness by contrasting with people of color (ch 4). In this scene, Peter's image as a masculine and sexually attractive figure is strengthened by the foolish behavior of the broader built Ned. In terms of screen time, Ned only has twelve seconds, but they are specifically devoted to making him act like a fool.
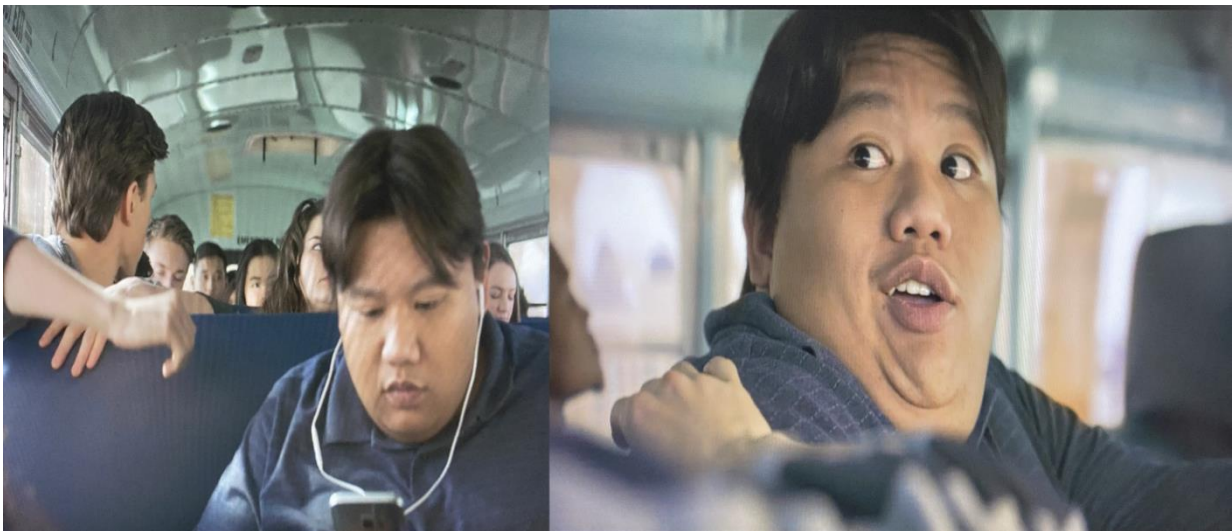

Figure 9. Ned's two scenes in Avengers: Infinity War. The frame and close-up shot exaggerate his face

In *Ant-Man and the Wasp* (2018), the story is about Scott Lang helping his mentor and love interest in rescuing their family, while avoiding legal authority. The goal of the film is to rescue the wife of his mentor who is trapped in an alien realm. In the film, Korean American actor, Randall Park plays an FBI agent named Jimmy Woo. Throughout the film, Jimmy acts

as a minor antagonist to Scott. He continuously keeps him under surveillance and shows up for any sign of him breaking his house arrest. In addition to serving as an obstacle to the main hero, Jimmy also acts as comedic relief. Throughout the film, Jimmy is ridiculed by Scott and his family for doing his job. The comedy serves to emphasize that he is not meant to be taken seriously by the audience. In terms of the masculinity that he is conveying, the comedy also serves to make Jimmy effeminate. This fact is especially the case at the end of the film during Jimmy's final interaction with Scott. At 01:44:15, when Scott is freed from his house arrest, Jimmy has an exchange with Scott and mistakes Scott's words as an invitation for dinner. Although the scene is played for comedy, it further emphasizes Jimmy's sexuality, because it implies that he is homosexual. In this case with Jimmy, mockery is used to downplay his character and screen presence. In terms of his display of masculinity, Jimmy is not meant to be a desirable or pleasant character. His implied homosexuality is used to mark him as a deviant. His sexuality is contrasted by Scott's display of masculinity throughout the story. In the film, Scott is desired by five women. His daughter, Cassie wants her father to be released from his house arrest. His love interest and teammate, Hope with whom he shares an unresolved sexual tension. At a point in the film, the mother of his love interest, Janet, possesses his body to contact Hope and her husband, Hank Pym. His divorced wife, Maggie treats him with affection. Ava, the antagonist of the film, flirts with Scott when she meets him. Thus, Scott is portrayed as a highly desirable and masculine character. This portrayal serves to strengthen the power gap between Jimmy and Scott in terms of presence. Scott is the ideal man, while Jimmy is not.

Spider-Man: Far from Home (2019) is about Peter Parker's school trip to Europe. The main conflict is Peter's struggle with facing his mentor's legacy and dealing with teenage
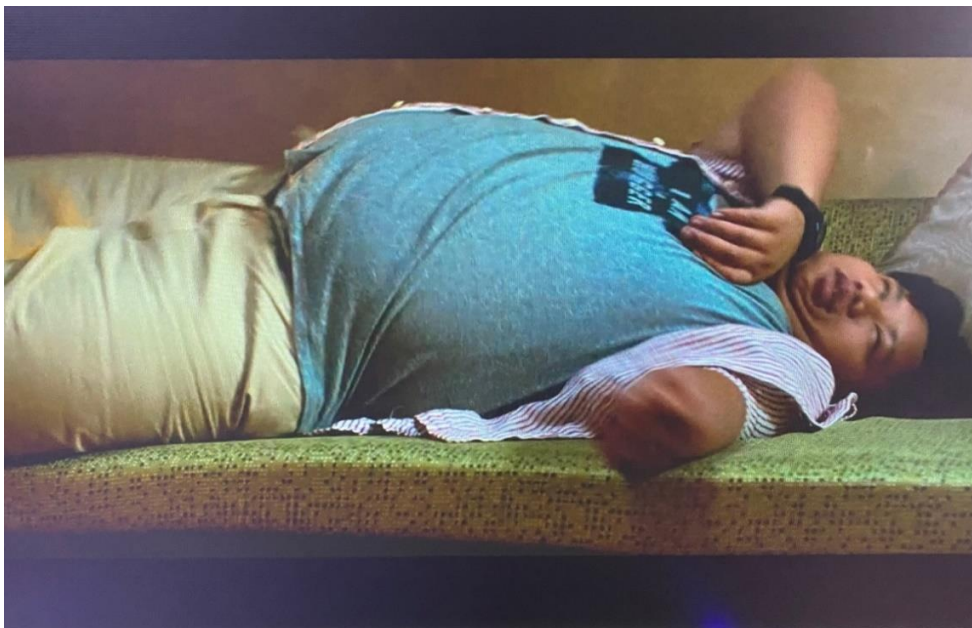

Figure 10. Ned falls onto the couch in Spider-Man: Far from Home (2019).

drama. Ned Leeds remains a supporting character in the film. He continues to be comic relief. Once again, his size is used as a source of comedy. At 00:27:05, after returning to the hotel, Ned gets tranquilized by Nick Fury. He falls onto the couch and his belly is at the center of the frame. While he is sleeping, Ned continues to act as comic relief by snoring and interrupting Peter's conversation with Nick. Although the characters never comment on Ned's size, this portrayal can be depicted as a form of body shaming. Additionally, Ned's fall is done intentionally. When Ned is shot with the tranquilizer, he is facing and talking to Peter. The moment he got hit by the dart, he spins around to fall on his back. If Ned had fallen front-view down, his belly would not have been shown and the portrayal would not have been as degrading, but he had to fall on his back to emphasize the comedy. The frame is an example of implicit fat shaming. The characters are not mocking Ned's body, but cinematography does. The subtle shaming of Ned's body is done without overtly mocking him.

In terms of his display of masculinity, Ned continues to be dorky and passive. He enters a brief relationship with the character Betty Brant played by Australian actress, Angourie Rice. On the surface, their romance is portrayed as a positive one and Ned is shown as a supportive boyfriend. However, he is also very passive and unassertive. He follows Betty's commands and does not challenge her. Their relationship is done for the sake of comedy rather than genuine development. By the end of the film, their relationship ends, and this development is treated as a positive outcome, implying that an interracial relationship between Asian and white people is not meant to last.

Spider-Man: *Far from Home* (2019) introduces a character named Brad Davis played by Australian actor, Remy Hill who has East-Asian descent. In the film, Brad's role is to a minor antagonist to Peter. He is framed as a jock-stereotype who is athletic. He is in love with Peter's love interest, MJ, played by American actor, Zendaya. His feelings toward MJ put him at odds with the protagonist. In terms of the display of Asian masculinity in Marvel films, Brad breaks the pattern. He is overtly athletic and masculine, displaying none of the body images that are previously shown of Asian masculinity. As a character, he is written to be unsympathetic. His main motivation in the film is to enter a relationship with MJ and act as an obstacle to Peter. When he mistakenly believes Peter is having a sexual encounter with a female agent, he takes pictures and intends to show them to MJ. At 00:37:05, Brad and Peter's first and only noteworthy dialogue interaction is a hostile one. He continues to act antagonistically toward Peter. His segment in the film concludes with him making a fool of himself in front of his classmates after they question his predatory actions of taking photos of

people going to the toilet. In this case, mockery is used to reduce Brad as a character. After this moment, Brad loses all relevance to the story. He is no longer a rival or a threat to Pete

Spider-Man: Far from Home (2019) has an unsympathetic portrayal of the interracial relationship between Asians and non-Asian people. The film conveys a narrative that should a non-Asian character get romantically involved with an Asian, that relationship is either doomed to fail or will bring trouble. Ned's romance with Betty puts her in danger. Ned's involvement with Peter's work as a superhero is the indirect cause. But Betty would not have been in danger if she did not want to have a romantic date with Ned. Additionally, they did not share an on-screen kiss. At 00:53:14, after surviving an attack, Betty turns to Ned and says, "I would totally kiss you, but I think I just threw up in my mouth a little." In context, the scene is meant to be comedic, and Betty is embarrassed to kiss Ned due to her accident. Out of context, Betty's sentence suggests that she does not want to kiss Ned, implicitly implying that she finds him disgusting.
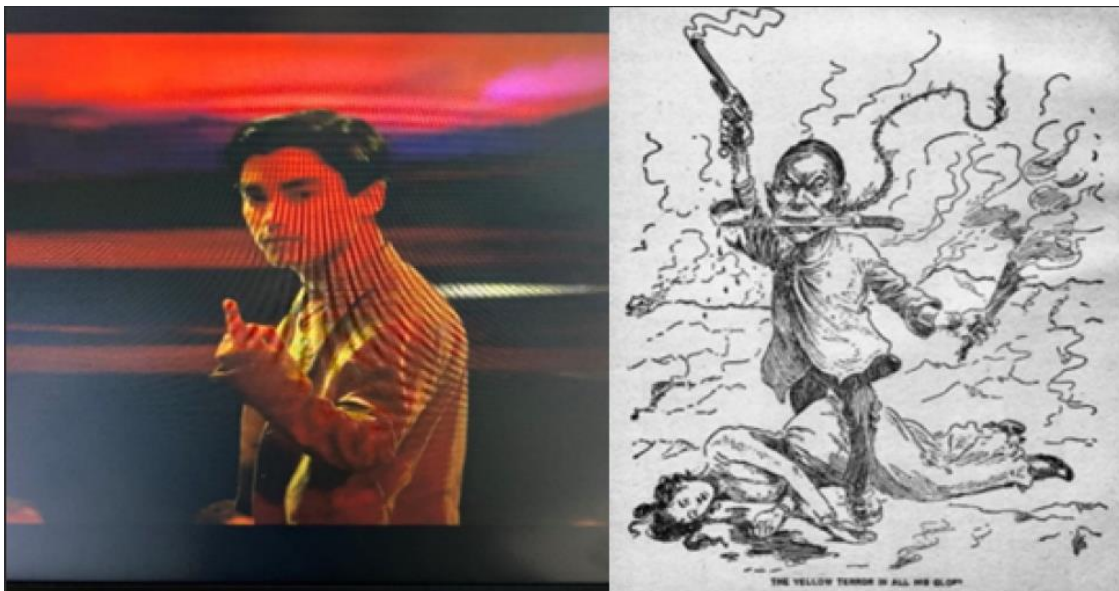

Figure 11. To the left, Brad flips off Peter before sitting next to MJ in Spider-Man: Far from Home (2019). To the right, The Yellow Terror in All His Glory (1899)

As for Brad, his romantic interest in MJ is portrayed as a negative one. Throughout the story, he serves as a threat to Peter's love life, and thus he is a portrayed as a threat to white masculinity. He is consistently pushy in his desire to become MJ's boyfriend. He comes off as a peril to MJ, in the same vein as the narrative of the yellow peril who steals women from white men's hands. The image of Asians stealing white women is different since Zendaya has African American descent. But the message remains the same; Asians are stealing women from white men. In their analysis of *the Yellow Terror in All His Glory (1899),* Ono & Kent state:

Absent in the image is a figure of white male, obstetrically the reader to whom the image is directed and from whom compensatory action is sought, and the Asian or Asian American women, a character not relevant to a narrative of an alien, masculine threat to the nation. To complete the reasoning of the image, in order to protect white women and the nation from further trespass and violation from animalistic and violent Chinese aggression, white men must act and potentially eliminate the lawless Chinese aggressor. (ch 2)

At 00:47:20, the mise-en-scene focuses on Brad giving Peter a look. Out of hostility, he flips his middle finger at Peter before he moves to sit next to MJ. Angered, Peter was about to charge toward Brad before he was forced to leave. The film frames Brad as a danger to MJ and Peter, the white main character, should go to her defense. Eventually, this subplot ends with Brad not earning MJ's affection and humiliating himself in front of his classmates when their black teacher reprimands him. Peter's animosity with Brad contrasts his friendship to Ned. Previously, I stated that Ned was never a danger to Peter because his body does not put Peter's image at risk. The presence of an athletic Asian character means that Peter's body image is challenged. The conflict between Peter and Brad is a contest of masculinity. By the end of the film, Peter's masculinity wins over Brad's. The film's message is that Peter's white masculinity is superior to Brad's non-white masculinity. This narrative perpetuates the idea that male Asian bodies are regarded as undesirable because either they do not fit the ideal body image or that they are predatory.

In *Eternals* (2021), the character, Gilgamesh is played by South Korean American actor, Ma Dong-seok. Compared to the other Asian male characters in the previous Marvel films, Gilgamesh is the best portrayal of Asian masculinity. He is a positive character, but the negative Asian connotations of the previous films are still present. As a character, Gilgamesh is described as the strongest warrior in the team. His display of strength in the film is portrayed by having him punch his opponents. In terms of personality, he is shown to be a kind person who is loyal to his friends. Although his relationship with his fellow teammate, Thena is a platonic one, he acts as both a protector and pseudo-husband to her. The first point is Gilgamesh's relationship with Thena. The character, Thena is played by American actress, Angelina Jolie. In the story, Gilgamesh and Thena have a close relationship due to Gilgamesh's choice to act as her protector and caretaker due to her mental illness. For several centuries, they lived together in isolation. However, the fact that the film makes it explicit that their relationship is a platonic one reinforces the narrative that an Asian is not allowed to be in a relationship with a white person. Later in the film, while protecting Thena, Gilgamesh dies which ends any potential for a relationship between him and Thena. The only moment where

Gilgamesh and Thena are shown with intimacy is when Gilgamesh dies and Thena hugs his corpse in grief. The only moment where a white actress is allowed to be intimate with an Asian is when the potential for any romantic relationship is cut short. This pattern parallels Ikaris and Sersi's doomed relationship. It reinforces the narrative that any relationship between Asian and white is doomed. Additionally, the relationship reflects the broader narrative of Hollywood's attitude toward Asian American men, whom they regard as unattractive and must be dissociated from white women (Nemoto 30).

In terms of body image, Ma Dong-seok's body is muscular. His body is like Wong from *Doctor Strange* (2016) and Ned Leeds from *Spider-Man* (2017). Although his body is

Figure 12. Gilgamesh being put under a baby suit illusion in *Eternals (2021)*

meant to emphasize Gilgamesh's strength, it also follows the same pattern in what Marvel considers to be a good male supportive character if they are Asian. They must be big and broad. They must be supporting characters in service of a white protagonist. This portrayal resembles the Charlie Chan stereotype which is to be supportive. An archetype of Charlie Chan is often shown to be broad in body and have big cheeks and chin. Wong, Ned, and Gilgamesh are all influenced by the legacy that has been left behind by the Charlie Chan stereotype who are characterized as being subordinate to white characters (Rzpeka 1464). The fact that this portrayal has come to be regarded as a positive characterization of Asians shows how ingrained this stereotype has become in popular media. For Asian American writers and filmmakers, this stereotype has become a salient figure (Rzepka 1465). Gilgamesh fits the Charlie Chan stereotype who are depicted as "effeminate, apologetic and deferential to his white masters" (Rzepka 1464); Gilgamesh is not overly effeminate, but he is put into a role where he is

feminized. His platonic relationship with Thena further highlights his asexuality which is another Charlie Chan characteristic (Rzepka 1464).

Another negative connotation is the fact that Gilgamesh faces mockery just like the other Asian male characters in the other Marvel films. At 00:50:20, Gilgamesh is reintroduced to the present. Before his reintroduction, the character Kingo starts building up Gilgamesh's image as the strongest in the team. When Gilgamesh opens the door, he is shown in a flowery apron. He is shown cooking and displaying feminine traits due to being Thena's caretaker. For six seconds, the mise-en-scene lingers upon him and his upper torso, showing him in his flowery apron. At 00:53:50, while having dinner that Gilgamesh has cooked, the character, Sprite uses her illusion powers to put Gilgamesh in a toddler suit after he teased her. For eleven seconds, Gilgamesh is shown wearing the glamor while the other Eternals laugh at him. The scenes are meant to be comedic, but they are also undermining Gilgamesh's image and presence. Every moment that Gilgamesh is built up as a respectable figure, the comedic moments are tearing down his image. These moments have the effect of reducing Gilgamesh, firmly putting him in the role of a supporting character who also acts as comedic relief.

This view of white heterosexual masculinity being superior to Asian masculinity is something that Ono & Kent have discussed in their text (ch 4). Using Thomas Nakayama's study of the film, *Showdown in Little Tokyo* (1991), Ono & Kent state that the Asian American character, played by the late Brandon Lee who was the son of Bruce Lee, functions to reconstitute white masculinity (ch 4). The film was released in 1991. The fact that this interrelationship dynamic between white and Asian continues in contemporary Marvel films shows that it has not changed.

5.2.3 Asians in pain

The prominence of Asians working as stunt actors means that they tend to appear often in action sequences. Subsequently, it means that the nameless character played by the extras in the film are guaranteed to endure abuse by the main characters. All characters who fight in these movies endure some form of pain, but there is a difference between how the pain is portrayed by characters played by white actors and those of Asian descent. The difference is that the pain of those of Asian descent is treated as an afterthought by the cinematography. Ono & Kent states: "Within the media, Asian Americans are often at the sidelines, feeling the effect of dominant media representation but hardly ever appearing in the spotlight. The subjugation, invalidation, and persecution on-screen of those without power should be taken seriously." (ch 1).

In *Thor 1*, during a sequence that happens at 00:21:56, the character of Hogun is the target of a spectacle attack done by frost giants. The mise-en-scene shows him getting hit by

this attack, but his pain is not visible. The scene of Hogun being hit only lasted 0,65 milliseconds before it cuts off to show Thor fighting. Meanwhile, Fandral, played by American actors Josh Dallas in *Thor 1,* and by Zachary Levi in *Thor 2* and *Thor 3*, is pierced by an ice spike and the cinematography treats this scene with seriousness by showing his visible pain. He gets two seconds where his pain is displayed on screen. This pattern of showing pain does not change in Phase 3. In *Thor 3,* when the antagonist, Hela arrives in Asgard, she kills Fandral. Although his total screen presence in this film lasted only twelve seconds, the scene shows Fandral's pain visibly. The audience gets to see his face as he gets stabbed by Hela. In contrast, although Hogun lasted longer than his companions, his death scene shows him being brutally impaled and his face is barely visible. Fandral's death receives a close-up shot. This close-up shot of Fandral's death has the effect of evoking emotions. On the other hand, Hogun's death receives a long shot. Hogun's death is shown in a long shot and has the effect of objectifying him. His death is a simple obstacle to the antagonist's quest to claim her throne. This disparity between these characters' pain is more noteworthy in *Thor 3*. Rose states that close-up shots produce the effects of claustrophobic intensity (74). Additionally, she states that long shots create the effect of alienation and emptiness (Rose 75) The fact that even though Fandral receives less screen time and spoke no dialogue compared to Hogun, he is still treated with more dignity by the cinematography than Hogun.

Hogun is not a special case. There are multiple instances where extras of Asian descent are subjugated to pain but the editing obscures their injuries or death. In *Iron Man 3*, Tony Stark fights against three of the Mandarin's henchman. At 01:27:50, he fights and punches one of them who is of Asian descent. The pain of this nameless character lasted for a fracture of a second before it cuts to the next henchman who then accidentally shoots the nameless Asian character in the shoulder. Once again, this character's pain lasted a fracture of a second before it cuts back to Tony who then shoots the nameless character with his repulsor beam. At

Figure 13. The nameless henchman about to be shot by Tony Stark in Iron Man 3 (2013)

01:29:58, during a grapple hold, Tony managed to aim his attacker's gun to aim and shoot at the nameless Asian again, this time the bullet hits his head, killing him. Due to how quickly the sequence moves and cuts between shots that unless a viewer intentionally stops the film and analyzes the frame, the nameless Asian's pain is hidden by the cinematography. Once again, there is a disparity between how the pain is allocated. One henchman is allowed to retreat without injury, the second henchman is knocked unconscious by Tony and the third henchman, the nameless Asian is killed. This example shows that the editing is used to make quick cuts that obscures the suffering that this nameless character is enduring. This editing has the effect of making Tony appear heroic while masking the fact that he is killing a non-white person.

In *Doctor Strange*, at 00:22:30, Strange encounters three thieves. The leader of the thieves, played by a white actor, gets to engage in dialogue with Strange. The two other thieves who stay silent are played by a Black actor and one of Asian descent. The disparity of pain is shown when Karl Mando goes to rescue Strange from his attackers. The white leader, who antagonized Strange with threats and harm, gets one second when he is forced down to the ground by Karl Mando. The black thief gets one second where he receives one punch by Karl Mando before he gets to flee from the scene. Meanwhile, the Asian thief receives six seconds of pain, where he is being put under a chokehold, punched to the ground, and stepped on by Karl Mando. This observation shows that the Asian thief, who has no dialogue with Strange and only two seconds where he is shown kicking Strange, receives more punishment than the white and black thieves who are given nine seconds where they get to kick and punch Strange. There is no narrative reason for why the Asian thief should receive more pain than his two acquaintances who gets two seconds where their faces are displayed with rage. The Asian thief is on the sideline. Because he is an Asian without power in the media, his suffering is invalid in comparison to the white and black thieves.

Figure 14. Karl Mando stepping on the nameless thug in Doctor Strange (2016)

(GROANS)

This invalidation of Asians being in pain continues in *Spider-Man: Homecoming*. In the story, Spider-Man is on a ferry to prevent the villain, The Vulture, from selling dangerous weapons to criminals. The buyer happens to be played by an actor of East Asian descent. After watching Spider-Man dispatching his sellers, the Asian buyer gets ambushed by The Vulture at 01:14:50. The antagonist grabs the buyer's head and violently slams him into a nearby vehicle twice. Even though there is a narrative reason for the Vulture knocking his buyer unconscious, there is a clear disparity between how the violence is portrayed compared to Spider-Man dispatching the criminals. The scene that shows Spider-Man apprehending the criminal is done as a spectacle set piece. The action is exaggerated and the criminals, who are played by white and Hispanic actors, get their pain obscured by the action. The last time the Asian buyer is shown is him lying unconscious, at the center of the ferry. His presence is erased soon after, even though the narrative implies that he dies due to the ferry being split in half by The Vulture's weapon.

These examples show that Marvel consistently treats characters of East Asian descent as the expendable group. Their display of pain is obscured by the cinematography either through fast pace cutting or obscuration. When there is a narrative reason for the pain, the story treats their pain as a faceless casualty. These films being fictional does not justify the violence. Marvel's large catalog of films will continue to be watched by people, and thus the discourse will continue to shape representations of Asians. The perpetuation of violence toward Asians and people of Asian descent is teaching a narrative that it is permissible to hurt Asians.

5.3 Asians as the Model minority in Marvel movies

Asian actors who play supporting characters in Marvel films from Phase One to Phase Two follow one consistent pattern: they are defined by their stoic loyalties to the main lead. The first supporting character with an Asian actor, Hogun fits this requirement. Besides his stoic demeanor, his only other defining characteristic is his loyalty to Thor. Throughout the first film, his dialogue revolves around Thor, such as affirming his loyalty to him or urging the other warriors to find him. Beyond his commitment to Thor, he shows no other characterization. He is a submissive character in the same mold as Charlie Chan (Ono & Pham ch 5). Hogun's adherence to Thor shows that he is not a figure who challenges authority in the same way as Charlie Chan. Just like the archetype, Hogun's presence among Thor's warriors is only there to provide a decorative and exotic token flavor to the group. Hogun's characterization as a Charlie Chan is further emphasized by his heavy accent, which marks him as a foreigner, compared to the other warriors who speak with a clear British accent. Hogun's characterization as a model minority is further emphasized by how inspired he is by the Japanese aesthetic

compared to his comic counterpart who follows a Mongol aesthetic. Given the historical context between US and Japan, which have a positive relationship, in this perspective, making Hogun look, and sound Japanese would seem like a good representation of Asians. However, this decision only further highlights how Hogun is designed to be a model minority, given how the Japanese are lauded by the United States for being compliant, in other words, submissive and obedient to the dominant white majority. Thus, when the character, Jim appears in *Captain America: The First Avenger,* it is no coincidence that he turns out to be Japanese as well. Similarly, to Hogun, he is stoic but loyal to the main lead, Captain America. Just like with Hogun, Jim's character is defined by his obedience to the protagonist. Hogun and Jim are the only prominent Asian supporting characters during Phase One of the Marvel films. Both characters are layered with characteristics associated with the portrayal of the model minority.

In Phase Two, the most prominent Asian character is Dr Cho in *Avengers 2* (2014). She exhibits many characteristics of a model minority portrayal. She is loyal and intelligent, and that is the extent of her characterization in the film. Just like with Jim and Hogun in Phase One, her purpose is to act as a function for the story. It is her technology that the antagonist, the robot, Ultron wanted to use. Once her purpose has been served in the film, she only briefly appears as a silent background character at the end of the film.

In Phase Three, Wong from *Doctor Strange* (2016), Mantis from *Guardians of the Galaxy 2* (2017) and Ned Leeds from *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017) are the primary Asian representation of the Marvel films. Min-Erva from *Captain Marvel* (2019) is a special case because the actress Gamma Chan has her skin obscured by blue paint. But I will still be putting her on the list of Asian representation here. They are all playing supporting characters. A difference between the characters of Phase One and Two is that they are written to be more humorous. Wong is written to have a deadpan personality; his stoicism is the characteristic that is played for laughs in the film. Mantis' comedy derives from her weirdness; the character, Drax, is the one who keeps mocking her appearance, yet it is never taken seriously. Ned's comedy comes from his portrayal as a stereotypical, obese nerd who has difficulty getting a girlfriend or respect from his peers. In this regard, these characters are breaking the stereotypical portrayal of a model minority who must be serious and humorless. However, the problem is that mocking is being used to generate comedy. Wong's stoicism is mocked by Doctor Strange. Mantis' look and behavior are mocked by Drax. Except for one moment where Spider-Man mocks Ned's size during the scene at 00:57:50 in *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017), Ned is never repeated mocked by the characters in the film. However, he is still mocked by the cinematography, which is done by focusing on his size. In their book,

Ono & Kent devoted a sub-chapter titled "The Persistence of mimicry and mockery" (ch 6). In this sub-chapter, they state: "Whereas mimicry is a performance that makes difference into a spectacle and highlights the unacceptable qualities of the Other, mockery is an act that distinguishes between who is in power and who has the power to name and regulate appropriate and inappropriate behavior." (Ono & Keny ch 6). They frame both actions to exert power and control the narrative, in this case, the representation of Asians. In the case of the characters, Wong, Mantis and Ned of Phase Three, mockery is used to dictate the narrative. The films frame the mocking that they receive as a positive presentation, rather than an offensive one. This presentation is a damaging narrative because it is perpetuating the idea that Asians and people of Asian descents should be the targets of comedy. While the act of comedy is not a problem, it becomes a problem when it is used to establish power relationship. In *Doctor Strange* (2016), Wong is neither treated as an equal or a superior by Doctor Strange, despite the former's experience and rank. Meanwhile, in *Guardians of the Galaxy 2* (2017), Mantis is treated with disrespect despite her feats of strength, such as subduing the main antagonist. Additionally, Ned from *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017) will always be inferior to the main protagonist, despite achieving intellectual feats such as using his hacking to assist Spider-Man. All their achievements are undermined by the mocking that they are subjected to in the films. Finally, Minn-Erva from *Captain Marvel (2019)* is a serious character who serves as a minor antagonist. For most of the film, she is a threatening character who is dedicated to her mission. However, at 01:35:04, she engages in a fight with Captain Marvel. She mistook a toy gun for a real weapon which she points at the main character. After spending two-thirds of the film as a serious character, she is ridiculed for pointing a toy gun at Captain Marvel and promptly gets defeated. Finally, at 01:40:10, Minn-Erva dies when her spaceship gets shot down. Her death is treated with jubilation with triumphant music playing as the characters, Nick Fury and Maria celebrate. Ono & Kent state that the act of mockery through mimicry is used to remind colonial subjects of their unequal position in society (Ch 6). Thus, mockery is a tool to assert power over minorities. Mockery denies protests and prevents recognition of differences (Ono & Kent ch 6). The fact is that mockery is being used to downplay the strength and impact of characters who are played by actors of Asian descent.

Violence toward Asians continues in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019). The film is about the Avengers' quest to restore the world after Thanos' victory in the previous film. In his introductory scene, the character, Hawkeye goes on a rampage against the Japanese crime syndicate, the Yakuza. For two minutes, Hawkeye is shown killing multiple Yakuza. At 00:55:00, Hawkeye eventually confronts Akihiko, the boss of the Yakuza and engages him in

a katana fight. During a sequence that lasts one minute and ten seconds, Akihiko receives four stabs and two punches. The crime boss is outmatched by Hawkeye's superior fighting skills. Although Akihiko is neither a major character nor sympathetic given his occupations, the scene is framed from his perspective because the mise-en-scene is focused on him. For one minute, the frame is focused on Akihiko's expression as he realizes that he will get killed by Hawkeye. Over the course of the sequence, Akihiko goes from being dignified as he faces his adversary to cowardly as he pleads for his life. The masculine image that he displays at the beginning of the sequence gets tarnished as he faces his defeat. In this regard, Akihiko is portrayed as weak and cowardly which has the effect of making him look unsympathetic as he dies. Akihiko is not meant to be heroic because he is a criminal. However, the story uses this portrayal as a justification for him and his subordinates to be Hawkeye's targets for violence. In this regard, nothing has changed in how Asian characters in the film are presented. Although the film does not focus on this aspect, Hawkeye, played by white American actor Jeremy Renners, defeats Akihiko in a katana fight. The scene shows that Hawkeye is better at fighting with katana than a Japanese character using a weapon of his nationality. This shows that the scene implies white supremacy which is a common trope in Hollywood storytelling with stories featuring white leads in non-western countries.

5.3.1 Dialogues and interactions

The characters who are played by actors of Asian descent follow the model minority archetype. This fact can be observed when examining their dialogues. A common pattern is that their dialogue shows no characterization beyond being supportive toward the main protagonists. Additionally, the number of words that they get to speak tend to be short. In *Thor 1*, Hogun has a total of thirty-four words of dialogue, divided in five sentences. His dialogue is further muddled by the fact that he has no on-screen exchanges with the characters. His first dialogue with Thor was an affirmation of his loyal and the conversation promptly ends afterwards. His second dialogue is urging his comrades about them being in a dangerous environment. His third and fourth dialogue is telling his comrades about a traitor in the kingdom, to which the character, Fandral promptly shuts him down for suggesting it. His final dialogue in the film is urging his comrades to find the exiled, Thor. Never once in the film does he exchange words with the characters. This has the effect of giving Hogun no characterization beyond being loyal follower to Thor. The lack of exchanges prevents Hogun from having a presence in the film. While it could be argued that it is justified due to Hogun being a supporting character, the problem is that the other characters of Thor's group of warriors get more characterization

despite their limited screen time. In 00:37:43, the Warriors and Loki discuss about Thor's banishment. The scene goes like this:

[VOLSTAAG]: "We should never have let him go"

[SIF]: "There was no stopping him."

[FANDRAL]: "At least he's only banished, not dead. Which is what we'd all be if that guard hadn't told Odin where we'd gone."

[VOLSTAAG]: "How did the guards even know?"

[LOKI]: "I told him."

[FANDRAL]: "What?

[LOKI]: "I told him to go to Odin after we'd left. Though he should be flogged for taking so long. We should never have reached Jotunheim."

[VOLSTAAG]: "You told the guard?"

[LOKI]: "I saved our lives. And Thor's. I had no idea Father would banish him for what we did."

[SIF]: "Loki. You must go to the Allfather and convince him to change his mind."

[LOKI]: "If I do, then what? I love Thor more dearly than any of you, but you know what he is. He's arrogant. He's reckless. He's dangerous. You saw how he was. Is that what Asgard needs from its King?"

[SIF]: "He may speak about the good of Asgard, but he's always been jealous of Thor."

[VOLSTAAG]: "We should be grateful to him. He saved our lives."

[HOGUN]: "Laufey said there were traitors in the House of Odin. A master of magic could easily bring three Jotuns into Asgard."

[FANDRAL]: "Loki's always been one for mischief, but you're talking about something else entirely."

While Fandral did respond to Hogun's word, the scene ends before any exchanges happen between them. The fact of the matter is that Hogun's contribution to the whole conversation is one sentence. He stays silent until he gets to speak his sentences. He is serving a function rather than being a character for the narrative.

Many dialogues said by characters played by actors of Asian descent have been examined in Phase One and Two. The Hogun dialogue is an example among many dialogues where they serve only to progress the film rather than show any characterization. To bring another example besides Hogun, the character, Jim from *Captain America: The First Avenger*

(2011) only has five exchanges with characters. To prove my point about how the dialogue is problematic, I will analyze each of them.

In Jim's first scene, after getting freed from his cell by Captain America, an American soldier, Dugan questioned whether Jim should be freed.
[DUGAN]: "What, are we taking everybody?"
Jim approaches Dugan and show him his tag.
[JIM]: "I'm from Fresno, Ace."

The conflict between these two characters is that Dugan is questioning Jim's allegiance due to his Japanese heritage, because the story takes place during World War 2. The implication is that Dugan carries a prejudice toward Jim for his heritage. What Dugan is doing to Jim is othering him. As previously stated by Kagedan, othering happens when a minority is put on disadvantage by the majority (2). The exchange between them is short but hostile. After Jim's retort, Dugan does not respond, only giving him a glance before the scene return the focus back to Captain America. Nothing about the hostile exchange between them is solved nor acknowledged later in the film.

Although the scene is minimal, involves two supporting characters who does not affect the story, and only lasts four seconds, it characterizes Jim by stereotyping him. The first thing that is put on the forefront is Jim's race, which marks him as a foreigner, regardless of his background. Jim must affirm his background as an American to keep Dugan from mistrusting him. The fact is that Jim's race is the first thing about him that is acknowledged. By placing his race on the forefront, it allows the audience to fill the blanks of Jim's personality and role in the film, that he is Japanese American who is serving the US military. This quick characterization has the effect of quickly establishing Jim's role as a supporting character for the rest of the film.

After snapping the neck of a German soldier, Jim watches Jacques, a French soldier, pick up an alien gun.
[JIM]: "You know how to use that thing?"
Jacques does not answer him. Instead, he shoots the gun and destroys the wall of a building. Jim looks surprised.
[JIM]: *(Meekly)* "Okay…"

The purpose of the scene is to be comedic. But it has the effect of putting Jim into the role of a comedic relief and downplaying his display of masculinity. Ono & Kent states that when representation aims to provide comedic relief it feminizes Asian American men (ch 4). After seeing the destructive capability of the weapon, Jim reacted by raising his arm in surprise. He is shown being frightened by the weapon and it has the effect of making him come off as meek, despite the scene initially show him killing a German soldier. Additionally, there is the fact that there are no exchanges of dialogue between Jim and Jacques. But the factor is that the scene is focused mainly on Jim, and he is the one who the comedy focuses upon, not Jacques, the French soldier.

Steve Rogers goes meet Dugan, Gabe, Jim, James, and Jacques to build his team.
[DUGAN]: "So let's get this straight."
[GABE]: "We barely got out of there alive, and you want us to go back?"
[ROGERS]: "Pretty much."
[JAMES]: "Sounds rather fun, actually."
Jim burps before responding to Rogers.
[JIM]: "I'm in."
Cuts immediately to Jacques who speaks French. Then to Gabe who also speaks French. The two have a friendly exchange and a handshake. Gabe looks to Rogers.
[GABE]: "We are in."
[DUGAN]: "Hell. I'll always fight. But you got to do one thing for me."
[STEVE]: "What's that?"
[DUGAN]: "Open a tab."
Everyone laughs.
[JIM]: "Well, that was easy."
But the camera is immediately following Rogers, and Jim's last dialogue for the scene is barely heard and acknowledged.

This scene is like the Hogun's dialogue in *Thor 1*. Jim's presence is barely acknowledged by the characters around him. Dugan and Gabe are complementing each other as exchanges their words with Steve. Although his dialogue is not translated, Jacques, the French soldier, shares a meaningful interact with Gabe. Jim's contribution in the scene is burping and affirm his willingness to join Captain America with a short sentence. Jim's screen time in the scene lasts only seven seconds. The rest of the characters, with the sole exception

of James who has six seconds due to sharing his scene with Jim, have a screen time that are over twelve seconds. The point is that Jim's contribution in the scene is minimal. He shares no meaningful exchanges with Steve nor the rest of the squad. Additionally, his burping only serves to affirm Jim's role as the comedic relief.

[PHILLIPS]: "Johan Schmidt belongs in a bughouse. He thinks he is a god, and he is willing to blow up half the world to prove it, starting with the USA."

[HOWARD]: "Schmidt's working with power beyond our capabilities. He gets across the Atlantic, he will wipe out the entire Eastern Seaboard in an hour."

[GABE]: "How much time we got?"

[PHILLIPS]: "According to my new best friend, under 24 hours."

[MAN]: "Where is he now?

[PHILLIPS]: "Hydra's last base is here. In the Alps, 500 feet below the surface"

Phillips throws some photos in front of Jim, who is now revealed to be at the table. He picks up the photos.

[JIM]: "So what are we supposed to do? I mean it's not like we can just knock on the door."

[STEVE]: "Why not? That's exactly what we're going to do."

The point of showing this dialogue is to show Jim's purpose in the scene. All characters in this scene have a function. Phillips being the colonel establishes the problem and goal. Howard emphasizes on the danger. Jim's function is to suggest the idea of attacking the antagonist. On one hand, there is nothing wrong about the scene. There is no need for the characters to establish their personality. There are no exchanges between the characters. However, Jim acting as the function that allows the story to continue is a role that other characters played by actors of Asian descents will continue to have throughout the Marvel films. Additionally, by having Jim suggest the idea but having Steve take the idea and executing it, Jim is acting as the support who puts Steve on the spotlight. In this regard, Jim is acting as the Charlie Chan archetype. Jim is helpful and submissive toward the hero, Captain America.

[STEVE]: "Come in. This is Captain Rogers. Do you read me?"

[JIM]: "Captain Roger, what is your…"

But Jim gets pushed aside by Peggy Carter and she interacts with Steve for the rest of the scene.

This scene is the final scene where Jim has a speaking line in the film. He is not allowed to have an exchange with Steve because he is not a major supporting character unlike Peggy Carter who acts as the love interest. He is not important to the story. Yet he still functions as the character who gets into contact with Steve to facilitate the final conversation between Steve and Peggy. The point of showing all of Jim's exchanges in the film is both to encapsulate his role within the story and to demonstrate how his amount of dialogue is woefully short compared to most of the characters within the film. His characters are acting as a function, rather than a person. He is not expected to be more than his function. The only characterization that the audience needs to know about him is that he is a helpful soldier to the main protagonist. While the other characters in Captain America's squad are similarly lacking in characterization, this does not explain why Jim is not allowed to have exchanges with the main hero. This is similarly to Hogun and Dr. Cho's dialogue in Phase One and Two. The problem that these characters are serving as functions, not just through their actions but also in their dialogues.

The problem of dialogue exchanges continues to persist in Phase Three. In terms of exchanges, there are improvements in terms of how dialogues are handled. For example, supporting characters played by Asian actors are exchanging dialogue with the main protagonist. However, there are still elements that are problematic. In *Doctor Strange* (2016), at 00:35:45, the main protagonist, Stephen Strange meets Wong, the librarian. This dialogue is their first exchange:

[WONG]: "Mr. Strange."
[STRANGE]: "Uh, Stephen, please. And you are?"
[WONG]: "Wong."
[STRANGE]: "Wong. Just Wong? Like Adele? Or Aristotle. Drake. Bono. Eminem…"
Wong ignores Strange's remarks and looks at the returned books.
[WONG]: "The Books of the Invisible Sun. Astronomia Nova. Codex Imperium. Key of Solomon. You finished all of these?"
[STRANGE]: "Yup."
[WONG]: "Come with me."
[STRANGE]: "All right."
Wong takes Strange further into the library.

The point is that these characters are interacting on a minimal level. Wong is not responding to Strange's remarks and attempts to make fun of him. His behavior marks him as

serious and stoic. Nothing about their first conversation characterizes Wong as a character beyond being stoic. In this regard, Wong is the archetypical stereotype of a serious, Asian character who treats his duties seriously. His establishing scene activates the perception of Wong being a model minority. Regardless of his serious nature, Wong is still helpful toward Strange and provides him with guidance. But as it stands, Wong does not deviate from how previous characters played by Asian actors are portrayed. Just like others before him, Wong's role is to serve as a function for Strange and for the story to progress. Besides acting as a supporting character, Wong also serves as the character who provides exposition about the film's setting to Strange. In this regard, Wong has more dialogue and screen time than the characters before him. However, it still does not change the fact that his role is written to be a mechanical one. Neither does it change the fact that Strange mocks Wong in his first exchange with him. As Ono & Kent state about mockery, Strange's mocking of Wong has the effect of exerting his power over Wong (Ch 6). It establishes the power dynamic between them by allowing Strange to maintain his importance in the narrative, despite Wong having more experience.

As previously stated, the director of *Doctor Strange* (2016) wants to avoid making Wong a stereotype (Nilles 2019). But the problem is that Derrickson has replaced one stereotype with another. Wong is still a stereotype because his character as written does not challenge the portrayal. The director's approach to make Wong likable is giving him comedic moments where he is either embarrassed by Strange who steals books from the library under his watch or have a sudden laugh at the end of the film. Making an Asian character laugh is not problematic. But it is still perpetuating a narrative that good representation of Asians are supposed to be entertainers. This narrative is problematic because it puts people with Asian descent in a box. Just like how model minority is masqueraded as a 'good' stereotype, creating a stereotype where Asians are meant to be entertainers for the pleasure of a white audience is another type of suppression. And this type of portrayal is seen in characters like Mantis in *Guardians of the Galaxy 2* (2017) and Ned in *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017).

The dialogue improves in *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Five Rings* (2021). However, the dialogue is only an improvement in terms of the fact that a vast majority of the dialogue is given to a primary Asians cast. Throughout the film, the number of white characters that Shang Chi interacts with is only two people, a flight attendant and a minor antagonist character named Mathias/Razor Fist. In the scene where Shang-Chi interacts with the flight attendant, despite being a minor character, the flight attendant holds the power during their interaction. During the scene, the flight attendant repeatedly cuts off Shang-Chi's conversation

with his friend, Katy. This situation happens because the scene is played for comedy. But narratively speaking, in terms of how she affects Shang-Chi in the scene, the flight attendant is exerting power over him despite being a minor character. In the case with Mathias, he is Shang-Chi's equal during the fight. Shang-Chi also shares a limited amount of dialogue with Mathias, despite deleted scenes showing that Mathias is his adopted brother by his father. Similarly, to Peter Parker's exchanges with Brad in *Spider-Man: Far from Home* (2019), the dialogue interactions that Shang-Chi has with these two characters are either implicitly or overtly hostile. At 00:25:57, Shang-Chi and Katy have the exchange with the Flight Attendant:

[FLIGHT ATTENDANT]: *Interrupts a conversation.* "Beef or vegetarian?"

[FLIGHT ATTENDANT]: *Gets no response.* "We are out of chicken so I can only offer you beef or vegetarian?"

[KATY]: "Um…Vegetarian would be great."

[SHANG-CHI]: "Yeah, same."

[FLIGHT ATTENDANT]: "Yeah, okay. Thank you."

[KATY]: *About to resume her conversation with Shang-Chi* "So..."

[FLIGHT ATTENDANT]: *Interrupts again.* "Oh, we are out of the vegetarian too. Now we only have beef."

[KATY]: *Annoyed* "Beef. 'Cause that's all you have, right?"

[FLIGHT ATTENDANT]: "Okay, you have the beef."

[KATY]: *"Yes."*

[FLIGHT ATTENDANT]: *Turns to Shang-Chi* "And?"

[SHANG-CHI]: *Annoyed* "Beef…"

The exchange with the Flight Attendant is unnecessarily antagonistic. While the scene is meant to be comedic, it is also implicitly a hostile exchange between an Asian and a non-white. The Flight Attendant is indirectly mocking Katy and Shang-Chi for picking vegetarian meals as their first option and depriving them of their initial choice by forcing them to choose beef.

These odd dialogues exchanges, being selective with body types, stereotypical characterization etc, these are problems that are rooted in Hollywood. The production of the film is heavily influenced by the systemic racism that is plaguing Hollywood. This ideology is a majority reason why actors of Asian descents are either forced to play stereotypes or get roles as background extras.

6.0 DISCUSSION

6.1 Systemic Racism in Hollywood

In her book, *Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism,* Nancy Wang Yuen discusses systemic racism in Hollywood. In her introduction chapter, she uses statistics from Oscar nominations to highlight how the people of color are treated by the Awards (ch 1). According to the statistic, at the time of her writing, in Academy Awards' eighty-eight-year history, actors of color received only 6,2 percent of total acting nomination and won only 7,8 percent of acting awards (ch 1). Only two Asian actresses in the history of the Academy Awards have won best supporting actress. Miyoshi Umeki, Japanese American actress, won in 1957 for her performance in *Sanyonara* (1957). Sixty-three years later, Youn Yuh-jung, a Korean actress, won the award for her performance in *Minari* (2020). The gap of time shows that the Academy deems only white actors to be worth honoring which only reproduces Hollywood's structural racial bias (Yuen ch 1). Despite a call for change and Hollywood's attempts to diversify, Yuen states that the problem persist because it is an ideological one (ch 1). Yuen highlights these ideological problems by stating that African American actresses, Hattie McDaniel, Octavia Spencer, and Lupita Nyong'o won their awards for playing subservient roles such as maid or slaves (ch 1). These examples with the Academy Awards are a symptom of a larger racial problem in Hollywood. Yuen has interviewed a Japanese American actor who informed her that Hollywood never looks beyond his race (ch 1). Meanwhile white actors whom Yuen interviewed are praised for their looks and acting capabilities; their race is never considered (ch 1).

About racism in Hollywood, Yuen states:

> Racism, in the form of job exclusion and racially stereotyped roles, has defined Hollywood film industry since its birth in the early 1990s. The first character of color were portrayed as morally bankrupt and intellectually deficient by white actors in blackface, brownface, and yellowface-makeup to portray people of different race. (ch 1).

Going by Yuen's words, Hollywood's racial ideology is ingrained in their system. This system means that actors of color will always be at a disadvantage compared to actors who are white. Historically, racial discrimination and racial biases were permissible in the United States (Banks 1169). However, the executives who are in the system might not be aware of their racist practices. In her article, Barbara Harris Combs states that "Racist ideology undergird and are embedded within institutional practices; this normalizes the practices and render them invisible." (39). Eugene Wong states that American institutions are the creations of white

racism, which is the idea of white people being superior to non-white, and thus the institutions operate with racism as its foundation (7). Thus, many of the barriers that people of color face in Hollywood are layered with racist ideology. When racism occurs, it is not necessarily out of malice but habit. This view is acknowledged by Wong who states that members of institutions such as Hollywood are not necessarily prejudiced (8). However, this does not excuse the act of racism itself. If anything, the fact that these systems have become so rooted in racist ideology is a worse problem than intentional acts of prejudice. This situation is very problematic because racist practices have become normalized; it has become normal to regard white actors as the superior breed, while people of color are always the inferior group. Hollywood has a legacy of portraying people of color as the target for comedy or violence (Yuen ch 1). As the analysis of the Marvel films have shown, these practices have continued to persist in contemporary times. Marvel is masquerading their Asian characters as progressive because they are given screen time. However, the fact remains that their characters played by actors of Asian descent are often the target of comedy. Wong in *Doctor Strange* (2016), Mantis in *Guardians of the Galaxy 2* (2017), Ned Leeds in *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017), these are characters who are given a prominent presence in the film, and they are good because they are the target for comedy. Meanwhile, characters like Hogun in *Thor* films and Dr. Cho in *Avengers 2* (2015) are the targets for violence. These examples are positive ones compared to characters who do not have dialogues. Multiple background characters played by actors and actresses of Asian descents are reduced to either tokenism or violence. The reluctance to give actors of Asian descent a leading role comes from an economic standpoint. Yuen states that contemporary Hollywood relies on big name actors (ch 1). They regard actors of color as a financial risk because they are not fortunate enough to be bankable actors (ch 1).

Further in her examination of the racial problems in Hollywood, Yuen states that the institution has colorblind racism (ch 2). Yuen states:

> It is this air of colorblind neutrality that allows Hollywood to continue its practice of excluding people of color without sanction. Colorblind racism allows white decision makers and creative personnel to divest themselves of any social or moral responsibility while maintaining hegemonic control of the industry. Colorblind racism also exists in the larger US society, where more than 80 percent of white Americans deny the role of race in job, income, and housing discrepancies between whites and blacks. (Yuen ch 2)

The struggles of colored actors receiving roles stem from this racism. Hollywood claim that they are giving all actors an equal opportunity (Yuen ch 2) and that if a colored actor is

unable to achieve success, it is due to their lack of talent (Yuen ch 2). However, Yuen states that this is not the issue; the lack of success of colored actors is not due to a lack of talent but a lack of opportunities (Yuen ch 2). When actors are cast for a role, white actors have more access to roles than actors of color (Yuen ch 2). The result of the system is that white actors are more in the spotlight. Additionally, this vicious cycle explains why people of colors are more likely to be cast as silent background characters or stunt actors. The racial representation is utilized to maintain a status quo (Smith 780).

Another problem in Hollywood is the lack of willingness to search outside of their talent pool. Hollywood claims their lack of diversity is due to a short pool of actors of color (Yuen ch 2). However, in her research, Yuen finds that the lack of actors of color is not due to shortage but an unwillingness to go outside the traditional venues to find actors (Yuen ch 2). For the executives in Hollywood, relying on their large pool of white actors is more convenient than looking beyond their pool of talents. However, Yuen states that these reasons are excuses that Hollywood use to avoid hiring actors of color. Yuen highlights two additional excuses that Hollywood use to diversify their talents (Yuen ch 2). Yuen coins one of the excuses as "Write what you know" (Yuen ch 2). In this section, Yuen states that Hollywood writers' defense for writing stereotypes is to blame their lack of knowledge of other cultures (Ch 2). Yuen criticizes this rationale as an excuse to naturalizes racial segregation (Yuen ch 2). This observation further emphasizes on Hollywood's fixation on race and the fundamental flaws of Hollywood's writing. Yuen states:

> "First, the idea that white writers can never write authentic stories about the people of color is problematic. It falsely assumes that people of color are defined only by their race and glosses over national, ethnic, and geographic diversity with racial groups. -…Furthermore, it assumes immutable differences between racial groups - marginalizing people of people of color as racial "other." "(Yuen ch 2)

In her concluding statements about "Write what you know", Yuen highlights colorblind racism as the problem, and this excuse is used to justify institutional racism in Hollywood (Ch 2). She states that this type of writing, portraying people of color as being fundamentally different, strips them of humanity (Yuen ch 2). In the case of the Marvel films, actors of Asian descent who are given roles to act as extras or stuntmen become background furniture or punching bags for the white lead. This observation explains why characters played by actors of Asian descents are given minimal personality.

In the *Thor Trilogy*, Hogun is a good example of a character who is a victim of Hollywood writers. Hogun's main characteristics are his Asian aesthetics. His Japanese aesthetic in the first film is there to emphasize on the actor, Tadanobu Satō's nationality. If he did not have this aesthetic, the image that he presents on screen would not fit Hollywood's idea of Asian culture. There is no need to characterize him because his aesthetic is enough to signify who he is. His character does not need any depth beyond being a stoic warrior. He does not need to speak because his only purpose is to be loyal to the main character, Thor. The film makes it clear that he is loyal to Thor because most of his dialogue throughout all three film is to affirm his loyalty to him. Throughout the *Thor Trilogy*, Hogun receives an improvement in terms of his display of masculinity. His Japanese aesthetic has been replaced by a Mongolian aesthetic though his portrayal is still adhering to Hollywood's standard on Asian stereotypes, that he should remain a stoic warrior. Taking his aesthetic and personality into account, Hogun inhabits both the stereotype of a model minority and the barbarian aesthetic of a Yellow Peril.

Besides blaming talents and lack of knowledge, Yuen states that Hollywood blames the market for not being receptive toward people of color (Yuen ch 2). For Hollywood, the myth is that the market regards white actors as profitable and marketable. Meanwhile actors of color are not regarded as either profitable or marketable. Additionally, Hollywood is more willing to finance a film with a white lead than with one of color (Yuen ch 2). The system of Hollywood is built to support and perpetuate a white-dominance narrative. Hollywood's adherence to having a white main lead does not guarantee the success of their films (Yuen ch 2).

Additionally, Hollywood claims that they have racial equality because there are actors of color that have managed to achieve success (Yuen ch 2). However, these actors are used as a cover to hide the systemic racism within Hollywood. They do not account for the fact of what type of roles that these actors are playing. They are perpetuating a narrative that actors of color should only be playing subservient roles. In Marvel, this is evident by the fact that many of the actors of Asian descents are mainly playing supporting roles. For Asian American actors, they suffer generalization by the casting (Yuen ch 2). Hollywood regards Asian Americans or those with Asian descent as not castable because they are not expressive enough, implying they consider them stoic by nature (Yuen ch 2). This generalization is one of the causes that leads to typecasting among actors of Asian descent. Yuen quotes Mako's experiences with Hollywood: "Asian American actors have never been treated as full-time actors. We're always hired as part-timers. That is, producers call us when they need us for only race-specific roles. If a part is seen as too 'demanding' that part often went to a non-Asian." (Yuen ch 2).

Mako's experience highlights that Hollywood takes race into consideration when casting. Yuki Matsuzaki is a Japanese-born actor who is based in Hollywood. On March 7th, 2022, he posted on Twitter, recounting his casting experience with Hollywood. A quote of Matsuzaki's post on Twitter: "In Hollywood, when the role you're audition for is a stereotype, in order to "fix" the portrayal, you first have to subscribe to that stereotype and win the role. It's very humiliating experience. How do I know this? BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT I HAD TO DO." (Matsuzaki 2022). He continues his recounting during an audition where his ethnicity is questioned because of his height (Matsuzaki 2022). The casting crew have difficulty reconciling their bias of Japanese with Matsuzaki, because he does not match them. This scenario links to the problem of having stereotypes being accepted as the factual truth. If something does not match the stereotype, the person, in this example Matsuzaki, is an aberration. The fact that their biases are wrong is not taken into consideration. In this regard, Matsuzaki's experience is a case of Yuen's "Write what you know" problem in Hollywood.

Based on Matsuzaki's experience, Ono & Kent's, Yuen's research on Asian and Asian Americans' experience with Hollywood, the cinema of the US is very keen on having people of color play by their stereotypes. To Hollywood, having people of color play by their stereotype is not an offensive portrayal, but an accurate portrayal. This system is a problem. But a better question is asking why they keep stereotyping people of color. A hypothesis is the impact of media. Much of the problem can be found in the media. The stereotypization and underrepresentation of Asians and Asian Americans creates a psychological effect on the American audience (Besana 201; Ono & Kent ch 1; Zhang 1). Media keeps misrepresenting people of color by circulating the narratives of stereotypes. For people with Asian descents, it is either the docile model minority, the foreign and exotic aliens of Otherness or a danger to society as the barbaric Yellow Peril.

There is a power gap when characters who are played by Asians and actors of Asian descents interact with the white leads. This pattern keeps occurring throughout the Marvel films. In *Thor 1* (2011), Hogun's first speaking scene is him affirming his loyalty to Thor. This same dynamic is still present in the new films in Phase Four. In *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Five Rings* (2021), the main character's interaction with white characters is both limited and lacking. Thus, *Shang-Chi* (2021), despite having an Asian actor as the main lead, is still having trouble with Asians interacting with white people. This example shows that Marvel and by extension Hollywood still have problems with portraying Asians in films. This problem is rooted in Hollywood's ideology on race. About racism, Comb states: "Racist ideologies undergird and are embedded within institutional practices; this normalizes the practices and

renders them invisible." (39). Whether intentional or not, the Marvel films has an implicit racial bias toward Asians and actors of Asian descent. While it is agreed that racial bias are wrong, but everyone has a different idea of what constitutes as racial bias (Banks 1190).

6.2 Hate Crimes toward Asians

Historically speaking, Asian Americans have been victims of hate crime and discrimination since the establishment of Chinatowns in the 1800s (Gover, Angela R., et al 648). This problem has continued in contemporary times as Asian Americans continuously suffer from verbal and physical attacks (Gover, Angela R., et al 649). According to research, this problem persists on a systemic level as the state is actively encouraging racist and xenophobic rhetoric (Gover, Angela R., et al 649).

In 2022, the anti-Asian hate crime increased by 339 percent (Yam 2022). The list of crimes aimed at Asian Americans or Asian descended goes from verbal harassment to murder by the perpetrator. As shown in the graph, verbal harassment and shunning are the most frequent discrimination toward Asian Americans or Asian descended people.
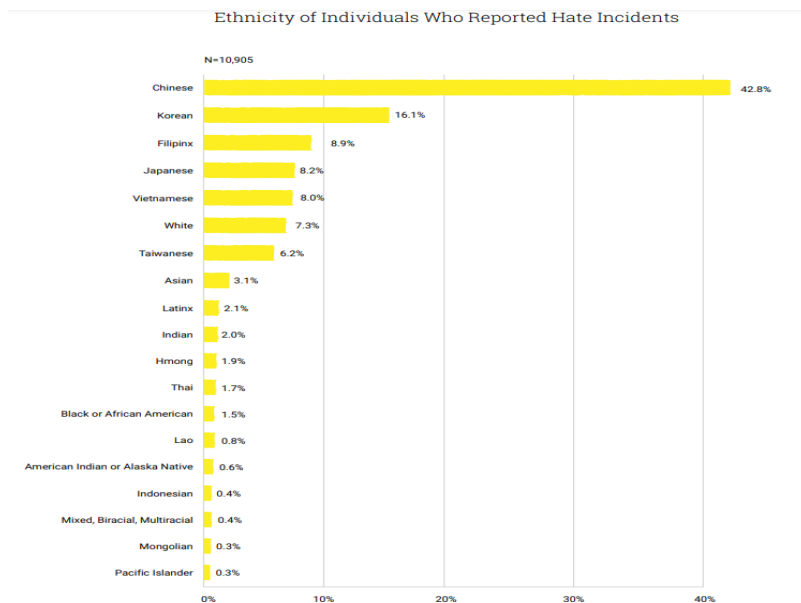
Ethnicity of Individuals Who Reported Hate Incidents

N=10,905

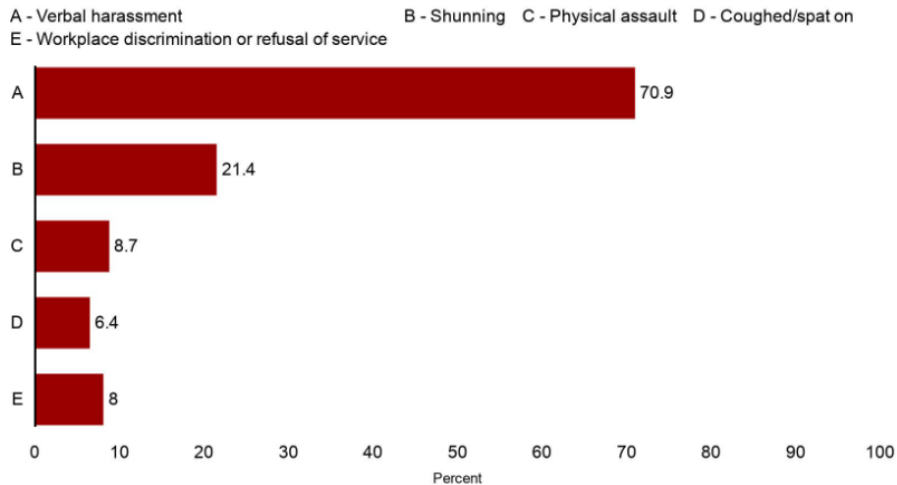| Ethnicity	Percentage
Chinese	42.8%
Korean	16.1%
Filipinx	8.9%
Japanese	8.2%
Vietnamese	8.0%
White	7.3%
Taiwanese	6.2%
Asian	3.1%
Latinx	2.1%
Indian	2.0%
Hmong	1.9%
Thai	1.7%
Black or African American	1.5%
Lao	0.8%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.6%
Indonesian	0.4%
Mixed, Biracial, Multiracial	0.4%
Mongolian	0.3%
Pacific Islander	0.3%

Figure 15. Graph of ethnicity of individuals who reported hate incidents in 2021 national report by Stop AAPI Hate.

What kinds of discrimination have been reported?
Percentage of 2,808 reported incidents from March-December 2020

A - Verbal harassment   B - Shunning   C - Physical assault   D - Coughed/spat on
E - Workplace discrimination or refusal of service

A — 70.9
B — 21.4
C — 8.7
D — 6.4
E — 8

(x-axis: 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 — Percent)

Source: Stop AAPI Hate Reporting Center   BBC

Figure 16. Graph of discrimination toward Asian Americans from March-December 2020. ("Covid 'Hate Crimes' against Asian Americans on Rise.")

The above statistic about reports of hate incidents collected by Stop AAPI Hate, where AAPI stands for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, shows that 42.8 percent out of 10.905 is done by people of Chinese descent. The graph shows that Chinese people in America are more likely to be victims of harassment. Chinese is followed closely by Korean, Filipinx and Japanese. The graph shows that anti-Asian hate crime is high in the United States.

During the period of the worldwide pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus, the stigmatization of Asians and people of Asian descent has risen by 76 percent (Barr 2021) in the United States, when they become the target for causing the pandemic (Gover, Angela R., et al 648). People of Asian descent have been subjugated to racially motivated attacks (Gover, Angela R., et al 659). The perpetrators believe that their victims are Chinese, even though many of the victims are of other east Asian descent (Gover, Angela R., et al 659). But this instance of scapegoating is not unique to the COVID pandemic. Historically speaking, people of Asian descents are often the target of pandemics. During the bubonic plague in 1900, Chinese residents of Chinatown were specifically quarantined; during the SARS outbreak in 2002, East-Asians experienced global stigmatization (Gover, Angela R., et al 650). To quote a statement from Angela R Glover about Asian Americans:

> Despite comprising a tapestry of diverse ethnicities, Asian Americans have been historically viewed as a monolith, othered by the myth of the model minority in times of peace and economic security, while othered as a scapegoat in times of economic adversity, wars, or pandemics. (Gover, Angela R., et al 653).

This statement further supports Eugene Franklin Wong and Isabela Paneler's statement on the West's dynamic with Asians in general. To the West, a 'good' Asian is to be a submissive and productive member of society. Not to be regarded as an equal, but to be a useful minority. Model Minority is premised on this narrative. But as the pandemics over the course of history have proven, this myth is only during times of peace and security. During times of instability, people of Asians descent will be the west's designated target. The fact that this pattern keeps recurring shows that the United States is still not on the road to a post-race society. It also shows how the influence of the yellow peril narrative is still alive in the present day. The model minority stereotype is not the cure to stop racism for Asians, it is just another narrative rooted in the same ideology of fear toward Asians.

The problem is that the west has a narrow view on Asians. Even though Asia is a continent with multiple distinct countries and cultures, China, Japan, and South Korea are more on the mainstream consciousness than east-Asian countries like Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, etc. Western media tend to portray China as the main adversary. Whereas Japan and South Korea tend to be viewed favorably. A hypothesis for the former case is due to China's potential to challenge the United States' position as a world power. Research has shown that since 2018 China's contribution to global trade is outpacing the United States (Hong & Park 33). China's economic growth is one point of tension between them and the United States. This tension explains why there is a need for western media to craft a negative narrative about China. Meanwhile Japan and South Korea tend to be viewed favorably. The main reason is that both countries are under the United States' sphere of influence and shares similar capitalistic ideologies. The positive relationship that the United States has with Japan and South Korea is reflected in how they are depicted in the media. This relationship is reflected in the Marvel films. In *Avengers 2* (2015), ten minutes of screen time is devoted to showing the main characters in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea. In *Avengers 3* (2019), in a plot-heavy film, a solid three minutes is devoted to showing Tokyo, the capital city of Japan. The depiction of these capital cities reflects the United States' positive view on both countries. Meanwhile in *Shang-Chi* (2021), despite having a Chinese main lead who speaks Mandarin, the primary location of Chinese representation is Macau which is a special administrative region of China.

The point of this section is to talk about how hate crimes are generated by the media. As previously stated by Besana, the consumption of media is shaping people's perception, and media's misrepresentation of people of Asian descent plays a role in creating biases (201). The danger is that these narratives about how to be Asians become self-perpetuating. Using the lack of knowledge about people as an excuse is a pervasive excuse in Hollywood (Yuan ch 2). But

as Yuen notes in her book, some actors of color are exonerating Hollywood's lack of knowledge (Yuen ch 2). Accepting the status quo is dangerous, because it is an acknowledgement of accepting that racial prejudice is acceptable in society. This acceptance shows the invasiveness of ideology that people of color are willing to accept and excuse institutionalized racism. Another danger is that people of color start perpetuating racist acts themselves. Comb states:" White dominants and even non-dominants who have internalized the view of white moral superiority consciously and unconsciously perpetrate daily acts of racism against people of color, which makes understanding contemporary racism even more complex and confounding." (39). Comb's statement shows that racism is not relegated to white people. People of color can partake in the prejudice themselves. The statement shows that the idea of racism is a social construct. In their article about racism, Audrey Bryan states:" The idea that 'race' is a social construct draws attention to the idea that 'race' is a social-historical construct which was used to justify imperialistic regimes and practices, and to enable the exploitation and subordination of blacks by whites." (600). Thus, according to Bryan, the idea of race is constructed to exploit and dominate people of color. The contemporary view on race in the United States has its tradition from the colonial period. Despite the centuries since the settler colonial states, the ideology of the era continues to dictate how the American society should regard race. These types of behavior must be met with critique because dismantling racism requires acknowledging all its forms (Comb 39).

6.3 The problem of Marvel's Asian Representation

The idea of good Asian representation is something that is ambiguous. The question should be: what is a good representation? On a basic level, representation means when something is put on display (Ono & Pham. Glossary of Key terms). What is considered positive is, therefore, subjective depending on how each group of people are interpreting them. Different cultures interpret images with other opinions. However, I am not going to explain how each country view Asians in Marvel films. What I want to examine is which Asian images are conveyed on screen. More than culture values, images have powerful effects that can change people's perception (Alexander 260). Thus, it does not matter if a film has good cultural representation in terms of aesthetic. When examining Asian aesthetics in Marvel films, they are good and accurate visions. As an example, Hogun's armor evolution from Japanese to Mongolian is good visual representation. They are accurate to mainstream western audience's expectations. But they are simply perpetuating Hollywood's narrative and bias of what Asian should look. In effect, these images are maintaining and creating racist attitude. These images are dangerous

because they solidify what the majority in society wants Asians to be. They are damaging because they are self-perpetuating. In her examination about Hollywood's rationale toward actors of colors, Yuen states that actors of colors believe and exonerate Hollywood writer's excuse for not subverting stereotypes (ch 2). Thus, when stereotypes become self-perpetuating, they become dangerous images that masquerade as a positive truth. This factor is why it is important to keep calling out stereotypes in all its forms to keep them from self-perpetuating.

The problem with the Marvel films is that they do not acknowledge racism in all its forms. Compared to the Black characters who have a stronger representation in terms of presence such as African American actors playing recurring roles across the films, Asian representation in the Marvel films is lacking. Simply having Asians shown in these films is not enough to depict and challenge racist conventions. To challenge these conventions requires the filmmakers to write Asian characters as people and to give actors of Asian descent more opportunities. As Yuen states, the problem with Asian actors in Hollywood is not because of a lack of talent, but a lack of opportunities (Yuen ch 2). An argument can be made that having more Asian supporting characters in the films would not be distracting and not add anything to them. But this argument is an excuse, in the same vein as Hollywood writers' refusal to write Asian characters as people due to a lack of knowledge.

When looking at the whole category of Marvel films, the representation of Asians has changed, tut the attitude and biases have not. If each Phase of the Marvel films is counted separately, the number of Asian supporting characters will increase. Phase One has Jim and Hogun which counts as two. In Phase Two, Dr. Cho counts only as one. Phase Three has Ned, Wong, Jimmy, Mantis, and Brad which counts as five. In terms of dialogues, the characters of Phase Three are given more to say. In terms of screen presence, they all break the two minutes of screen time of the previous Phase One and Two characters. This change is an improvement, but other problems occur too. The problem is that the characterization of these characters remains the same. They are all written within the stereotypes. If they are positive characters who are aligned with the heroes, they must be supporting characters who follows the characteristics of model minorities. When comedy happens, they are the target of the joke. If they are antagonistic, they must be the source of ridicule. The exception to this view is the Mandarin from *Shang-Chi* (2021). The character is written to be sympathetic and a subversion of the yellow peril portrayal. But the character's goal hinges on the assumption that he must accept that his deceased wife, whose body that he has helped bury is somehow located behind a gate in another dimension. Although the in-story reason is that the character is blinded by

grief and manipulated by an ancient spirit, the narrative is still implicitly ridiculing him for believing this.

In Marvel films, Asians are often the target of mockery. Whether the target of violence or comedy, characters played by actors of Asian descent are mocked. The acts are racial in nature. From the beginning of the first Asian character introduced in the Marvel films, Hogun's first interaction in *Thor 1* (2011) is him being looked down upon by Thor and acknowledging his fealty is a form of subtle mocking. The dialogue is a form of mocking as well, and the framing is done to emphasize Thor's power over his friend. This moment is the first occasion where mockery is used to downplay and reduce Asian characters. As later Marvel films have shown, this pattern keeps reproducing itself.

Although more screen time and dialogues are given to Asian characters from Phase Three and forward, the amount of mockery toward Asian characters increased. Hollywood writers portrays Asian characters who are aligned with the main heroes as humorous, but the comedy is done by making them the target of the joke. This kind of portrayal is derogatory. The problem is not that Asians should not be humorous, but rather this pattern keeps repeating. In terms of the display of seriousness, Hogun is the character who shows it the most. However, he becomes the victim of violence and lack of screen presence. The problem with Marvel's representation of Asian characters in the film is that mockery is often used to downplay the strength of the characters. Whether through violence or comedy, they are used to make Asians look foolish and not to be taken seriously. It has the effect of reducing the characters to supporting roles. Although the use of comedy is a common feature in Marvel's formula in their films, it does not change its damaging effects toward people.

The portrayal of bodies among Asians is problematic too. Marvel is selective toward Asian bodies. There is a set of criteria that needs to be fulfilled when deciding who gets to be good or evil. Asian actors who are broadly built are chosen to play supporting characters. The examples are Wong, Ned, and Gilgamesh in their respective films. The exception to this rule is Hogun from *Thor* films, but he is a character with few dialogues. When athletic Asian actors are cast, they tend to be either background characters or stuntmen to be punched by the main characters.

Marvel's portrayal of women is problematic because female characters tend to be objectified. However, while white and black female characters tend to show competence through their fighting prowess, Asian female characters are written to be passive and depended on men. From the first supporting female Asian character, Dr. Cho of *Avengers 2* to the main character, Sersi in *Eternals* (2021), actresses of Asian descent are given roles where their

characters serve as objects for the story. All the Asian female characters carry a longing for men. In *Avengers 2* (2015)*,* Dr. Cho carries an attraction toward Thor. In *Guardians of Galaxy* (2017), Mantis has a pseudo-romantic relationship with Drax. In *Shang-Chi* (2021), Katy's motivation is driven by her desire to help Shang-Chi. Finally in *Eternals* (2021), Sersi has romantic relationship with two men. They are characters who need men in their lives to function. This pattern is not necessarily restricted to Asian characters as other female characters in Marvel films are driven by the desire to please men. The difference is that the Asian women in Marvel are not portrayed to be desirable because they bring trouble. Dr. Cho from *Avenger 2* (2015) is a model minority stereotype. Although she is briefly portrayed as supportive to the main characters, she gets brainwashed by the antagonist who shifts her into an undesirable dragon lady stereotype. As previously mentioned, Mantis is frequently described as hideous by the characters in the film and in terms of aesthetic, she looks more alien than the other creatures in *Guardians of the Galaxy 2* (2017). In *Shang-Chi* (2021), the character, Katy is portrayed as a tough tomboy who enjoys speed-driving. These characterizations are not necessarily problematic and restricted to characters who are Asian. Marvel tends to either give female characters overly masculine characteristics or make them passively feminine. This approach to the portrayal of women is misogynistic. However, while black and white women in Marvel films have a stronger narrative due to their fighting skills or assertive personalities, Asian women are consistently shown as passive which is a weaker representation.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The goal in this thesis is to examine how Marvel portrays Asian characters in their films. The intent is to search for any overt or implicit racial biases such as model minority or yellow peril. At the point of writing, all four phases of Marvel films span fourteen years. For fourteen years, mainstream audiences across the world have watched these movies. The span of time provides an opportunity to watch a visual progress of how Asian representation has changed. Based on the number of visual blockings, consistent archetype of the model minority and yellow peril, and the portrayal of Asian genders and sexuality as implicitly deviant, the conclusion of this thesis is that the representation of Asians is still problematic.

On the surface, the representation of Asians has improved in the Marvel films. In Phase One, characters who are played by actors of east Asian descent are mostly silent and passive. The prominent Asian characters of Phase One are Hogun of *Thor 1* (2011) and Jim of *Captain America 1* (2011). Additionally, Phase One codes the main villain of *Iron Man 2* (2010) with a yellowface aesthetic. There are no female supporting characters played by an actress of East

Asian descent in Phase One. Thus, in the first batch of Marvel films, Asian characters have a small screen-presence and problematic representation. In Phase Two, the amount of screen time is still short and limited for Asian characters. Besides Hogun who only appears in *Thor 2* for twenty-five seconds, most of the screen time is reserved for Dr. Cho of *Avengers 2* (2015) who gets two minutes and forty-four seconds. Giving a role to an Asian actress a role is the only improvement during Phase Two.

Proper changes start happening in Phase Three, where Asian actors and actresses are given more prominent supporting roles. Characters such as Wong of *Doctor Strange* (2016), Ned of *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017) and Mantis of *Guardians of the Galaxy 2* (2017) provide a stronger Asian presence in the Marvel films. They get more screen presence and have better exchanges with the main characters. However, while the amount of screen time has increased for Asian actors, I have discovered that the portrayal of Asians is still problematized by three recurring patterns.

Firstly, Marvel is selective with Asian body types. Asian actors with broad and big cheeked bodies are given supportive roles. Asian actors with athletic body types are given antagonistic roles. Marvel has a homogenous view on Asian representation. This aspect fits with the idea of what representation should be done (Stets & Burke 225). But this is a gross misrepresentation because it ignores the complex and multicultural aspect of not just East-Asian cultures but Asia as a whole.

Secondly, Marvel codes alien characters as Asians, and Asians as aliens. Ono & Kent states that the yellow peril stereotype continues to persist in contemporary times (ch 2). The consistent portrayal of casting Asian and Asian descents actors in role as alien is an evolution of the yellow peril stereotype. This observation shows Asians being typecast as alien has ingrained itself in modern media. It perpetuates the narrative that Asians are fundamentally different which is also creating a narrative of otherness. This narrative is dangerous because it encourages the us vs them mentality which can leads to hate crime.

Thirdly, Asians are targets of racial mockery. This type of mockery has the effect of downplaying the presence of Asian actors on screen. At best, the comedy makes them comic relief. At worst, they become the target for violence. In most cases as shown in the analysis, mockery is used to justify violence and humiliation toward Asians. This aspect of the portrayal of Asians in the Marvel film is problematic. It has the effect of teaching people who watch these movies that it is valid to hurt Asians. However, bad images are just likely to downplay and reduce disadvantaged groups into stereotypes, relegating them to restricted roles as shown in Hollywood's casting of actors of east-Asian descent.

Analyzing most of the Marvel films highlights this fact: Asians are often the target for mockery. Comedy is a common aspect in the Marvel films, most of the characters of all ethnicities are affected by comedy. The difference is how the comedy is done. Until *Shang-Chi* (2021), none of the Asian characters in the film had a voice to fight back against mockery. Even so, *Shang*-Chi (2021) is also an abnormality, because *Eternals* (2021) resumes the mocking given the treatment on the character Gilgamesh. Marvel movies have a problem when writing exchanges between Asian and non-Asian characters. This aspect of the films has improved in later phases, but they are still filled with problematic elements such as mockery being used and established power gaps between white and non-white characters. The increased screen time for characters played by Asian actors has also caused more mockery aimed at these characters. Thus, while actors of East-Asian descent have gotten more supportive roles in Marvel films, mockery, alien codes, and gender portrayals show that racist ideologies are still the dominating creative voice in Hollywood.

Finally, what is regarded as good representation of culture is decided by how accurate images fits mainstream expectations. When it comes to positive representations of Asian culture, images must fit the model minority stereotype. The positively regarded characters played by Asian descent actors in Marvel films are characters who are adhering and submitting themselves to white people. This story is a perpetuating narrative that has become the norm for Asian representation. This narrative is damaging because it has effect of restricting people who cannot meet the expectations dictated by white majority in Western societies.

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