

A Lotus or a Dragon? – The orientalization and fetishization of Asian women’s bodies

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THEMATIC ARTICLE

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Abstract *This article stems from interviews conducted with Chinese women residing in Lisbon, aged 18-34, during the initial phase of fieldwork (2021/2022). As an outcome of my Anthropology Ph.D. project, the focus here is on comprehending the perception of Asian women within the realm of everyday life as fetishized entities and how they persist in (re)shaping their identities. By primarily examining visual “yellow fever” depictions (in Hollywood cinema through films like “The World of Suzie Wong”, “Madame Butterfly”, “Miss Saigon”, and the “Year of the Dragon”, along with interracial Pornography), I endeavor to delve into the impact of “race”, “sexual fetishization”, and the ubiquitous propagation of stereotypical imagery on the lives of the individuals I engage with.*

Key words *Asian women, Ethnography, Sexual fetishization, Visual representations, Stereotype*

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Introduction

My Ph.D. research in Anthropology started in 2020 and is grounded on the perception of the exponential increase in the cosmetic market in Lisbon, Portugal, which is fundamentally aimed at a ‘transnational ethnic’ community. Within its vast scope – which encompasses African and South American peoples (particularly focusing the Brazilian population), the Indian subcontinent, and East Asia – I limit myself to the female Chinese population, which has established itself within the ten most representative foreign populations in the country¹ since the 1990s.

Using qualitative methodologies, I propose conducting an ethnographic study focused on constructing an “ideal beauty”, the aesthetic imaginary surrounding it, and how these are articulated with the hegemonic and “Eurocentric” ideals of success and beauty that circulate globally.

In the first stage of fieldwork (2021/2022), I performed several interviews with Chinese women (self-identification) living in Lisbon, aged 18-34, with different life trajectories, born in different countries (Portugal, Spain, France, China, and the USA), with different professions and education and broad social profiles. From within these narratives, those presented here were selected because they highlight a familiar argument: the anguish caused by the daily confrontation with their bodies read by others as “exotic” and their stereotypical and highly sexualized images, defined in a presumed availability or heteronormative sexual compatibility with white partners.

Agreeing that there are several ways to produce the exclusion, racialization, and fetishization of female bodies, “yellow fever” has appeared regularly in the news, newspapers, music, television, and literature².

This article focuses on two areas: the broad spectrum of influence of Hollywood-produced films, mainly at the suggestion of one of the interlocutors, and, in lesser depth, interracial Pornography.

Cross-referencing these data with biographical memories brought up during the interviews, I also seek to understand the impact of these experiences on their daily lives.

Often hidden as “individual preferences” and neglected in racial discussions, I argue that “yellow fever” is objectionable because of the disproportionate psychological burdens it imposes on Asian women in a pernicious system of racial meanings.

I am aware that this discussion is still very incipient, as highlighted by De Moraes³. The first obstacle is precisely recognizing these women as racialized beings whose experiences, while not comparable to those of Black women, carry within themselves a racial discrimination problem, sometimes in more covert and less institutionalized forms³.

I hope to contribute to the visibility and awareness of the subject with this ethnographic production while calling for public decision-making measures. By exposing these women’s health losses, I also show the importance of an anti-racist fight to which more marginalized and invisible bodies join.

Hollywood cinema’s construction of Asian female bodies

Jia, 24, born in China, a master’s student living in Lisbon since 2019, between laughter and disbelief, confided to me: “*When I moved here, I met a guy at the Confucius Institute. He wanted to talk to me to practice his Chinese, which he was learning. So, we went out once. We walked one afternoon and had ice cream at McDonald’s. When he finished eating the ice cream...we were in the afternoon, in a public park, the kind with trees and picnic tables...he asked me whether I was going to have sex with him. I was shocked. It was just an ice cream from McDonald’s [laughing]. I immediately told him no.*”

Trying to disguise the disturbance that this revelation aroused in me, following the fieldwork, other statements were added to Jia’s. “*I dated a Portuguese man. I later discovered that he was with me just out of curiosity. He didn’t like me and wanted to meet an Asian. He already had a Russian girlfriend*” (Fen, 29, born in China. In Portugal since 2018). “*Once on Halloween [...] A group of very young boys were drunk and started to close in on me. As I was wearing a costume with a mini skirt, they tried to lift it. It was a joke. They laughed a lot, but I was scared. They said it was to see if... you know, they say that Chinese women have... a beak-shaped...*” (Jian-Li, 34, born in China. In Portugal since 2005). “*I receive many messages on social media. It’s horrible. I don’t even want to open my profile anymore. They want to get to know me just because I’m Chinese...*” (Liu, 30, born in Portugal).

Establishing a closer relationship with Liu, resulting from constant coexistence, I ask her why so many Chinese women have similar experiences. Liu offers me a personal analysis: “[men]

have a very wrong idea about Asian women. They think we are very easy [...] It must be from the movies they watch. There is always a submissive oriental woman, someone very sexy, of course, who does whatever they want”.

Suggesting me to watch the movies and understand how Asian women are portrayed, Liu's interpretation follows the academic theory already produced in this spectrum.

The cinematographic representation of female Asian characters in the primary Western entertainment media, which are disseminated globally, reveals a long and complex genealogy that involves orientalist narratives and allows maintaining a Western psyche firmly rooted in a patriarchal canon.

The imagery that permeates these stereotypes takes the form of archetypes: the *Dragon Lady* and the *Flower Lotus*^{4,7}. If the former represents the seductive and dangerous deviation, the woman-temptation, the latter is the prerogative of docility and obedience.

Visual production is not exclusive to a Western paradigm. It faces similar challenges in China. Dai Jinhua addresses this issue in *Cinema and Desire: feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua* (2002), observing the situation and representation of women within this cultural production, also stressing what he calls “self-orientalization”⁸. However, considering that Portugal holds a very peripheral market regarding Asian filmography, audiovisual consumption is mainly the one produced by the great North American blockbusters⁹, which we shall explore next.

So, on these cinematic screens, we watch Asian women portrayed as having no power over their own lives and relationships. Films such as *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), *Madame Butterfly* or *Miss Saigon*, *Year of the Dragon* (1985), *Come See the Paradise* (1990), *A Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991), and *Charlie's Angels* (2000; 2003) are some examples.

The World of Suzie Wong (dir. Richard Quine, 1960) is particularly suitable for the argument developed here: an American man (played by actor William Holden) travels to Hong Kong to dedicate himself to painting. Along the way, he meets a young Chinese woman (played by actress Nancy Kwan) with whom he falls in love. Only later, during the plot, he discovers that the young woman is actually a prostitute, called Suzie Wong, and not the millionaire heiress (and virgin) that she initially claimed to be. Fascinated by her, he makes her the object of her paintings,

maintaining an unofficial extreme-eroticism relationship. The way the narrative develops reveals the prolific commodification of Asian bodies: Suzie Wong, as a woman, contains the Asianness that North Americans were looking for. Her distinctive ethnic characteristic also becomes a fetishized commodity, as the paintings can only be sold in London, an exotic-hungry market¹⁰.

Classics such as *Madame Butterfly* and *Miss Saigon*, in which the Asian female character commits suicide in the final act because she can no longer have a relationship with the white man she loves, popularize the idea of the tragic lover. The role of Asian women in Western media seems to be nothing more than “satisfying the desires of white men”, and when their lovers disappear, they disappear too¹¹.

However, when relating to these women, as the male character in *The World of Suzie Wong* does, the man transcends his conventional social circle and enters the realm of the exotic and, consequently, exciting: an adventure and romance without consequences^{12,13}.

This fantasy seems to persist in some male imaginations. Let us take as a reference the statement of Anne, one of my interlocutors: “I was in a bar with some friends, and a friend of one of them arrived and barely looked at me and said, ‘I’m crazy about Asian women’. He didn’t even know my name. However, he spent the night wanting to be with me; he told me that any Asian woman was ‘a real woman’ to him, that Asian women were special, and made him feel like more of a man” (Anne, 27, born in Portugal).

Making the Asian woman a “natural” or suitable partner for the white man, Laura Hyun-Yi Kang, in *The Desiring of Asian Female Bodies* (1993), argues that this imagery allows “the reconstruction of racial conflict and sexual domination as a complementary difference”¹⁴. This “complementarity” is then used to alleviate tensions over racial differences and patriarchy's challenges, making everything fit the established white male worldview. For the man who tried to seduce Anne, it is precisely the Asian woman who “makes him feel like a man”, a message brought by films where the white male identity is articulated through the presence of the Asian female body.

At the same time, the Asian female characters are also constructed around the relationship with the male hero, suggesting their inability to have agency in the process of self-creation and identity. “Even in *Marvel fiction*”, Paulo (33, born in Lisbon to Chinese parents), a friend who collab-

orates with me on some articles, commented to me: “The main character of *Eternals*, super powerful, is Gemma Chan. What do you see of her in the film? That she had a relationship with the leading figure! This is her peak”.

Often encapsulated in secondary or primary roles but with less density, depth, or just figurative, there seems to be an emphasis on the secondary role of the Asian person in what should be their very narrative.

The projection that the actress gains through the dissemination and popularization of these films contrasts with the erasure and ethnic interchangeability that often accompanies Asian characters in these films. Kang¹⁴ underscores the ease with which Asian groups are replaced by each other in popular culture. “These cinematic distortions of [ethnicity-age]”, he continues, “have been naturalized by representations of Asians as being largely inter-changeable – a cinematic articulation of the ancient ‘*All Orientals Look Alike*’¹⁴(p.8-9). Assuming that Asian individuals form a homogeneous group, belonging to a “monolithic oriental culture”¹⁵, Anne’s statement corroborated this idea: in the statement of the man who tries to conquer her, “anyone” represents “all” Asian women and no woman in particular.

The choice of the same physical type of woman or the inclusion of Pidgin English, based on silences or giggles¹⁶, also serves to universalize the spoken experience of Asians. Popular media help in this universalization process, disseminating the idea that Asians are all the same or very similar in culture, speech, and outlook.

Jani Zhao (30, born in Portugal to Chinese parents), a Portuguese actress of Chinese descent with a long cinema, theater, and television career, admits with concern that she is still the “*only one in the field*”, and that this reveals the “*enormous, persistent prejudice*”.

The initial characters of her career included a young Japanese woman, “*she had a Tamagotchi, and was very connected to technology...it was the image that people had. They were waiting for a young, restrained, modest, reserved, technology-connected, very docile, innocent, and amiable Japanese woman...*”. She was asked not to correctly pronounce the “r” letters when speaking.

The following characters included a young woman who is imprisoned in Thailand, framed for drug trafficking, a Mafia agent operating in Portugal, and in a youth soap opera with great prominence in Portugal, “*the typical young Chinese girl. My role was that of a daughter of immi-*

grants with a Chinese store. That’s it. She was also very modest and naive, always around the image of a culture that is very fearful and obedient... very oppressed. After this project, I thought, “This is not for me”. It has been really good. I really appreciate it, but I’m more than that”.

Today, with an international career, Jani seeks to show that there is more than the ordinary: “*And mainly doing something that doesn’t interest you, that shows a mentality with which you don’t agree and don’t identify with. Above all, because you fight against it. It’s one thing for you to be an accomplice and another for you to want to fight against that mentality. You can’t be on the other side and think everything is wrong. It’s about coherence, principles, values, and humanity, besides some sensitivity and emotional intelligence. It doesn’t make sense to me*”.

If *The World of Suzie Wong*, *Madame Butterfly*, or *Miss Saigon* are narratives set in Eastern geographies, *The Year of the Dragon* (1985), *Come See the Paradise* (1990), and *A Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991) are examples of films with the United States as a backdrop, but which tend to perpetuate stereotypes.

Kang¹⁷ analyzes how Asian women are represented in these films and how the attempt to reduce difference complements supporting power variations. Using the movie, *The Year of the Dragon* (1985) as a model, the author examines how women represent a threat to the male unconscious due to their sexual differences. Tracy Tzu (the Asian co-protagonist) causes heightened anxiety in Stanley White (the white protagonist) due to her display of “a hostile, foreign country, a lost war, a manipulative social mechanism, and class antagonism”¹⁷.

The cinematographic representation of Asian populations is equally problematic because it uses “physical, social, and psychological distancing”¹⁸ as a method of presenting a mythological, almost unreal, or barely human “Other”. In this representation, one expects to see Asian characters portrayed as greedy, dirty, cheating, or disgusting¹⁹.

By providing a historical portrait of stereotypes in cinema, one can understand the trends in the social views of Chinese citizens in places like the United States throughout the 20th century. Portrayed as *coolies*, servile workers, owners of laundries or restaurants, they were seen as ‘in-assimilable’ by the axes of difference that operated in the rest of the population. For decades, “culturally biased perceptions of Chinese people as non-Western in dress, language, religion,

customs, and eating habits continued [...] determined that [they] were inferior”²⁰.

Furthermore, the creation and exploitation of a “yellow peril” to society, a fear of “threatening, taking over, invading, or negatively “Asianizing” society and culture”²¹ serves the development of a xenophobic culture. The idea and fear that Chinese individuals would be taking over “everything” is still a constant today.

From the “sexual minority model” to “orientalization” as methods of exclusion

Compulsorily portrayed as seductive and provocative, equally passive and vulnerable, Asian women preserve an image of very ‘attractive’ women, or, as Zheng²² puts it, this “ideal in its association of sex appeal with family-centered values and a strong work ethic” is often what men want. In other words, the established and exhaustively replicated archetypes do not belong to antagonistic natures but rather complementary ones, which underlie the creation of an imaginary category of “sexual model minority”. This “extension” of the “model minority” idea to the sexual plane could work as an excuse to feed the idea that their ‘passivity’ is a form of permission²³.

However, the perception of Asian women as immoral villains can lead to the normalization of their sexual harassment²⁴ and discrimination in the workplace, constant policing, and surveillance^{25,26}.

Their brand of “sexual model minorities”, along with the dehumanization to which they are repeatedly subjected, serves as a backdrop for situations such as the armed attack that occurred in Atlanta (USA) on March 16, 2021. The perpetrator – a 21-year-old white man described as a “sex addict” – determined to “eliminate his temptation”, carried out a massacre in a massage center, shooting dead eight people, six of whom were women of Asian descent and workers there.

While this case is not unique in US history, it reproduces the disposable way in which Asian women and their bodies are considered and observed. Official power, personified by the Captain in charge of speaking to the press, showed more compassion for the murderer than for the victims by stating that the motive for the massacre was not a racial factor but the “sexual addiction” of the young man, describing him as “having a terrible day”²⁷. The public opinion’s assumption that they would be sex workers because they are massage services perpetuates the fetishization of

Asian women’s bodies and their racialization as hypersexual bodies²⁸.

Correlating the Atlanta murders with sex work inadvertently immortalizes the unconscious bias of prioritizing the perspective not of victims but of those who marginalize them. According to sociologist Rick Baldoz²⁹, equating the selective killing of “Asian sex workers” in Atlanta with someone having a bad day reinforces the idea of white (male) victimization.

The concept of Oriental, which Liu used to describe the configuration in which white men place her, takes on geographic and cultural and sexual connotations, assuming “exoticization” and “difference” contours. “*I am always the ‘Oriental’ one to others, even if I was born here, went to college, and only speak Portuguese. I never cross the barrier my body puts me in [before] the eyes of others, especially men.*”

She continues: “[at school] People were always asking me ‘you’re Chinese, where do you come from?’ which made me realize that they didn’t see me as being from here. It made me aware that I was different from other people. In seventh grade, a girl in my class told me that my face was very flat and asked me whether I had been hit in the face with a frying pan. That hurt me a lot. I grew up without any confidence. It got worse during adolescence. I didn’t want to have straight hair. I wanted to be blonde. The fact that I am Chinese led me to be very dissatisfied with myself. I couldn’t be part of any group of friends, it made me create barriers. In college, it eased a little. Because we were older. However, I still have many barriers”.

Orientalization is, therefore, the process by which Asian women from the most diverse Asian origins are stereotyped and objectified. “The Orient was almost a European invention”³⁰, following the criticism initiated by Edward Said³¹, who described the “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the East” in his magnum opus *Orientalism*. However, he observed the confluence of *Orientalism* and *Sexism*, where women are represented with unlimited sensuality, and women’s sexual achievement is related to conquering their physical territory.

In the film *The Year of the Dragon*, the male hero’s question, “*Why do I want to fuck you so much?*” to his Asian co-protagonist, reveals how he has to conquer her sexually in order to bring her within the terms of his comprehensibility and sexual agency³².

Placing the East as metaphorically associated with femininity and the West with the masculine equivalent, this dimension of difference perme-

ates the issue of gender. It represents a power relationship and “domination with several complex hegemonic levels”³³.

The history of the colonization of the East can be considered an allegory of the history of gender relationships: “The geographically distant East, a foreign land of dishonest practices, is discovered, described, and dominated, just like women”³⁴.

By assuming that the first women they contacted in Asia were sex workers, the European military shared colonial fantasies of pale, fragile, and diminutive women. By continuing to circulate these images, they guarantee their opinion of ownership and dominance over the East³⁵ and reflect their interests in maintaining and reinforcing oppressive and subordinating attitudes. These representations and the processes that are (re) created in preserving ethnic stereotypes are often used as a legitimate tool to justify a racial division of labor³⁶ or presume an exclusive body to assist and give pleasure³⁷. Li (34, born in Portugal to Chinese parents) had a similar experience: “*They [the men] think they can do anything, say everything. They can look at me blatantly, they can touch me, harass me, and I must remain silent. I was on Martim Moniz Street [area of Lisbon where most of the commercial activities of Chinese citizens are located] and a guy started saying, shouting, ‘Oh, Chinese, you are gorgeous. I would do this and that to you...’ and I answered him firmly, ‘do you know that what you are doing is a crime?’ He didn’t expect me to understand Portuguese; he was immediately embarrassed when I told him about the police, and he ran away.*”

Sex and Pornography: fabricating “Race” and “fetishization”

“Race”, class, gender, nationality, and sexuality are interconnected systems of power, domination, and oppression, where everyday practices preserve racial and gender equality. Some individuals believe that “race” and gender begin before birth and continue throughout life. Asian female bodies are immersed in ethno-sexualized messages and pictures from their most intimate family relationships and their surrounding environment, where cultural values are incorporated into the way of “doing gender”³⁸. The women I interviewed sometimes deal with values within the family that contrast with those in the outside world (peers, teachers, co-workers, and the media). They learn very quickly that they are different from “white people”, and assumptions are made about them, their bodies, and behaviors based on ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

Sociologist Joane Nagel³⁹ warns us that “sex is the whispered subtext in spoken racial discourse. It is the sometimes silent message contained in racial slurs, ethnic stereotypes, national images, and international relations”. Nagel also adds that there is an emotional aspect to ethnosexuality: sexual fears and aversion are endemic to racial terror and hatred.

In *The Hypersexuality of Race* (2007), filmmaker and film scholar Celine Parreñas Shimizu shows how upon immigration to the United States, Chinese women were invariably seen as “prostitutes”, Japanese women as “war brides”, and Filipino women as “mail order brides”. In short, non-white women merely served as objects of pleasure⁴⁰.

The discussions raised by the media representation of mail-order bride marriages, with intersections between the Asian body fetishization and Western men-imposed colonialism fantasies, have already been portrayed in academic literature⁴¹⁻⁴⁴, where some men’s idea is that Asian women fill the void that Western women left when they achieved certain economic independence. This idea aligns with the idea of the “sexual model minority” that we have already discussed previously.

If, on the one hand, mail-order bride websites act as a vehicle to consolidate Western American values of imperialist power and the romanticization of a new colonialist era⁴⁵, on the other hand, the porn industry equally acts as a disseminator of these behaviors. Here, “race” is the primary identity for Asian women in Pornography, where their “racialization represents their perversity, so Asian women must make ‘yellowface’ in order to be legible in pornography”⁴⁶. Put another way, in order to stir sexual desire and arousal in viewers, these women must play with Asian women’s tropes, which are simultaneously created and (re) invented through Pornography.

Analyzing the table of most searched categories in 2022 on the pornographic website Pornhub, “Japanese”, “Asian”, and “hentai”⁴⁷ appear in the top six spots.

In a study analyzing pornographic websites that portray the rape or torture of women, Gossett and Byrne⁴⁸ reveal that more than half have Asian women as victims, and a third show white men as perpetrators. The essay also revealed a strong correlation between ‘race’ and pedophilia – as the titles “Japanese Students” or “Asian Adolescents” attest.

This “fascination” of Western men with the “childish” bodies of Asian women also works to fuel the romantic vision that some white men

build of themselves as the “saviors”, “heroes”, or “protectors” of these women^{49,50}.

An excerpt from Yi-Min’s (25 years old) interview helps think about how issues of “race” and “sexuality” are involved: “*I was objectified. I am aware of this now, looking back. My [Dutch] boyfriend made me just a body. I was my body. It was very complicated at the time, but I was too distracted to see it. He only wanted me for sex, apparently. Then I realized that he only dated Asian girls. Another Chinese, a Thai. Is that not strange? It’s as if I only date, say, Black boys. One? Okay, it can happen. But all? It seems strange to me. I pay more attention now*”. Sexual fetishism is a situation in which the target of affection is an inanimate object or a specific part of someone when one’s exclusive or almost exclusive preference for sexual contact with others belonging to a specific racial group takes the form of racial fetishism⁵¹. For Asian women, outside the borders of the nation-state of China or within it in emotional contact with individuals coming from ethnic groups different from their own, here lies an arena in which racism and sexism intersect.

Final discussion: the impact of stereotypes on women’s lives

If, in the eyes of others, Asian women are homogenized – their bodies, expected behaviors, and statements – we can also consider this process of universalization as an invisibilization experience. Contrary to the idea of “just” a type of “personal preference” based on a purely aesthetic and superficial taste⁵¹, this behavior has deeper historical roots. In this article, I argue that the data collected through fieldwork by sharing stories and emotions by my interlocutors can attest that some men are not looking for a particular person but rather a stereotypical, sexualized, and fetishized image – built and disseminated based on popular media, Hollywood films, and Pornography.

My interlocutors relate experiences in which white men approach them with assumptions about their sexuality, arising from Asian women archetypes. Reading a specific type of sexuality in the female gender, they tend to ignore the qualities of the individual woman in favor of stereotypes about an entire group of people.

The fetishization of a woman, a group of people, or a community is harmful and reduces the recognition of their identity covertly and overtly – take the example of actress Jani Zhao and the

characters she played in the early days of her career.

Stuart Hall⁵² recognizes identity as a matter involving becoming identity and then “being it”. Identity within a given “race” is not rigid and static but “fluid” and mutable material, meaning identity constantly changes. However, I understand that the habit of creating labels for identities is what makes some become small for the surrounding society. The layered invisibility of groups that are not representative in the white, heterosexual, and patriarchal cultural environment in which we operate can lead to their perception as “targets” and allow them to be seen as objects instead of humans, trivializing, justifying, and even making provocative or abusive behaviors acceptable.

This situation also allows bodies constructed as “other” to be exploited and used as commodities to consolidate colonialist values preserved throughout Western history⁵³.

The psychological impacts of women’s sexualization have already been extensively studied, documenting how it adversely affects several health domains: emotional and cognitive (low self-esteem and confidence, shame, and anxiety); mental and physical health (constant monitoring, eating disorders, and depression); sexual development (compromised sexual self-image)⁵⁴.

Particularly with Asian women, racialization adds up to the previous ones. It contains sexual fetishism, the assumption of universal appearance, the attribution of features such as hyper-femininity and submission, invisibilization, and invalidation by the media.

Authors such as Celine Parreña Shimizu^{55,56} argue that the contemporary Asian woman can be seen as a “subject in a struggle within power circuits”. So, where is her struggle located, and how does this affect the production of her identity?

This article aimed to provide a more in-depth look at how racial and gender minorities, through the fetishization of their bodies, popularized sexualized images, and the constant objectification to which they are subjected, manage and negotiate their identities within structures that have been historically and systematically oppressed, misinterpreted, or misrepresented. It allows us to think about how the sexualization and fetishism of certain bodies affect identity and, in a broader sense, its community and “culture”. Women from migrant populations believe that different experiences and realities lead to different ways of navigating and negotiating their bodies. Theoret-

ically, linking concepts such as fetishization and touching spaces belonging to post-colonial and racial issues, this work searched for connections with the historical and social perpetuations of “race”, gender, and sexuality to understand how these identities are socially constructed.

If, as we have seen, Hollywood film productions generalize a particular image of Asian female bodies, encouraging their view of them as “always available” and “naturally” compatible with white men, they also help to vulgarize their fixed and immutable nature. Pornography – which explores the notion of passivity and domination – and more concisely interracial Pornography, allows us to understand how the sexual act provokes, leads, and builds categories that structure ideas of “race”, which leads to condensing all characteristics into a general feminine archetype that transcends any specific historical situation but embodies all Asian women.

When reviewing this text, Michelle Yeoh became the first Asian actress to win an Oscar for Best Leading Actress from the Hollywood Academy. In the film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022), Yeoh plays a Chinese woman who moves to the USA looking for a better life and becomes the owner of a laundry shop. Playing with clichés and stereotypes, she later moves into a meta-verse world.

It is only necessary to highlight two aspects as a conclusive conclusion: Yeoh was the first Asian woman to receive this distinction – in a ceremony that has rewarded North American cinema since 1929 – and the second non-white woman to receive it. However, despite hundreds of films featuring Asian characters, Yeoh was also the first self-identified Asian actress to receive a nomination for best actress: Merle Oberon, nominated in 1936, hid her Indian origins⁵⁷ so as not to have to deal with racial prejudice that would be even more rooted in Hollywood at the time.

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