



# REPRESENTATION OF ASIAN WOMEN IN MEDIA

Film and television are a medium that reflects societal norms, values, and ideologies. Through media, racist stereotypes and tropes have been reproduced which impact the way Asian women are perceived. Within North American media, Asian women have been oversexualized, villainized, and made to seem exotic and submissive. However, as the world has changed, Hollywood clichés of Asian women still persist in many ways.

The content of this factsheet draws from the film *Slaying the Dragon: Reloaded* (Kim, E., 2011) to examine what has changed, what's stayed the same, and what future of female Asian representation looks like in the media.



## The Dragon Lady

One of the stereotypes Asian women are pigeonholed into is the Dragon Lady. This character is a villain, often sexualized and portrayed as a dangerous and exotic threat. In modern cinema, this character is subhuman or superhuman causing her to be non-relatable to the viewer.



## The Submissive Stereotype

Asian women are very often portrayed on screen as the seductive, submissive, and pleasure-giving woman. This character defaults to taking care of men and is objectified for her "exotic" beauty.

Unfortunately, these stereotypes are very prominent and reflect the oversexualization of Asian women in the real world.



There is a direct legacy between U.S. wars in Asia, and the hypersexualization of Asian women in media



## Military and Oversexualization

The U.S. military bases in Asia led to Asian women being exoticized by American soldiers. Prostitution and sexual violence were prominent, and the stereotype of the sexy, submissive Asian woman was introduced into American pop culture.



## Saved by the West

The portrayal of Asian women as victims needing to be saved from Islam and Muslim men has been used to justify the U.S. invasion of the Middle East. This portrayal serves to both victimize Asian women and exploit American fears of a racialized enemy.



"You see a brownening of faces, but a continued whitening of character"  
Robin Kelley  
Professor at USC



## White-Washing

Although there is an increased representation of Asian women in the media, too often the characters' cultural heritage is erased. Erasing these cultural differences furthers the racist idea that people of colour must assimilate to white culture.



## South Asian Representation

South Asian women have also endured a lack of positive representation in media. When South Asian culture has been shown in Hollywood, often it was as passive to their male counterparts, without making decisions for themselves.



## Reclaiming Authorship

Luckily today, Asian American women are taking control and telling their own stories. Through independent film, Youtube, and even mainstream film and television, more women are able to tell their own stories and create diverse and accessible representation on screen.

Alice Wu's *Saving Face* (2004) and *The Half of It* (2020) feature strong, Queer, Asian American protagonists



## CITATIONS

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