

STEREOTYPED ASIAN WOMEN

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East Asian Women have been portrayed as being submissive, dependent, and apathetic. In Giacomo Puccini's "Madame Butterfly", a famous opera composed in 1898, the female protagonist Cio-Cio-San is portrayed as a Japanese geisha who falls in love and married with an American navy, as she decides to betray her family ancestral culture and religion. However, the navy left her and their child in Japan, and married his "real wife". Cio-Cio-San is heartbroken when she knows that the navy is planning to take her child away and raise the child in America with his American wife, and she committed suicide after she bids farewell to her callous husband.

Cio-Cio-San is a textbook example of those stereotyped east Asian female characters in western world. Their features appear on operas, movies, fictions, and other media types. The issue occurs due to the lack of the understanding about Asian women in western world, so the composers put their misunderstanding or even bias about the race to appease western audiences. Being develop further, Asian women are even portrayed as dependent servants (geisha, prostitute, etc.) who are always waiting others to rescue them. Another example can be Suzie Wong, the main female character of a 1957 British novel "The World of Suzie Wong" by Richard Mason. Wong is a prostitute from Hong Kong who sells her body to three Caucasian men to make a living, and she falls in love with and is married to the one who brings her joy in life.

There is no direct support to indicate that the medias directly make Asian women be related to sexuality, but it can be true that Asian women's role in western world is usually stereotyped as sexual workers who are typically attractive to western

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man. The women have a nickname of “white lotus”, since their virginity and vulnerability are overly highlighted by the medias. “Being docile is specifically about being deferent and obedient, especially to the authority of men.” Said by Rachel Kuo, a Asian Contributing Writer for Everyday Feminism, “As (Asian females’) race, gender, and sexuality become ruled by Western and male fantasy, in order to serve men sexually, Asian women must both be “feminine” and “heterosexual” and also either submissive and/or hypersexual. The stereotype of ‘Lotus Blossom’ reflects the ways that Asian women become transformed into either a sexual servant or embodied as a sexual adventure.”<sup>1</sup>

The prejudice still exists widely in the western society, since there are few Asian female representations, and their voice is passive compared to the mainstream, which is constructed by Caucasian males. In daily life in western world, Asian group is still facing serious discriminating issues; to females specifically, they are continuously hesitated because “some white men covet Asian women because they can’t deal with strong, independent white women”<sup>2</sup>; in another word, white men favor in Asian women because they are weak and easy to control, compared to western women who “have recently being stereotyped as ‘calculating, suffocating, and thoroughly undesirable’ and as too concerned with independence to adequately take care of their families”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> 5 Ways ‘Asian Woman Fetishes’ Put Asian Women in Serious Danger”, Rachel Kuo, December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015. <https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/12/asian-woman-fetishes-hurtful/>

<sup>2</sup> “Gender: He Said, She Said” from “Yellow Journalist: Dispatches from Asian America”, page 150, William Wong, 2001

<sup>3</sup> “‘Ain’t I a Filipino (Woman)?’: Filipina as Gender Marker” from “Building Diaspora: Filipino Cultural Community Formation on the Internet”, page 81, Emily Noelle Ignacio, 2005

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A straight illustration of the negative effect brought by this stereotype can be the human trafficking, yet Asian women are the most popular targets for sex slaveries in the trafficking activities. The 2016 Global Slavery Index (GSI) indicates that there are nearly 4,800,000 victims who are suffering from forced sexual exploitation of human trafficking worldwide. Of that, 6.1% of the total Asian population are involved<sup>4</sup>.

It can be argued that the Asian stereotype does not influence the United States as much, since Asian American only occupy a small portion of the total American population. However, the drastic growth of immigrants – including Asian women with yellow skin – is a factor that cannot be ignored by the head governors. Since the USA is recognized as the most globalized country in the world, discarding the stereotype is therefore important for them to build trust in between the government and all US citizens. In fact, Asian sexual slavery has become a forbidden topic but also a serious social issue in USA. According to Ranita Ray's "Sex Trafficking: In Our Backyard?", human trafficking "becomes especially the case for women and girls of color, where their gender and race connote forms of inferiority in patriarchal, racist societies. Buying women from different races and nationalities gives men the illusion of experiencing the 'different' or 'exotic'. Men come to expect stereotyped behavior from the women they buy in prostitution."<sup>5</sup> To sum up, the stereotype of submissive Asian women is problematic and should be denied for guaranteeing US citizens' safety in the country.

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<sup>4</sup> From Global Slavery Index Organization official website, <https://www.alliance87.org/2017ge/modernslavery#!section=8>

<sup>5</sup> "Sex Trafficking: In Our Backyard?" from "Human Rights in Our Own Backyard: Injustice and Resistance in the United States", page 216, Ranita Ray

### **Annotated Bibliography**

Ray, Ranita. Sex Trafficking: In Our Backyard?, *Human Rights in Our Own Backyard: Injustice and Resistance in the United States*, Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights, 2011.

This chapter in the book states the definition of sex trafficking, indicates the effects it brought to US population (especially to people in color), and illustrates how sex trafficking is run in USA as the US government does not effectively respond to the issue. Ray insists that the government should take more action to deal with the issue by raising awareness to the public.

Noelle Ignacio, Emily. Ain't I a Filipino (Woman)?': Filipina as Gender Marker, *Building Diaspora: Filipino Cultural Community Formation on the Internet*, 2005.

Ignacio, as a Filipino American woman, writes the chapter to demonstrate her and her Asian friends' experiences about racist and stereotypes in America. She firstly demonstrates how western media stereotype Asian males and females, and then lists some stereotypes given to Filipinos. Next, she explores further on the relationship between colorism and stereotypes, yet she is asking how Filipino women can get rid of the stereotype, as they keep some of their original identities in the

racist society.

Wong, William. *Gender: He Said, She Said, Yellow Journalist: Dispatches from Asian America, Mapping Racisms*, 2001.

Wong write this research paper to argue how Asian people receive bias stereotypes, unfair treatments, and racial discrimination in western world. He correspondingly shows how western people view Asian men and women by exaggerating their identities using several examples, and indicates that the issue is hidden by the society, since the mainstream of the society is still Caucasian men. At the end of the chapter, he stands for Bruce Lee, an Asian male hero who open the western eyes to eastern world, and discard the Chinese stereotype as weak sluts.

<https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/12/asian-woman-fetishes-hurtful/>

Kuo, Rachel. 5 Ways 'Asian Woman Fetishes' Put Asian Women in Serious Danger, web source, Dec 25, 2015.

Kuo demonstrates five ways that western people see Asian women as

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submissive, exotic, immoral, worthless, and passive respectively. The stereotypes are giving Asian women labels that they don't want and can harm them by enabling them to experience sexual violence.