

(E)RACE: SYMBOLIC ETHNICITY AND THE ASIAN IMAGE

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Symbolic Ethnicity and the Asian Image

Abstract

This thesis examines why and how dominant Asian images continue to permeate cinema through the reinforcement of Asian symbols and icons. Chapter one develops a system model to explain the communicative and social properties of Asian representation. Chapters two and three show how dominant cinema and Asian-North American alternative cinema follow the same communicative and social models which, in turn, lead to stereotypical Asian images. Using the communication theories of Andrew Tudor, the sociological theories of Herbert Gans and the theories of Orientalism of Edward Said, the thesis shows how historical Asian icons, continually used in cinema, are symptoms of a society that is moving closer to a homogenous culture. In effect, the Asian identity is becoming deculturalized. The argument is made that by examining the issue of Asian identity through cinematic and social theory, Asian North American cultural producers can develop a critical self-evaluation beyond what exists at present.

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(E)Race: Symbolic Ethnicity and the Asian Image

Introduction

Mention the word "Asian" and immediately, strong, vivid images of particular foods, languages, peoples, and geographies are evoked. Yet how were these images implanted in a "North American" collective mind? To what extent do these images affect the Asian community in respect to its own identity? This thesis is concerned with how Asian images are formed, perpetuated and used as a defining force of Asian identity. The main objective of the thesis is to show how Asian identity has been distilled into simple symbols and icons. No longer does identity require the association of an active community: it now defines itself with preconceived images dictated by historical exaggerations. In essence, this renders ethnicity as symbolic rather than actual. Some American writers have applauded this trend in ethnic identity since it reduces ethnic difference to superficial images. Allan Bloom, the author of The Closing of the American Mind (1987) and E. D. Hirsch, the author of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know (1987), both advocate an American society that strives for unity, avoiding what Ronald Takaki calls "Balkanization" of America. (Takaki, 1993) Thus, for Hirsch and Bloom, the symbolic treatment of ethnicity is a safe outlet of displaying difference, free from social or political consequence. By using superficial icons as a means of difference, difference itself becomes superficial. Images that define ethnic identity are approved only when they conform to a certain ideal dictated by the dominant culture. Yet as will be seen in this thesis, the dominant culture strives for social homogeneity (what Hirsch and Bloom describe as unity). Symbolic,

iconic ethnicity can be regarded as a symptom that cultural difference is merely a facade; ethnic identity is being culturalized into the dominant society.

Like many ethnic communities, the Asian community has been influenced by how it has been represented throughout history. Since there are numerous examples of how Asians are seen by the rest of the Non-Asian society, the Asian image is a good research tool to study how ethnic identity is influenced by its historical reference. In turn, this study can show how historical influences have affected the Asian communities' own self-representation.

Chapter One is divided into three sections. In the first part, the process of communication is investigated in terms of how a medium conveys a message. An overview of some of the communication theories is provided to allow a better understanding of how Asian images are either accepted or rejected by an audience. In addition to detailing communication processes, important elements of "imaging" are defined in relation to how they affect ethnic representation. This thesis' argument is that the success of the communicative process depends on how effectively an audience perceives the image as compared historically and socially accepted images. In other words, success is measured by how closely images match an audience's preconceptions. In ethnic representation, "audience imaging" is developed only if "social imaging" and "historical imaging" correlate. "Compression Model" of communication will be used to show how both cultural history and social environment create the iconographic images of Asian identity.

The second part of Chapter One deals with the social criteria necessary to establish Asian representation based on Symbolic Ethnicity. Theories of Edward Said, Herbert Gans, and, to a lesser extent, Saussure will show how interpretation

is predetermined. The theory of Orientalism -- how the Occident has interpreted the Orient -- is used to explain how cinematic representation of the Asian has been relatively unaltered throughout cinematic history. Said defines two types of Orientalism, Latent and Manifest. Latent Orientalism is defined as the "culmination of the clichés, historical inaccuracies, exaggerations as well as historical truths brought forward by the interpretation of the Orient by an Occidental authority (opinion leader)." (Said 201-225) Manifest Orientalism occurs when these same clichés, half truths and exaggerations are overtly represented as part of a communicative process. (Said 201-225) The convergence of Latent and Manifest Orientalism is what Said describes as the present state of Orientalism now. The presence of Symbolic Ethnicity not only confirms this assertion but also gives us an insight where Orientalism will exist beyond the Occidental community.¹

Finally, Chapter One will explore the outcome of the convergence of Latent and Manifest Orientalism. This thesis contends that the implementation of Symbolic Ethnicity in the cinema is a symptom of the converging Orientalisms. The impact on the viewer is a mediated interpretation of the Orient. The impact on the Asian community goes beyond artistic bounds and imposes an anxiety between the individual and group identities. As with other ethnic communities in North America, the Asian community is absorbed into the larger encompassing culture. If the use of Symbolic Ethnicity to define Asian identity prevails, a deculturalization of the Asian community is inevitable. In this section, assimilation and deculturalization will be defined and used in explaining Herbert Gans' Straight Line theory. In this theory, Gans asserts that in a population of several cultures, within time, all cultures will conform towards the dominant culture. As seen in other writings by Hirsch, Bloom and others, there is a school of thought that

advocates exactly such an amalgamation. (Takaki, 1993) From the model of deculturalization described in this section, films will be examined in relation to the degree and method of deculturalization.

Chapter Two will survey mainstream narrative films that deal with Asian identity.² These films represent Asians through a system of identification -- a distinct set of codes involving social, emotional and psychological elements. The films, Year of The Dragon (Cimino 1981), China Girl(Ferraras 1987) and 1000 Pieces of Gold (Kelly 1990) are used as examples of major Hollywood films that use the Asian image to encourage a fear of difference. In the these three films, conflict is expressed through a series of antinomies. By emphasizing the differences between the Asian culture and the dominant culture, these films seek to reinforce the authority inherent in the dominant culture. By understanding how the presentation of main characters, supporting characters and antagonists are portrayed, either as Asian or Non-Asian, a distinct trend of stereotyping can be observed. Asian icons are compared to American icons, resulting in the diminishment of the Asian identity. The most powerful example of how Asian identity is diminished in these films is the treatment of the locale of Chinatown. The cinematic portrayal of Chinatown is simplified into a series of iconographic images suggesting an "Otherworldliness."(Chin 10-15) Chinatown as Other-world becomes an exotic anomaly, heightening the concept of difference. Consequently, it remains a savage and dangerous place; a place to be feared.

Because of this fear of the Other world, the central theme of these three films is that the integration of the two cultures, Asian and American, is not only difficult but dangerous. The relationships that exist between characters and communities are the basis of the conflict in the diegesis. The films portray that

resolution can only arise from complete submission of the Asian character. In this way, the films of Cimino, Kelly, and Ferraras perpetuate the latent Orientalist beliefs, and, in effect, create new manifest Orientalisms.

The final chapter, Chapter Three, looks at the treatment of the Asian image in Asian Canadian films and videos, and discusses two specific questions: To whom are these films addressed? To what degree are the Asian images authentic when represented by an Asian film maker? In Chapter Three, films and videos by Asian Canadians will be examined to see how they approach self-representation. This chapter will chart, specifically, how elements of Symbolic Ethnicity have led to deculturalization in relation to four Asian Canadian films, Silence into Silence (L'Amitié Chinoise de Montréal/Le Vidéographe 1989), The Compact (Lum 1990), Sally's Beauty Spot (Lee 1990) and Chinese Characters (Fung 1986).

Other independent films have re-represented history and identity in their own terms. They use symbols as subjugated units of place and time, as exemplified in Displaced View (Onodera 1988) and My Father's Place (Fung 1987). In re-telling their history and their own identity, they actively reject the content of the Orientalists and their versions of the Orient. From the constant deluge of Asian images from Orientalists there is an acknowledgment of confusion of Asian identity. Films like Ordinary Shadows (Wong 1988) and Banana Split (Fulbreck 1990) purposely create a confused personal vision in which to search for the artist's own identity.

In examining independent film and video by Asian Canadians the conclusion can be made that the recognition of ethnic self-identity is, in a sense, a reaction against assimilation and acculturation into and by North American

society. Herbert Gans believed that Symbolic Ethnicity is a reflection of an insecure self-esteem character of both the individual and community. (Gans 1979, 25-70) The pressures between individual and community become so fierce, a deculturalization of the community results.³ Asian culture and identity become ritualized without meaning.

Overall, by evaluating how the Asian image has been used by both Asian and non-Asian film and video, the processes of Symbolic Ethnicity and deculturalization can be mapped and assayed. This thesis will show that the issue of ethnic identity can be researched by systematically detailing how Asian images are created, implemented and perpetuated.

Since writings and research in the field of ethnic recognition are still in their infancy, it is hoped that this work will foster new insights and promote more effort in the area of Asian identity. In that light, the final section of this thesis reiterated the themes and analysis of the previous Chapters and offers some commentary on the conflicting influences towards assimilation of the Asian community into the dominant culture.

Chapter One.

Model of Symbolic Ethnicity, Communication and Deculturalization.

...movies are better understood as events experienced in a collectively prestructured perceptual field, idiosyncratic to social groups than to single individuals. When we detect and draw attention to stereotyping, we are describing a structural feature of the collective perceptual field, which may be "invisible" to the actors.

(Jarvie 1978, 167)

In order to understand why stereotyping is so common in films and videos, the process of stereotyping must be examined. Chapter One aims to explore the iconographic representation of ethnic cultures. First, several theories of communication processes will be discussed evaluating the strengths and weaknesses in each theory. Secondly, from these theories, a model will be suggested to assess the consequences of ethnic representation. The model will examine how "Symbolic Ethnicity" (Gans 1978, 28), as a system of representation, functions within the parameters of cultural assimilation and acculturation. Finally, the model will address cultural definition, inter-cultural interactions, social imaging and marginality.

This chapter will introduce the structural mechanism of "Symbolic Ethnicity" as a test for both Hollywood films and independent films and videos. Is the use of Symbolic Ethnicity inevitable when representing ethnic people in a visual medium? Are the consequences different depending on the means and

interpretations of the ethnic icons within this system? These issues are evaluated within the confines of the cinematic medium in the following sections.

I. Patterns of Communication

In examining how images are visualized, it is essential that one recognize the cognition process within which they are developed. The cognition process begins at the elemental stages of communication. This process consists of three components: the communicator, the medium and the receiver. In the least mediated process, the communicator relates thought through a shared medium that both receiver and communicator understand. (see figure 1.1)



Figure 1.1 Elemental Model of Communication (Tudor 1974, 24)

In this setup, the model assumes that both the receiver and communicator are isolated individuals within a unique micro-environment, free from external influences. Obviously, such a scenario is unrealistic. More factors must be included within this model of communication to consider the external as well as internal influences that affect how information is relayed. Andrew Tudor in Images and Influence describes four parameters within which the patterns of communication revolve:

1. Cultural: the cultural experience within a global setting.

2. Personal: the individual ideas and feelings unique to each person.
3. Organismic: the physical attributes of the receiver and the communicator affecting the interpretation and sending of information through the medium (for example, physical pain may affect how information may be related).
4. Social: The influence of both economic and political leanings of the individual.⁴

Since these elements exist beyond the closed system of communicator - medium -receiver, a more interactive process must exist. In the interactive process, each element is divided into individual and shared experiences. For example, in the cultural parameter, the communicator may portray an idea within the cultural confines that he/she understands. In the same manner, the receiver may interpret through the medium either a similar cultural interpretation or a different one depending on the receiver's most potent cultural experience. Thus, experience is either a collective response or an individual response. This pattern follows the rest of the influences and can be incorporated into a modified model of communication. (see Figure. 1.2)

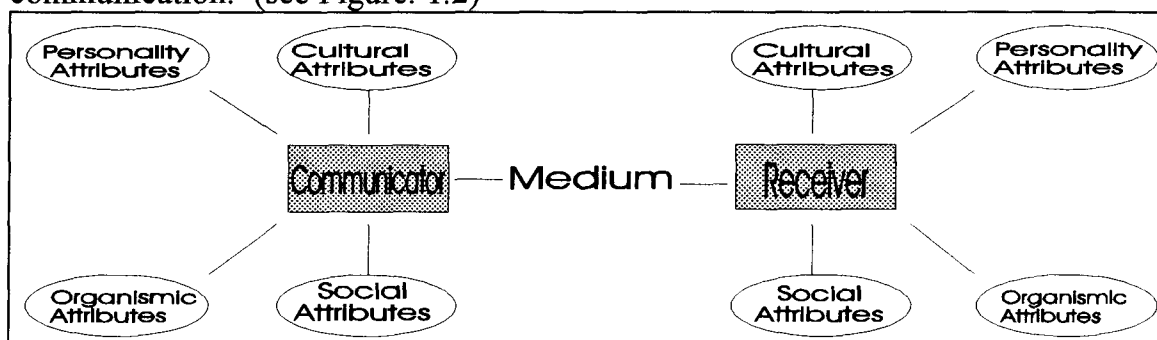


Figure 1.2: Communication Model with Social, Personality, Cultural and Organismic Attributes. Factors influencing the mode of communication.(Tudor 1974, 28)

The examination of shared and individualized experience is crucial in understanding how images become almost homogeneously interpreted by mainstream culture. Interpretations require communication; therefore, how the communication process is constructed affects interpretation.

The effectiveness of the outlined system (Figure 1.2.) is dependent on the medium in which the information between communicator and receiver is relayed. For example, in conversation, the medium is language. The "shared" language can be used to exchange ideas, representations and feelings. According to this process, the interaction is bi-directional since communicator and receiver may switch roles and interact on essentially an equal power base.⁵ With film and video (as with other mass media) the medium restricts this direct interaction. The communicator has the power of images and language while the receiver remains passive in his/her absorption of the ideas through the medium. Yet how passive is the receiver? In a system where the communicator controls the access of information, the authority of information benefits the communicator. (see Figure 1.3.) It is the communicator that dictates the shared culture and its structure of interpretation.

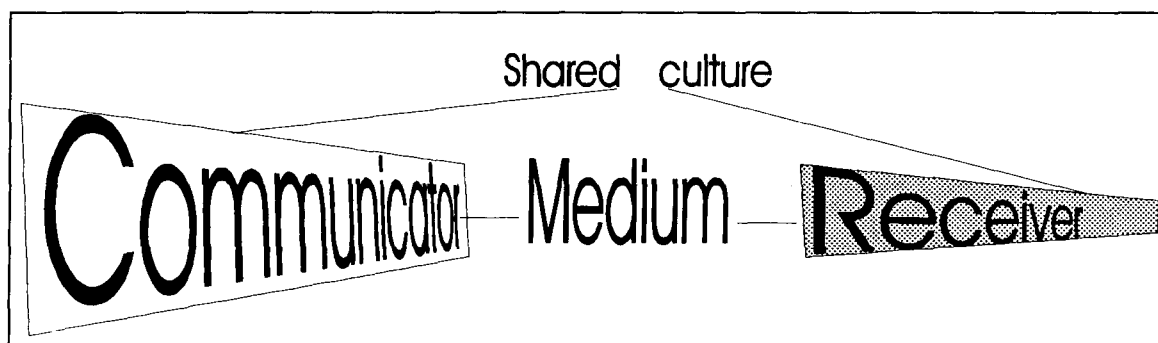


Figure 1.3. The Asymmetric-Hypodermic Model of Communication. The Inclusion of hierarchical authority into the pattern of communication:

In Figure. 1.3., the area of the triangle is proportional to the control of information. In this model, the receiver is passively reacting to the process. Yet how accurate is this model? In an indirect way, the receiver is active. Within the cinematic experience, the viewer dictates ratings, box-office and critical comments that will inevitably decide the next response of the communicator. More interaction is further initiated within a social context when a receiver exchanges information with other receivers concerning the same cinematic text. The success of a film, or in a more specific perspective, of an image, is determined by the agreeable response of the viewer. Thus, the process branches out into a larger scope of information all of which is an active form of interaction. (see figure 1.4) Using this more complex model to illustrate, for example Asian stereotypes in North American films, would result in a diagram as follows:

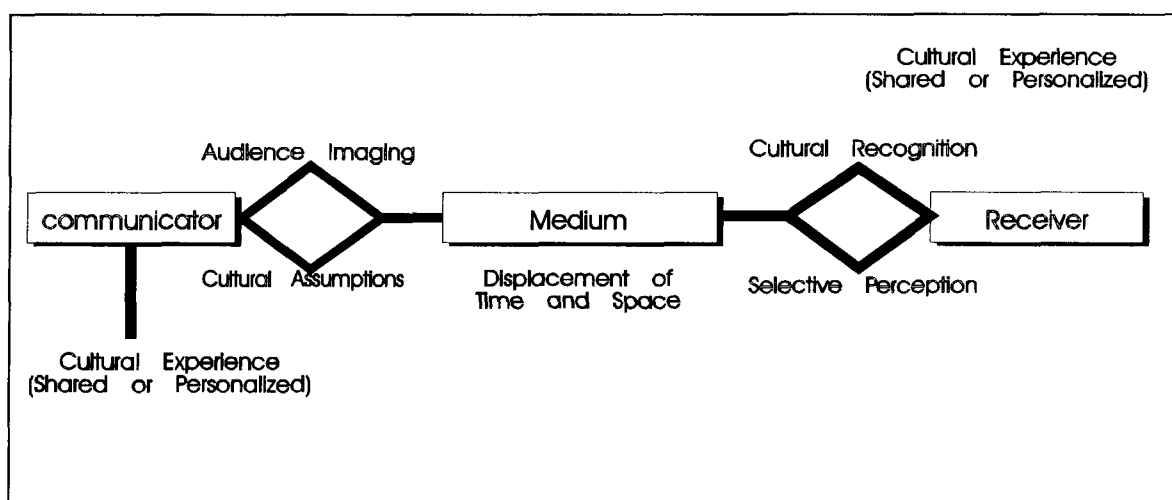


Figure 1.4. Interaction between Receiver and Communicator Detailing the Process of Perception.

Even this model is a simplistic view of how interaction between receiver and communicator can be seen in terms of an authoritative hierarchy. The "compression of authority" is not as symmetrical as the model sets out to be. The

assumption that the information is translated through the medium in an unadulterated form, unaltered from its original intention can be seen as another compression within the communicative model. Seldom does the receiver live in a social-environmental vacuum. As such, the receiver takes the information and interprets it to fit the preconceptions of what is familiar and logical. This process of interpretation is called "selective perception." (Kendall and Wolfe 149)

The notion of "selective perception" is important when understanding the process of stereotyping and "Orientalism" (to be explained fully below). In the previous diagram (Figure 1.4), the iconic imagery would be potent in evoking a preconception about ethnic peoples. Even if the intended message is clear in the mind of the communicator, the receiver may use selective perception to completely change the intent. The intended result is altered - yet the process is the same. Interpretation becomes dependent on the cultural disposition of the audience and what they let themselves see and hear.

In the same context, other factors may interfere with the interpretation of the message. Since the receiver does not exist in a social vacuum, the opinions of others will influence how the messages are accepted. The views of what H. Gans calls "opinion leaders", who are more heavily weighted by the receiver than by others, will determine how information is understood by the receiver. These "interferences" thus involve the refutation of Figure 1.3, the hypodermic model of medium based communication. That is, information is not "injected" into the receiver but mediated and negotiated. The process of communication and interpretation is bi-directional and amorously influences those that have and will use the same method of interaction. The result is that the information received is dependent on the receiver's ability or compulsion to receive. In Figure 1.5, this

compulsion is mapped as the confirmation or denial of the verisimilitude. Depending on the outcome of the belief, concepts, such as Orientalism, are either reinforced or rejected. The overall process as described in Figure 1.5 exists within a cycle so that each confirmation or denial becomes part of the shared cultural experience of both the communicator and the receiver. Information is processed by accessing and interpreting its verisimilitude.

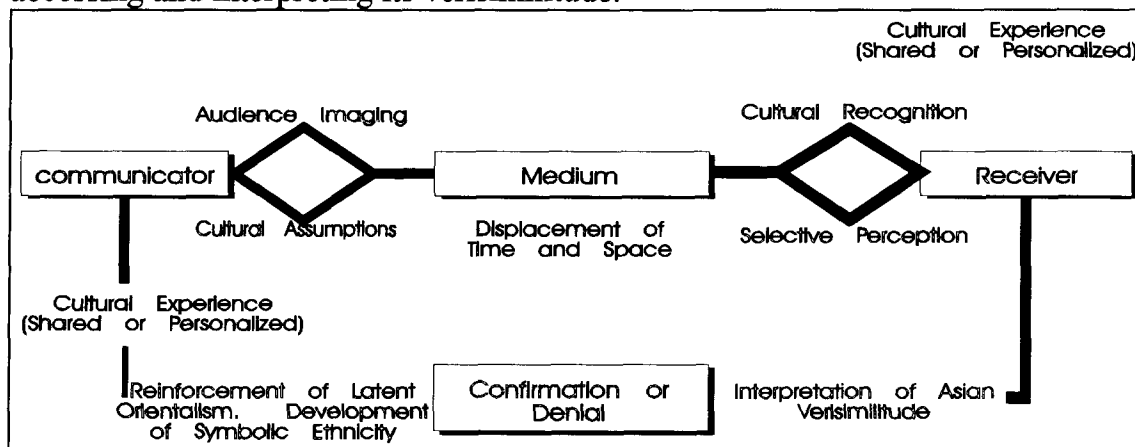


Figure 1.5. Interaction between Receiver and Communicator including elliptical indirect power relation and confirmation/denial process.

Yet what is the general nature of information? What types of messages tend to be more powerful than others? How does the communicator conceive of what and how to portray a cohesive message? H. Gans, in 1957, looked at the cinematic example of these questions in his studies of "audience images" in the movie-making process. (Gans 1957, 134) In this model, he notes that, as in all social interactions, there must be a means to ensure that the "role images" being portrayed are realistically correlated between the participants in the communication process. In other words, preconceived notions of images match that of the audience's preconceptions in order for the truest reception of unaltered information. The cinema has developed this idea of conformity into highly formed genres and motifs. Yet obviously, a dilemma exists whenever one attempts to

balance both preconceived notions and true communication. When the images are of peoples, particularly ethnic peoples, the "audience image" and the "social image" become linked and the resulting message can be distorted. Such a mechanism of iconoclastic representation is called "Symbolic Ethnicity."

II. Process of Symbolic Ethnicity.

a mobile army of metaphors, metonym, and anthropomorphism - in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are.

(Nietzsche 46-47) ⁶

In the Compression Model of communication identified above, several different influences that mediate the flow of information were discussed. Some of these focused the participants in the communications process, as discussed in the last section. This section considers the information within the system and, more specifically, the influence of selective perception and the premise of audience imagery. How has the Asian been represented in the context of the communicative process? Why has this sort of representation been so prevalent within today's films? These are the questions that will be discussed in formulating the process of Symbolic Ethnicity. (Gans 1978, 29)

Symbolic Ethnicity is described by Gans as the process in which ethnic identity is solely associated with iconic elements of the culture. (Gans 1978, 27-32) In his article, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures

in America", Gans explains the trend among third and fourth generation Catholic and Jewish peoples whom have begun to re-associate themselves with their ethnic culture. Gans found that the ethnic associations were mainly symbolic and that the traditional community interactions were lost. These third and fourth generation ethnic groups began to identify their ethnic race in a personal perspective as opposed to a communal one. The result is an outward ethnic identity that uses superficial symbols and icons to label and categorize a certain race. Such a system of identification is also seen in cinema. Race and ethnicity is represented through a series of images based on ethnic symbols and icons. These symbols and icons are accepted as "ethnic" though past associations based on social and historical judgments -- a Logical Priority. (Wollen 37) For images of Asian ethnic cultures, the Logical Priority is reinforced and maintained by the dominant culture in North America, namely the Occidental culture. This process of defining Asian cultures from Occidental beliefs is termed Orientalism. (Said 206)

In this section of Chapter One, an examination of two aspects of Symbolic Ethnicity will allow further understanding of how Asian icons have become the major identifying factor in Asian ethnic culture. The first aspect of Symbolic Ethnicity is the communicative hierarchy existing in the process of representation. By examining how Asian "difference" is seen through Eurocentric representation, Symbolic Ethnicity can be seen as a mechanism to contain difference and maintain homogeneity. As well, the premises of Logical Priority will be examined. Logical Priority is simply the premise that information has a pre-existing truth. (Wollen 37) Second aspect of Symbolic Ethnicity examined in this section is the specific information found in the text (film, video, literature). In most of the texts that relate to Asian culture and are received by North American society are based on Orientalism dictated by Western/European ideology. By discussing Orientalism in

relation to Logical Priority, the elemental aspects of Asian representation are revealed. Aspects of self-identity and self-representation dictated by social tensions between individual and community are discussed.

In film, the Asian has often been shown as the "Other."⁷ The "Other" is useful in Western society because it enables contrast and judgment of other peoples against assumed social and historical standards. The "Other" is a reaffirmation of Western society's attempt to control and civilize different cultures. It is the "difference" from the Occident that intrigues the North American population.⁸ The Asian difference can be used as a context to encompass a wide variety of systems involving patterns of communication. For example, difference can be articulated by individual and group communications or developed with inter-group and intra-group communication. Difference is recognized either within an entity such as a group or individual, or difference can be recognized from outside an entity. In other words, "difference" can be noticed within once community or within another's. In the majority of films today, the recognizable difference is directed at outside entities. *They are different from us.* Films produced by and for smaller community groups usually deal with the issue of self-recognized difference. *We are different from them.*

For the Asian community in North America, identity is defined as an acknowledgment of difference. What is remarkable is how this difference is seen through films made by both Asians and non-Asians. In truth, the process of recognizing difference is similar for both parties. Difference is first noted when the group viewed does not follow a recognizable standard. The assumption here is that there are codes and pre-existing templates that are used to measure credibility. Does a certain object match the standard given by a certain culture?

The idea of a standard or a code to judge meaning is developed in many semiotic studies of language and cinema. The idea of a "Logical Priority" in meaning aids the process of Symbolic Ethnicity. Logical Priority suggests that there is an inherent meaning in all symbols. That an icon, symbol or index has a pre-existing meaning opens the question of where the source of the meaning originated. Meaning is then evaluated on the basis of pre-existing meaning. Similarly, identity becomes the correlation between the standard and the test. This is then measured in degrees of "difference." (Gans 1957, 112) The standard is socially and culturally developed over time. In cinema, although the standard may shift, the main process of recognizing identity is still the correlation of social and cultural norms - audience imaging and role imaging.

As mentioned above, there are two interpretations of difference: one from outside and one from inside a group. Edward Said and Herbert Gans both look at identity of ethnic groups and how they are perceived outside that group. Gans further looks at how ethnic groups see themselves and the influence larger outside groups have over their self-esteem. Since it is the cinematic Asian image that concerns this thesis, Said's concept of Orientalism will provide a foundation of analysis on the social criteria necessary to establish Asian representation based on Symbolic Ethnicity.⁹

Edward Said's Orientalism relies on the notion of culturally preconceived history dictating the treatment of the Orient. Said defines Orientalism, the Occidental's treatment of the Orient, into two types - "Latent Orientalism" and "manifest Orientalism." It is these two modes of Orientalism that drive the process of Symbolic Ethnicity.

Latent Orientalism, as defined by Said, is a culturally pre-existing level of cognition developed through historically based exaggerations of the Orient. In Said's chapter, "Orientalism Now", he lists the various forms of Latent Orientalism as a "... body of ideas, beliefs, clichés, or learning's about the East, and other schools of thought at large in the culture." (Said 205) For Said, these beliefs, based on past knowledge, are unconsciously held and unchanging. Said states that "one of the important developments in nineteenth century Orientalism was the distillation of essential ideas about the Orient - its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness - into a separate and unchallenged coherence; thus for a writer to use the word Oriental was a reference for the reader sufficient to identify a specific body of information about the Orient." (Said 205) Obviously, the "distillation of essential ideas about the Orient," has manifested itself in the cinema via the Asian icon -- symbols of Asian identity that instantly invoke Latent Orientalism. For example, films like The Good Earth (Franklin, 1938) and Charlie Chan: Meeting at Midnight (Foster, 1944) have taken Asian themes and settings and placed an obvious Hollywood bias towards them. Asian culture is seen as passive multitudes that lack individuality in these and many other films. As with these motifs, other distinct Asian icons in the cinema are a reference to an unconscious constant - Latent Orientalism.

Manifest Orientalism is the expression of Latent Orientalism. Specifically, Manifest Orientalism is the textual response and consequence of Latent Orientalism. Whatever is contextualized as the Orient is found almost exclusively in Manifest Orientalism. Thus, it is here, in Manifest Orientalism, that reveals changes in how the Orient is seen by the Occident.

The Occident accentuates the difference to keep intact the "separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability...". (Said 207) Western attention, according to scholars like Renan, Marx, Lane, Sacy, Flaubert and Nerval, was required to reconstruct the Orient from its backwardness. (Said 206) Yet it is this backwardness that these and other scholars find so intriguing, because it permits them to easily name the essential difference between "us" and "them." This is a powerful means of identity since difference is then imposed onto the Orient by a group that assumes the higher ranking in the "natural" hierarchy.¹⁰

Orientalism, therefore, is seen as a body of knowledge that is used to label difference. There is a constant process of Latent Orientalism being transformed into a Manifest Orientalism. Latent Orientalism, as Said sees it, is constant. Manifest Orientalism, on the other hand, shifts and evolves to match the changing focus of the population. Said believes that the trend now, and the process' natural conclusion, is that these two Orientalisms will converge. Hence, latent and Manifest Orientalisms will become one. The correlation between Latent Orientalisms being directly represented and taken as absolute truth instantly, without critical or analytical thought, will be dictated by the Occident. The danger in this scenario is that Asian communities will begin to use Orientalisms to define their own identity. The fear is that Orientalism = Orient.

Said makes several points important to the process of Symbolic Ethnicity. Firstly, he proposes that Latent Orientalism exists on an unconscious, not a conscious level. Second, he maintains that Latent Orientalism is constant. Said claims that Orientalism changes only textually and not contextually, meaning images of Asian may evolve during a period of history, but the essential Orientalist

interpretation of the Asian remains the same. There is no question that an immense amount of literature exists, reinforcing both present and past Orientalisms. It is also plain to see that the Manifest Orientalism present today offers little chance that the current interpretation of the Orient will change. And thirdly, although Latent Orientalism has a possibility to change, the direction of Asian identity today has intensified Orientalism directly due to the convergence of latent and Manifest Orientalism. Simply put, the Asian community has taken Orientalist's views and have claimed it as their own.

The intensification of Orientalism in the cinema is due mostly to the processes involved with movie making. Since film is a largely visual medium, difference in ethnic identity is seen mostly visually.¹¹ For most mainstream narrative films, the plot becomes the main interest of the film. Characters, especially Asian ones, become superficial accessories to the setting. Establishment of Asian identity is first based on instantaneous recognition of Asian-ness. But does the self-representation of the Asian image escape the trap of Symbolic Ethnicity? Since Asian images must be recognized to establish identity, many films by Asian-Canadians consciously acknowledge the Symbolic Ethnicity in their work. In films discussed in Chapter Three, such as The Compact (Lem, 1988) and Sally's Beauty Spot (Lee, 1988), the Asian identities they attempt to define for themselves are dependent on a selective image of Orientalism. The overall effect from this dependence is the diminishment of identity as a communal quality to an identity based on symbols and icons.

III. Deculturalization

This process, of replacing communal, associative ethnic culture with icons and symbols of that culture can result in Deculturalization. Deculturalization is the process of a culture becoming increasingly absorbed by the surrounding dominant culture.¹² The desire, in the case of Asian culture, to define identity in a recognizable way follows the representation methods that confirm latent Orientalist beliefs. Orientalism therefore becomes an integral part of Asian identity. Deculturalization is the end result of ethnic representation through Symbolic Ethnicity.

Whether Asian identity, through Symbolic Ethnicity, is defined by Asian or Non-Asian film makers, the result is always the Deculturalization of the Asian image. Herbert Gans stated that in a population consisting of many smaller cultural groups, the smaller cultural groups will eventually culturalize themselves toward the dominant culture. Depicted graphically, the dominant culture is represented by a straight diagonal line and the smaller cultures are points surrounding the line. With time, these points representing the smaller cultures will merge into the straight line and become part of the dominant culture. Gans calls this the Straight Line Theory. (Gans 1979, 17) Symbolic Ethnicity, therefore, can be shown to promote both the Straight Line Theory and the process of Deculturalization.

For Deculturalization to exist, there must be at least two groups differing in identity and culture. The "Own Group", in this thesis, is the group that struggles to maintain its own identity in the face of a larger dominant group. The dominant group is the "Other Group." Each group tries to maintain their identity within the social hierarchy by differing methods. For the dominant group (the Other Group),

their identity is maintained through imposing a image onto the Own Group -- Orientalism. For the Own Group, identity is maintained by creating an ethnocentric atmosphere. Unlike the Other Group, who can also create a merged ethnocentric atmosphere, the Own Group will isolate their culture as much as possible. This maintenance ultimately fails due to the frictions inherent between the two groups. The overwhelming prevalence of the Other Group will not only force the Own Group to follow the Straight Line Theory and deculturalize from their own heritage, but will impose upon the Own Group an identity that follows the doctrine of Orientalism.

The hierarchy of Own Group and Other Group is based upon displacement. Displacement dictates why the Own Group must struggle to keep its own identity against the Other group. The Own Group, when displaced, is alienated from a circumstance where it is the Other Group. For example, the Own Group may be displaced geographically, psychologically, socially or economically. In the case of Asian communities, displacement occurs:

- Geographically, in that they are separated from their Asian homeland, where they are the Other Group.
- Psychologically, in that they follow different cultural values than the Other Group, Anglo-Canadians.
- Socially, in that they associate amongst other Asians due to a common language.

The displaced group defends its cultural identity through isolation and ethnocentrism. Yet as mentioned before, the dominant Other Group will eventually influence how the Own Group will view itself. Members of the Own Group, in the

process of Deculturalization will eventually resort to Symbolic Ethnicity to identity themselves. (See figure 1.6).

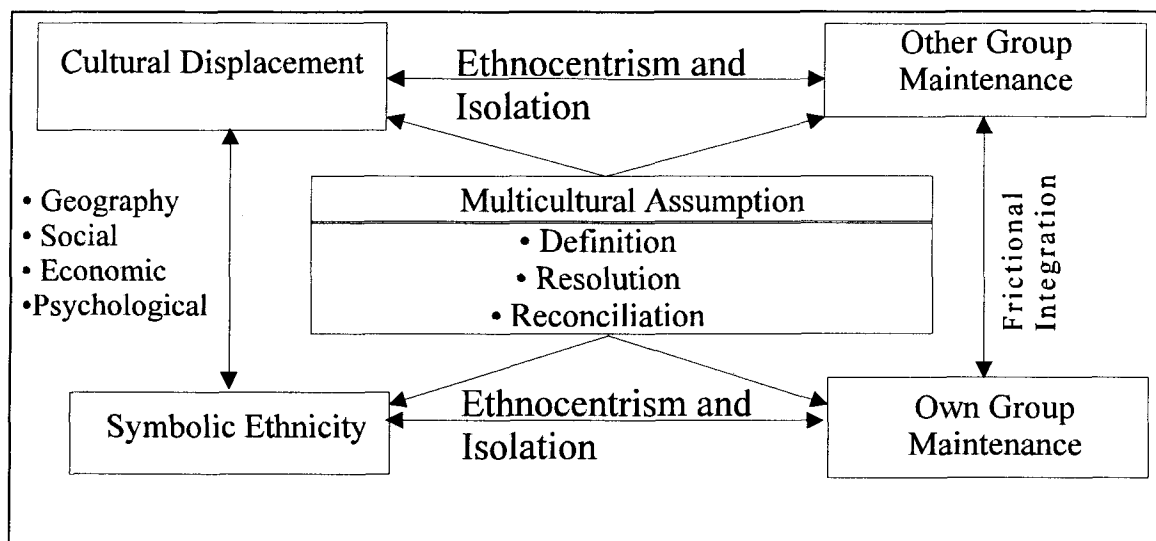


Figure 1.6: Process of Deculturalization.

At the center of the constituent parts the process of Deculturalization is the Multicultural Assumption. (Burnet 4-10.) The Multicultural Assumption supposes that by encouraging the uniqueness of marginal groups (Own Groups), the strength of the dominant group (Other Group) will be bolstered. In effect, the assumption seeks to reconcile differences by tolerating individual identities, while maintaining authority of the dominant culture.¹³ Yet by retaining the authority, the dominant group is able to control and influence how the marginal group is defined. The notion of the Multicultural Assumption is arguably the key element to the process of Deculturalization.

The significance of Deculturalization on films about Asian identity cannot be ignored. The power that the dominant group (Other Group) has in defining identity can be shown by the presence of Orientalist views in Hollywood

mainstream films. These films promote difference, yet define the difference in a way that is feared or ridiculed. The result of Deculturalization also can be shown in Asian Canadian films that seek to define Asian identity within the Asian community. In these films, the methods of self-representation inevitably follow the trend of Symbolic Ethnicity. Both categories of films therefore display some form of Deculturalization.

Throughout all the issues discussed in this chapter, the common thread is that ethnic identity is not independent of the dominant culture. In the communication models addressed, the receiver is able to convey to the communicator a varying degree of verisimilitude depending on the images perceived authenticity. The receiver and communicator exist in a culturally influenced environment and, thus, will call upon these influences when deciding whether to accept or reject the images. These selected images, as seen in the issue of Symbolic Ethnicity, are used to define, instead of to represent ethnicity. In other words, icons and symbols are used to label and codify ethnicity. For Asian ethnicity, Orientalism is the basis of the codified Asian identity. The transformation of Latent Orientalism to Manifest Orientalism intensifies stereotypes with each iteration. The final result from all these elements is the Deculturalization of the Asian identity. Through images perceived and accepted by Asians and Non-Asians, the Asian community is inescapably sliding towards the dominant culture. In other words, the principle of Gans' straight line theory is reinforced by the methods discussed in this chapter of Asian representation.

Evidences for the straight line theory and Deculturalization are seen in the films that will be investigated in the following two chapters. In Chapter Two, films that use an Asian setting or theme are investigated. What will be discussed is the

use of symbols and icons that are rooted in the Orientalist tradition. Through a series of antinomies, these films use the differences of cultures to advance the authority of the dominant culture over the Asian culture. In Chapter Three, films and videos by Asian Canadians will be examined to see how they approach self-representation. This chapter will chart, specifically, how elements of Symbolic Ethnicity have led to Deculturalization. Ultimately, the following chapters will show the need to acknowledge the dilemma of self-representation, and the need to a new cinematic language to define ethnicity.

Chapter Two

Treatment of the Asian Image in Hollywood

This chapter examines the notion of symbolic ethnicity in mainstream films dealing with Asian themes. By looking into how such films use the Asian image and how these films relate Asian themes within a North American context, a pattern of antinomies becomes evident. These antinomies are visually represented by a series of icons that punctuate the theme of difference between Asian and Non-Asian cultures. Illustrating this pattern are three films that best exemplify the current trend in the use of the Asian image in mainstream films -- Year of the Dragon (Cimino 1982), 1000 Pieces of Gold (Kelly 1991), and China Girl (Ferraras 1987). These films are significantly representative of the process of Symbolic Ethnicity to allow closer discussion of how film works towards becoming a social document.

Year of the Dragon, 1000 Pieces of Gold and China Girl are all relatively recent releases and thus can show how past representations of the Asian image have influenced current thoughts on the contemporary Asian theme. Year of the Dragon and China Girl are both set in the present and center their conflicts on the integration of Chinese culture into modern day North American society. As such, these two films are good examples of how Hollywood sees the multicultural situation and how they perceive the resolution to the clash of traditions. In 1000

Pieces of Gold, the story is set in the late 1800's, mainly in a small working class town near San Francisco. This film shows how Asian history is mediated and told through a distinct American (e.g. White) perspective. Despite its use of the western/cowboy genre setting, the film comments on modern conflicts of integration. The interesting elements of 1000 Pieces of Gold are its amalgamation of Western genre icons and conventions, and the Asian theme as an effective foreign association.

All three films share certain structural similarities. Each uses the difficulties of integration as the focus of the plot. Obviously, the films use different scenarios to develop friction; yet, as will be shown, the same resolution is used to close the conflict. All of these films feature predominantly either an Asian protagonist and/or an Asian antagonist. As well, these Asian characters are developed within the diegesis in tandem with their Non-Asian counterpart. Instead of using films that deal with Asians as only minor characters, I've chosen these films because the Asian character is integral to the storyline. As such, Asians are not treated as merely extras, detailing the setting, but develop structural relationships that motivate the plot of the film. Even if some Asians are used as details to the setting, as in some instances, the examination of such incidences shows exactly how symbolic ethnicity plays a role in defining Asian identity.

Another element common to Year of the Dragon, 1000 Pieces of Gold, and China Girl is the location of Chinatown. In all three films, Chinatown is used to promote a narrow and unappealing view of an Asian ethnic community is envisioned in Hollywood cinema. From an immigrant haven, to a hellish slaughterhouse, the representation of Chinatown comments on the Asian relationship to North America society.

This chapter investigates how Asian characters are portrayed and interact with their surroundings. The analysis of the films will produce a list of recurring icons and associations that, shown together, indicate a pattern of symbols. Logically, these icons seem to proliferate when there is an establishment of characters within a location. Therefore, special attention will be concentrated on how each Asian character and location is introduced in comparison with how non-Asian characters and locations are introduced. The second part of the chapter will examine how two different cultures relate to one another on both an individual and community level. Finally, by examining the resolutions to the plot conflicts, the films' assumptions about integration become clear: either there is an impossibility of integration or there is a fear of it.

I. Establishing the Presentation of the Asian and Non-Asian Character and Setting

Year of the Dragon follows a New York investigator, Stanley White, assigned to the rough confines of Chinatown. His arch nemesis is Tey, a Chinese mobster bent on taking control of the drug and gang syndicate from elder mobsters such as Harry Yeung. As Stanley tries to find enough evidence of Tey's wrongdoings to convict him, Stanley befriends an Asian reporter, Tracy Tze, whom he uses to manipulate the press. The film begins oddly enough with a disclaimer reassuring that the representation of the Chinese community was not meant to offend or depict any sort of reality. This notice, presumably, was placed in the film after numerous community groups protested the depiction of Chinatown and the Chinese community.¹⁴ After the disclaimer, the film begins with the sounds of pounding drums. The location and time frame are established by the use

of the Dragon costume in the traditional dragon dance. It is Chinese New Year, Chinatown, New York. The first shot specifically shows the dragon's mouth lunging into the camera and virtually into the audience. Along with the tribal sounds of the drums, firecrackers are heard in a startling flurry of loud explosions. What does this introduction to the film invoke?

From the startling images of dragons to the sounds of pounding drums, the impressions begin with aggression. Seamlessly, the film follows this establishing shot with the shocking progression of a violent murder. An elderly Chinese man, eating in a Chinese restaurant, is stabbed by a Chinese youth. This is the setting of the film -- an anarchistic community killing itself. Stanley White states, as he is reassigned onto the Chinatown beat, "the gutters of Chinatown are going to run red with blood."

In China Girl, the film begins with the mood of discontentment. In a slow motion sequence, a Chinese family stands outside a building raising a new sign indicating that they are just opening a new restaurant. Intercut with this proud moment for the family are a montage of images of Italian merchants looking outside of their businesses obviously unhappy that a Chinese family is intruding in on their community. With the use of slow motion, this discontent is amplified since the anger is released slowly as though it is simmering. The Italian community members just stare at the sign being hoisted up on the building, a symbol of a threat to their community.

The premise of China Girl is similar to Year of the Dragon in the sense that both deal with gang warfare and a romantic interracial relationship. In China Girl, the conflict between interracial gangs is the predominant factor of the violence.

Violence is introduced soon after the beginning sequence with Asian gang members attacking an Italian boy for dancing with a Chinese girl. The violent behavior of the Asian gangs is unrelentingly portrayed from this point on.

For the film 1000 Pieces of Gold, the setting in the introduction is Tibet. In order not to confuse the viewer, the subtitle gives the location and the year -- "Northern China, 1880." Amongst the desert setting is a woman in peasant clothes walking against the wind and sand towards a small shelter. She enters the compounds of the house and begins unloading clothes from her basket. Throughout this sequence are the sounds of Asian influenced music played on a wood flute. The first symbol of Asian culture is the wide brimmed circular hat (coolie) that the woman wears. Unlike China Girl or Year of the Dragon, there is initially no sense of violence. However, the film soon verifies other stereotypes.

Based on a true story, as the film makes clear in its first five minutes of the film, 1000 Pieces of Gold concerns this Tibetan woman, named Lailu, who is sold by her father to a slave trader. The film chronicles her life in a small town in California. She is sold to a Chinese merchant as a wife, yet refuses his request to prostitute herself for the saloon he has leased from a White community leader, Charlie. Soon Charlie and Lailu become involved and must struggle with the conflicts that exist between their two cultures. Like the two other films, 1000 Pieces of Gold develops the theme of Asian integration into America using the metaphor of inter-racial romance.

By surveying the icons used in the introductions of these films a pattern will emerge that, in later discussions, will be matched to icons used in films by

Asian North Americans. In Year of the Dragon, the first set of associations shown is:

- Drumming sounds
- Dragon costume
- Fire Crackers
- Ritual Celebration
- Chinatown
- The Chinese Restaurant
- Weapons -- Knife Attack
- The Chinese Woman Reporter ¹⁵

Other associations of Asian culture in the introduction are:

- Asian Homogeneity in Chinatown -- Absence of Non-Asians
- Chaotic crowding
- The Chinese horde
- Violence via the Stabbing
- The Asian Gang Member

In China Girl, there are the recurring incidences of violence as well. Some of the icons in the introduction here are:

- The Restaurant.
- The Knife
- The Chinese masses (in a Chinatown disco)
- Chinatown
- The Asian Gang Member

In both films, the Asian Gang Member is young and ruthless -- wielding a knife with deadly results. For the film 1000 Pieces of Gold, the icons are developed in a less flamboyant fashion since the subtitle states the location and mood:

- Peasant
- Coolie Hat
- Large family

With the introduction of Lau Lu into America, the recurring icons are established:

- The Chinese masses
- The Merchant Chinese
- Chinatown

Lau Lu is portrayed as the traditional Western icon of the loner, coping with strange, unsympathetic surroundings with little community support. The only other Chinese community members are two men who have integrated into the "Cowboy Culture". One of the characters is actually called Cowboy Jim. Both have attempted to put their Chinese presence in the background in order to succeed in American commerce.

In the first two films, Year of the Dragon and China Girl, the most explosive theme associated with the icons is violence. From firecrackers to knives to gang members, the Hollywood view of Chinatown and its inhabitants is one of uncontrolled violence. How does this affect the viewer and how can the viewer recognize this community in the film as accurate or inaccurate?

In each film, the end result of the introduction is violence. Yet before each episode of violence, a distinct series of icons tells the audience that they are watching a sequence of events in a location populated by Asians. As Said has stated, the Orientalisms of the past are manifested in films such as these (Said 201-226). Partial truths and non-truths are exaggerated and become codes of reality. The codes are not static, as some may believe, but have progressed and are re-entrenched by constant repetition. The introduction of the Asian woman reporter in Year of the Dragon is a new code, a new stereotype of the Connie Chung women. The success of an Asian-American woman in the high profile medium of television has developed through repetition of the association: Asian → woman → aggressive reporter. Through this repetition, the association codifies itself into the psyche of the viewer audience. The result is a priority of logic that is used to gauge verisimilitude. If a sequence of statements is presented, only the statements that are recognized through repetition are deemed as accurate (Wollen 116-155). There is a progression of symbols in the introductions of the three films that re-establish logical priorities of recognition.

Chinese Masses → Chinese Peasant → Chinatown → Chinese Community Leader
→ Chinese Mob → Chinese Youth → Asian Gang Member.

Icons such as Chinatown, Chinese elders, and Chinese youths become synonymous with danger, exoticism and Otherness.

When examining how each of the major Asian Characters is introduced, as compared to the introduction of the White characters, a similar pattern is observed. The introduction of major Asian characters within all these films is dependent on

gender in the use of the associated icons. The Asian females in all these roles are treated as a threat to either the status quo or to the progression of race relations. All of the Asian women in these films become seductresses. In contrast, the Asian males are portrayed as either ruthless and violent, or the complete opposite, passive and victimized.

The introduction of the lead female, Thai, in China Girl is first seen in a Chinatown discotheque. As she dances (sequence in slow motion), an Italian boy, Tony, sees her and approaches. When he reaches the "China Girl" they begin to dance with each other. This dance is stopped by the group of Asian male youths that disapprove of the interaction. After telling the Italian boy to stay away and telling the Chinese girl not to fraternize, the gang begins an extended chase of the Italian boy that only ends when a more numerous Italian gang appears. The end result is a gang fight that concludes when the authorities appear. Although this is a predictable sequence of events, especially in a mainstream Hollywood film, the interesting aspects of these introductions of characters are the polar opposites between male and female, yet the similarities between Chinese and Italians.

In 1000 Pieces of Gold, Lau Lu is first introduced as the peasant Tibetan sold to a slave trader. The first speaking Asian other than Lau Lu is a female auctioneer who sells Lau Lu to Cowboy Jim. Cowboy Jim then delivers Lau Lu to his boss, an Asian saloon manager. In all instances, the Asian male is associated not with legitimate commerce but with illicit commerce. Thus greed becomes another association with the Asian community. Seen in all three films, the lust for money and power become a natural part of the Chinatown landscape. As a plot device, this Asian lust for wealth is extremely effective since it provides a threat to the opposing community in the film. Even the title, 1000 Pieces of Gold, is a reference

to Lau Lu's goal of making enough money to travel back to Tibet to see her father once more. In contrast, the White characters in the film are more varied in personality. There is Charlie, the kind hearted owner of the Saloon. There is the prostitute, the kind hearted friend and subsequent boss of Lau Lu. There are also various cowboy type characters that drink in the saloon and display the typical western genre traits that one expects in a western setting. It is the mob mentality of these cowboys that leads to Cowboy Jim and his boss' exodus and the loss of their dream of success. Since both Jim and his boss' goals are based on greed, viewer sympathy towards them is low.

The notion of Asian greed is most predominant in the films dealing with organized crime. Year of the Dragon's antagonist is the feared mobster, Tey. Impeccably dressed and well groomed, he personifies and reinforces the image of the Asian criminal. Tey's ruthless progression towards the top of the Asian crime organization is littered with killings, betrayals, lies and deception -- a perfect Hollywood antagonist for a White New York Investigator named Stanley White. Stanley's character is interesting in that, being Polish, he himself belongs in an ethnic community. His denial (he changed his name from Kolowski to White) and his pride ("I'm not Italian, I'm a Polack and I can't be bought".) show the internal conflicts of identity he is going through. The treatment of this character is also not a flattering portrayal. His reception into Chinatown is cordial yet not completely welcome. Tey tells Stanley, "For a thousand years, the Chinese will not go to the police." Stanley, with hostility, replies, "One thousand years is a lot of bullshit. America is 200 years old so you better get your clocks fixed."

Stanley White is introduced during an aftermath of a bloody assignation. Since he has a position of authority, the icons surrounding him, such as a police

officer on a horse, a holster and a gun, and a police badge, all emphasize his power over the district he serves. Yet White is unorthodox in his methods and is criticized throughout the film on his lack of strict police procedure. During White's introduction, the officer on the horse says, "the best deterrent to crime is a visible police presence. You would know that if you put on a uniform for once." As White replies "That's not my style." In comparison, the icons associated with Tey are symbols of power within the community. The Asian mobster is shown by setting his headquarters in a basement where gambling takes place. Again, the Chinese masses and illicit commerce are predominant, emphasized by the cramped quarters they are using.

The other major Asian Character is Tracy Tze, the news reporter. Ambitious and direct, Tze follows the new stereotype of the "Connie Chung" personae. In this instance, Tze attempts to void all Asian icons in her life. In her personal life she makes it clear that she dates only White men. Thus, the icons that surround her relate to her success in her career and not to her ethnic background. Her apartment, her workplace and her friends are all seen as outside of the Chinese community. As a reporter, she is seen as an outsider trying to look in -- as can be shown when she is held back during the funeral of Harry the Elder. Even with her successful career and her aggressive reporting skills, however, Tze is still portrayed as a passive Asian female when Stanley forces himself on her and she, after some struggle, accepts his sexual advances. Later, she is raped by several Asian gang members so as to intimidate her to stop the investigation of Tey. Even without the typical Asian surroundings, Tze is still forced to play a submissive Asian female.

As mentioned before, Chinatown is the main location for Year of the Dragon, China Girl and, to a lesser extent, 1000 Pieces of Gold. Other films such as Hammet (Wenders 1981), Chinatown (Polanski 1974), and even Bladerunner (Scott 1981) (actually it's Little Tokyo) use the displaced setting of an Asian marketplace in North America. It is important that Chinatown be seen as a displaced location within the confines of a larger metropolitan city. Whether it is Los Angeles, New York or San Francisco, Chinatown has become the center for Asian commerce and community.

Again, it is useful to examine how Chinatown is introduced in these films and how it is seen throughout their narratives. As mentioned above, Year of the Dragon begins with the Dragon dance and an assassination in a Chinese restaurant. As the film follows Stanley's quest to put Tey away, Chinatown is seen as a forbidden place to non-Asians. Chinatown becomes a place of conspiracy. Tey tells White, "Chinatown can be very easy or very hard." In this instance, White is not merely trying to put away a crime leader, but trying to right what he thinks is wrong with Chinatown (namely, the Chinese refusal to fully integrate into the dominant culture). The struggle between Stanley White and the people of Chinatown represents the struggle of an individual against a community.

In China Girl, the first location within Chinatown is, oddly enough, a discotheque. The important element about this introduction is that it is set at night. Throughout the film, Chinatown is rarely seen during the day. This is noticeable only because the Italian district is seen almost exclusively in the day. The few times sunlight is seen in Chinatown occur during violent uprisings: the deaths of Thai and Tony, and during the conspiracy to murder Tony. These scenes can be shot during the day because the overall emotional tone of darkness still prevails.

Chinatown in 1000 Pieces of Gold, unlike Year of the Dragon and China Girl, is seen as a haven, not as a threat to the lead character. Since the lead character is an Asian and not White, like Stanley White or Tony Monzi, the film treats Chinatown as a place where Lau Lu can be treated as a community member instead of a slave (as she is outside of Chinatown). Yet there are motifs that are constant in this film as in others: again the idea of Chinese masses is present and the people in Chinatown are seen, without exception, to be passive, working class types who happily smile as they perform their chores. In the local Chinese store, acupuncture is performed while customers shop for their daily groceries. Outside of the small Chinatown, Lau Lu's responsibility as a wife and a slave continue.

In surveying the filmic associations of Chinatown in these films, a similarity of icons is evident in the introductions of the films:

- Chinese Masses
- Passivity
- Danger
- Mystery
- Evil
- Xenophobia
- Illicit Commerce
- Darkness

Each of these descriptors evokes an unflattering image of Chinatown, and by association, Asians. Historically, such dark views of Asian images are familiar. In literature and early film, the use of the "foreigner within" was a useful tool to

create an atmosphere of conflict. It would seem that contemporary film still uses this device of the unfamiliar area in a familiar setting.

For these films, Chinatown is a location of identity. The association with Chinatown and Asians is so dependent on each other, that the community takes on the characteristics of the location. As a result, not only the location of Chinatown becomes a place of danger and evil, but also the people. Yet how do people within Chinatown relate to each other? Are they as evil as or more evil than the people of non-Asian descent, as portrayed in the films? To understand how the Asian image is extrapolated to an iconic identity, the interaction between characters must be socially and cinematically understood.

II. Structural Relationships of Individuals and Communities

The structural relationship between the characters of the films often dictates the identity traits of the individual and the community. The constancy of ethnic representation and identity is dependent on the degree and influence of integration of the characters into mainstream society. Integration and definition become linked in that the response to integration may either reinforce ethnic codes or forge new ones. In all the films mentioned in this chapter, integration is the central conflict to be resolved. How this conflict is conveyed and resolved prescribes how mainstream cinema looks at integration and its ramifications.

Socially, the ramifications of integration within an ethnic community, according to Gans (Gans 1979, 17-19) are a steady decline in the original associations with ethnicity. From unrelenting integration of outside influences,

self-definition becomes less associated with the community as a collective, and becomes more associated with personal ethnicity as self. As the definition of ethnicity becomes increasingly personal, the need to reassert the community associations decreases. Ethnicity then becomes a symbolic identity more than a lifestyle. The definition of ethnicity, as formed by cinema, follows this symbolic pattern. In fact, in most cinema that deal with ethnic integration, ethnic lifestyle is inseparable from its symbolic codes. Ethnic lifestyle is not an associative or collective means of existence, but a symbolic code -- an icon.

Conflict is established when a symbolic ethnic lifestyle clashes with either the established lifestyle or with another symbolic ethnic lifestyle. All of these lifestyles are, in a sense, symbolic, in that lifestyles are difficult to define in substance. In cinema, however, the undefinable becomes not only definable, but easily categorized and codified. In the three films, China Girl, 1000 Pieces of Gold, and Year of the Dragon, the symbolic nature of lifestyle and associations can be mapped out; thus, the films show how personal associations are imposed, regulating the viewer's sympathy of the conflicts and resolutions.

The ethnic clash in China Girl is the central conflict that is violently resolved. The characters revolve simply on an "I'm Italian/Chinese and you're not" mentality. It is the xenophobic nature of these two communities that results in violence. All the characters are cartoon stereotypes of their ethnic background. There is the hot headed Italian man who refuses any authority, even when it threatens his life. There is the hot headed Chinese man who refuses any authority, even when it threatens his life. There is the mild mannered Chinese Girl and her mild mannered Italian boyfriend. There is the Godfather-like Italian Mobster, and a Fu Manchu-like Chinese Mobster. In all, the film portrays the ethnic groups just

as the news media and Hollywood see them. Both ethnic groups deal with organized crime and are portrayed as uncontrollable lawless communities. Within each community is a series of inter-group relationships that define the actions of the individual. For the Chinese community, the inter-group relationships deal with family and peer hierarchies.

Within the Chinese Community:

Brother ↔ Sister

Brother ↔ Youth Gang

Youth Gang ↔ Mafia

In many ways, the Italian inter-group interaction parallels the Chinese community in that both must deal with the family and crime element of their community.

Within the Italian Community:

Mother ↔ Son

Brother ↔ Younger Brother

Both Brothers ↔ Youth Gang

Youth Gang ↔ Mafia

In contrasting the two situations, the most notable difference is the absence of parental influence within the main Chinese relational hierarchy. The scenario is that the brother and sister have immigrated from Hong Kong without their parents. No reason was given for their stay and there was no indication that they were just visitors. The impression left upon the audience is that these two people were only temporary residents of the United States. Their territory was restricted to the

confines of Chinatown and it was implicit that for them that to venture outside of Chinatown was dangerous and foolhardy.¹⁶

The Italian community, on the other hand, is portrayed as a permanent population. There is no indication that Little Italy and its people are a temporary imposition on the city. When Thai and her brother get into trouble, their only option is to leave the United States and to head back to Hong Kong. That option is not even considered when Tony and his brother suffer from a similar situation. The assumption of the permanency of the Italian community, as opposed to the temporality of the Chinese community, is further strengthened with the strong parent-sibling ties of Tony, his brother and their mother. The mother figure acts as an anchor to ethnic tradition and thus stabilizes the family within America. The family situation with Thai and her brother is less defined. The whereabouts of their parents is never revealed, and their only allegiance is to themselves and each other. When the two communities begin to integrate, this sibling allegiance begins to dissolve.

The modes of integration in China Girl are violent, romantic, and commercial.¹⁷ The three personal interactions between the two communities illustrate these modes:

Inter-group Interactions:

Romantic	Thai ↔ Tony
Violent	Chinese Gang ↔ Italian Gang
Commercial	Chinese Mafia ↔ Italian Mafia

The relationship between Thai and Tony is the catalyst that results in romance and violence. As stated before, the threat of integration begins at the onset of the film. In fact, the threat of integration is a threat to the status quo existing between the two communities. Eventually, the romance between the two youths becomes a threat to the two Mafiosi in that the merger of the crime organizations is offset by the gang rivalry spurred on by the disapproval of the romance. This simple circular situation is the structure of the relationship conflict. Conflict is propelled to the next level of intensity through violence that follows almost every sequence involving integration. For example, in the introduction of the film, the attempt of Tony to dance with Thai is followed by a violent response by a Chinese youth gang. In another example, Thai teaches Tony the Chinese phrase for "I love you" and Tony reciprocates by teaching Thai the Italian phrase for the same. The scene is interrupted by members of the Chinese youth gang attacking Tony for being with Thai. The most obvious example of violence following an episode of integration is the death of both Thai and Tony as they walk hand in hand along the streets of Chinatown in the final sequence of the film. From the opening of the Chinese restaurant in Little Italy, to the cooperation between the Chinese and Italian Mafia, violent sequences are traced back to some attempt at integration. The underlying assumption of China Girl is that violence is the result of integration.

The equation of integration = violence also propels the conflicts in Year of the Dragon. Like China Girl, Year of the Dragon uses the romantic coupling of interracial backgrounds to justify the retribution of violence. Stanley's affection for Tracy results in the death of Stanley's wife, Connie, and the rape of Tracy. Although the violence is not as directly linked to integration as China Girl, nevertheless, violence ultimately is offered as the solution to the integration of Chinatown. Again, as in China Girl, the Asian population is still restricted to

Chinatown. Yet the two main Chinese characters, Tey and Tracy exist beyond Chinatown in an effort to fulfill their goals.

Relations within the Chinese Community:

Tey ↔ Tze (both may be considered outsiders as well)

Tey ↔ Chinese Youth Gang

Tey ↔ Chinese Elder Crime Leaders

In this film, Tey best exemplifies Chinatown, and of course, being the antagonist, represents the "evil" nature of the Chinese. Tey deals with the elders and the youth gangs in a manipulative way that results in his acquisition of power. The hierarchy within the crime organization mirrors the hierarchy within the Chinese community.

Tracy Tze, as a character, is unusual in that she both rejects her background as an Asian American and yet owes her success in using it to become a journalist in Chinatown. In a sense, she is devoid of a community since in most situations in Chinatown, she must struggle to look inside the community. This struggle with identity is also seen in Stanley White's relationship with others.

Relations outside of the Chinese Community:

Stanley ↔ Police Commissioner

Stanley ↔ Connie (Wife)

Stanley ↔ Captain (Stanley's boss & Connie's lover)

In symmetry with Tey's association with the Chinese community, Stanley is the focal point of the community outside of Chinatown. Stanley is the archetypal blue-collar worker that deals with the mundane aspects of life such as a broken

marriage and an uncooperative boss. Tey, in contrast, seems to avoid such aspects of life and is seen only indulging in corruption. Stanley's dealings with other people are almost always adversarial, giving the impression that he is a singular force trying to right the wrongs of everyone around him.

Stanley's dealings with the Chinese community are another focal point of integration. The violence that follows Stanley and Tey is seen as a result of the lack of tolerance between the Chinese and the dominant social order. The disparity between the two social orders causes the disruptions that lead to violence.

Interaction between Communities:

Violent Stanley ↔ Tey

Romantic Stanley ↔ Tze

Subjugative Stanley ↔ Quan (Undercover Chinese Police Officer)

In each relationship, Stanley addresses the three stereotypes of Asian as evil, submissive and subservient.

The qualities of submissiveness and subservience are echoed in the major themes of 1000 Pieces of Gold. In this film, the communities are less defined and the main character, Lau Lu, must cope with being outside of all the groups in one sense or another. Since Lau Lu is abducted from her homeland in Tibet, her transplantation into America, even within a Chinese community, is still a forced displacement, leaving her an outsider. This is accentuated by the other Asian characters she must interact with.

Interaction within Community:

Laulu ↔ Cowboy Jim

Laulu ↔ Boss

Laulu ↔ Slave Trader

Cowboy Jim ↔ Boss

Surrounded by difference, Laulu develops her own self-identity away from the Asian community around her. She interacts with minor Asian characters briefly, such as the store owner and workers in Chinatown, but her main Asian interactions are with Cowboy Jim and Boss. Both Cowboy Jim and Boss distance themselves from their Asian backgrounds and, like Laulu, are characters outside the Asian community of Chinatown. They are never seen in Chinatown nor do they interact with other Asians except the ones that have business ties with them. As such, their definition of ethnicity has been replaced by the codes of the west -- the cowboy, the saloon manager. The relationship between Cowboy Jim and Boss retains the hierarchy of Asian authority as well as a typical employee -- employer relationship. Both characters avoid traditional Chinese clothing; instead, they define themselves as an integral part of the western genre. Laulu herself sheds the traditional wardrobe of her Tibetan home and appropriates the customs of the west. Her integration with the "West" parallels that of both Cowboy Jim and Boss.

Integration outside the Asian Community:

Laulu ↔ Charlie

Laulu ↔ Whore

Laulu ↔ Workers

Boss ↔ Charlie

Cowboy Jim ↔ Charlie

In 1000 Pieces of Gold, the degree of success is measured in dollars or, more specifically, American dollars. The ability of the Asian to amass income is linked to the amount of integration that is exhibited and, in turn, the amount of success. The initial goal of Lulu is to earn one thousand pieces of gold in order to return to Tibet. In other words, she must buy her freedom. As the story continues, Lulu realizes that her actual goal is to blend into the dominant community as seamlessly as possible. The town's people, reluctantly, allow Lulu to become part of their lives. This film champions the ability of Lulu to overcome her challenges, such as discrimination, slavery, and poverty. But in overcoming these challenges, Lulu must separate from her Asian identity and take on the role dictated by the dominant society. This role is inevitably the role of submission. In each stage of Lulu's character development, she submits to others (usually men) in order to survive. In the beginning of the film, Lulu is sold by her father to a slave trader. The closure of the film shows how she attains a certain peace by living with Charlie, as the Asian community leaves town without her. In both situations, Lulu remains a slave. The film may portray the ending as a romantic resolution to the problems of Lulu's displacement, but the assumption that integration is best achieved romantically is still reinforced. The icon of the submissive Asian female is further entrenched.

In all three of the films mentioned, the icons and associations with Asians and non-Asians follow a historic pattern described by Said (Said 113-197). By listing some of the icons and associations discussed in the three films, the polarity is apparent.

<u>Asian</u>	<u>Non-Asian</u>
Illicit use of the knife/gun	Justified use of the gun
Violence/Crime	Violence/Justice
Martial Arts	Fire Arms
Peasant	Tourist / Blue collar worker / Authority
Killer/Victim	Observer
Newcomer	Established Citizen
The Horde	The Individual

The Asian menace of films such as The Dragon Seed (Wilks 1944) and Mr. Moto's Last Warning (Foster 1939) has been transformed in contemporary cinema as the Chinese Mafia. The use of the Asian crime organization as a plot device in films such as Black Rain (Scott 1989), and Harry's Hong Kong (Dear 1987) indicates the fear of integration brought on by the increased Asian immigration into North America. Similar to the romantic racial integration, the Asian criminal integration into the North American society is made into a fetish. With its different language, secret dealings and strange rituals, the Chinese Mafia fully exploits the fears of society. Mainstream cinema uses the conflicts involved in criminal or romantic integration, and emphasizes incompatibility.

Cinematic resolutions to the conflicts brought on by Asian integration are predictably bleak. In each of the films considered, the resolutions consist of shunning traditional Asian identity or facing either death or abandonment. In China Girl, the "Romeo and Juliet" forbidden love ends with death at the hands of an Asian gang member with a gun. The double murder scene that ends the film occurs at night on the streets of Chinatown while onlookers casually gaze at the

two bodies stretched out on the street. While typically melodramatic for a romantic conflict, the death of the Chinese girl and the Italian boy leaves the viewer with a sense of futility about inter-racial coupling. The other resolutions to this film involve Thai's brother's forced departure to Hong Kong and Tony's brother's stabbing by the Asian Gang. Not only do the attempts to integrate fail, resulting in violence, but the cohesion of the initial groups begins to fall apart as well.

1000 Pieces of Gold resolves the conflicts of integration by abandoning one group for another. Lulu, at the film's closure, separates from the exodus of the Asian people and joins Charlie. The exodus of the Asians was the historical resolution to the "Yellow Peril" scare in which Asian cheap labor was thought to threaten job opportunities for Non-Asian (white) Americans (Roy 18). This film outlines the procedures for both the cinematic and historical resolutions to the difficulties of integration into the American social order; the social order does not include ethnic identity. At the end of the film, Cowboy Jim, his boss, and all Asians (other than Lulu), are absent. For Lulu, this departure of Asians around her is, in a sense, the departure of her own Asian identity. Throughout the film, her character searches for an identity that takes her slowly but inevitably away from her Tibetan heritage. The film focuses on her personal struggle with identity. She resolves the struggle by leaving the Asian community, and spending her remaining life with Charlie. Lulu's subservience to Charlie has been echoed through her entire life. From her father selling her to the slave trader, to Charlie, taking her as a wife/homemaker, integration for Lulu does not gain her freedom, but entrenches her subservient role. This subservience aids in the progression towards assimilation. Assimilation, in fact, is the major element in Lulu's resolution of her displaced identity. In contrast, other Asians in the town do not assimilate and are forced to leave. Their integration has failed since they did not assimilate into the

White community and were thus considered a threat. Laulu, on the other hand, is less threatening to the town's people since she has assimilated directly into the social milieu. Although assimilated to a certain extent, the two characters of Cowboy Jim and Boss did not follow the subservient route as Laulu did. Both Cowboy Jim and Boss were forced to leave their homesteads just as the other members of the Asian community. By conforming with established ideas and thoughts, Laulu was able to lessen her threat. Yet, in turn, Laulu had to redefine her identity away from her Tibetan background, towards Charlie's vision of her identity. For 1000 Pieces of Gold, closure involves the weakening of ethnicity.

The closure of Year of the Dragon is typical in a police thriller genre. Stanley White has discovered where Tey's next shipment of drugs is being delivered. Stanley is present at the drop-off location to intercept the shipment and catch Tey with the evidence. The conflict between Stanley and Tey is resolved when Stanley chases Tey onto a railway bridge and traps him. Stanley, after incapacitating Tey with several bullets, allows Tey to "do the honorable thing" and shoot himself, which he does. In addition to the criminal conflict, the romantic conflict between Stanley and Tracy is resolved at the end of the film. When Tracy and Stanley embrace after Stanley initiates a small riot in Chinatown, the camera cranes up and the credits roll. Again, the pattern of integration parallels that of 1000 Pieces of Gold. The Asian that integrates into the established order is able to successfully continue his/her goals. Since Tey refused to completely assimilate with the dominant society, he was ultimately eliminated. Tracy, on the other hand, consciously denies her Asian identity, allowing Stanley to successfully court her. Like Laulu, Tracy has not only redefined her identity to conform to the Non-Asian establishment, but also she has kept the Orientalist's vision of submissiveness. Both Tracy and Laulu modify the label of the "other" and succeed as a result.

In the resolutions to the disruptions caused by integration, the identity of the Asian character has been redefined according to the assumptions of the dominant society. Each character yearns to assimilate into a lifestyle different from their ethnicity.

<u>China Girl</u> :	Thai → Tony
<u>Year of the Dragon</u> :	Tze → Stanley
<u>1000 Pieces of Gold</u> :	Laulu → Charlie

The trend towards assimilation follows the straight line theory of Gans (Gans 1979, 17-19). The films reflect the social tendency of ethnic communities to move away from ethnic associations and move towards the mean social order. When this progression occurs, ethnicity becomes more of a personal definition rather than a community definition. As seen in the characters of Laulu, Tracy, and Thai, the personal definitions become intertwined with the definitions of their surroundings, namely the dominant social order. Hollywood has defined not only the image of the Asian, but also how the Asian has integrated into American society. Using icons, associations and relationships, mainstream cinema creates an atmosphere where identity is only credible when codified.

With the constant barrage of Hollywood films that represent Asian themes in rigid codified structures, there are several questions that arise concerning how ethnicity is represented by Asian North American cinema and video makers. Does ethnicity define itself through film in the same manner as mainstream film? What role does integration play in the personal definition of identity? What icons and associations are used when Asian film-makers establish their ethnicity, and to what

effect? And finally, do films by Asian North Americans reinforce or deny the trend of the Straight Line Theory? These questions are the focus in Chapter Three: The Treatment of the Asian Image in Asian Canadian Film and Video.

Chapter 3

Treatment of the Asian Image in Asian Canadian Film and Video

In the last chapter, Asian images, dictated by mainly non-Asian film makers, were seen as symptomatic of a system that allows recognition of ethnicity purely on Orientalist preconceptions. Using icons and motifs perpetuated by history, the Asian and their associated themes depict a narrow view of the Asian community. These views are even more exaggerated when Non-Asian icons and motifs are used to emphasize the difference in culture. But the question arises: can a truly authentic representation of Asian life be possible? If there is an Orientalist slant in Hollywood, as seen in our last chapter, would Asian Americans fair better in their own self-representation?¹⁸ In this chapter, the Asian community, mainly in Canada, will be examined to discover how it represents itself. What methods do Asian Canadians use to recognize themselves and what differences are there between the Hollywood representation of Asians and self-representation? By looking at several Asian Canadian films and videos dealing with identity, we can understand why self-representation remains full of contradictions and dilemmas. The main focus of this analysis is to show how Asians within a displaced social order have fallen into the same Orientalist Hollywood traps when representing an ethnic theme. In a larger context, this inability to identity oneself without the Orientalist approach is an indication that the overwhelming influence of the dominant culture is moving the ethnic communities towards amalgamation. The consequence to the marginal groups, such as the Asian community, is a steady Deculturalization of their historical identity.

The films and videos that will be used to evaluate Asian self-representation will be confined to short format works by Asian Canadians. Although there have been few feature length films by Asian Canadians dealing with identity, there has been a steady stream of short works on film and video commencing in the mid-eighties. (Wong 6-9).¹⁹ As more funding becomes available for Asian Canadian artists, the output of works should increase and a more comprehensive study on this subject can then be made. For this study, works by Brenda Joy Lem, Helen Lee, Ruby Truly, Richard Fung and Paul Wong will be the primary ones used to evaluate how Asian Canadians deal with self-representation within a displaced culture.

These films share an examination of the theme of self-identity within a displaced culture. They show how ethnicity is recognized by either personal or social means. such recognition form the core concerns of this thesis. Is there any difference in methodology of recognizing ethnicity between self-identity and social identity? As Charles Taylor writes in his essay, "Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'",

"The demand for recognition ... is given urgency by the supposed links between recognition and identity, where the latter term designates ...a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being." (Taylor 25)

The threat of misrecognition has led many "subaltern" or minority groups to be suspicious of others identifying them since, as history tells us, the result could be a demeaning and sometimes contemptible picture of themselves.²⁰ By dealing with recognition and identity first hand, these subaltern groups, such as the Asian Canadians discussed here, are able to circumvent the problems they have with the

representations by non-members of the Asian Canadian community. Thus, these new Asian Canadian artists are creating new personal and community perceptions of themselves. Yet, as will be shown, some of the same misrepresentational traps remain even in the films by Asian Canadians, thus resulting in their own Deculturalization, both personally and communally.

Who are audiences that the new Asian Canadian film makers address? In the Hollywood model of representation, the director, and the writer attempt to cast as wide a net as possible to gain the most audience and, thus, revenue. This usually translates to the White audiences of North America. According to another of Herbert Gans' theories, this net can be further divided into subcultures. (Gans 1957, 315-324). Gans defines the subculture as a specific audience group that follows a particular interest in one type of film over another. This theory suggests that the film makers have an imagined audience with which they communicate. (Gans 1957, 315) For example, a gangster movie may appeal more to the male audience than to the female. In the same manner, a romance movie maybe more to likely appeal to a female audience. Each subculture can be divided into many categories such as taste, gender, and ethnicity.²¹ Gans believes that the film's creator directs to accommodate the target subculture. (Gans 1957, 315-324) Thus, the authenticity of the film will be dependent on the reception of the subculture.

The nature of authenticity, as seen in this theory of subcultures, is fluid, changing from audience to audience. A judgment of authenticity relates to the measure of morality a particular person possesses. Morality, the belief of what is right and wrong, is associated with recognition, since this is how we judge the believability of identity. Identity was once defined by Jean Jacques Rousseau as "finding the natural voice within us." (Taylor 31) He and others such as J. G.

Herder believed that truth (authenticity) was intertwined with identity, writing that in order to find the truth, one must block out all the excess constraints of conformity and find the inner, moral self. (Taylor 30) Yet as seen throughout this thesis, the influences of "conformity" abound and cannot out rightly be ignored. George Herbert Mead called these outside influences as interactions with "significant others" .(Mead 123)²² He and others believed that the judgment of not only morality and authenticity were dependent on a group social acceptance, but also that individual identity was dependent on the same. Thus the function of the audience for the film maker is to serve as the significant other, either confirming or denying the acceptance of authenticity. We will see in this chapter that the audience functions to either confirm or deny the authenticity of identity by confirming or denying the Orientalist's views of the Asian community. Can the audience or the film maker avoid the influences of the larger sphere of Hollywood stereotypes? Since recognition, authenticity and identity are completely meshed, it is difficult to believe that a pure unadulterated voice will find a pure unadulterated audience.

I. Relationship Between the Audience and the Film Maker

As we have explored in the first chapter, the audience and film maker relate to each other in a communicative model in which both the receiver and communicator are influenced by shared and unshared experiences. Whether the receiver is willing to accept or reject the message, depends on whether or not the cumulative experiences configure to the receiver's beliefs. In essence, the receiver judges authenticity according to experience, actual or extrapolated. (See Figure 3.1)

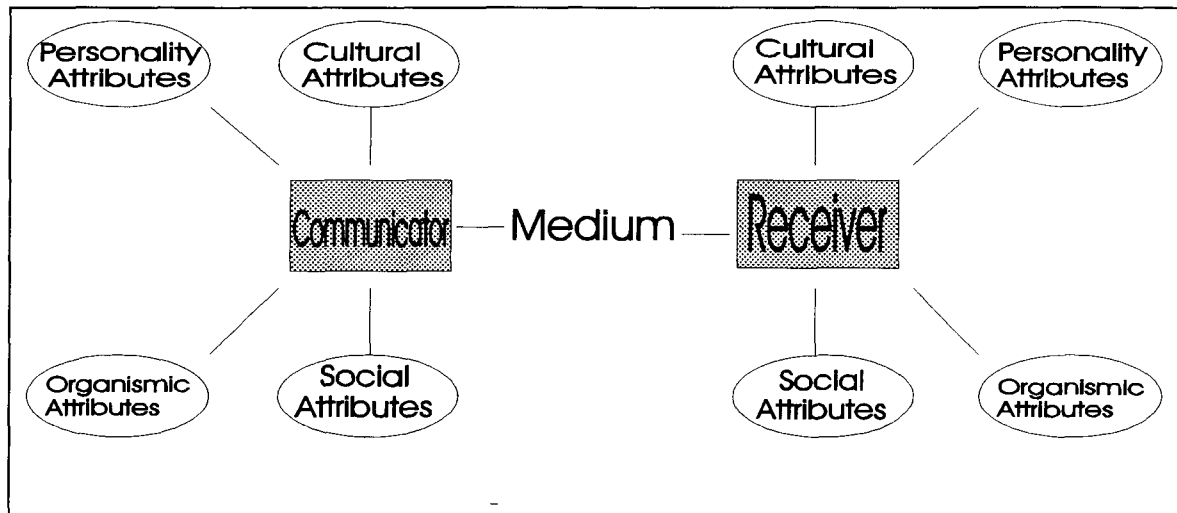


Figure 3.1 Culminative Experiences Influencing Communicator (Film maker) and Receiver (Audience). (Tudor 1974, 28)

As for the specific issue of Asian identity, it is obvious that the judgment of authenticity will also be based on experience, actual or extrapolated. As Gans has mentioned, not all audiences are alike. (Gans 1957, 315-324) The difference, for example, between the subculture of Japanese Canadians and Chinese Canadians can result in two conflicting judgments of authenticity when one representation of an Asian is shown. Again, each social experience is unique enough for differing appraisals of what is closer to the truth.

When ethnicity is the main theme of the film, the film maker, audience and the subject of the film become inevitably linked with Deculturalization. Deculturation can be defined as the assimilation of one culture towards another predominant culture. In North America, the Asian community has, in various degrees, been assimilated because of its displaced circumstance. As the Asian community grows further and further away from its historical roots, the second, third and subsequent generations of the community will find it more difficult to

concretely characterize themselves. How do these people identify themselves amid the deluge of stereotypes based on history and exaggeration? This is what Gans concerns himself with in his article on Symbolic Ethnicity. (Gans 1979, 1-19) As explained in Chapter One, Gans believed in the Straight Line Theory in which all ethnic communities will inevitably conform into the dominant North American culture. That is, when differences of ethnic communities are graphically plotted against time, the general form of the resulting data will form a straight line representing the dominant culture. (Sandberg 15) Thus, according to this theory, the longer an ethnic community is exposed to the influences of a dominant culture, the more difficult it becomes for that community to define itself as different. Inevitably, ethnic groups finally resort to a symbolic form of identity as opposed to a community associated identity.

Although Gans' prediction seems too broad in its assumption that the Straight Line (dominant culture) is a fixed homogenous entity, he makes an interesting observation that second and third generational ethnic peoples find it difficult to define themselves because of the intensity of the influences of the dominant culture. Since it is the second and often third generation Asian American that produces films on identity, these films become worthwhile social documents to either confirm or discount Gans' conjectures. By combining the social elements of displaced ethnicity and the filmic elements of Symbolic Ethnicity, a simple methodology for studying identity can be established. But first, a brief explanation is necessary of the primary fear many ethnic communities feel against a larger dominant culture (Deculturalization).

In this chapter, Deculturalization is discussed as the end result of Asian Canadian films.²³ These films, centering on self identity, have several common

notions of personal and cultural experience, all of which result in Deculturalization. They are as follows:

1. Displacement: Usually geographical, social and psychological.
2. Assimilation and acculturation: Usually by the dominant culture termed as the "Other Group". The "Own Group" is defined as the marginal culture struggling to define itself.
3. Individual and Group self identity: The confusion in defining the self usually manifested through Symbolic Ethnicity.
4. Intergroup Interaction: With increased contact to differing groups, an increase of tolerance will follow -- The Contact Theory. (Berry 99-112)
5. Frictional Integration: The contrasting notion, that assumes increased contact with a differing group (Other Group) promotes conflict.
6. Ethnocentrism and Isolation: The process whereby each group attempts to preserve its own culture against the dominant culture, which ultimately leads to isolation.
7. Multicultural Assumption: The contradictory policy that praises difference while advocating assimilation. The assumption is that this policy will favor tolerance amongst ethnic groups.

With these parameters, a model of Deculturalization allows a more critical analysis of Asian Canadian films. (See Figure 3.2)

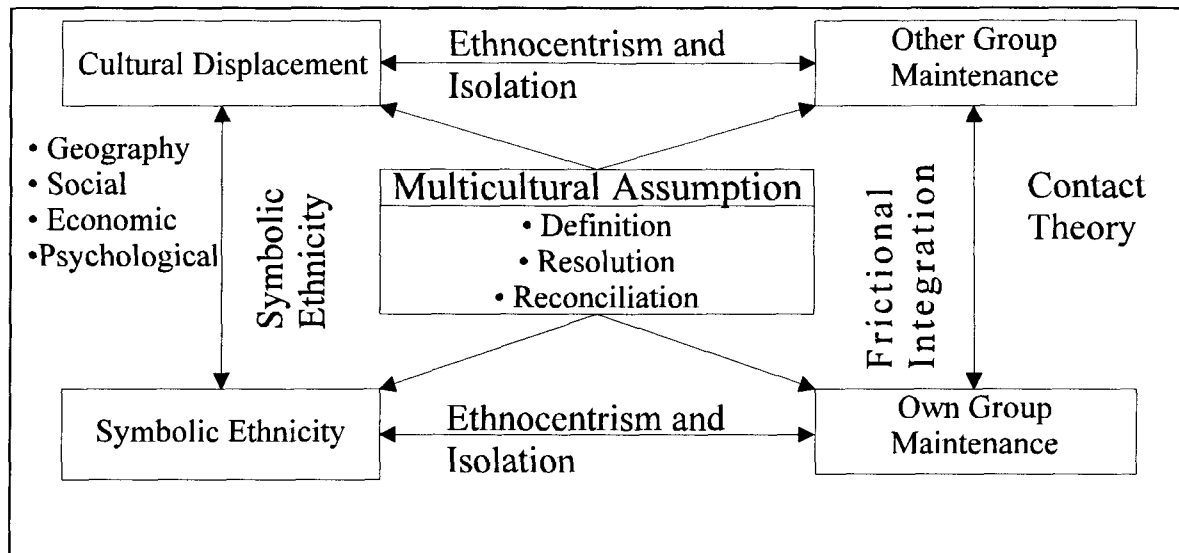


Figure 3.2: Model of Deculturalization. The emphasis in this system is the idea of self-definition (self-identity). In cinematic terms, definition becomes narrative resolution / social reconciliation and identity becomes image related (Symbolic Ethnicity).²⁴

In this system each quadrant can interact simultaneously. An ethnic group can arbitrarily begin with Own Group maintenance which can move towards an isolationist / ethnocentric approach of Symbolic Ethnicity. Or, it can interact with the Other Group frictionally or tolerantly. Each quadrant can interact through the various pathways mapped. In such a scenario, the Other Group can foster the Symbolic Ethnicity approach of the Own Group through elements of the Multicultural Assumption. As part of these elements, cinematic influences would be included -- relying on image and narrative as its foundation. The fourth quadrant, Cultural Displacement, can be considered either as a precursor or a final status of both the Other and Own Groups. Cultural Displacement is reached both by Own or Other Group-motivated isolation. Overall, each constituent of the model works through each other constituent.

Deculturalization, according to this system model, is the inevitable result of a displaced group. The concern of this thesis is how these displaced groups cope with or resist against impending assimilation. Again, the manner that many Asian artists use to reassert their identity against deculturation is with Symbolic Ethnicity.²⁵ The next section of this chapter will discuss the dilemmas Asian artists face when using the representational media of film and video to recognize within themselves and their subculture a unique identity. In attempting to look within the Asian North American identity, the film maker inadvertently perpetuates the system of Symbolic Ethnicity. The important question to answer is: does Symbolic Ethnicity as used by Asians confirm or deny an Orientalist's perspective? The final result is always the Deculturalization of the ethnic image.

II. Presentation of Asian Images

The previous chapter surveyed several feature length contemporary films made in Hollywood dealing with an Asian theme. It was obvious that the messages promoted by these films were an unflattering, homogenous picture of the Asian community. In general, Hollywood's treatment of Asian themes was and is an Orientalist view of the Asian population here in North America. Not surprisingly, these images from the mass media are not isolated to Non-Asian audiences. In fact, the Asian community is deeply influenced by what it sees and hears in the culture around them.²⁶ This can explain the schizophrenic nature of Asian film/video makers in recognizing their own identity. As second and third generation Asians seek their identity, their community connection becomes less and less influential. Thus, identity becomes a process of personal, inner recognition. Authenticity of identity is not judged by social association but by individual evaluation. (Taylor 31-35) Recognizing the Asian image in North America is so entwined with the

methods and views of Hollywood that Asian artists use the same Orientalist methods to recognize themselves. Many artists actually acknowledge the power of mass media imaging by using camp imagery and other forms of self-reflexivity within their work. It is the intention of many of these artists to create a new dialogue between Asian North Americans. (Wong 3-9) Unfortunately, this dialogue is mired in the language of Orientalism.²⁷

At this point, it is worthwhile to revisit the idea of confirmation and denial of Orientalism as a route to represent cultural experience as identity. In Figure 3.3, the communicator creates a medium targeting a specific subculture, such as the Asian community. Using the assumptions the communicator has about the receiver (Cultural assumptions), a medium is then recognized by the receiver. The receiver judges the medium's authenticity of the subject (Selective Perception) and interprets the Asian images as either inconstant or faithful to known Asian symbols and icons. This confirmation or denial of verisimilitude of the portrayal of identity is then taken by the communicator as a measure of success of the medium. As such, the reinforcement of Orientalism (Latent) becomes part of the Communicator's cultural experience, allowing more manifest Orientalisms to be produced. The cycle continues to build on latent Orientalist ideas.²⁸

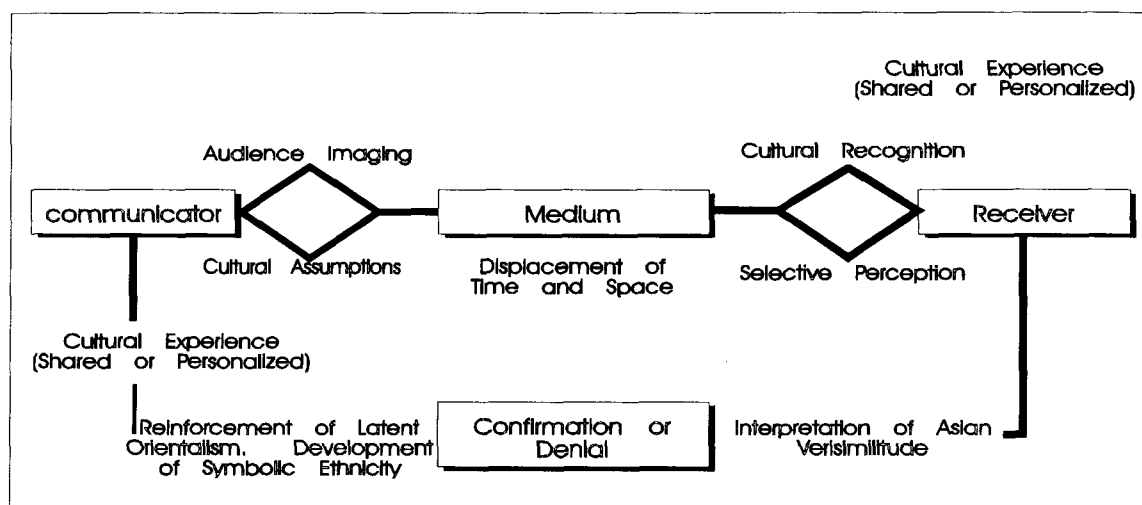


Figure 3.3: Confirmation and Denial of Orientalism as a Route to Represent Cultural Experience.

Asian Canadian films and videos can be used to test this model. One example is a video production from Montreal by the L'Amitié Chinoise de Montréal/Le Vidéographe called Silence into Silence (1989). This video follows a standard narrative story about a young woman forced to decide whether she should move away from Montréal to Edmonton with the rest of her family or stay in Montréal and pursue a graphic design career.²⁹ Although a relatively uninspired narrative, the video dwells on the lifestyle of a typical Chinese Canadian family consisting of a father, mother and two daughters -- one married with kids, the other single. The family's lifestyle is balanced between the Chinese Grandmother and her adult daughters. Each character, except for the daughters, copes with the friction of the Own Group and Other Group with tolerance and acceptance. The conflict in the story arises from the choice the single daughter must make between family obligation (Asian community) and career opportunity (White Community). The polarity between communities in the film is made clear by allowing only one Asian character to venture outside the Chinatown area. In fact, the only character that is not Chinese is the French Canadian woman, Anne Marie, who asks Lai Yin

(the single daughter) to work for her. Of course, her sister, Amun, wants Lai to help her with the new Chinese restaurant in Edmonton. Lai must decide whether family obligation is more important than personal satisfaction. This type of dilemma is seen in almost all the videos and films dealing with identity. The family members in Silence into Silence are an archetypal Chinese family. The Grandfather is a wise sullen retired cook and the Grandmother is the wise caring homemaker. The daughters, being dutiful to their family customs, take care of their parents. The married daughter's children are established as the successful mix of Chinese upbringing and North American sensibilities. In essence, the Chinese family in Silence into Silence depicts the model minority proving the Multicultural Assumption correct.

The friction between Chinese and North American culture is curtailed cinematically in Silence into Silence by matching reassuring images of traditional Chinese culture, with images of common North American activities. The opening sequence is a montage where scenes of the grandmother praying to the Buddha altar are juxtaposed with the grandchildren playing hockey. Not only cultures are crossing, but also generations. The first outward friction is seen when the grandchildren are persuaded to give thanks to the Buddha altar (three bows with incense in hand and knees on floor) when all they want to do is play hockey. The main conflict arises when Lai ignores the family's wish to remain a unit. Lai, wanting to separate from the family, delays telling her mother of the decision to stay. Finally, when Lai does tell her mother of the decision, the mother disappears for an afternoon. Resolution is accomplished when the mother returns and accepts her daughter's decision. The closing scene is of the three women going shopping.³⁰

Using the seven notions of Deculturalization, we can map the social circumstances in Silence into Silence which are used to create an Asian image.

1. Displacement: As with most Chinese Canadian families, the generational separation between first, second and third generation causes conflicting values. The grandmother believes that the family must be preserved at all costs. The daughter, on the other hand, must decide whether her career is more important. It can be argued that Lai is more displaced than her mother since it is Lai that traverses both cultures by working outside of Chinatown and living inside Chinatown. The mother is isolated in the family she has raised. Thus, the family is not only displaced by geography, but by time.

2. Assimilation: The obvious victims of assimilation are Lai and the grandchildren. The interesting aspect of the video is how the lifestyle of the family both welcomes and simultaneously wards off North American culture. The grandchildren treat praying to the Buddha like drinking medicine, and the grandmother abhors the family values North Americans embrace.

3. , 4 & 5. Individual and Group Self Identity, Intergroup Interaction and Frictional Integration: Again Lai, the main character, seeks to find her identity between career and family. Interaction mainly happens between Lai and her family, and Lai and Anne Marie. It is the latter relationship that causes Lai to reconsider her own identity.

6. Ethnocentrism and Isolation: The grandmother is the only character who is truly isolated from the dominant culture surrounding her. She has isolated herself within

a family and thus she is the most distressed when the Other Group threatens her Own Group.

7. Multicultural Assumption: As discussed earlier, the family portrayed can be called an example of a model minority. Conflicts about identity are resolved at the closure of the narrative by keeping the family together psychologically, allowing Lai to pursue her own career and identity.

In Figure 3.4, each quadrant follows closely to the original model of Deculturalization. The video avoids outwardly implying Deculturalization by reconciling the frictions between Own and Other Groups and resolving the conflicts between self-identity and ethnic identity.

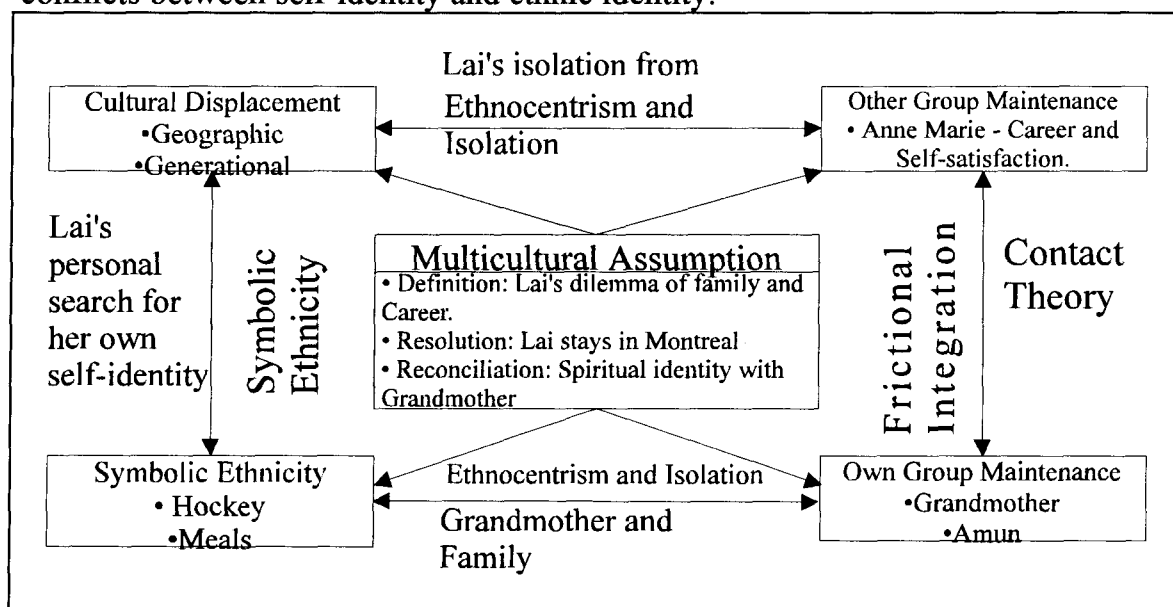


Figure 3.4: Deculturalization of the Asian Image in Silence into Silence. In this video, the Multicultural Assumption is upheld.

One way Silence into Silence is able to maintain a seemingly authentic representation of Asians while still adhering to the Multicultural Assumption is by using many of the Asian motifs as a symbolic identity marker. Throughout the video, the characters, settings and the theme work to convey lifestyle differences. The visual cues of difference start with the Buddha altar at the opening of the video, and continue until the closure with the stroll through Chinatown. For the Asian audience, these motifs are used to convey a fellowship of lifestyle. Everyday dilemmas within the Asian community are related back to the community, sanctioning the concerns of the Own Group.³¹ In essence, the film is maintaining the Own Group. Silence into Silence, by trying to define the Own Group as both Chinese and Canadian, illustrates the friction involved in representing two cultures as one.

The Compact (1990), by Brenda Joy Lem, is another narrative that deals with the friction between two cultures brought on by differing expectations of each others' identities. The story follows a young Chinese Canadian woman in Toronto as she copes with her relationship with strangers, her Anglo-Canadian boyfriend, her parents and herself. Through a series of flashbacks and dream sequences, Lee, the main character, deals with the historical pressures she must endure in defining her identity. Each of her relationships relies on conflicting images of her. The resulting confusion creates the discord between how she wants to be identified and how she is expected to be identified.

The film begins with Lee, played by Lem, waiting for the Toronto subway. She is approached by a man that she ignores. She says to herself, "You think I'm harmless, don't you?" Even at this early scene, the audience is shown Lee's refusal of a role she is supposed to embrace, that of a harassed woman. The film continues

with a montage of body and facial features while Lee's voice-over states the different meanings of "compact." "Compact," the voice-over says, "closely or neatly packed together; concise. Make compact. Small flat case for face-powder. Agreement. Contract."³² The multiple meanings and the metaphors of both the agreement (agreement of perception in Lee's identity) and the makeup case (used to create an enhanced facial image) make the title of the film apt.

The central conflict of the narrative begins when Lee wants to meet her boyfriend's parents, against the wishes of the boyfriend. The boyfriend, an unabashed Orientalist, is obsessed with the Orient and with the image of the Oriental female. Consequently, he tries to project his image of the Oriental female onto Lee. The boyfriend believes that Lee's meeting with his parents is insignificant because they are Anglo-Canadians and are not exotic enough to be of interest. Although Lee finally gets to meet the parents, the parents insist in identifying her as Japanese. Lee, as a result, takes on the stereotypical Japanese subservient woman role for her boyfriend with his approval. Dream sequences show the boyfriend trapped in a Japanese garden, reciting lines like, "All you have to do is exist. I am Life. I am Death." His parents tell each other how their son's White girlfriends were, "nothing but trouble" and that there would be no trouble with a Japanese woman. Lee, struggling with these multiple identities assigned to her at the end of the film, recognizes the complexity of expected perceptions and develops her own personal identity. By dealing with pressures from her parents, her boyfriend and herself, to become "Asian", Lem begins to identify herself through Symbolic Ethnicity. Oddly enough, the identity she accepts for herself is more Anglo-Canadian than Asian. The closing sequence mimics the opening, with her waiting for the subway -- a typical North American activity.

The elements of deculturation in The Compact are intertwined with issues of gender roles and ethnic perception. Both the models of Cultural Experience, and Deculturalization can be used to map out how the film effects both the theme and the audience. The core of both models, in relation to The Compact, is the obstacle of Orientalism. It is through Orientalism that ethnic perception and Deculturalization result. Perceptions within the diegesis of the film mimic that of the audience's perceptions. In such a fashion, Lem has looked at the character as she has looked at the audience, the receiver of her message. Within the diegesis, Lee's boyfriend has a fixed image of her as a subservient Oriental woman. She has become the medium through which the boyfriend wishes to communicate. (See Figure 3.5)

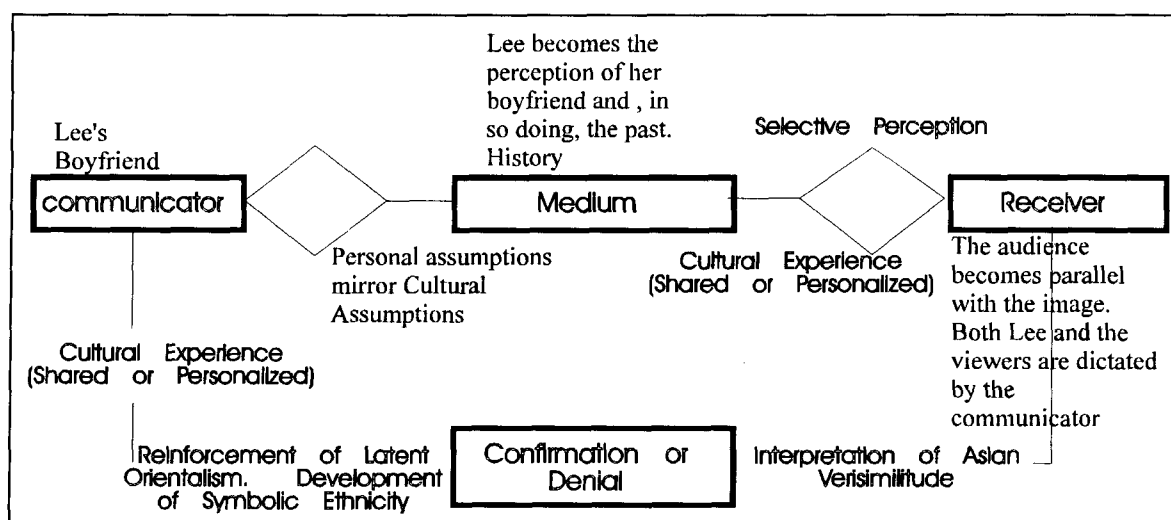


Figure 3.5: Representation of Cultural Experience in The Compact. The film maker, subject, and the audience are parallel entities within this structure.

The personal assumptions of Lee's boyfriend mirror his Latent Orientalist cultural assumptions. The manifestation of the Orientalism is Lee herself, allowing the audience and the subject to either confirm or deny the icons and motifs of Asia. A powerful example of the manifest Orientalism in this film is the sequence when

Lee dresses in a kimono, submitting to the perceptions held by her boyfriend. The fact that she is Chinese makes the sequence ironic in that the message relayed could be either that the Asian community has become homogenous, or that the Asian community is perceived as homogenous, by either the Anglo-Canadian or Asian-Canadian population.

Unlike Silence into Silence, The Compact has transformed the medium in which the subject is revealed to the receiver. Lem is able to make parallels between the perceptions by the characters in the narrative to the audience experiencing the film. The medium of the film is equal to the medium of the subject, Lee. By creating a Manifest form of Orientalism within the narrative, Lem can self-reflexively comment on the nature of experiencing film. Lee becomes Chinese, then Japanese, then basically, Anglo-Canadian at the closure of the story. The transformation is dictated by all those that surround her as well as by herself.

Since the identity Lee chooses eventually to reject both her parent's pressure to follow a Chinese lifestyle and her boyfriend's pressure to become the stereotypical submissive Japanese female, the film's closure can be interpreted as an empowering statement of self-identification. Yet the identity she chooses is a personally acknowledged definition that moves away from a definition involving community. The disinvolvement of community is evidence of the deculturation of the Asian population. Thus, the film works on three levels. The first level follows the communication pathway by looking at how viewers perceive their subject. Within the diegesis, the boyfriend perceives Lee as one entity while the audience perceives her as a different entity. The medium Lem uses is transformed. The second level uses this transformed medium to relate the consequences of cultural experience. As seen in Figure 3.5, the medium denies or confirms the Latent

Orientalism present in the characters of the film and the audience watching the film. Encompassing these two levels is the third level of deculturation. Both the story and the effect of the film, as determined by the closure, point to a Deculturalization of the Asian community. The representation of second and third generation Asian individuals defining their identity on an inward, personal level, reinforces the decline in importance of communal identity. Consequently, the transformation of the medium (subject) aids in the achievement of the Multicultural Assumption. Through symbolic representation of ethnic identity and the overriding of communal identity for personal identity, the process of Deculturalization continues. (See Figure 3.6)

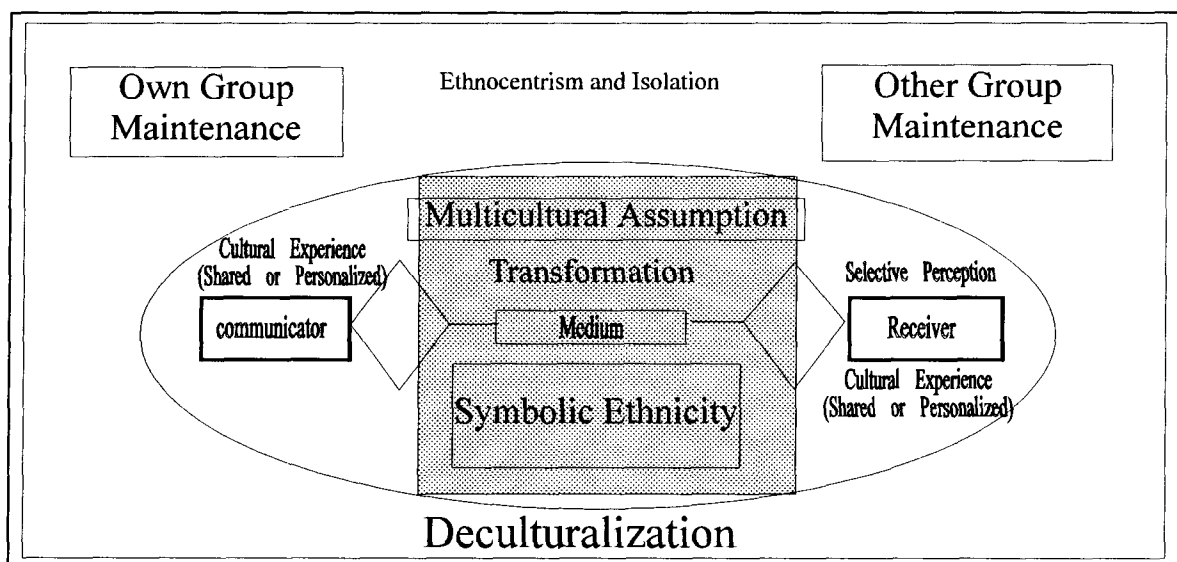


Figure 3.6: Deculturalization in The Compact through transformation of the Medium and Symbolic Ethnicity.

The main parties of Own Group and Other Group are still protecting their perceptions through isolation and ethnocentrism, and maintaining many Latent Orientalisms. The shaded area of Figure 3.6 indicates the influence of the transformation of Symbolic Ethnicity, producing the Multicultural Assumption.

Overall, the three levels of communication, transformation and Deculturalization make the film, The Compact, able to show the difficulties in representing ethnic and personal identities.

Images of ethnic and personal identities are also explored in two experimental films by Asian Canadians. Helen Lee's Sally's Beauty Spot and Richard Fung's Chinese Characters use the issues of exclusion and perception to search for their own identity. As in the two previous films discussed, the desire to be accepted into the dominant culture is still present in the experimental films of Lee and Fung. Unlike the narrative films, the image associated with identity is the paramount concern of the film maker. Hence, the films/videos can directly address the issue of Symbolic Ethnicity.

In many experimental Asian North American films and videos, a common subject is exclusion. By examining how people perceive the Asian community and how the Asian community perceives Non-Asians, the film makers comment on their own personal identity. Films like All Orientals Look Alike (Soe, 1987), and The Journey (Truly, 1985) explore the stereotypes of Asian images through experiences within their own personal lives. In Sally's Beauty Spot, Lee explores gender and ethnic stereotypes through her sister, Sally. Specifically, Lee uses her sister's beauty mark on her chest as a metaphor for the imperfection of an image -- body and identity. The critical attitude towards Sally's body in Lee's film illustrates the fragility of one's own identity. The idea of the perfect body mimics the idea of the perfect minority. Since the ideal of either is unachievable, the identification of the self becomes wholly symbolic. The film opens with television images of Sally as she attempts to wash away her birth mark. As she continues to groom herself, images from the movie The World of Suzi Wong (Quine 1960) are shown on the

television screen behind her. Lee uses a three perspective approach in exploring identity. The first perspective begins with the use of a musical film from the Sixties. Suzi Wong becomes the archetype for the Asian woman. Sally measures her identity against Suzi and finds that she fails, not only in body type, but in sexuality as well. Suzi in the Hollywood film is the sexual fetish for William Holdman's character. Sally, in the experimental film, confronts the Asian woman fetish motif by detailing the effort involved in grooming for the role of the fetish. Hindered only by the imperfection of the beauty spot, Sally continually attempts to rid herself of the self-perceived imperfection by constantly washing the mole, associating it with being dirty. The influence of Suzi on Sally demonstrates the process of how latent Orientalism develops into manifest Orientalism - the second perspective on ethnic identity. (See Figure 3.7)

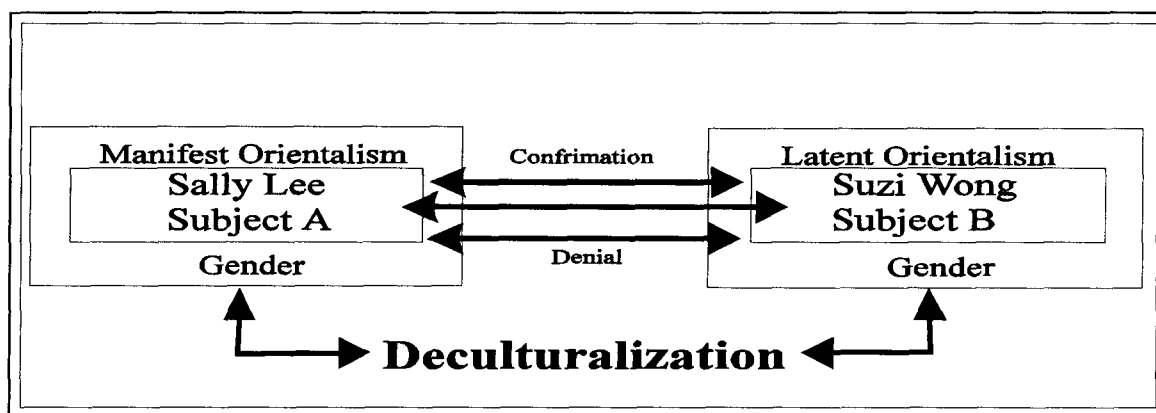


Figure 7. Notions of Orientalism, Gender and Deculturalization in Sally's Beauty Spot.

In Figure 3.7, Sally is labeled "subject A" and Suzi is labeled "subject B". The subjects can be defined as the receiver as well as the communicator of the medium since both subjects perpetuate the messages that they process.³³ The third perspective on ethnic identity is the exploration into the representation of gender -

the Asian female. Sally receives the gender and Orientalist notions of submissiveness and eroticism from Suzi and, as a result, Sally acts upon the medium she has received. Latent Orientalism has transformed into Manifest Orientalism through Sally. The dilemma Sally faces is whether to confirm or deny these messages. Her urge to rid herself of the mole is an urge to present herself in the best possible image. The ethnic image becomes entangled with the gender image and, thus, both images are made into fetishes. The images become campish and exaggerated in Lee's film. The clips of Suzi Wong are seen as television edits, contained within a frame. Images of Sally, in contrast, are black and white, yet in extreme close-up -- a hand, a breast. Rarely does one see a wide shot of Sally. The final scene of Sally is that of a full shot, possibly allowing the audience to access the image as a whole and not as a fragmented image. Speculatively, Helen Lee, the film maker, is "subject C", completing the cycle of communicator and receiver. Lee tries to define her identity through the films that portray Asian women. The absence of other Asians makes it clear that Lee is concerned with the perception of other communities and subcultures along with the Asian community. The subject's struggle to be accepted into the dominant culture, leads to the conflicts in the film. Again, as seen in all the films discussed, the end result is a Deculturalization of the Asian community.

This same struggle is approached in a different scenario in Fung's Chinese Characters. For Fung, identity is derived from his Asian/Trinidadian background, and his gay sexuality. In the film, Fung struggles to find a place in the gay culture which, for him, serves as the dominant culture. The video begins with familiar Asian motifs of cherry blossom trees and scenic streams. Throughout the opening, Chinese pepot music is played. Text such as "Food and sex are human nature" are superimposed on the outdoor images. The entire sequence provides an iconic

Asian calmness against which Fung's conflicts turbulently erupt. Not surprisingly, an initial voice over begins, "Long ago in ancient China..." The narrator tells a story of an explorer named Wye Ging and his journey down the Yellow River. During the narration, the images switch from the Asian motifs of nature, to a contemporary indoor setting and an Asian dressing himself for what seems to be a night of dancing. With the introduction of electronic dance music over this segment, the video transforms itself from a narration of an ancient Chinese story, to an exposé of the gay lifestyle.

Fung is in the video, describing his interest in homoerotic literature. Because homoerotic literature is absent of Asian men, Fung finds himself excluded from his own sexual fantasies derived from the literature.³⁴ As he relays this experiences of gay pornography, a television monitor in the background plays a sample gay video. The video is repeated in a later segment but with an Asian character electronically superimposed onto the scene. In effect, Fung is forcibly creating his own image onto the gay pornography he is excluded from. At the same time, his inclusion in the images involving the story of Wye Ging is minimal. Although the protagonist in the Chinese story mimics that of Fung's search for his identity, images of actual Asian characters are absent from the segment. In effect, Fung has been excluded from two worlds he knows he is part of. (See Fig 8.)

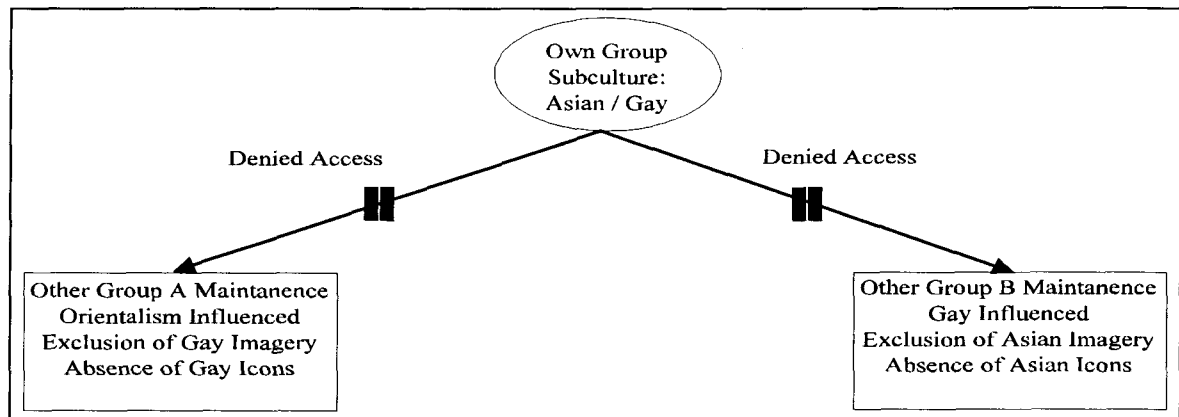


Figure 3.8: The Asian/Gay Own Group Subculture Failed Attempt to Integrate with Gay or Asian Groups (Groups A and B)

Like Helen Lee's Sally's Beauty Spot, Chinese Characters has taken the icons of the dominant culture (Gay and Asian) and have made them mythic.³⁵ For Fung, an association with a community must be contingent with the inclusion of his own image. The image he wishes to convey, that of a Gay image for the Asian community and that of Asian images for the Gay community, become in themselves stereotypical. Therefore, the video, by stressing the inclusion of symbols involved with Orientalisms, confirms the Latent Orientalist images. Fung sets up an antinomy by separating Asian images and White, male Gay images. In Chapter Two, films like Year of the Dragon and China Girl perform the same process of separation with conflicting cultures. The icons used in Chinese Characters are unique to one or the Other Group.

ICON LIST

<u>Asian</u>	<u>Anglo-Gay</u>
Traditional pepot Chinese music	Electronic dance music
Exteriors -Cherry Blossoms - Nature	Interiors- empty rooms - technology (T.V)
Voice over - third person (unseen)	Voice over - first person (seen)
Recounting of an ancient story	Recounting personal experiences
Wye Ging, mythic explorer	Richard Fung, and friends.
Morality	Immorality - use of pornography

Fung meshes the icons by using the Chinese legend as a device to express his own journey in finding his position in the Gay community. Yet as he defines himself within the Gay community, he ostracizes himself from the Asian community. He states in the video, "How much of my Asianess am I denying?" Near the finish of the video, Fung questions the messages that Gay pornography address and asks the audience, "Who are the viewers?". One can also ask the same question to his audience.

The desire to be included in a particular group inherently involves the process of Deculturalization. Fung's identity crisis develops from being a member of a marginal group among a larger dominant group. The trend is consistent with Gans' Straight Line Theory; yet, in this instance, the Straight Line represents the alternative dominant cultures, the Asian and Gay cultures. In all of the cases studied, the main predilection in defining identity was the desire to be concretely associated with one group or another. The conflict arises when the desire for concrete identity is thwarted by issues of Symbolic Ethnicity and Deculturalization.

Overall, the different processes and their relationship to the films discussed in this chapter lead to the conclusion that, although Asian self-identification acknowledges the incongruities in Hollywood's recognition of the Asian image, the ultimate result of cinematic representation is the Deculturalization of Asian identity. We have seen in Silence into Silence how the composition of its central family confirms the Multicultural Assumption. At the same time, the closure of the film makes it clear that personal identity is evaluated on a personal level and not a communal level. The same judgment is made in The Compact, in that Lee has refused the Orientalist trappings from her boyfriend and her parents in order to lead the Anglo-Canadian lifestyle with which she is comfortable. In other words, she has chosen to become Deculturalized, to become part of the dominant culture, or as Gans would term, part of the Straight Line. Deculturalization in Lem's film is progressed by communication, transformation and frictional integration. By using these three systems, Lem is able to take the identities others perceive the main character to be, and reject all of them. Again, the final result is Deculturalization through Symbolic Ethnicity. For the experimental films, Symbolic Ethnicity becomes even more important since the image of the Asian is the central issue. It was shown in Helen Lee's film, Sally's Beauty Spot, that notions of Orientalism and gender are part of the Deculturalization of Asian identity. Sally, the main character, explores the images of Suzi Wong, trying to relate the images to her own. In creating a dialogue between the images of Suzi and the images of Sally, the film maker attempts to define her own image. The process is left unresolved and the outcome is the exclusion of both identities. Fung's Chinese Characters also deals with the exclusion of identities, namely his Asian and Gay identities. Although Fung's desire to become part of what many consider a marginal group, in his mind, these groups are the dominant culture. Unfortunately, the method that he

uses to forcibly include himself in the groups he desires relies on symbolic imagery and icons. Identity, for Fung, is dependent on how the dominant culture uses their symbols; therefore, Fung dismisses identity through communal interaction. The urge to be part of the Straight Line still remains in Fung's quest for identity.

There exist many other films by and about Asian Canadians, yet few if any can escape from the inevitable slide into Deculturalization. Since recognition is based on the judgment of authenticity, there will always be certain symbols and icons needed to be understood as authentic. In film and other media, the notion of identity constantly changes. As seen in this chapter, the process of self-representation moves the direction of change towards the dominant culture, and of Gans' Straight Line.

Conclusion

This thesis has surveyed various methods and effects of Symbolic Ethnicity on cultural identity. The main effect of Symbolic Ethnicity was shown to be the Deculturalization of the ethnic identity. Specifically, the Asian identity was found to follow the principles of Deculturalization and to adhere to the Straight Line Theory. For each film examined, there was a direct relationship to the method of representation and to the method of Deculturalization.

Chapter One explored some various theories and methods of communication. The thesis established an hierarchy of receiver and communicator in respect to interpreting images on a selective basis. Interpretation, as argued in Chapter One, was influenced by shared and unshared experience. The judgment of authenticity depended on these experiences which incorporate both opinion leaders and notions of Orientalism.³⁶ The process of Orientalism was examined to ascertain how Latent Orientalism transformed itself into Manifest Orientalism and how the merging of these two Orientalisms developed to a Symbolic Ethnicity used by both the Non-Asian and Asian communicators to relay an Asian image.

Also in Chapter One, the concept of Deculturalization was introduced. Deculturalization was shown to be the end result of Symbolic Ethnicity. By explaining the individual constituents of Deculturalization, the social positions of both the communicator and the receiver can be shown as an integral part of the Deculturalization cycle. The thesis further explained the interactions between the

Own Group and the Other Group and how they function through ethnocentrism and isolation. Friction was found to be a consequence of the Own Group's struggle with their displacement. In turn, the Own Group reacted to the social displacement by isolating their own cultural values, creating an ethnocentric atmosphere. When this ethnocentrism is intruded upon by the dominant culture (the Other Group), the progression towards Deculturalization begins, and continues until the Straight Line Theory is fulfilled. At a point when a culture (in this thesis, Asian culture) becomes difficult to define due to extensive displacement and Deculturalization, Symbolic Ethnicity evolves into the exclusive definition of the Asian identity. Therefore, Symbol Ethnicity fosters Deculturalization which, in turn, fosters further Symbolic Ethnicity. Since Symbolic Ethnicity is a visual cue of identity, it is not surprising that the cinema has taken full advantage in using it to represent and define the Asian identity.

In Chapter Two, Asian images were examined in mainstream films. Specifically, Year of the Dragon, 1000 Pieces of Gold and China Girl were shown to reinforce Orientalist views of the Asian culture by using antinomies developed from Symbolic Ethnicity. The main sources of conflict in these films were the frictions involved with integrating two cultures together. In each film, ethnic lifestyles were codified and established early in the introductions of these films. For example, in Year of the Dragon, the film begins in Chinatown during the festivities for the Chinese New Year. Symbols and icons, such as dragons and firecrackers, set the stage for violence. By associating the setting and the images to violence, violence becomes part of the cultural identity. Other associations also become part of the Asian identity because of the repetition within the narrative. In China Girl and 1000 Pieces of Gold, the use of the "Chinese horde" is repeated often enough that the viewer equates the Chinese community with a faceless mob.

In Year of the Dragon, the presence of the horde almost always means violence. The opening sequences of all three films evoke a violent atmosphere that becomes part of the Chinese identity. In Year of the Dragon and China Girl, the Chinese community is introduced through violent sequences of attempted murder. In 1000 Pieces of Gold, the opening sequence stems from a raid on a Tibetan village. Here, the Asian culture is not only associated with violence, but submission as well.

Other qualities linked to the Asian community in these films include are: displacement, Otherness, isolation, and frictional integration. For each association, there is a priority of recognition -- greed, honor, dishonesty, and untrustworthiness. For example, in 1000 Pieces of Gold, the masses of Asians are equated with peasants. These peasants are equated to Chinatown. Chinatown is equated with the Chinese Mafia. The progression continues until the Asian community is equated to greed and violence. All the qualities mentioned are expressed through antinomies. Characters and settings are compared to each other. In China Girl, the Italian community is pitted against the Chinese community. Similarly, a Polish cop is pitted against a Chinese mob leader in Year of the Dragon. Both films express the wide difference in Asian ethnicity from "mainstream" North American culture by isolating Chinatown from the rest of society. Since Chinatown is seen as a manifestation of displacement, the dynamics of Chinatown aid in the process of Deculturalization. As a result, the Asian identity is defined by difference. By structuring identity through iconic antinomies, cultural definition and Symbolic Ethnicity become synonymous.

Chapter Three explored the same cultural definition as Chapter Two by using films by Asian Canadians. The issue of self-recognition was discussed in terms of perceived authenticity. Can authenticity be judged? After re-examining

the position of the audience and film maker, the judgment of authenticity was shown to be dependent on cultural experience. Whether shared or unshared, this experience determined what the viewer allowed to be termed "authentic." Because of this selective perception, identity is easily codified by Symbolic Ethnicity. In Chapter Three, codified identities described in Chapter Two were found to be present in Asian Canadian films as well.

Evidence of Deculturalization was found in the four films discussed in Chapter Three. In the two narrative films, Silence into Silence and The Compact, the friction involved with integration was the basis of the central conflict. As with the films in Chapter Two, the Asian Canadian narratives resolve the conflict of integration by conforming to one culture at the expense of the other. As such, the film's resolutions support Gans' Straight Line Theory of assimilation.

Deculturalization in Silence into Silence was found to stem from its attempt to adhere to the Multicultural Assumption. The dilemma faced by the protagonist of the film is resolved so that ethnic identity is both preserved from the dominant culture and, at the same time, absorbed into the dominant culture. The Compact was able to form a transition between the systems of communication, and the system of Deculturalization. Both systems act to confirm or deny Orientalism.

Brenda Joy Lem uses the film media to comment on the position of the viewer and the Asian by acknowledging the separation between communicator -- receiver and Own Group -- Other Group. Yet, as with Silence into Silence, The Compact resolves the conflicts between cultures by advocating the Multicultural Assumption at the closure of the film. Again, Deculturalization results from the film's adherence to this assumption.

Chapter Three also examined two experimental films by Helen Lee and Richard Fung. In Lee's film, Sally's Beauty Spot, the issues of Orientalism, Deculturalization and gender are addressed by equating imperfection with self image. The mole on Sally's body becomes an obstacle within a codified identity. Lee is able to use this conflict to reflect upon the cycle of confirmation and denial of an "ideal." For Sally, the ideal is expressed by both the body and ethnicity. The film clips from The World of Suzi Wong become the images Sally uses to confirm or deny her gender and ethnicity. Ethnicity, therefore, has evolved into symbols of perfection. Images of ethnicity are defined in the film as authentic ethnicity. In the second experimental film examined, Richard Fung also comments on the images of ethnicity by illustrating the absence of the Asian image in gay pornography. In Fung's film, Chinese Characters, Deculturalization is demonstrated by categorizing the Asian community and the Gay community as the Other Group. The Own Group is defined as the integration of the Asian and Gay identity. The desire to be included in the Other Groups can be seen as a desire to assimilate towards the dominant culture. In Fung's scenario, the dominant cultures are the Asian and Gay communities. Yet, like Sally's Beauty Spot, the desire to become part of an ideal group is based on images. The Asian image remains the defining factor of identity. This Deculturalization seamlessly infiltrates into all four Asian Canadian films.

By examining the systems of Symbolic Ethnicity, Orientalism and Deculturalization, one can achieve a better understanding of how ethnic stereotyping is perpetuated not only by Hollywood films, but by Asian Canadian films as well. The next phase of research should explore new cinematic languages that acknowledge the issues of authenticity and address the future of ethnic representation. Some innovative attempts are already underway. One Japanese community has created video dialogues whereby members create personal video

tapes addressed to each other. (Lai 31-37) Other community organizations are developing outreach programs to integrate cultural projects as symbols of solidarity and empowerment. Both of these can be seen as significant efforts to modify the inevitability of the Straight Line Theory of assimilation. And the pressures for that inevitability should not be underestimated. Some American writers have applauded this trend in ethnic identity since it reduces ethnic difference to superficial images. Allan Bloom, the author of The Closing of the American Mind (1987) and E. D. Hirsch, the author of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know (1987), both advocate an American society that strives for unity, avoiding what Ronald Takaki calls "Balkanization" of America. (Takaki 3-15) Thus, for Hirsch and Bloom, the symbolic treatment of ethnicity is a safe outlet of displaying difference, free from social or political consequence. By using superficial icons as a means of difference, difference itself becomes superficial. Images that define ethnic identity are approved only when they conform to a certain ideal dictated by the dominant culture. Yet as will be seen in this thesis, the dominant culture strives for social homogeneity (what Hirsch and Bloom describe as unity). Symbolic, iconic ethnicity can be regarded as a symptom that cultural difference is merely a facade; ethnic identity is being culturalized into the dominant society. Conversely, other independent films not analyzed in depth here, indicate attempts by Asian American/Canadian film makers to re-represent history: identity.

This thesis simply seeks to create an environment where critical analysis is able to reflect within and outside the community. As mentioned before, cultural experience does not exist within a vacuum. Finally, it is hoped that after examining the methods of ethnic representation in this thesis, the word "Asian" should invoke more than just Asian images, but universal critical thinking.

Endnotes

Introduction

¹ The last chapter on independent and alternative Asian North American Cinema, discusses how Symbolic Ethnicity exists within the Asian cultural community and how in a similar fashion it reinforces the latent Orientalism pursued by the Occidental community.

² Since few writers and directors of mainstream films are Asian, this thesis refers to Hollywood and mainstream films as directed and written by Non-Asians. In other words, the Asian images in these films are dictated by Non-Asians.

³ Full discussion of *Deculturalization* as well as its incorporation into the process of symbolic ethnicity will be explained as the feature model within this thesis.

Chapter One

⁴ Tudor actually lists ecological influences within this system, yet fails to fully explain why he has not developed its incorporation into the communication process. As such, this factor is omitted in favor of concentrating on the elements that will support the subsequent model of Symbolic Ethnicity.

⁵ Of course, this is another simplistic scenario and power within this relationship will depend on social, economic, educational and other factors. For the context of this thesis, the conversational scenario will be useful.

⁶ See Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, (New York; Viking Press, 1954), p. 46-47.

⁷ This reference to the "other" can be used with communities other than Asian. It is hoped that the system of analysis in this thesis can be used in other examinations of representations.

⁸ Although using the phrase, "North American" connotes various descriptions of a truly diverse population, for the sake of this thesis, this term will simply apply to the non-ethnic or, specifically, the non-Asian portion of the population. It can be argued that this milieu will affect the structure of communication being proposed, yet the polariness of Other and Self seems to remain intact, and this is the essential key to Symbolic Ethnicity.

⁹ Although there are many who have studied the interpretation of Orientalism, Edward Said has been the most prominent in discussion of this concept, and it is from his book that this thesis derives the majority of the system of interpretation used herein.

¹⁰ Other recent writers such as Allan Bloom and E.D. Hirsch has alluded to this hierarchy in their assessment of current university pupils. Both advocate a strict traditional canon and criticize the groups (usually minority groups - specifically Black) on their inability to assimilate and accept the established teachings.

¹¹ Cinema uses aural "connects" of Orientalism as well.

¹² The term and process of deculturalization was developed through the concept of culturalization of an ethnic culture. Culturalization occurs when a group will conform to another, larger group. A discussion of deculturalization can be found in an essay by Stephen Lee, "Deculturalization in the Films of John N. Smith".(1992) Unpublished.

¹³ The term "Multicultural Assumption" was used by J. Berry to describe the Multicultural policy implemented in the mid-seventies by the Canadian government. (Berry 1979, 99-112)

Chapter Two

¹⁴ Interestingly, Oliver Stone who wrote the screenplay of Year of the Dragon has just produced the film version of Amy Tan's novel, The Joy Luck Club. His next project is rumored to be Heaven and Earth, a Vietnamese account of the war he portrayed in Platoon and The Fourth of July.

¹⁵ Connie Chung Syndrome is defined in the documentary, Slaying the Dragon, as the latest ethnic stereotype, that of an Asian female reporter. The documentary concludes that the network television organizations favour Asian reporters over other ethnic minority reporters because they are less threatening. In effect, the Asian female reporter icons reassure the dominant culture's authority.

¹⁶ According to Thai's brother, when Thai attempted to venture outside of the community, he was chased, beaten and almost killed.

¹⁷ Integration through romance, violence, and commerce reoccurs in most of the contemporary Hollywood films.

Chapter Three

¹⁸ Reference to Asian Americans, Asian North Americans and Asian Canadians are used interchangeably unless otherwise stated.

¹⁹ To the author's knowledge, there are no Canadian feature length films that deal with identity by Asian Canadians.

²⁰ The term "subaltern" was first used by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to describe oppressed groups in culture, mainly dealing with feminist forms. See Chapter Two for examples of representation of ethnic communities by Hollywood and the mass media. (Spivak 154-184)

²¹ Gans, in his writings about subcultures, is too strict in categorizing different interest groups. In my opinion, the amalgamation of one subculture into another is more common than not.

²² The search for inner truth and the influences of "significant others" can be found in George Herbert Mead, Mind, Self, And Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934)

²³ References to films also include videos as well.

²⁴ This model is taken from an earlier essay entitled "Deculturalization in the Films of John N. Smith." This article discusses the treatment of ethnic communities in Smith's films through a sociological

methodology. Each film in which he uses a ethnic theme follows a constant pattern of threat and reconciliation.

²⁵ "Asian" here refers to Asian individuals within the displaced group of Asians in North America, or specifically, in Canada.

²⁶ The statement that Asians are influenced by North American culture is relatively obvious. The influence of North America in Hong Kong, where films are produced in large quantities, also show how Hollywood has influenced Asian culture there.

²⁷ See Bakhtin, "The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology and the Human Sciences," in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. (Austin: University of Texas Press , 1986), p. 126

²⁸ See Chapter One for an explanation of Latent and Manifest Orientalism.

²⁹ The majority of the references in the films and videos mentioned dealing with character will be Asian since it is the Asian identity that is at the core of this thesis.

³⁰ Although not the most compelling story or dialogue, the video is interesting in its attempt to depict a certain Asian Canadian lifestyle.

³¹ The dilemmas in this video are not unique, and obviously exist outside the Asian community as well.

³² Lem has taken the definitions for the term "compact" from the Oxford dictionary. 144. "Compact," The Oxford Dictionary of Current English, 1984 ed.

³³ For each subject, the medium is the common element. In other words, both subjects receive and communicate the medium's message. As discussed in Chapter One, the process is a bi-directional cycle, meaning that receiver and communicator influence each other.

³⁴ The homoerotic literature that Fung is referring to is the pornographic magazines that he sees in the Toronto newsstands. He describes in the film his exposure to these publications and his desire for Asian images to be included.

³⁵ The dominant culture exists in respect to the subculture that is outside of it. In Fung's case, the subcultures that he wishes to be included into are subcultures themselves. Irrespective of the marginal status of the Asian and Gay community, these groups become the dominant culture in the eyes of Fung.

Conclusion

³⁶ The interpretation is specific to Asian images in this thesis' context.

LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED

FILMS

- All Orientals Look Alike. Dir. Mona Soe. 1990.
- Bad Day at Black Rock. Dir. John Sturges. With Spencer Tracy. MGM, 1955.
- Big Trouble in Little China. Dir. John Carpenter. With Kurt Russell. Twentieth Century Fox 1981.
- Black Rain. Dir. Ridley Scott. With Michael Douglas. 1989.
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