

Preliminary Research Proposal

If you were, to analyze the roles of minority women in American movies, you might recall the tearful Oscar acceptance speech of Halle Berry for her work in *Monster Ball*. You might also recall Latin-American actress Jennifer Lopez as the *Wedding Planner*, Puerto Rican actress Rosy Perez in *The 24 Hour Woman*, or Middle Eastern actress Shannon Elizabeth in *American Pie*. While many of these minorities have experienced great progress through these increasingly non-ethnic, non-stereotypical roles, Asian-American actresses are among these minorities in Hollywood still struggling to avoid typecasting and avoid racial stereotyping. While Asian-Americans, the second largest minority in California, are underrepresented on the Big Screen, even the roles in which they manage to be cast are almost completely stereotypical roles: either to meek China doll or karate-chopping Dragon woman. With the perpetuation of these stereotypes, often their Asian-American faces are visual rhetoric in themselves, used by casting directors to enhance the credibility and characterization of the individuals they portray. What are the visual cues of these stereotypes and from what do they originate?

I intend to use movies as my primary sources, although I haven't selected which ones yet. I'd like to also look at some of the scripts. In terms of research and secondary sources, I've found several websites by Asian-American actors' guilds or groups with links to articles and editorials about Asian Americans and Asian-Am identity in Hollywood. I'd also like to look at some of the historical basis for these stereotypes, so a book discussing the emergence even of Asians in general into mainstream television and movies would work. Also, I think I might find some interesting quotes or comments in interviews with the actresses themselves. Even a biography by others in television might yield some interesting perspectives, such as those by journalist Connie Chung or ABC correspondent Lisa Ling.

At this point, the biggest challenge I can foresee is organizing my thoughts and ideas. This topic is personally significant to me, so I think I might have trouble narrowing my topic when questions about cross-cultural identity emerge. There are just so many factors and issues, which relate to this! Plus, I find it hard to focus it just on specific movies instead of incorporating television roles as well.

Pictures

(Right) Awaiting a hero to rescue her, Lucy Liu portrays meek, helpless Princess Pei-Pei in *Shanghai Noon*.

(Left) Using her dragon-like instincts, Lucy Liu's Alex employs her high-kick martial arts to conquer villains in *Charlie's Angels*.