

“Evolution of Western Stereotypes and Media Portrayals of Chinese People: From Orientalism to Inclusion,,

Yusheng Gu^{1,*}

¹Ross School, East Hampton, USA

*Corresponding author: ygu26@ross.org

Abstract:

In the past century, the West's attitude towards the Chinese has changed significantly, reflecting a wider social change, to be inclusive, and a deeper understanding of Chinese culture. Initially, Western concepts believed that Chinese culture was uncivilized, inferior, etc. This view led to the introduction of his laws such as the Chinese Evans Act. Stereotype. However, in recent decades, under the promotion of the rise of China's economic rise, Asian Americans to fight for equal rights, and the increasing attention of Western media in China's positive image, these views have gradually changed. Movies like „Golden Parcel“ marked the departure of traditional stereotypes, showing a Chinese role with different identities and ambitions. Today, the media plays a dual role in challenging and continuing stereotypes, but more and more trends are to describe more accurately and respect for the Chinese, thereby promoting a more balanced understanding of the world.This article will attempt to explore this issue and propose relevant viewpoints.

Keywords: Orientalism, Stereotype, media

1. Introduction

In a more inclusive and open environment, Westerners' impression of Chinese people has changed a lot in the past 100 years. Initially, Western concepts were seriously affected by Orientalism[1], and believed that Chinese culture was uncivilized, inferior, etc. The Western held a patronizing attitude towards Chinese and any other non-western cultures.The emergence of Orientalism still has a profound influence on Westerners today. The reasons for Westerners' negative impression and attitude towards Chinese a hundred years ago are extensive and reflected in

many aspects (Fig.1). There were many reasons for this, such as the incompetence of the Qing government and the prevalence of opium among the Chinese people at that time. At that time, the attitude of Westerners towards Chinese people was very exclusive and discriminatory. Take the Chinese Exclusion Act as an example. In the spring of 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act[2] was passed by Congress and signed by President Chester A. Arthur. This act provided an absolute 10-year ban on Chinese laborers immigrating to the United States. Western media platforms at the time also had a negative impression of the Chinese, such as the evil Chinese character Fu Manchu

[3]. It was during these two decades that Westerners began to have a better impression of Chinese. China's prosperity and the struggle for equal rights among overseas Chinese both contributed to this result. Since the reform and opening up, China has taken on a new look in front of Westerners since 2000, and many prejudices and stereotypes about China have been broken, for example, China is poor and backward, and Chinese people are the sick man of East Asia. The protest of AsiAn-Americans for equal rights is also a reason for the change of Westerners' impression of Chinese. Through various protests, the Western mainstream people's understanding of Asian-Americans as a non-speaking and role model race is gradually broken. These changes can be seen in many Western media platforms, which implies that people in the West are more accepting of Chinese culture and immigrants and the stereotype of Chinese people for a long time. More and more Chinese actors appear in European and American movies with positive images, although their images are somewhat stereotyped but gradually getting better. For example, Crazy Rich Asians[4], released in 2018, was the first Hollywood film with an all-Asian cast. This movie cannot be described as a film without stereotypes; however, the Asian people became the main character with different identities and they got rid of the stereotypes about appearance, so it is a significant progress. For a variety of reasons, the western impression of the Chinese has changed dramatically in the past 100 years, which can also be reflected in all aspects of society.



Fig. 1 The chinese exclusion act [5]

2. Westerner's Stereotypes towards Chinese

2.1 Different Types of Stereotypes towards Chinese from Westerners' View

Stereotypes about Chinese people from a western perspective can change widely and are often based on a bunch of misunderstandings, historical influences, and western media. Hardworking is one of the famous stereotypes of Chinese people. Even though these traits are positive, this also makes other people think Chinese people only and overly focus on the work. Furthermore, because of this stereotype, Chinese people in the USA are always described as the "model minority"[6]. Secondly, Chinese people are considered as academic excellence. Westerners tend to believe Chinese people are all good at math and think Chinese people are talented at these areas which ignores Chinese people's effort and pressures they face. Thirdly, Chinese people are also portrayed as quiet and submissive. For instance, when Chinese face some trouble or inequality, they like to stay silent, just endure the pressure by themselves, never speak out. These three stereotypes mentioned above can be divided into the positive or neutral aspects. There are also a lot of negative aspects about the stereotype towards Chinese people. A lot of Western people think Chinese people are overly competitive, especially in academic or professional settings. For example, Chinese people are always willing to do extra work to please the superior. This image is also portrayed in a lot of anime. The image of Chinese people in Family Guy is that they are always learning, workaholics and very demanding of their children. There is another negative stereotype that portrays Chinese people as eating strange foods, often with a judgment. Westerners always like to talk about Chinese people eating dogs[7], however it is a really lopsided view. Admittedly, there are some areas in China where people take dogs as a food source, but it cannot be concluded that all the people in China eat dogs. These stereotypes are often inaccurate, oversimplified, and can be harmful.

2.2 What Makes these Stereotypes Days Before

Before the Opium Wars and the Qing Dynasty's opening of foreign trade ports to the West, China was often thought of as a mysterious and fertile country. At that time, China and Europe were not directly connected, but traded through the Silk Road connecting Central Asia and West Asia. At the end of the Silk Road, the Byzantine Empire served as a medium for the exchange of goods between East and West, so direct contact between China and the West was rare. At that time, if you ask a Westerner what his impression of China is, he may not know what China

is. After the Great Age of navigation, the communication between China and the West gradually became more and more, and the impression of Westerners on China often became porcelain and tea, while Westerners had no impression on Chinese people. The defeat of the Opium War[8] cemented Western stereotypes of the Chinese.

The defeat in the Opium War marked the onset of a detrimental stereotype of the Chinese in Western perception. Prior to this period, notably during the time of Marco Polo, China was widely regarded as a highly developed civilization, often depicted as a land abundant with wealth and gold. However, the outcome of the Opium War significantly altered this image, leading to a Western view of the Chinese characterized by associations with opium addiction and a weakened state. Western aggression and oppression of China in the 100 years after the Opium War further deepened the prejudice, and China was regarded as uncivilized. However, attributing this prejudice solely to Western invasion would be an oversimplification. During the era of semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, China lagged significantly behind the West in terms of social and technological development. While superstition remained prevalent in China, the West had already undergone two Industrial Revolution. The appearance of people in the Qing Dynasty also contributed to the westerners' stereotypes toward Chinese people (Fig.2). Because of the backward technology, famine was very common in the Qing Dynasty, and people were generally thin, which also led Westerners to have a stereotype of Chinese people as thin. The most distinctive feature of the Qing people is that men wear braids, which is often laughed at by Westerners. In the early 20th century, Westerners had a fear of the yellow race, and the image of Fu Manchu is a good description. Part of the reason for this fear is the impact of the Boxer Rebellion[9].



Fig. 2 Qing Dynasty [10]

2.3 What Makes these Stereotypes Nowadays

Western stereotypes of Chinese people have changed a lot since 100 years ago. The stereotype is no longer focused solely on the Chinese being evil and cowardly, and the

reasons for these prejudices have become more complex. Take the stereotype that Chinese people eat dogs as an example. The stereotype about Chinese people eating dogs comes from cultural practices that are specific to some regions and groups within China, where eating dogs has been carried out for thousands of years. This practice is not widespread across the whole of China; and other cultures also have customs of eating dogs. Cultural differences play an important role in this stereotype. In many Western cultures, dogs are considered pets; when people from these cultures encountered the practice, they would be shocked which led to a stereotype. In addition, media coverage reinforces stereotypes. Western media has often focused on the Yulin Dog Meat Festival in Guangxi. Although this is true, it should not be generalized that all Chinese eat dogs. The images of Chinese people on screen are not only the expression of stereotypes but also the transmission of stereotypes. The images of Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan[11] on screen have given Westerners the stereotype that Chinese people know kung fu.

3. The Connection between Media and Stereotypes

3.1 The Influence of Media on Stereotypes

The media plays a role in promoting the spread of stereotypes. The influence of the media on stereotypes is significant because the media is a powerful agent of people communicating, influencing how people learn about the world. While a lot of people have not been to a lot of countries, media is the only way they contact the world. Under the guidance of the media, people will agree with this wrong view without thinking, and stereotypes are formed in this way. The subjectivity of the media is very strong. Certain groups may be underrepresented or portrayed in limited, stereotypical roles. For example, different media would have different views on the same topic due to different positions. Take the example of the Yulin Dog Meat Festival in Guangxi. The local media would report this event as a traditional custom. However, some foreign media will focus on why Chinese people are so cruel and why China is still so backward. In addition, the western media only presents eating dogs about Yulin, they definitely would not focus on other stuff about Yulin. When the media repeatedly presents a particular image or idea about a group, it will reinforce the stereotype. Historically, Chinese individuals have been stereotyped as “model minority”, characterized by academic and professional success. This image has often been portrayed in the media. Additionally, during times of the COVID-19[11] pandemic, ste-

reotypes of Chinese people became the virus carrier. The media contributed a lot to this result. The media tended to include all Chinese people into the COVID-19 carrier which made the appearance of Chinese people really negative. Film, as a kind of media communication, also plays a crucial role in the spread of stereotypes. In the 1900s-1960s, Chinese people's image was really negative on the screen, such as Fu Manchu who is an evil Chinese man. Fu Manchu is the representative of Western fear of the Yellow Peril. Fu Manchu is Chinese, but he was always played by White actors. Fu Manchu's first film began in 1923, and no film about him has been made since 1980, due to the Chinese boycott. Fu Manchu villain, destroy the world, beaten by white hero. In history, Western people constructed this man by their stereotypes towards Chinese people. Although Fu Manchu has disappeared for 44 years, his influence is far-reaching, and the racist gesture of making single eyelids at Asians comes from Fu Manchu. Fu Manchu's emergence was a good example of Orientalism and racism.

3.2 More Accepted Attitudes towards Chinese People in the Media

In recent years, the western media's attitude toward Chinese people has become more positive and widely accepted. This change reflects a great progress on diversification, as well as a deeper understanding of Chinese culture. The media gradually shed narrow stereotypes and began to show more of the diversity and contributions of Chinese people in fields such as art, science, business and politics. At the same time, the media focused on presenting Chinese culture in a positive and respectful way, celebrating its rich history, tradition and modern development. This change is also reflected in film, television and literature, where Chinese characters are no longer limited to traditional or stereotypical images, but are portrayed as multi-faceted characters with diverse personalities and rich backgrounds. Take Crazy Rich Asian as an example. All the characters were Asian, and in the Chinese people's image there was only Kungfu and good at math, all of them have different personalities. As these more balanced and positive images are increasingly presented in the media, the acceptance and appreciation of Chinese people is also increasing globally.

4. Conclusion

In the past century, the West has had a profound change in the attitude of the Chinese people, from exclusive stereotypes to more detailed and inclusive understanding. Initially, Westerners' views on the Chinese were influenced by Easternism, and Chinese culture was regarded as

inferior and uncivilized. This view not only defends discriminatory practices such as the „China Dedication Act“, but also to permanently impress the negative stereotype through the performance of the media, such as the villain Fu Manzhou. These descriptions strengthen the narrowness and prejudice of the Chinese, leading to general discrimination and exclusion in Western society. However, the gradual changes in these attitudes in recent decades have reflected major social, cultural and economic development. As the rise of a global economic country, China has played a vital role in changing Western concepts. Asians and Americans's visibility and enthusiasm for equal rights are also increasing. These factors help break the old stereotypes and show the diversity and complexity of the Chinese. They contribute in various fields such as art, science, business, and politics. The media, which has played a core role in spreading negative stereotypes, has begun to depict the Chinese with a more positive and respectful attitude. Films such as „Golden Picks“ have broken the traditional stereotypes, which marks a broader trend, that is, more balanced and more vividly presenting the Chinese. This transformation of the media image not only reflects the changes in attitudes, but also promotes further changes, helping to better accept and appreciate Chinese culture and the Chinese people on the global stage. Despite these positive development, it is important to realize that the stereotypes of the Chinese still exist, whether it is positive or negative. Although the stereotype of the „model ethnic minority“ emphasizes the characteristics of hard work and academic success, it also covers the diversity of the Chinese people and brings them under pressure. Negative stereotypes, such as stereotypes around eating dogs or exaggerating competition, continue to exist and are often strengthened by selective media reports. The connection between the media and stereotypes is still very strong, which may make the outdated views permanently or promote a more inclusive narrative. As the media continues to play a vital role in shaping the public concept, the content creators must notice their descriptions that may have the impact on social attitudes. By accepting more accurate and diversified expressions, the media can help eliminate harmful concepts of Chen, and help build a more fair and understanding society. In short, the transformation of the Chinese attitude towards the Chinese in the past proved the power of cultural, economic and social forces in challenging and changing the stereotypes of stereotypes. Although it has made progress, the process of comprehensively accepting and appreciating Chinese culture and the Chinese people continues, which requires the continuous efforts of the media and society to ensure that the results achieved will continue and further develop in the future.

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