

hmong
khmer tibetan
indian chamorro
japanese
taiwanese
filipino
korean singaporean
sri lankan
chinese
laotian vietnamese
indonesian
mongolian
thai nepalese
burmese teochew
cham samoan
shanghaiese
malaysian
pakistani

representation



OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates is a national membership-driven organization of community advocates dedicated to advancing the social, political, and economic well-being of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) in the United States.

To fulfill its mission, OCA has adapted the following goals to:

- Advocate for social justice, equal opportunity and fair treatment;
- Promote civic participation, education, and leadership;
- Advance coalitions and community building; and,
- Foster cultural heritage.

Founded as the Organization of Chinese Americans in 1973, OCA has grown to be a robust national advocacy organization to advance the civil and human rights of AAPIs and aspiring Americans. The organization presently has over 50 chapters, affiliates and partners, impacting more than 35,000 individuals across the country through local and national programming. The organization's headquarters remain in Washington, DC, allowing OCA to directly engage in critical public policy issues on a macro level, it continues to largely remain as a grassroots constituency of lay advocates from all walks of life and diverse ethnic identities addressing uniquely local level issues impacting over 19 million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders across the country.

OCA takes no collective position on the politics of any foreign country, but instead focuses on the welfare and civil rights of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

IMAGE

Publisher - OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates
Executive Editor - Lisa Wong
Managing Editor - Thu Nguyen
Contributors - Rita Pin Ahrens, Emilio Manuel Camu, Kyra Du, Gabriel Kramer, Eric Lin, Malaya Siy, Kent Tong, Lisa Wong

For comments or sponsorship inquires:
OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates
ATTN: IMAGE Magazine
1322 18th St NW
Washington, DC 20036

Telephone: 202.223.5500
Email: oca@ocanational.org
Website: www.ocanational.org

President - Sharon M. Wong
Executive Vice President - Edward Lew
Treasurer - Thong Tharm
Secretary - Linda Ng

Vice Presidents of:
Communications - Lisa Wong
Chapter Development - Eric Lin
Economic Development - David Lin
Education and Culture - June Jee
Finance - Virginia Ng
Public Affairs - Roland Hwang
Membership Services - Greg Jung
Immediate Past-President - Leslie Moe-Kaiser
General Counsel - Ada Loo

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From the Board



Dear AdvOCAtes,

Half of this year seems to have flown by in a flurry of change and transition. While OCA welcomed our first ever Southeast Asian executive director, Rita Pin Ahrens, AAPI filmmakers and authors have been releasing works consistently, and an AAPI presidential hopeful along with many others running locally. As we continue the conversation of AAPI representation, this summer's issue of IMAGE hopes to bring other points into the conversation.

We bring back chapter updates and contributions, as well as OCA intern writings. IMAGE is not just a physical newsletter for members to keep up with OCA National. As a published magazine with a distribution of over 4,000, IMAGE can be a platform in which the work of rising artists, writers, and advocates can be highlighted.

As OCA continues to reflect on how representation should be pursued and executed, we hope you look forward to the coming years and the changes that will be reflected in our advocacy, programming, and IMAGE magazine.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharon M. Wong".

Sharon M. Wong, OCA National President



Dear Friends,

Since May, I've had the pleasure of getting to know the second oldest Asian American civil rights organization in the country as the new executive director of OCA. Notably, I'm also the first Southeast Asian American executive director that the organization has seen since the rebranding to be OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates in 2013. Although OCA has been a pioneer and champion in advocating for the political and socioeconomic well-being of all Asian Americans, I am excited for the challenge of ensuring that we fulfil our mission and vision of advocating for all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

I look forward to meeting you at a future OCA event, and thank you for your continued support of OCA.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rita Pin Ahrens".

Rita Pin Ahrens, OCA National Executive Director

Chapter Highlights



OCA Greater Cleveland



For Asian Pacific American heritage month, OCA Greater Cleveland partnered with Cleveland State University to present a panel discussion on “AsiaTown and the Asian American Experience,” a Brown Bag Film series featuring The Chinese Exclusion Act “Who is American?,” “Oral History Documentary of Japanese American – Cleveland’s Japanese American’s experience from Internment camp to the City of Cleveland, and OCA Image TV AsiaTown highlights; and the “Faces of Chinatown” Gallery Exhibit during the month of May. OCA Cleveland also celebrated 10 years of the Cleveland Asian Festival with 40,000 attendees, 130+ vendors, and 50+ performances on two outdoor stages over the 2-day weekend in May.



OCA UTAH



Clockwise from top left: (1) OCA UTAH members performed Tinikling at the annual University of Utah Asian American High School Conference hosted by the Asian American Student Association. (2) Group picture from the inaugural Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month potluck in Salt Lake City! (3) Group picture from APIA U hosted by OCA UTAH. (4) OCA UTAH was invited to be guests of the showcase the Intercollegiate Pacific Islander Showcase, in which the directors gave remarks.

Why Representation Matters To Me

Written by Rita Pin Ahrens, OCA Executive Director

I was very young when my family fled the killing fields of Cambodia and arrived in America, to the small ski resort town of Ketchum, Idaho. Those first years of living here were a blur, save for snippets of distinct memories tied to heightened emotions. There was the frustration at not being able to explain when a sandy-haired, blue-eyed boy snatched a teddy bear out of my hands and I snatched it back, only to be sent to sit in the corner of the pre-school classroom while he continued to play with the other children. There was also the cold knot of fear in my stomach when my mother explained in hushed tones that “this is their country, not ours, and they can send us back.”

In the eyes of a not-quite five year old, who looked so different from everyone else outside the family and who could not understand any of the strange words coming out of the mouths of all the ‘barang,’ the Khmer word for foreigners, it was natural to feel that we did not belong. Except we were now the foreigners, in foreign lands, displaced from our own home country.

Later in school, I learned and heard frequently and fervently that America was the great melting pot, but I didn’t see it anywhere around me – not in the people of the town I grew up in, nor in the books that I read or the shows that I watched on television. Although we had the Cosby Show, which I favored over the Brady Bunch, I had never seen a black person where I lived, and so it seemed that they, too, were out of place and yet, in some small way, relatable to me. It didn’t occur to me, for the longest time, that the rest of the country could look and be different from where I lived.

The school history books then did not paint a picture of America’s rich tapestry. They glorified the American Revolution, mourned the Civil War, and celebrated the Lewis and Clark expedition that paved the way for settlers to travel westwards – lingering on those early, formative years of our country and dismissing much of modern history. World history was

distinctly focused on European history, as if the rest of the world ended if you went too far east. The Vietnam war was barely mentioned, save for the great losses that we suffered as a nation and fearmongering about the spread of Communism, and nothing was said of the Cambodian genocide nor what happened in Laos. Most tragically, we learned nothing of the Chinese railroad workers or gold miners, nor of the Japanese internment camps, even though these were indelible parts of Idaho history and the remnants of those times could be seen firsthand just a short drive away.

I was never ashamed of my heritage and my background. We were, after all, survivors of a brutal communist regime, displaying all the resilience, grit, and tenacity that was so cherished in the pilgrims and the heroes of the Revolutionary War. My parents had carried me on their back, walking the same distance from Washington DC to New York City, trudging through mosquito-filled jungles, carefully creeping past soldiers, and praying they avoided landmines to reach the refugee camp on the Thailand border that would send us somewhere, anywhere out of Cambodia. In between the stories of how they struggled to survive, my parents reminded me that we had the blood of warrior kings and the ancient builders of Angkor Wat within us. So despite the stark poverty of my youth, I was always proud of my parents for their bravery, because they were exceptional, having endured hardships so unbelievable in contrast to the seemingly easy lives of others around us.

But in Idaho, I felt distinctly unAmerican. I accepted that we looked different, ate delicious food that others strangely wrinkled their noses at, and didn’t pray to the same gods as everyone else. I hardened myself against what was blatant ignorance and discrimination, because there weren’t many like us in our town. My childhood memories were filled with the racial slurs that school kids slung at recess despite not truly knowing what they meant, the teachers



Left: Rita Pin Ahrens and family at temple.
Right: Rita and daughter dressed in matching traditional costume, ready for perform!

that told me I would burn in hell for being a heathen, and the sometimes curious, sometimes wary looks we received anywhere I walked with my brothers. In a town and a state that lacked diversity and others that looked like me, I was disturbed, but not truly distressed by the prejudice and discrimination.

I thought things would be different when I was in college, at Yale, one of the most prestigious schools in America, where the student population was incredibly diverse, with one in five students of Asian American or Pacific Islander heritage. Surely, in a college that was renowned for its liberal views and nestled in a town that had an annual international festival of arts and ideas located in the center of the city, things would be different.

Unfortunately, though there was plenty of racial diversity, some things hadn't changed. Again and again, I found myself in situations that felt all too familiar to what I had experienced growing up in Idaho. The prejudice wasn't as explicit, but it was just as keenly felt when carelessly slung in jests or taunts from the local residents to go back to Japan or wherever I came from. The biggest disappointment, however, came from my residential college dean, who refused to write the required dean's excuse for me to attend a holiday celebration that was both cultural and religious, even though I had a local Buddhist abbot call to explain its significance and confirm that he would personally take me to the celebration. At that time, there was no Buddhist chaplain at Yale who would stand up for me and admonish my dean, and there were certainly no Cambodians or Asian Americans I could turn to for help in the administration.

It was a difficult lesson about representation and why it is so important, a lesson that is hard to forget. It didn't matter that there were others all around who looked like me. What mattered was whether those who held positions of authority understood who I was and what my values were, and therefore could make decisions that were responsive to my needs.

In the end, we can be present in great numbers, but are we truly being valued and included as Americans if we aren't amongst those making the decisions that impact us in our everyday lives – in our schools, our businesses, our entertainment, and our country?

"Show Them What We Can Do"

Written by Gabriel Kramer, OCA Greater Cleveland



As Jackie Robinson steps up to the plate, in front of loud boos and racist taunts, a young black boy at the baseball game puts his hands together, closes his eyes and says, "Please, God. Let Jackie show them what we can do."

It's a scene from the biopic '42.' The young boy's words give me goosebumps every time I hear him say it.

When the 'Crazy Rich Asians' hype built up last summer, I repeated that boy's words. Show them what we can do, Constance Wu. Show them what we can do, Henry Golding. Show them what we can do, Akwafina, Gemma Chan, Nico Santos, Sonoya Mizuno, John M. Chu, Kevin Kwan and all of the other brilliant Asian people who put this together. Show them what we can do.

More than anything, I wanted 'Crazy Rich Asians' to show the world all of the different kinds of Asians that exist. I don't mean Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino -- what I mean is cool Asians, funny Asians, even mean Asians. The world needs to see the breadth of personalities that Asian people have, because there is so much more to Asian people than a John Hughes movie will suggest.

By now we know the film's success -- the first American film with an all-Asian cast profited more than \$200 million. But the success we all wanted was more than dollars and cents. 'Crazy Rich Asians' was supposed to lead to better representation of Asians in film.

"It didn't."

At least that's what Meg Hanson wrote in a Popdust article titled "The Failed Promise of 'Crazy Rich Asians': Asian-American Representation Is a Lie."

Hanson mentions that a few Asian-American led stories were to be featured on major TV networks, but all had been cancelled, including both a drama and a comedy intended for ABC. Additionally, Fox approved and cancelled the Albert Kim written 'Kung Fu,' a drama featuring a Chinese-American woman who inherits her father's martial

arts business.

Hanson quotes a tweet from Kim, in which he writes, "TV execs like to say they're eager for shows featuring stories from a different culture. But often what they really want are stories they're already comfortable with. They simply want to cast them with diverse actors."

The Asian Pacific American Media Coalition released report cards for TV networks on their inclusion of Asian-Americans in April. The results were less than ideal. The APAMC graded the networks on its actors, hosts and contestants, writers and producers, directors, program development, the network's commitment to diversity and the strength of the relationship between the APAMC and the network. These seven categories provided the following overall grades: ABC - B, CBS - B-, Fox - F and NBC - C.

The road to representation definitely seems to have a lot of speed bumps and construction zones, but there are still plenty of wins that Asian-Americans should celebrate.

ABC renewed 'Fresh Off the Boat,' the story of a Chinese-American family living in Orlando, for a sixth season. Korean-American John Cho starred in the thriller 'Searching' just a few weeks after 'Crazy Rich Asians' was released. Jason Momoa, whose father is a Native Hawaiian and he himself was born in Hawaii, starred as the Marvel Superhero 'Aquaman.' 'A Sun is Also a Star' premiered in theaters in May. It features Korean-American Charles Melton as the love interest to the young black actress Yara Shahidi.

A number of Asian led films are coming out this year including 'Yesterday' starring Himesh Patel, 'The Farewell' starring Awkwafina, 'Tonight' starring Mindy Kaling, 'Stuber' starring Kumail Nanjiani and 'Blinded by the Light' starring Sanfraz Manzoor.

Some hosting jobs are going to Asian-Americans as well. Filipino-American Joshua Dela Cruz is the new host of Nickelodeon's Blue's Clues reboot. Indian-American Sahana Srinivasan is the host of the Netflix show called Brainchild, which is an educational science show for kids.

Netflix also recently created some recent Asian-American movies. 'To All the Boys I've Loved Before' is a teenage romance story that is getting a sequel. Also, Ali Wong and Randall Park play old childhood friends who reconnect as adults in 'Always Be My Maybe,' which had impressive early reviews -- including one from my mother.

There are plenty more examples to name and all of

these roles are signs of progress for representation. Meg Hanson mentions some of them in her article, calling them "small inches" in terms of progress. So what will it take to turn these small inches into miles?

"Every movement needs it's mafia."

That's what Bing Chen said when he created the

'Crazy Rich Asians' #GoldOpen campaign, suggesting that Asian-Americans should pack theaters to support the film. Chen is chairman and co-founder of Gold House, an organization dedicated to supporting and celebrating Asian professionals.

Asian-American artists and creatives need support. 'Crazy Rich Asians' proved that audiences wanted to see Asians in big blockbuster films. Consumers should get just excited about the upcoming Asian led movies or TV shows. Buy tickets, tune in, stream and spread the word because it might show TV and movie executives that the demand for Asians in film is real.

Kimberly Truong wrote an article for InStyle titled, "One Year Later, Has Crazy Rich Asians Actually Changed Hollywood?" Truong interviewed a screenwriter named Soo Hugh.

"Asian's aren't a monolith; we can't keep telling the same story," Hugh told InStyle. "We need to be brave enough to say that our people are worth a million stories."

Asian people can be cool, nerdy, athletic, crazy, mean, nice, beautiful, smart, tough -- anything. Asian people have stories to tell. Asian people can be stars. And if we support Asian artists, we can "show them what we can do."

The Harbinger

by Kyra Du, OCA Summer Intern 2019

Looking back into the dusty fog of my boyhood, The Harbinger stood out as my only constant companion, with the exception of my dead brother. It sat atop the cover mantelpiece of my mother's garage-sale purchased piano, erect and burgeoning. The belly spilled out magnanimously like a porcelain waterfall curved outwards, or rather, like the plump body of a smiling, slant-eyed monk with a necklace of spherical beads, a figure whose variations now, at least, only really exist on the countertops of some smoky Oriental restaurant in a thick San Francisco-esque din. The red varnish which coated its sides and the intricate, frozen patterns of tangled vines and blooming orchids that enshrined its swooping bulge was interrupted by slim cracks swimming under the plaster, like thin strings of wet hair smeared upon its milky surface.

Nevertheless, while I was practicing, The Harbinger was the most beautiful thing in the world. The Harbinger was my benevolent guardian. It looked down from the tops of the piano and watched over me, situated in the space between my scrawny body sticky with sweat on the peeled leather piano bench and my mother, sitting on the uneven dining chair besides me. The watchman. Whenever my fingers would betray me and play a B instead of a B flat over keys slick with my sweat, or some other demonic variation, The Harbinger would warn me of the incoming storm.

It's coming, Shelby, it would whisper, she's going to go off again.

"Ai – wrong, that was wrong," my mother would spit out, her tongue sharpening the hot, obsidian surface of Mandarin into a black scythe. If my playing skills were particularly inadequate, she would then hack at me again, adding, in English this time, "Why you can't focus, eh? Why you can't – you can't be like –"

I would play again. While I was playing, it probably seemed as though I was staring at the music sheet when in reality, I would be searching for answers in The Harbinger's passive, avuncular expression. My fingers went awry; my mother exploded again. Behind me, the framed photo of nine year old Jesse performing at Cambridge University simmered.

"I'm sorry, son," I remember The Harbinger saying once. "She's only got him on her mind."

[二]

The news of my brother's death came to my mother two weeks before she was scheduled to give birth to me. I was born just four days shy of his would-be eighteenth birthday. Official documentation states that I was born around 4:56 AM, surrounded

by the local doctors and my mother, although this is not entirely true. When I was born, Jesse was there, too.

He was there, standing over my mother reclining in the hospital bed, his body still riddled with the bullet holes: one in his chest, one in his stomach, the third through his brain. Jesse stood over me and my mother and his eyes were apathetic while blood leaked in rivulets from the holes in his body — onto the marble floor, into the cotton sheets of my baby blanket still wrapped tight around me, dripping against my mother's front lobe so the red streaked down her face until it curved around her cheekbone and towards her chin, like tears.

It was the first time, but not the last, Jesse's ghost had reached a cold, blazing claw into the arteries of my heart and pulled.

[—]

I asked my mother about the origin of The Harbinger on the summer before I turned ten. It was the hot, sticky first Sunday of July and the anniversary of Jesse's death. And since it was a Sunday, that also meant it was mandatory reading day. My mother and I were settled on the sofa cocooned in plastic wrapping. "We went to China sometimes," my mother answered, after a pregnant silence. "To visit grandparents. And to let XiaoLing practice his Chinese, although he did not need to. Unlike you." My mother sniffed and spoke again, this time in English, "You Chinese sucks."

She proceeded to then turn a page of a grainy and quasi-soggy Chinese newspaper which had made its debut into my life through the overly air-conditioned entrances of the local Asian

food market, where the scent of peeled leeks and ripe honey-melon still clung to its drooping corners. And since my ten year-old self was already well versed in the labyrinthine nature of my mother's conversations, I avoided a landmine by not indulging her. Instead, I settled deeper into the squeaky, plastic-coated body of our family couch. I clutched my battered copy of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* even though, when I was sure she wasn't looking, my hand would try and sneak between the sofa cushions to reach the glossy surface of *Batman: No Man's Land*.

"Mama, what time is it?"

"You ask me again and your one hour reading time will start over."

My mother was positioned on one end with her Chinese newspaper written in hieroglyphics, me on the opposite. In between us sat Jesse, bleeding all over the upholstery, his body a trifecta.

"What are you looking at," my mother spoke, not even glancing up from her newspaper. "Focus on your reading."

"I wasn't looking at anything, Mama."

"Then why you not reading?" It was English this time, and I ducked my head over Huckleberry Finn.

After reading time was over, I tried to wipe the blood from the cushions. It wasn't too hard since the fabric was protected by a layer of plastic wrapping; the blood came off easily in spools of expanding pinkish circles. My mother walked in just as I was kneeling on the carpet to wipe away the stains that had escaped from the cushion and dripped onto the floor.

"What are you doing, HongHong? Is that my new kitchen towel?" I hastily stood up and hid the cloth behind my back, even though I knew my mother couldn't see the red blooming through the white. "You idiot boy," my mother chided, her straight back and strong, wide shoulders shifting as she shuffled over to pry the bloody towel from my hands. "Look, it's all filthy with dust now." My mother held the thing by its two corners and then flicked her wrists in and out, twice in succession, quick and fleet as the bony legs of a flighty grasshopper. I watched as a few droplets hit the soft indented mid-section of the sofa, the middle cushion where Jesse had been only moments ago, and wondered, briefly, if I were allowed to follow to the place where my dead brother had vanished.

[0]

亲爱的,

你知道什么是砚吗? It comes to existence first from the earth, whose blackened lips reach up to kiss the salty water of the sea. 黑土. 你知道吗? It comes away with 墨水, like the dark saliva which coats two smoking sticks of incense, balancing so dangerously that the monkey king in the clouds morphs into manhood so he can listen. The brush falls next. 毛笔. A magic stick weaves through sweet fire and scented oils and carves gorges along the black body: a glue cake. The spit of a boy loosens its strings so that the sugar inside the ink bleeds into the pink lining down his throat. Finally, the porcelain bowl. 瓷器. 白白的脸, 像月亮一样. The aged face makes it seem so kind; it stands inside a dusty shop in some obscure city and some obscure time until the boy comes in again with a white smile brilliant against the milky, colorless surface. 可是这是假的. But that is an abstraction. It is only until the brother comes, clear water leaking from his eyes, that we see the true hues: 红.

Red, like the rising sun.

亲爱的弟弟1, oh how I love you so.

[四]

I still dream of Jesse. His spirit floats inside of my body, my conscience his barrack and feeding ground. In my dream, where it is neither night nor day, only a bright whiteness like the full moon, he crouches above me and watches as I struggle to stay clinging to the gaping maw of a black well expanding beneath air. His wounds are open and dripping red onto the sunflower petals by his feet and down onto my skin.

Jesse speaks, too. He chants and repeats the same phrase in Chinese every single time and even though I can understand Chinese decently well from the mouth of my mother and the living, I can never understand the Chinese of the dead. The only way I know that Jesse is speaking to me in the mother tongue is because of the way the sounds from his throat vibrate inside my hot, suffocating body and then straight up through to my own lips, where the same language would threaten to spill out like cracked, misshapen stones; like the only way I could ever speak the language Jesse speaks is if the words tore themselves directly out from my esophagus simply on the account of my mouth being too weak of a vessel to hold such incomprehensible power.

“Wait,” I gasp, still dreaming. “Wait for me.”

Jesse only grins, the hole in his head snaking red ink down into his face, across his eye and then over his top lip so that it taints a crack between two gleaming white teeth. I feel myself slipping from my grasp now swallowed with blood. The skin turns red, red, red.

“Please.”

My brother leans in close and whispers to me the language of rocks as I fall.

¹ *Dear little brother.*

I am but a Shadow

by Malaya Siy, OCA Summer Intern 2019

(Originally performed as spoken word.)

I am but a shadow
Call me the 'lost soul'
You may know me as dirty, sneaky, and hollow
And yes you do spell "shadow" lowercase
Because I only refract your shape
But there's depth to the darkness
More to a trope than harmless, heartless
The light may dance between the objects
But i'm more than just their cape

*So remember while you walk
Though they may trapse upon me
I'm still here
Always will be
Thinking of you, fondly*

Let me meet you where you grow, mother fucker
One drop rule and a mask to hide from the light.
Umbra, penumbra, nothings watered down from the source.
Its emotional exhaustion
but
Love is an act, Love is a verb
So get active, mother fucker
Listen, language is divisive
Still to you i am a shadow
That's just our ready-to-sign contract
Still, i forgive you mother fucker

*Remember that shadows speak through the winds
So you CAN always hear me
But apparently only she listens
She can hear my screams
She alone knows the shades of my grays.
Beyond what you think you know
I'm still here through storm and snow.*

I have roots
Deep roots
Roots rooted in loud uncles, too many cousins, and lost angels. A
Roots rooted in family
Roots
You cannot pull up
I can exist anywhere.
Rid the world of me if you dare.

You want me to want to be
The sun.
If i were to want to be
Its
not me.

Well shit... I am but a shadow.

**Am I what you expected, though?
You who defines the shadow by the light
I know lightbulbs more genuine than you
So listen, dear, to what you did not want to hear
There will always be more to me
than what the sun can see.**



Crazy Rich Asians: The Complex Fight For Representation

by Kent Tong, OCA Programs Coordinator

'Crazy Rich Asians' doesn't represent all Asians.

There's been a lot of hype surrounding 'Crazy Rich Asians', with many heralding it as big step towards representation of Asians in Hollywood. However, once the film's trailer was released, there was much outcry and criticism aimed at the film for not representing *all* Asians. Most of the critiques I've read are thoughtful and valid, some I disagreed with, but ultimately this discussion is good to have because it helps move the conversation forward.

With many progressive movements, including Feminism and Black Lives Matter, there are people who consider themselves members and supporters of the movement, but who may not necessarily agree or adhere to the same philosophies. Can you be a housewife and still be a feminist? There are feminists who disagree and feel that it moves feminism backwards. However, most feminists would say the answer is yes, you can be a housewife and still be a feminist because feminism allows women the freedom of choice. Can you be pro-Black Lives Matter if you're against the LGBTQ community? Some may say yes, because the Black community is racial, whereas LGBTQ concerns sexual orientation. However, the answer is no, because how can you be pro-Black Lives if you don't also support black LGBTQ lives?

Movements are complex because they have to represent so many people under one umbrella. But the debates we have, with each one of us educating the other, eventually help solidify and strengthen the overall progressive message the movement stands for. Now the question begs: can we truly have Asian representation when we're only seeing light-skinned East/Southeast Asians, or ethnically ambiguous Asians?

Then there's the criticism that 'Crazy Rich Asians' has racist undertones and promotes the oppression of South Asians and brown Asians. It's true, when you watch the trailer or the actual film, the major characters are all light-skinned Southeast Asians.

"Chinese Singaporeans, at 77% of the population, are the vast majority of the nation and the population's minorities are Malay and Indian people, who make up 15% and 7% respectively," writes Singaporean writer and activist Sangeetha Thanapal. "Given this context, this movie is actually perpetuating the state of racism and Islamophobia in Singapore. The only Brown people in the movie are opening doors or in service of the elite Chinese in the movie. Minorities only exist in the periphery of the film. Why is this being lauded as revolutionary?"

To be fair, the novel is loosely based on his experiences growing up in an affluent family in Singapore. Kwan has a passage in the novel that suggests there's colorism within Singaporean society; the passage was regarding a family member who got disowned for marrying a woman who was "one shade too dark." I have no doubt that the real people Kevin Kwan based these characters on are all light-skinned Asians. I don't doubt that the rich Asians he based these characters on surround themselves with people just like themselves.

In a way, the film may be depicting an honest truth in the way the 1% live, and the types of people they keep in their circle. Growing up in a middle-class family, even I've heard there was a preference for light-skinned people in Vietnam because if you were dark-skinned it meant you were poor or worked out in the fields. It's not right, but it's a reality of many Asian societies. Just look at how pale all of the Kpop

stars are!

Some recent films that come to mind, ones that have been celebrated for their impact in Hollywood's diversity problem, include Pixar's 'Coco' and 20th Century Fox's 'Love, Simon'. The former was the first film from Pixar that focused on non-white characters, and the first animated film by a major animated studio to feature an entirely Latino cast and characters. The latter is the first film from a major Hollywood studio to feature a gay, teen protagonist. Both are films I love and cried over. Both were celebrated as major wins for diversifying Hollywood's stale slate of films. But I don't remember hearing complaints about 'Coco' not being diverse enough in depicting other facets of Mexico, including Afro-Latinos, and the racism darker-skinned Mexicans face in their country. With 'Love, Simon' there were some complaints about it being yet another story featuring a white gay character, though the film did feature two supporting characters who were gay and black, and featured a scene that showcased how there's different types of gays and they can't be boxed into one stereotype. These criticisms were not as vocal as the ones I'm hearing about 'Crazy Rich Asians' and its responsibility regarding adequate representation of its community. I think the main reason for this disparity is the fact that in America, we're not used to seeing Asian characters on screen as we do Latinos and even Gays (and I'm definitely not implying this is a game of who is oppressed more).

Molly Ringwald ('The Breakfast Club,' 'Sixteen Candles') wrote a piece in The New Yorker earlier this year about how John Hughes's films looked in the #MeToo era. In an age where we're constantly demanding more representation in Hollywood, John Hughes's films have not aged well; you can find elements of sexism, sexual assault, and racism (remember Long Duk Dong?). Hughes's films can be considered great, yet still problematic. They featured white characters, but also stereotypical and offensive minorities. Yet some can still find themselves represented, as Ringwald described in her piece:

"And yet I have been told more times than I could count, by both friends and strangers, including people in the L.G.B.T. community, that the films 'saved' them. Leaving a party not long ago, I was stopped by Emil Wilbekin, a gay, African-American friend of a friend, who wanted to tell me just that. I smiled and thanked him, but what I wanted to say was 'Why?' There is barely a person of color to be found in the films, and no characters are openly gay. A week or so after the party, I asked my friend to put me in touch with him. In an e-mail, Wilbekin, a journalist who created an organization called Native Son, devoted to empower-

ing gay black men, expanded upon what he had said to me as I had left the party. 'The Breakfast Club,' he explained, saved his life by showing him, a kid growing up in Cincinnati in the eighties, 'that there were other people like me who were struggling with their identities, feeling out of place in the social constructs of high school, and dealing with the challenges of family ideals and pressures.' These kids were also 'finding themselves and being 'other' in a very traditional, white, heteronormative environment.' The lack of diversity didn't bother him, he added, 'because the characters and storylines were so beautifully human, perfectly imperfect and flawed.' He watched the films in high school, and while he was not yet out, he had a pretty good idea that he was gay."



It's true that 'Crazy Rich Asian' doesn't represent all Asians. There are billions of us - how can it? But the film doesn't try to represent all of us, and it shouldn't have to. The fact that we're having this conversation is a result of Hollywood's drought in diversity. Because a film like this is so rare in Hollywood, we examine it under a bigger microscope than we do with white-led films. Because it's the first film in 25 years to feature an all-Asian cast, it's not unreasonable for all of us Asians to want to be represented in this film. But it's not fair to expect the film to do so.

"It is diverse when you look at it in the scope and context of Hollywood, which is predominantly white," says Nancy Wang Yuen, chair of Biola University's sociology department. "But in terms of representing all of Asians and Asian Americans, it doesn't hit that mark. It is a very specific story to a specific enclave, and even within that enclave, a specific class of that enclave." She goes on to add "The problem is that we don't have enough stories. It's not that the film is terrible and Kevin Kwan's book is so horrible, but that it is one story and it shouldn't represent all of Asia and nobody wants that to happen."

What Yuen said about looking at the film in the context of Hollywood is important. The topic of Asian representation can be split into two viewpoints: one from the Asian-American perspective, and one from

the Asian perspective. A film like 'Crazy Rich Asians' is not going to be a big deal in countries where movies like this are the norm. Minorities in Asian countries see films represented by light-skinned, ethnically-Chinese stars all the time. They most definitely have a right to voice their concerns about representation of darker-skinned Asians. That's not to say Asian-Americans don't have that same right. It just helps to understand why the majority of Americans view Asian representation in a different light - because it's a different context.

Hollywood is dominated by so many white players in front of and behind the camera, anyone not white is considered diverse. From the Asian-American viewpoint, 'Crazy Rich Asians' is a game-changer because there's simply no other film that looks like it in Hollywood.



'Crazy Rich Asians' reinforces western beauty standards and what it means to be attractive.

Though the film is deemed a win for representation of Asian-Americans in heavily-white Hollywood, there's valid criticism in how the film showcases its attractive Asian characters. If you disregard the fact that they're Asian, most of the actors in 'Crazy Rich Asians' would fit within Hollywood's conventional idea of beauty. The women are tall and skinny, the men have chiseled abs and defined jawlines, both groups have thin noses and lighter skins.

On one hand, portraying Asians like this helps put us on an even playing field as whites. On the other hand, should we even want that? Shouldn't we aim for different standards of what it means to be beautiful? Shouldn't we set the bar higher than whites do?

And then there's the issue of the film reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. Phillipe Thao (co-host of the Asian-American Millennial podcast "What's the Bubble Tea?") writes:

"If Golding did not possess these masculine and heterosexual traits often associated with hegemonic

masculinity, would he still be considered desirable? My guess would be no... Crazy Rich Asians has shown that Asian male desirability is able to exist when there isn't whiteness to compare it to. I would like to suggest that it's not just whiteness that we must decolonize from our minds, but the gender binary as well. The only Asian men in the film who are sexualized are all straight, but not all straight men are sexualized."

Ken Jeong, Nico Santos, and Calvin Wong (who portrays Peik Lin's socially-awkward brother P.T. Goh) all play characters who are never depicted as desirable men, who are often the comic-relief, or in Wong's case, is the joke. There's nothing wrong with having characters who provide comic-relief, but as is almost always the case in Hollywood, the ones providing them are not conventionally attractive. Ken Jeong's Goh Wye Mun, like many of his other famous characters, is obnoxious and sassy; Nico Santos, an openly gay actor, portrays the effeminate gay cousin of the family. Regarding Jeong and Santos's characters, we often laugh with them. Regarding Wong's character, we're laughing at him. He's presented as the complete opposite of Golding's Nick Young, a total creep at times.

"It is possible for Asian men to be queer, feminine, funny, have an accent, and be considered desirable. Do I have a concrete answer on how representation can work toward embracing these complexities in identity? No, but writing more dynamic and non-stereotypical Asian characters may be a good first step into the right direction," Thao emphasizes.



Can any Asian actor portray any Asian role?

Casting Asian characters in Hollywood can often be a complex and touchy subject. 'Memoirs of a Geisha' (2005) generated controversy for having Chinese actresses in Japanese roles. Other examples in American mainstream media include Korean-American actor Ki Hong Lee playing a Vietnamese char-

acter named Dong Nguyen in 'Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt'; Korean-American actress Jamie Chung portraying the legendary Chinese character Mulan in 'Once Upon a Time'; and more recently, Vietnamese-American actress Lana Condor playing a Korean-American character in 'To All the Boys I've Loved Before' (also adapted from a best-selling book).

The argument is Asians are diverse and we're not interchangeable. It's true, we are diverse. We don't look alike. We have different features. All of this is important to note. However, this is a privilege white actors don't have to deal with because whiteness has dominated our media landscape for so long. We don't have a problem with a British actress portraying a French character (Emma Watson in Disney's live-action adaptation of 'Beauty and the Beast'), or with a British actor playing an iconic all-American type (Henry Cavill as Superman; Andrew Garfield as Spider-Man), because whites haven't had to endure systemic racism and have seen themselves depicted in mass media for generations.

When Henry Golding, who is of Malaysian Iban and English descent, was cast as the Chinese Singaporean Nick Young, there was outrage over him not being Asian enough because he's biracial. We have Korean-Americans (Ken Jeong), Japanese-Brits (Sonoya Mizuno), and Filipino-Americans (Nico Santos) portraying Chinese characters. This begs the question: Should the film have casted ethnically Chinese actors in all of its roles? This is something director Jon M. Chu asked himself, to which he acknowledges he doesn't have the answer to.

"Like are we allowed to cast a half Chinese, half some other ethnicity person in a Chinese role? Are we allowed to cast a Korean as a Chinese person? All these different rules that I don't know if there are answers to," he said. "Because with other ethnicities, we have British people playing US soldiers or Spider-Man which is an all-American thing, so I think it's a little unfair ... But at the same time, I also want to be the example of how to do it correctly."

When I read Ken Jeong and Nico Santos were cast in the film, I raised an eyebrow. They're two actors whose respective works I enjoy, but they definitely don't look Chinese. Ken Jeong is Korean-American and has Korean features. Nico Santos is Filipino, which inherently means he has darker skin. A white audience may not care enough to notice the difference, but even to me, as someone who normally isn't as concerned about having an ethnically accurate actor portraying an ethnically-specific character as others, I was confused why they'd be playing Chinese characters.

Director Jon M. Chu said he wanted to cast the "the Avengers of fucking [Asian] actors." I get it - he wanted to include not only fairly unknown Asian actors, but also the ones we love and recognize in American mainstream media. He wanted this film to be a celebration with some of the actors who helped play their part in the slow route to equal representation.

An unintentional benefit to the casting of not-ethnically-correct actors is that it can speak to Asians who are often told "you don't look Chinese," or "you don't look [insert ethnicity here]." I've had friends be told they didn't look like their ethnicity, and maybe they didn't take any offense to it or made it a big deal, but to others it can hurt and make them feel not enough.

In addition of the "They're not Asian enough" argument, there's the belief that casting biracial or ethnically ambiguous Asians in prominent roles, such as in 'Crazy Rich Asians', perpetuates the belief that Asians can only be deemed desirable if they have European features. The film features several Asian actors who come from mixed backgrounds: Henry Golding (Malaysian Iban and English); Sonoya Mizuno (Japanese, British, Argentinian); Remi Hii (Chinese, Malaysian, English); and Gemma Chan (Chinese and Scottish). Hollywood famously celebrates Asians when they're ethnically ambiguous and/or white-passing, like Keanue Reeves, Maggie Q, Vanessa Hudgens, or Chloe Bennett.

The belief that Asians are only beautiful when they're part white is something I've heard countless times growing up, and it's an idea I've unintentionally supported. "Half Asian, half white babies (and people) are so beautiful!" is a common saying. We even have a word for this - *mỹ lai* - which we say in high regard when talking about half-white Viets.

Perhaps when we get to a place where there is equal representation across the board, we won't have to worry about whether or not someone is Asian enough, or ethnically Chinese/Korean/Japanese/etc. enough to portray a specific Asian character. Right now, it's a privilege we just don't seem to have.

In Conclusion

As much controversy as 'Crazy Rich Asians' is causing in the debate surrounding representation, and the different levels of it, I'm really happy that these conversations are even happening. It's good to try and understand other people's perspectives and why or why not something you hold in high regard may not mean anything to someone else. If there's one thing I would want everyone to agree on, it's that 'Crazy Rich Asians' isn't and shouldn't be a one-size-fits-all approach to Asian representation in mass media. This

is not a perfect film that's going to solve all of our problems in Hollywood.

Unfortunately, like how minorities have to work twice as hard to get half as far in our society, this film is being held to a higher standard than most others. This is a film starring an all-Asian cast, but to some it's not Asian enough. This is a film starring Asian romantic leads, but it supports conventional western standards of beauty. "If we expect art from underrepresented groups to be flawless right off the bat, then we are holding it to the same standards as white art without acknowledging the advantages and privileges white creators have had for many years," Phillipe Thao writes.

A lot is riding on the success of this film and whether or not it's a hit at the box office. It goes back to how unfairly we view projects by minorities in comparison to white ones. If 'Crazy Rich Asians' failed critically or financially, it'd probably convince Hollywood that Asian-made or Asian-led films don't work. But how often can white-made and white-led films fail and not affect their future prospects? Even films featuring Hollywood's "box office draws" fail (cough, cough Scarlett Johansson, Will Smith, Johnny Depp, and so many more), yet they still give the very same people more opportunities. That's totally fine, but a film like 'Crazy Rich Asians' deserves the chance to be a failure without affecting whether or not future projects are made with Asian-Americans in mind. Thankfully, the film was a box office success, making over \$230 million at the worldwide box office.

From my perspective, all of the criticisms against 'Crazy Rich Asians' are valid and should be heard and discussed, but it shouldn't completely dismiss the fact that the film can be a momentous occasion for those who do feel the film adequately represents them in one way or another.

The struggle for on-screen representation is not easy and it's not a straight path. For us Asians who are 100% on board with the film and feel represented, that's great. Just don't make other Asians - those who don't see themselves depicted in this film - go out and effortlessly support it just because it's an American film with an all-Asian cast.

As Thanapa put it, it's not that no one should watch the film, but instead people "should consume it in a critical way."

Strength in Chapters

Written by Eric Lin, OCA VP of Chapter Development

OCA Asian Pacific American Advocates, is one the oldest national non-profit, membership-based Asian American and Pacific Islander civil rights organizations in the country. Since 1973, OCA has been working to address iniquities in our communities and empowering the next generation of leaders.

In the last 3 years, as the Vice President of Chapter Development, I have had the opportunity to work with many chapters in many localities across the nation. It has been a pleasure to see how our dedicated chapters and leaders engage our members and local Asian American & Pacific Islander communities. Our advocacy, cultural and social activities help bring meaningful change to, and representation for, our communities.

Headquartered in Washington D.C. and with 50 chapters and affiliates across the country, OCA has unique opportunities to engage and project influence that few can achieve. But this is only possible through the dynamic relationship that exists between our chapters and the national office.

Each of our chapters engage our communities in its own unique way. For all intents and purposes, we operate as autonomous local organizations. The local needs help drive the work and focus. The Houston chapter's work supporting the AAPI community in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey is a testament to responding to critical needs in an emergency. The San Mateo chapter's Speak and Lead program is an innovative way to engage our youth and develop important skills. The New York, Westchester, New Jersey and Long Island chapters' collaboration to host the Asian American in 2018 Conference was a fantastic opportunity to pool resources and develop a worthwhile advocacy program for our communities. The East Bay chapter's Pick It Up program is a wonderful example of ownership

and preservation of our cultural heritage in Oakland's Chinatown. The Sacramento chapter's work in the creation and engagement of their Business Advisory Council is the benchmark for corporate partner engagement. The Cleveland & Greater Los Angeles chapters work in registering voters gives insights into empowering our communities through innovative solutions. Each of these is an example of great work done by our chapters.

But when our chapters work together in coordination with national program's and calls to action, the real power of a national organization is on full display. When our partners like UPS, Southwest, Comcast and Wells Fargo wish to support professional development coupled with advocacy, we are able to engage chapters to host MAAP, B3 and the AAPI Womxn's Initiative in dozens of sessions. When State Farm wished to focus on youth advocacy and development, we partnered with them to create the APIA-U and APA-Y programs. And with the opportunity to work with the Coulter Foundation initiative to increase voter engagement, we created the OCA GOTV program that engaged tens of thousands of voters. And through the OCA National Internship Program and JAACL/OCA Leadership Summit we are able to build a pipeline of effective future leaders for our chapters and communities.

The opportunities are obvious when we have strong chapters with strong connections to a national office focused on advancing the social, political and economic well-being of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. In order for OCA to be the strongest it can be, our chapters must serve as a solid foundation on which the greater work can be built, and the national office must support and enable our chapters to grow. The national staff, the Executive Committee and I look forward to working with our chapters to make this a reality.

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