Yellow Dollars, White Masks: Hollywood and the Performance of Progressive Texts

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Abstract

*Crazy Rich Asians* offers an outlet for Asian American political energy. The success of the film has been subsidized by communicative capitalism and the draw or duties of a manufactured community. My theoretical critique of CRA looks at the production, subsidization, and consumption of this film within the context of representation in the US for Asian Americans. The term Yellow Dollars describes the neoliberal view of our financial worth and its reduction of our diverse identities and experiences down to a generalized racial grouping. If representation comes at this expense, we must question the benefits of this system of recognition. By allowing capital and consumerism to become the strongest part of our action framework, how we see ourselves, define our interests and approach the world, we restrict ourselves to behaving “appropriately” within the system if capitalist recognition, and our terms of recognition become more entangled with an exploitative system of global capitalism.

**Keywords:** Crazy Rich Asians; Representation; Asian American; Yellow Dollars; Model Minority; Ethnic Economics
Dedication

Dedicated to my mother who has taken this path of discovery and identity with me, who has taught me to aim high.
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# Table of Contents

Approval.............................................................................................................. ii  
Abstract.............................................................................................................. iii  
Dedication........................................................................................................... iv  
Acknowledgements............................................................................................ v  
Table of Contents ............................................................................................... vi  
Glossary............................................................................................................... vii  

Chapter 1: Introducing Progress and Performance.............................................. 1  
1.1. Introducing Crazy Rich Asians .................................................................... 1  
1.2. Literature and Theorists ............................................................................ 2  

Chapter 2: Affective energy ................................................................................. 4  
2.1. Performing Progress ................................................................................... 4  
2.2. Affective Subsidy ....................................................................................... 4  
2.3. Regulating Inter-Racial Anxiety Through Discourse .................................... 5  
2.4. Model Minority Community: Affective Networks ....................................... 7  
2.5. Not Asking the Real Political Economic Questions ...................................... 8  

Chapter 3: Do It For The Money ....................................................................... 11  
3.1. High Return on Investment ...................................................................... 11  
3.2. American Rich Asians .............................................................................. 12  
3.3. Asian Power Shift ..................................................................................... 13  
3.4. Representing Asians: Geography and Ethnicity ....................................... 14  

Chapter 4: Yellow Dollars ................................................................................ 16  
4.1. Winner Take All ....................................................................................... 16  
4.2. Ethnic Economics ..................................................................................... 16  
4.3. Yellow Dollars .......................................................................................... 17  
4.4. Income Inequality ..................................................................................... 18  
4.5. America’s Poor Asians ............................................................................ 19  
4.6. Produced Inequality ................................................................................ 20  
4.7. Personifying Progression ......................................................................... 21  

Chapter 5: Structural Critique ......................................................................... 23  
5.1. White Supremacy ..................................................................................... 23  
5.2. The Human Commodity ........................................................................ 23  
5.3. The Terms of Recognition ....................................................................... 24  
5.4. Domi-Nation ........................................................................................... 25  
5.5. Discussion ............................................................................................... 27  

Chapter 6: Conclusion ..................................................................................... 29  
References......................................................................................................... 31
## List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRA</th>
<th>Crazy Rich Asians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N.A.A.C.P</td>
<td>The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Glossary

**Communicative Capitalism**

Communicative capitalism refers to the form of late capitalism where the basic values of democracy are made implicit in networked communications technologies. Ideals of access, inclusion, discussion and participation are promoted through expansions, intensifications and interconnections of global telecommunications. In communicative capitalism, capitalist productivity comes from the capture and exploitation of communicative processes (Dean, 2014).

**Globalization**

The rise of cross-area and cross-border social relations between actors from very distant locations, and the heightened interdependence of transnational economic and social activities (Scherer & Palazzo, 2008).

**Model Minority**

A label and narrative that “romanticizes Asian Americans as hardworking, successful ethnic minorities, who fulfill the “American Dream” by overcoming harsh circumstances and discrimination while remaining quiet and submissive.” (Chao et al., 2013. p. 85).

**Studio**

Refers to a film studio, also known as movie studio, it is a major entertainment company or motion picture company that has its own privately-owned studio facilities for film production.

**Yellow Dollars**

The term Yellow Dollars describes the neoliberal view of our financial worth but also what has been framed as a tool of empowerment, success and power based on market share. The use of the word Yellow acknowledges the reduction of our diverse identities and experiences down to a convenient generalized racial grouping.

**#GoldOpen**

#GoldOpen is a movement that ensures opening weekend success of Asian American Films by buying out theatres for independent films, engineering viral social and press campaigns, and accelerating multicultural, global distribution (GoldHouse, 2018).
Chapter 1: Introducing Progress and Performance

1.1. Introducing Crazy Rich Asians

*Crazy Rich Asians* (CRA) is a novel turned film written by Kevin Kwan. This film premiered on August 15th, 2018 in Canada and the US boasting domestic gross sales of over 174 million and 238 million worldwide (Box Office Mojo, n.d.). Beyond the dollars and cents financial success of the film CRA has been broadly celebrated as a win for Asian American representation, as a ground-breaking film for Asian American stories on the big screen, and as an alternative narrative for Asian American protagonists. With over 22.2 million self-identified Asian Americans in the US alone and with one Asian American in every ten people in LA according to US census data the case for Asian American representation in American media is supported by a growing 5.6 percent of the total population in the US (US Census, 2018). Considering these statistics for *Crazy Rich Asians* to be the first major Hollywood production that isn’t a period piece to have an all-Asian cast in 25 years is a sound reminder of the lack of representation for many commentators who identify as part of the Asian American community (Mae, 2018). One of the reasons for this lack of representation is the systemic whitewashing of Hollywood storytelling, where Asian actors are regularly excluded from mainstream media. “In the case of whitewashing, Asian stories are embodied by white actors without even hinting at the erasure that is occurring, as if whiteness can adequately stand in for all racial difference.” (Lopez, 2012, p. 435). Lopez uses the term embodied to describe a process of picking and choosing the characteristics of an Asian character that should be portrayed but by a typically white actor. This kind of whitewashing erasure also happens at the higher level of Asian American stories not being produced at all.

The emotional catharsis of finally seeing Asian American actors taking lead roles in stories centered around their true experiences owes distress to the phenomenon of whitewashing alongside unsatisfying stereotypical portrayals of Asian American or Asian characters in most existing big-budget productions. There is a serious disconnect between Hollywood’s tradition of writing Asian characters with stereotypical traits of a “model minority” soft-spoken over achievers who excel at mathematics and martial arts, and the lived experiences of the majority of Asian Americans (Scaife, 2018). The acknowledgement and reconciliation of this stereotype in the opening scene of this film
fuels an emotional response that audiences, journalists, media commentators, and even myself experience and appreciate. Quickly put, the story of Crazy Rich Asians is that of Rachel Chu, “a university professor living in comfortable upper-middle-class New York who travels to Singapore with her boyfriend [Nick Young] only to discover his family is straight-up Asian royalty.” (Finn, 2018) This is how the film was described by Medium writer Melissa Finn in her plea for Asian Americans to support the film.

My work provides a theoretical critique of the films phenomenon by looking at the production and consumption of the movie and examines the economic relationship between these two important groups in relation to power, labour, and identity. Set before the backdrop of global capitalism, neoliberalism and White supremacy, I use theories and ideas from the traditions of critical race theory, affective networks, politics of recognition, and anxiety under the broader framework of political economy. I argue that the economic appropriation of social progress and its output is not only ineffective but counterproductive to Asian American self-determination. Using the economic analogy of Yellow Dollars as a measure of human value, I work to understand how performance, identity, and gatekeeping furthers larger structural injustices and obscures the truth of Asian American disenfranchisement.

1.2. Literature and Theorists

To do this I draw on several insightful scholars, the first of which is Glenn Coulthard. Coulthard (2007) introduces the politics of recognition by another self-conscious and self-determining subject, this discussion provides an understanding of the process of recognition and the essential elements that legitimise recognition. Coulthard also provides theories of subjugation and oppression for subjects under imperial rule which can be easily related to the experience of most visible minorities in the US. Then, Homi Bhabha (2018) identifies anxiety as an “icon of mitigation and reconciliation” showing anxiety as a transformative energy that call for traumas to be regulated in the discourse of the present in order to be disciplined by the current norms. I use this concept of anxiety to better understand the necessity of the films existence and its relationship with trauma and racism. Michael Storper’s (2000) work illustrates the pleasures of status-seeking and explains the situation of contestable markets, where competition is restricted to elite players who compete for the same market share. Storper’s work provides the tools to understand the success that motivates Asian
Americans to invest in this film. Storper’s ideas lead us to Jody Dean’s (2010) insight into communicative capitalism, affective networks, and the drive. Dean’s work allows us to understand and discusses the process of turning activity into passivity, how it becomes captured by communicative capitalism in the name of status-seeking. Comaroff and Comaroff’s (2000) work situates these ideas within a transnational corporate version of neocolonialism. They show us this by providing us with the idea that in this version of neocolonialism, cultural identity becomes a private asset rather than a collective claim. To better understand the collective claim that is being manufactured and imposed, Chao, Chiu, Chan, Mendoza-Denton, and Kwok (2013) give us insight into how the model minority narrative is also a narrative of fear. They also provide a very useful definition of Model Minority narratives saying that it “romanticizes Asian Americans” at their expense due to systemic failures such as exclusion from minority protections and support. Finally, Golash-Boza, Duenas, and Xiong’s (2019) work reminds us that there is very little work done on this topic that is situated within critical race theory or the contexts of white supremacy, patriarchy and global capitalism. They note that that those who are not represented lose access to the kind of cultural capital that could be used to challenge their environments and make real change. Thought their insights I believe that to provide a criticism of CRA that sees Hollywood as simply pursuing these projects because of money is to be too simplistic. We must situate, as Golash-Boza et al. says, this within the broader systems of white supremacy, patriarchy and global capitalism to see how the anxieties of identity are translated into resources that can be extracted.
Chapter 2: Affective energy

2.1. Performing Progress

The excitement of making progress, of realizing a dream of representation can be viewed through Hegel's theory of relations of recognition as described by Coulthard (2007). Representation is the realization of a subject, it provides the opportunity for the realization of the subject as a “self-determining agent”. However, Hegel insists that for this to be achieved the subject must be “recognized by another self-consciousness that is also recognized as self-determining” (p. 440) this is a reciprocal process, an exchange of recognition that allows for the freedom of self-determination to take hold. In the case of Crazy Rich Asians, Asian American protagonists are being produced and distributed within the system of White Hollywood is that recognition. As those without recognition regard Hollywood as a space that holds the power of recognition, we contribute to granting it and its whiteness the status of a self-determining, self-conscious agent.

This “excitement” can be attributed to what Michael Storper (2000) describes as “the pleasures of status-seeking” (p. 111) positive feelings associated with competing for a position of value. Storper also provides insight into the challenges that CRA would have faced when approaching major Hollywood film studios since their tendency is to produce “middle-taste or formula films”. Different stars and variations on common themes (for example unexpected royalty or exotic fortunes) are entertained to create the illusion of variety

as far as the decision makers in the industry are concerned, they could be rolling out installments in a series. Moreover, the price of making and distributing a successful formula film has risen geometrically, reducing the amount of studio capital available for other kinds of films. (p. 117)

These are just some of the challenges that make it difficult for atypical stories to make it to the big screens of Hollywood.

2.2. Affective Subsidy

CRA managed to slip through by accommodating the formulaic needs of the industry while also telling a new story. It is a film that boasts a common and recognizable
romantic comedy storyline with a trendy ethnic twist, an ethnic twist with soaring cultural and financial capital value. The film successfully received what has been described as “mid-range studio funding”, that is 30 million dollars to take it to production (Verhoeven and Donnelly, 2018). What director Jon M. Chu claims is that it is the affective energy and excitement of status-seeking that allowed them to produce a truly opulent film of true Hollywood proportions (Mae, 2018). This allowed them to go far beyond the typical production value for a film on a mid-ranged budget. Tapping into the cultural and financial capital effectively subsidized the modest studio funding, actors were adorned with clothing and jewelry worth far more than the entirety of what they would be paid for the film. These private subsidies provided in the name of representation and progress meant shooting locations waving booking fees and limiting compensation for lead actors, whose commitment went so far as to lend personal luxury items to the set (Verhoeven and Donnelly, 2018). Crazy Rich Asians banks on that community to produce affect, to produce an undefined number of opportunities for Asian American journalists, writers, film makers, actors and story tellers to become a part of the drive that is so coveted by industry and in doing so raise the dollars and cents value of the film all the way to over $238 million dollars worldwide.

The challenge of fitting the criteria of formulaic financially safe productions comes from what some interpret as oligopolistic market control, however Storper (2000) describes a highly competitive contestable market. Contestable markets are highly competitive but with a very limited number of producers who compete for market share, providing a “fantastic number of options, colors, and certain kinds of functional differences may be available but middle-of-the-road marketing criteria nevertheless dominates the selection” (p. 375). Without the critical resource built on the affective energy, racially constructed community, and the anxiety of carrying the burden of proof that Asian American productions deserve to be recognized, the film Crazy Rich Asians could have been destined to become another middle-of-the-road formula film with a few extra “yellow” faces on set.

2.3. Regulating Inter-Racial Anxiety Through Discourse

The arrival of more diverse casting and movement towards ethnic representation in Hollywood did not miraculously materialize. The long history of troubled relations between Asian Americans and White American persons is rife with conflict and deep
with the scars of misidentification, exploitation, and degradation (Chao et al., 2013). Homi Bhabha (2018) draw’s on Freud’s idea of anxiety as an “icon of mitigation and reconciliation” (p. 136) to understand the abrupt relationship between restitution and revenge for the past. Bhabha positions anxiety as the translation of restitution and revenge, the energy that transforms one to the other and back again. We see that there is more and more contention between ethnicities in America, not the least of which has been spurred on by policies and statements made by the current administration. In CRA it seems that the anxiety of the moment has signaled the need for a space for reconciliatory narratives at least on screen.

Hollywood has long worked to maintain a reputation of being liberal and accepting but the decision to produce a film that opens with a deft depiction of the power relations between ethnic classes and boundaries does the job of addressing the anxieties of trauma from the past. Traumatic events from the past “must be avoided in the anticipated future, while its memory, and the anxiety associated with it, has to be both realized (given presence) and regulated in the discourse of the present” (Bhabha, 2018. p. 135). The first scene opens with a confrontation between a Chinese family and the British concierge clerks at an ostentatious hotel. The mother has made a reservation at the hotel but the concierge judges her indicating that she might be confused as to where she is, the implication being that she does not belong there, and when she insists in perfect colonial Malaysian English, he suggests she look to Chinatown for a place to stay. This recalling of subtle-to-not racist exchanges is complete with a threat to call the police however in the end the Chinese women with their young children in tow emerge on top as their family has just purchased the entirety of the hotel, leaving the concierge clerks mortified and embarrassed. It is a very witty scene, played at the start of the film and as an unofficial teaser clip in the marketing push leading up to the films release. It sets the tone making a statement that reads “this is not going to be what you have come to expect”, for many Chinese viewers however this is a common narrative, treat those who seem poor badly and you will pay dearly because of some divine justice. The emperor who disguises himself as a beggar, the matriarch disguised as the maid, it is a familiar trope. Playing on familiarity for some and subversion for others, this scene does the work of realizing the traumatic events of the past in all of its tensions and anxieties while avoiding them in the anticipated future by regulating it in the discourse of the present (Bhabha, 2018). Capturing the anxiety of the moment within the context of
history and collective memory creates a “spontaneous, involuntary experience of memory as it is of memory as heuristic mode of inquiry dedicated to the retrieval or restitution of what is disavowed in the psyche or denied in history” (p. 134). This experience exposes the conditions of a globalized state, one that is made up of “fluid and shifting locations of the “self” that places itself in a multiplicity of relationships to various traditions.” According to Geoderi (as cited in Bhabha, 2018. P. 134).

2.4. Model Minority Community: Affective Networks

This desire to situate the self within shifting locations and within the multiplicity of various traditions is harnessed and facilitated by the affective networks of communicative capitalism. Jody Dean (2010) offers useful insights into the ways in which these movements produce capital value, value that works to stabilize and nullify potential risks earned by giving presence to traumatic racialized events for an Asian American audience. This affective network is produced by “the movement from link to link, the forwarding and storing and commenting, the contributing without expectation of response but in the hope of further movement” (p. 42). The connection between the requirement of globalization to trace the shifting locations of the self in relation to fluid traditions and this process of searching, connecting and producing that Dean describes feels like a handshake, an agreement that moves the resource of community and anxiety into an extractable realm. Dean tells us that “Affective Networks produce feelings of community or what we might call “community without community”, that they enable mediated relationships that take a variety of changing, uncertain and interconnected forms as they feed back upon each other in ways that we can never fully account for or predict” (p. 22). If we have people just responding, creating, circulating without really thinking critically about it then it becomes little more than a resource for the network to have value. This value provides the conditions for lowered financial risk of producing Asian American content such as Crazy Rich Asians, the resource of community affective energy made possible by the network’s compression of space and time to tap into global dialogue.

The characterization of the Asian American “Model Minority” is mystical, it is a changing discourse that has been saddled with the challenges of what are traditionally positive attributes. Evidence of these challenges can be found in Chao et al’s study The Model Minority as a Shared Reality and Its Implications for Interracial Perceptions
(2013). The article describes a sample from their study on news media. The news article presents the changing “demographics in the two top public high schools in Northern California and describes how White parents moved their children out of these schools and even avoided the school district all together, not because the schools were failing academically, but because the schools were, in the author’s words, “too Asian” overly “academically intense” and had many “excessively competitive and single-minded” Asian parents.” (p. 84). This illustrates another dimension to the issues of being held to an otherwise positive light, that is the issue of fear. Chao et al concludes that “These news stories have raised the concern in public discourse regarding the role the media have played to perpetuate and reinforce the model minority stereotype of Asian Americans, which could spark intergroup tensions.” (p. 84). The model minority stereotype masquerades fear behind flattery.

Chao’s (2013) research identifies the term model minority as a label that “romanticizes Asian Americans as hardworking, successful ethnic minorities, who fulfill the “American Dream” by “overcoming harsh circumstances and discrimination while remaining quiet and submissive.” (p. 85). Much of the triumphant energy around the film has been about the changing of that narrative. Challenging the assumed premise of “overcoming harsh circumstances and discrimination while remaining quiet and submissive” (chao p85) by producing a media narrative that shows Asians being “crazy” having vast swaths of power and celebrating characters that are anything but submissive. Displaying success without the burdens of being a minority, of enhanced strife, of quiet submission is a celebration of realized power, this achievement builds the affective energy surrounding the film.

2.5. Not Asking the Real Political Economic Questions

Celebration and excitement circle the drain of the drive, feeding into a system that creates vast swaths of money in the face of real poverty which is the reality faced by many Asian Americans today (Chao et al., 2013. p. 90). These are the critical questions that are overlooked in literature examining second generation immigrants, people are rarely if ever examining how the systems that grant access or do not grant access are exploiting the struggle that they impose (Golash-Boza et al., 2019). Golash-Boza et al. discusses the broader scholarship around immigration and migration providing insights into the kinds of work being produced in these areas of research. They assert that
migration scholarship is currently dominated by research focusing on the issues of second-generation integration, this would be inclusive of the experiences of the majority of Asian Americans that we have been referring to and to the protagonist Rachel Chu in *Crazy Rich Asians*. Golash-Boza et al. (2013) also asserts that while there is a high volume of material being produced on this topic of second-generation integration in America

...much of it draw[s] on the assimilation paradigm” and focuses on capital, enclaves, and economies but rarely focus on race. Racialization in many of these studies is discounted by the assimilation paradigm making it impossible for the studies to include analysis of the institutions and everyday practices that normalize racism and render it invisible (p. 2).

Golash-Boza et al. go on to say that the few exceptions that do examine migration and race fail to situate themselves “within the intersecting systems of oppression of white supremacy, patriarchy, and global capitalism.” (p. 3) and that they also “fail to take a broader political economy perspective” (Golash-Boza et al., 2019. p. 7). This study of the affective and financial energy produced within the phenomenon of the film *Crazy Rich Asians* will adopt a communications application of the critical race theory approach and situate this activity specifically within the systems of white supremacy, and global capitalism.

Critical race theory specifically recognizes the institutions and everyday practices that normalize racism and render it invisible, centering race within the systems of white supremacy and global capitalism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This approach is adopted over the more common assimilation, multiculturalism, views of cultural studies that Harvey (2000) argues “conceals [the] liberal self-deception” of academics by providing “an alibi for their complicity in the Trans National Corporate version of neocolonialism.” (p. 543), a version that collaborates, and creates “the hegemonic ideology, which looks, as usual, as if it were no ideology at all.” (p. 543). While critical race theory draws its roots form a legal background, Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) trace their view on capitalism in the neoliberal era to a critique of the legal baseline or rule-of-law paradigm of study stating that "power produces rights, not rights power" (p. 38). By this same vein power produces the structures through which we can become recognized, the structures do not allow us to gain the power of manifesting recognition. “If law underpins the langue of neoliberalism, constitutionalism has become the parole of universal rights, a global argot that individuates citizen and, by making cultural identity a private asset rather than
a collective claim.” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000. p. 39). Individualization is part and parcel of the draw of neoliberalism but through this we sacrifice cultural identity to the realm of private assets, disconnected from community and collective culture.
Chapter 3: Do It For The Money

3.1. High Return on Investment

The windfall of *Crazy Rich Asians* confirms the suspicions of many critics that the success of the film would greenlight hundreds of projects that had not been able to reach production. Projects such as *Lazy Rich Asians, Ohana*, a new live-action *Mulan* are being produced by Disney, *Shogun, Kung Fu, and Birthright*, by Fox, *International Student* and *Akwafina* have been picked up by Comedy Central, HBO is producing a project called *Slanted*, Amazon is producing an unknown project with Kevin Kwan (*Crazy Rich Asians* author), and even Apple is producing a project called *Pachinko*. Every major American media giant is working on getting a piece of the action ushered in by *Crazy Rich Asians*’s success (Berkowitz, 2018) and the shifting conceptions of wealth and power towards the east, a 238.5 million dollar paycheck is too good to pass up. Even though the draw on this film was less than Black Panther for example it was produced for a fraction of the price, only 30 million dollars compared to Black Panther’s 200 million dollars, that return on investment has studios seeing green- green lights for any and all inexpensive Asian American narrative they can get their hands on (Mae, 2018).

Hollywood has long faced the challenge of competition, De Vany (2008) provides an explanation into the early financial structures of Hollywood studios. In the early years the industry was organized by studio ownership, where both the means of production and distribution, including stars, sets, directors, writers, theaters and managers were employed by one studio at a time. The 1950’s anti-trust laws dismantled this system of ownership, this made actors, directors, theaters, and creatives independent contractors raising the cost of production. This brings us to the system that we have today where every time a project is being produced a team must be assembled by engaging independent contractors in the market place which can be expensive for the studio (De Vany, 2008). Therefore, one of the most important factors that allowed CRA to be produced on such a tight budget, when that team was being assembled, they negotiated their contracts based on their belief that this film would be more important than the immediate material value of their salaries (Verhoeven & Donnelly, 2018). This was done knowing that most films lose money, 80% of films that are released loose money and the oversupply of film productions guarantees many films will never turn a profit at all.
(Priceonomics, 2013). Because of this, two things are made clear, major efforts must be made to ensure that CRA is profitable for the studio since there is such a high risk of failure and failure is framed as closing the doors on Asian American productions. The second thing that is made clear is that whatever capital gains are made from CRA they must follow the tradition of going back to the studio to subsidize the films that have been produced but did not become blockbusters. These two conditions ensure that Asian Americans and their supporters must disproportionately support the success of the film but that the financial success of this film will never directly be redistributed to those who worked on the film by way of royalties. Furthermore, only studios that have the financial stamina and reserves to withstand the blockbuster and flop cross-subsidization cycle of the film industry are able to compete and eventually turn a profit in this system which also means that the chances of an Asian American owned studio becoming successful in this arena is extremely low (Thompson, 2011).

3.2. American Rich Asians

Contemporary capitalism has applied its market harnessing strength to create a machine of distribution and globalized content with the power to generate such a broad range of Asian American facing content in what seems like the blink of an eye. Storper’s (2000) insights into the capacity of contemporary capitalism is inclusive of both “advocates and detractors” in their view “that contemporary capitalism has greatly increased its capacity to support a diversified material culture with much greater variety than ever before.” (p. 375). From this I appreciate that the sudden flood of Asian American media projects have emerged only due to the system of contemporary capital. If we understand that the transmaterialization of wealth that Storper defines as “the transfiguration of wealth through the ever more abstract commodification of elements across time and space.” (p. 375) is part and parcel of the power of contemporary capitalism we see that another element, one of safety and risk management was produced to facilitate this move towards publishing the Asian American condition.

If wealth is “treated by investors as risks assumed on them, such as derivatives” (Storper, 2000. p. 375) this shift in thinking about wealth would require the risks of Asian American projects to be perceived as relatively low. To this I draw our attention to the story line and title of Crazy Rich Asians, it is a story about unimaginable wealth, disposable income held by an exotic undiscovered demographic. Even those depicted
as having no wealth are earning high above the median US income, as a professor at NYU Rachel Chu would earn a minimum salary of $99,700/yr as a assistant professor and up to $182,400/yr as a full time professor according to numbers procured as late as 2012 (D’Arcy, 2012), the median single person income in the US in the 2016 census was $50,825/yr (US Census, 2018). This means that Rachel Chu is making at least two times the median single person income in New York or even four times that amount today. There are effectively no poor or even average earning characters in the film.

3.3. Asian Power Shift

Kevin Kwan has succeeded in weaving the argument for the low-risk status of this investment into the script itself however all it required was a punchy reminder. The recognition of a global power shift towards China’s deep pockets has been working behind the scenes for some time, it has long been known that they hold over 1.11 trillion USD in US debt as of April 2019 (Amadeo, 2019) and the institutional considerations for an emerging global player with that much influence are hurried. Hoge (2004) writes about the transfer of power and the very real considerations that have been made in response to the rise of China. He says “The transfer of power from West to East is gathering pace and soon will dramatically change the context for dealing with international challenges- as well as the challenges themselves. Many in the West are already aware of Asia’s growing strength. This awareness, however, has not yet been translated into preparedness.” (p. 2).

At the foundation of Asia’s growing strength stands China’s economic growth, supported by “Economies of agglomeration provided by planned industrial districts and networks, a healthy and educated workforce, and the size of the international market” (Drake, 2010. p. 184) this frames China as an attractive place for international investment and even in the face of rising labor costs “the relative global weight of the Chinese market” increases the economic powers of the country over all (Drake, 2010. p. 184). Hoge (2004) predicts that this awareness has not yet translated into preparedness and the reaction of the international community to major China America issues seems to speak to that lack of preparation. In sharp contrast to the fear and conflict around China Us trade, Huawei 5g scandals, and foreign home owners’ taxes it would seem that in 2019 Hollywood is ready. This aligns with his assertion that “at the international level, Asia’s rising powers must be given more representation in key institutions, starting with
the UN Security Council. This important body should reflect the emerging configuration of global power, not just the victors of World War II. The same can be said of other key international bodies.” (Hoge, 2004. p. 7). Many would place Hollywood among the most significant international bodies in the world.

The Neoliberal economic reform discussed by Golash-Boza et al. (2019) have helped to restructure the US economy towards service sector industries, industries that have traditionally placed immigrants in low-paid service positions such as gardeners and nannies. This being said, in order to have a more complete picture of the US economic growth we must broaden our understanding of what service sector industries are. Beyond mechanics, nannies and waiters we can draw from the US Board of Census’s definition of the service sector that states, the service sector produces intangible goods, more precisely services instead of goods. Various service industries including warehousing and transportation services; information services; securities and other investment services; professional services; waste management; health care and social assistance; and arts, entertainment, and recreation (US Census, 2018). In this case, while immigrants are not being placed in low-paid service positions in the entertainment and media industry they are seen as bodies to be exploited. As one of the central economic and cultural institutions in America the institution of Hollywood should, by right of global equity, give China more representation in Hollywood. There is an indisputable difference between China and Asia however.

3.4. Representing Asians: Geography and Ethnicity

The clash of misidentification between Asians and China in the narrative of Asian advancement is problematic. Asian “groups disparate racial-cultural-linguistic people together under the broad umbrella of “Asian.” As a geographic label, “Asian” encompasses half the world’s population and a quarter of its land mass. As a cultural label, it is useless.” (Chen, 2018) The point that Globe and Mail contributor Jeffery Chen raises has not gone without scrutiny. Instances of commentators pointing out the lack of South Asians and the assumption that a narrative focusing on ultra wealthy Singaporeans and Asian Americans could be representative of an entire continent has been heavily criticized. The film, while representing a minority in North America focuses on Singapore’s ethnic Chinese who are a 75% ethnic majority. Failing to shed any light on the Malays, Indians and other ethnic minorities who account for the other 25% of
Singapore’s 5.6 million person population is at odds with the marketing and messaging of the film over all (Ives, 2018). One such critic Sangeetha Thanapal, Singaporean Indian activist and academic does not hesitate to point out the hypocrisy of substituting one kind of racial erasure for another saying “Part of the way that this movie is being sold to everyone is as this big win for diversity, as this representative juggernaut, as this great Asian hope. I think that’s really problematic because if you’re going to sell yourself as that, then you bloody better actually have actual representation” (Ives, 2018).

It is difficult to fault the first all Asian Hollywood film in 25 years for falling short of representing the specificities of 48 countries that make up the continent of Asia. One of the challenges that films pushing for representation face is what Hollywood critic and pop culture commentator Sonia Saraiya calls “the just one guy problem” defining it as “a situation where an actor or a film/show becomes a lone representative of an underrepresented group, and as such has to navigate a morass of identity politics” (Mae, 2018). Faced with the challenge of the “just one guy” problem; Crazy Rich Asians does not get to be a good or a bad story, it must saddle the weight of the entire Asian American community, tasked with being successful enough to convince Hollywood producers that casting Asian leads are a viable (profitable) option for other projects. One commentator illustrates the double standard saying “films featuring majority white characters rarely need to put themselves under the same level of scrutiny – their characters are able to be shallow or unlikable, or their stories plain bad, without that having any wider repercussions.” (Mae, 2018). Therefore, the challenge of all-encompassing representation is not the issue, it is that studios mark this burden as a selling point as Thanapal pointed out, this is how the movie is being sold, the selling point of the film is that it is taking on a challenge created by the industry that is now profiting from that strife. We should pay closer attention to how an institution can turn a profit from an open wound that it has created, this says more about the way we look at culture as a resource than about how much we should scrutinize creatives like Kevin Kwan.
Chapter 4: Yellow Dollars

4.1. Winner Take All

The rule of neoliberalism and the liberal proclamation of universal rights presumes the individuation of the citizen and creates an environment where cultural identity becomes “a private asset rather than a collective claim” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000. p. 39). The language of universal rights proclaims that each individual wants the same thing and through this “transmutes difference into likeness” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000. p. 40). In doing so, Comaroff and Comaroff argue that the value of universal human rights do not entitle the subject to a “means of survival. They do not guarantee the right to earn or produce, only to possess, to signify, to consume, to choose.” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000. p. 40). The asset of cultural identity is at the foundation of celebrity, a person whose significance and value comes from a cultural identity that is attractive in the global economy. This quote from Michael Storper’s (2000) work on Lived Effects of the Contemporary Economy illustrates the problem of individualized success.

The high-powered corporate attorney, the film or television star, and the internationally known medical specialists are examples of this internationalization of labor services. The providers of such services have earnings levels that are very high relative to the average in their occupational categories. These individuals have become desirable in the worldwide markets. Though such privileged individuals constitute a very small percentage of the total, their absolute numbers and absolute and relative earnings have been increasing rapidly in recent years. When a sports star, recording artist, international lawyer, or top executive gets fabulous compensation it is because her or his services now have worldwide markets. Some of the reshaping of income distribution toward the top is a result of this “winner-take-all” phenomenon. (p. 397)

Storper describes to us the kinds of unique positions that need to be held in order for earnings to increase rapidly.

4.2. Ethnic Economics

His quote describes the relative success of some who hold cultural and global economic capital, assets that we have explored in depth, however the “reshaping of income distribution” is the aspect that I wish to turn our attention to. Many believe that supporting the work of those with whom we share a cultural identity and who have
achieved these global financial heights is an investment in the success of that cultural capital, but the individualization of cultural capital creates as Storper proclaims a “winner-take-all phenomenon”. With an emphasis on relative earnings and the very small percentage of the total, Storper gestures us towards the understanding that for the average person, the success of a few top earners will not significantly impact their quality of life or wellbeing. To revisit Comaroff and Comaroff’s claim, this celebration and support will “not guarantee the right to earn or produce, only to possess, to signify, to consume, to choose.” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000. p. 40).

To discuss this right to consume and choose I borrow the popular term “black dollars” used in the literal sense in 1983 to describe specific US currency promoted by the N.A.A.C.P (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). The N.A.A.C.P. asked that Black Americans use two dollar bills and Susan B. Anthony dollars for all purchases for three days with the idea of demonstrating the power of the black economy and showing those in positions of economic power that Black Dollars are a significant part of the economy on which they rely (Laurie, 1983). More recently some commentators and activists have used the term to describe the economic importance of Black consumers in the US whose projected purchasing power in 2018 is an impressive 1.2 trillion dollars annually (Nielsen, 2018). Through this understanding of ethnic purchasing power we could describe Asian American purchasing power as Yellow Dollars.

4.3. Yellow Dollars

Yellow Dollars represent the fastest growing segment of the American population, boasting the third-largest spending capacity of all multicultural groups and the highest household median income across all US households there is no mistaking the power of the Yellow Dollar sitting at a total annual purchasing value of over 825 billion dollars in the US alone as of 2016. “Put another way, Asian-American buying power in the U.S. is greater than the economies of all by seventeen countries worldwide, and slightly greater than the gross domestic product (GDP) of Turkey” (News Wise, 2018). The Multicultural Economy report published by the Selig Center for Economic Growth predicts that the buying power of Asian Americans in the US will reach a projected 1.3 trillion dollars come 2022 (Weeks, 2018). Many feel that with that purchasing power comes the opportunity to support films like Crazy Rich Asians and a
movement #GOLDOPEN, created by creative Bing Chen and his salon of Asian American creatives and activists, has in their words organized “100+ creatives, founders, and leaders” to buy out theaters all over the US to “show the world: representation means business” (GoldHouse, 2018). However, a critical view of this benchmark for human value would say that “the treatment of people as capital leads to their valorization strictly as a source of wealth” (Coronil, 2000. p. 325). To further that critique, I add that the affective energy of consuming, purchasing, contributing without scrutiny has effectively sponsored the success of “privileged individuals [who] constitute a very small percentage of the total” (Storper, 2000. p. 397). The reality of the Asian American experience is far from the high praises of Hollywood.

4.4. Income Inequality

The Asian American experience, the reality of those who may be inspired to spend their Yellow Dollars on a #goldopen film is a far cry from anything depicted in and outside of the film Crazy Rich Asians. This winner-take-all model leaves many behind according to this article published in The New York Times, How ‘Crazy Rich’ Asians Have Led to the Largest Income Gap in the U.S. (Hassan & Carlsen, 2018). The article provides a broader picture of the distribution of wealth among Asian Americans exposing them as “the most economically divided racial or ethnic group in the country based on a new Pew Research Center analysis of US Census data” (Hassan & Carlsen, 2018). Both in actuality and in the film there are issues of income distribution representation for Asian Americans. In New York City, where Nick Young and Rachel Chu have their home in the film, Asian Americans are the poorest immigrant group according to that same study. Within the contentiously grouped demographic of “Asians” there is greater financial disparity among specific ethnicities. The study finds a relationship between Asian ethnic groups who have high levels of education and those who do not saying “People from India and China have higher incomes than those from Southeast Asia because they have higher levels of education on average.” (Hassan & Carlsen, 2018). The emphasis on education as a deciding factor in wealth accumulation is important as we see that there are deep discrepancies between those who have high levels of education and those with non (Chao et al., 2013).
4.5. America’s Poor Asians

The rise and celebration of the Yellow Dollar contributes to a stereotype, a long-held mythology where Asian Americans are referred to as the model minority. One of the many problems with the assumptions that accompany this mythology is that it creates an environment that erases the needs of Asian American communities who face the kinds of income disparity that is reflected in US census data. The reality of Asian Americans whose services do not attract “worldwide markets” and therefore fall on the low end of the income distribution is that of “poor families living in a single-room occupancy unit in Chinatown, and struggling Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian students (Vo, 2004; Yu, 2006).” (as cited in Chao et al., 2013. p. 90). This extends into the widened gap between Asian Americans who have been able to pursue a college education. Using information gathered by the Organization of Chinese Americans & Asian American Studies Program at the University of Maryland Chao et al. reveal that while twice as many Chinese Americans, ages 25 and above, hold college degrees in comparison to the general population of Americans, the number of Chinese Americans who have earned less than a high school diploma is also higher than average (Chao et al., 2013). These disparities are also reflected when comparing different Asian ethnic groups. “Whereas 44% Asian Americans over 25 years of age have a college degree, merely 7% of Hmong, 8% of Laotian, and 9% of Cambodian hold a college degree. Failure to conform to the model minority expectations of the struggling Asian American students often led to unjust treatment by teachers (Chang & Sue, 2003), leaving these students’ education needs unnoticed (Lee, 2001; Nance, 2007; Yu, 2006).” (as cited in Chao et al., 2013. p. 90)

These statistics show us that making a generalization about wealth and education for Asian Americans erases these realities.

Other challenges that are overlooked for Asian Americans include mental health and substance abuse issues, the racial framing of being a model minority pressures Asian Americans to forgo mental health and substance abuse treatment services, and those who use these services tend to exhibit more severe symptoms (Chao et al., 2013. p. 90). Overgeneralization of success creates the impression that Asian American’s are deserving of fewer resources. One instance described in Chao et al’s research on model minority perceptions of race described how “because of a budget deficit, in March 2008, 19 programs under the San Francisco Mayor’s Office of Community Development had
undergone budget cuts. Among all the programs, the three most affected ones are those that provide services to low-income Asian communities (Chin, 2008)." (as cited in Chao et al., 2013. p. 90). Other systemic failures include Asian Americans’ exclusion from the designation of being a protected minority under US federal affirmative action policies in spite of the fact that as a group they have a higher than average high school dropout rate (Chao et al., 2013).

4.6. Produced Progression

To promote the model minority myth is to facilitate overlooking the real sociocultural issues that befall that demographic. The victory of Crazy Rich Asians is that it challenges the stereotypes of Asian Americans. However, upon closer inspection the movie does little more than reinforce these myths. The main character is a university professor who fulfills the Asian American image of hard work being the only requirement for success. Other Asians who are more obviously going against the grain of typical depictions do not really belong in America. They are located in the east where they belong, these characters are celebrated in an overseas context. This is a narrative that mostly maintains the tropes of model minorities while acknowledging and compartmentalizing the undeniable existence of identities coming to light in the face of globalization and global power shifts. What’s more is, for disadvantaged Asian Americans, being told to spend their limited income on films that celebrate racial diversity may feel like catharsis but facilitating the success of a select few in their alleged communities who benefit from this kind of activism mirrors and supports the model minority mythology that contributes to their oppression. Spending becomes the affective labor that Dean forewarns, the rhetoric of commercial justice feeds the cycle of capital without a critical reflection on who is benefitting from those actions, the default is to respond by spending for the sake of spending. The desire to react to the accomplishment of recognition become “elements of an inescapable circuit in which we are caught compelled, driven.” (Dean, 2010. p. 21). This is a fundamental part of the entertainment networks necessary for globalized neoliberalism. “Communicative capitalism relies on networks that generate and amplify enjoyment. People enjoy the circulation of affect that presents itself as contemporary communication.” (Dean, 2010. p. 21). It is important to acknowledge the truth of Storper’s (2000) assertion that,
“It would be a mistake to hold that consumption is simply “pushed” on people, that they are duped into it by powerful institutional forces such as advertising. A more plausible interpretation is that consumerism, however it begins, ultimately sustains itself by becoming an intimate part of the action frameworks of individuals, how they see themselves and define their interests, how they approach the world, and how they present themselves to others.” (p. 105)

This view supports our understanding of consumption as appropriate action.

This cycle of spending Yellow Dollars to prove your worth or show support within a system that continues to ensure your oppression, to demand visibility in your community at the expense of erasing those in your community who are in need stems from a number of issues. Firstly, spending is your only way to prove your worth under neoliberal globalization, worthiness is measured by your economic value. Secondly, to spend Yellow Dollars becomes the most acceptable form of expression if you are not valued in worldwide markets. And finally, individualization of cultural identity fractures the alleged community to which you belong, you are tethered with the obligations a represented community without the foundation of it. In a reference to Dean’s theories this is the lived experience of community without community (Dean, 2010. p. 22) and at the root of this is viewing Asian Americans as a conglomerate of ethnicities. The production of progress provides a vivid snapshot of the neoliberal condition. Coronil (2000) provides a definition of the neoliberal system that we refer to, saying “Neoliberal globalization is implosive rather than explosive: it connects powerful centers to subordinate peripheries, its mode of integration is fragmentary rather than total, it builds commonalities upon asymmetries. In short it unites by dividing.” (Coronil, 2000. p. 355).

4.7. Personifying Globalized Capitalism and Neoliberalism

In a similar way to which there is danger in referring to Asians or even Asian Americans as a singular entity, “there is a risk in referring to capitalism by a single word” (Coronil, 2000. p. 365). By describing capitalism and neoliberalism with characteristics that provide the impression that they are “bounded or self-willed” entities I risk creating a singular caricature to be faced. Capitalism and neoliberalism are in fact “complex, contradictory, and heterogeneous process mobilized by the actions of innumerable social agents” (Coronil, 2000. p. 364). I borrow Coronil’s justification alongside his definitions, he hopes that by taking this risk it will help us to recognize defining features
of these systems. I also subscribe to what he establishes as the academic tradition of understanding globalization as a continuation of the old project of trans-continental trade, capitalist expansion, colonization, worldwide migrations, and transcultural exchanges and within that the understanding that “its current neoliberal modality polarizes, excludes, and differentiates even as it generates certain configurations of trans local integration and cultural homogenization.” (Coronil, 2000. p. 364). This, and the questions that accompany critical race approaches are the points from which I draw my analysis. It is through these frameworks for global capital that we can see how the “increasingly unruly commodification of social life offers possibilities for some people” but for the majority “it turns the world into a risky and threatening environment” (Coronil, 2000. p. 374). Without looking for these imbalances and disproportionate earnings it is impossible to know if these projects are making good on the promises that have earned their success.
Chapter 5: Structural Critique

5.1. White Supremacy

White supremacy means that White people hold the power through their domination of institutions, this would be inclusive of institutions such as the World bank, American financial institutions and Hollywood, it also “intersects with other systems of inequality like patriarchy and capitalism” (Golash-Boza et al., 2019. p. 2). We have discussed how ethnic minorities such as Asian Americans and African Americans have pushed for recognition in such institutions while presenting a critical view of those institutions, it is fair to now ask: Why add value to and validate systems that fundamentally supports White supremacy and depends on class exploitation?. What Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) call “decontextualization” separates a space from its sociomoral pressures, for instance separating Hollywood from its sociomoral pressures allows Asian Americans and other people of color to see it as a place to be won over rather than altered or even destroyed. Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) define decontextualization as an automatic impulse of capitalism at the millennium, saying that it is crucial to the process of “discounting labor” by removing itself (space, place, or institution) from civic obligation or confrontation. While we can confront individual stakeholders about their civic or moral failings, the true decision-making stakeholders of Hollywood sits outside the view of morality and politics. To confront the persons in charge of that structure, decision makers not involved in the public view are sheltered in “enclaved communities a world away, beyond political or legal reach. Capital and its workforce become more and more remote from each other.” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000. p. 13). Part of the problem of the structure of capital is that there are few to no opportunities for dialogue or accountability.

5.2. The Human Commodity

We live in a culture that sees people as human resources, “It is a culture that... re-visions persons not as producers from a particular community, but as consumers in a planetary marketplace: persons as ensembles of identity that owe less to history or society than to organically conceived human qualities.” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000. p. 13). By producing content for the planetary marketplace, consuming it, and overlooking
the histories of injustice within the institution that those actions serve we divorce ourselves from the society that we represent. Fighting for acceptance and visibility in an institution of white supremacy and global capitalism with the value of our Yellow Dollars further reduces our social, cultural, and moral value. Popularizing a model minority narrative that has always been used as a weapon in equal parts against those who fulfill it and those who defy it is precisely the role that Asian Americans have been compelled to play within the greater system of making “capital out of human difference and difference out of capital” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000. p. 15). The market has always done this by “cultivating exploitable categories of workers and consumers, identifying pariahs, and seeking to isolate enemies of established enterprise.” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000. p. 15). Poor Asian Americans have become the pariahs of this edition of the neoliberal social order, they are stripped of their human conditions their real lived experiences and needs erased, in Crazy Rich Asians this is done using all of the glitter and glamour that 30 million dollars can afford.

Asian Americans without purchasing power function within the system of global capital as a risk assessment buffer, from their lived experiences comes an effective energy, the energy of engagement and struggle, they must struggle and channel that struggle into quantifiable levels of engagement. This engagement driven by desire for progress is appropriated into the authenticity of celebrity in what can otherwise be viewed as an exclusive and limited class of service sector laborers whose worldwide market has permitted them to earn significantly more than their peers. This equation between the value of people and the value of things happens because both are reduced to capital. Once persons are defined by their financial value they will be treated as such “taken insofar as they contribute to the expansion of wealth and marginalized if they do not” this means that they are only valued as sources of profit (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000. p. 77).

5.3. The Terms of Recognition

My view rests on the understanding that the machine of representation in Hollywood is dependent on the painful crisis of identity and belonging for, in this case, Asian Americans. This is based on Coulthard’s understanding of social formation of colonized persons. Coulthard (2007) states: “colonial social formation depends, to a significant degree, on its capacity to transform the colonized populated into subject of
imperial rule.” (p. 443). Now, while I use this passage from Coulthard's article on subjects of empire, Asian Americans do not technically fall under the category of colonized population, but they do fall under the category of subjects under rule. The history of immigrant labor in America has seen the use of racialized bodies in many many ways, which many would understand as a process of subjugation (Golash-Boza et al., 2019).

As discussed in chapter four of this work there is a much to loose for Asian Americans in the face of myths such as the model minority narrative. This is a process of “White supremacy, and global capitalism in shaping access to cultural, familial, and community resources.” Golash et al. (2009) describes the process of deconstructing community “In a White Supremacist capitalist patriarchy, power and material and psychological resources are unequally distributed.” (p. 11) this leaves people with a lack of cultural capital that can be used to challenge these systems. This is another way that White supremacy and capitalism structures the settlement of immigrants and their families (Golash, 2019). When the cultural capital that minorities receive is being filtered through system of global capital, when we are prescribed a particular type of cultural capital it has the potential to lose the power to be of use in this way. There are inherent issues with being provided with cultural capital that might not be representative of your ethnic background, your financial background, and that may be imposed upon you in spite of those things; imposed because of the way that you are viewed by others. When some are considered inferior as part of normative ideals, those considered inferior “have to reform themselves to qualify for consideration under the universal ethical code, or the universal principles that operate as an intensely discriminatory code masquerading as the universal good.” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000. p. 227). That universal principle is the financial value of human resources. The result of understanding of yourself through this lens and subscribing to the model minority depiction of your ethnic destiny, one that is not attainable and that has been manufactured by a system with more interest in your Yellow Dollars than in your personhood, the result is a lesser sense of entitlement to services and rights for Asian Americans in times of need (Chao et al., 2013).

5.4. Domi-Nation

It is against the backdrop of the Nation State that we work towards equality, however it is the process of nationality that creates precarious and uncertain terms of
engagement. Davies (2005) describes the conditions of the nation in her article Diversity, America, Leadership, Good over evil. Davis tells us in a commentary on Hollywood film that

the “nation” has been predicated upon dividing practices that retroactively produce “the people” (over and over again) in specific cultural terms. [...] we might say difference is managed by various processes of constructing hierarchies, marginalization and assimilation, [...] the cultural formation of the United States as a universal nation by the highly selective representation of its ideal or exemplary citizens. (p. 399).

Being included in the club of ideal or exemplary citizens is the imagined outcome of representation. Fanon argues that in the context of domination, or in this case White supremacy, the terms of recognition are generally determined “by and in the interest of the master”. He also maintains that after prolonged domination the subjects of domination develop a psycho-affective attachment to “master-sanctioned forms of recognition and that this attachment is essential in maintaining the economic and political structure of master/slave relations themselves.” (as cited in Coulthard, 2007. p. 439). This is where we begin to draw pride from the imposition of the model minority stereotype, writing books about it, films to celebrate that narrative of hardworking, quiet minorities (Chao et al., 2013).

Patriarchy, White supremacy, and global capitalism are all systems of oppression (Golash-Boza et al., 2019). While we may fall into the psycho-affective attachments of “the pleasures of status seeking” (Storper, 2000. p. 375) and feel as though we have attained that status, given that Asian Americans have moved into the top seventeen percent of people whose purchasing power “permits them to acquire very large quantities of fine goods and services” (Storper, 2000. p. 375). This master-sanctioned form of recognition proves to provide a mere crumb of deliverance for Asian Americans at a considerable expense. A crumb large enough to ensure our participation in the affective labor that produces network value for communicative capitalism in the planetary market (Dean, 2010). Long-term stability of these systems of governance relies on these internalized forms of racist recognition (Coulthard, 2007). What’s more is that by taking Fanon’s argument on internalization into the internet era, Jody Dean (2007) provides the perfect summary of these actions,

We are captured in our passivity or, more precisely, by the reversion of our active engagements and interventions into passive forms of ‘being made
aware’ or ‘having been stated’. The problem, then is that ubiquitous, personal media, communication for its own sake, turn out activity into passivity. They capture it, use it. We end up oscillating between extremes. On the one hand, we have opinions, theories, ideas and information that we want to share. So, we write our books and blogs, adding in our contribution to the circulating flow. (p. 43)

While dean and Fanon’s theories apply to different specific systems of oppression my hope is that through this project I have been able to trace the relevance of both of these theories of oppression into the Hollywood media scape that has delivered this cultural phenomenon.

5.5. Discussion

The problem with progressive performances on the stage of White supremacy and global capitalism is not only that it exploits the identity politics and manufactured communities of an “Asian” diaspora, it is that it does not pose foundational challenges to the background structures of those systems of subjugation for ethnic minorities. The best possible outcome within this framework of progression is “white liberty and white justice: that is, values secreted by [their] masters. Without [inappropriate] conflict and struggle the terms of recognition tend to remain in the possession of those in power to bestow on their ‘inferiors’ in ways that they deem appropriate” (Coulthard, 2007. p. 449). These topics, of recognition, justice and equality require solutions, however the intersectional understanding of these issues, while it provides insights also makes us aware of the difficulties around proposing solutions. Harvey notes this, saying “this all sounds very noble until confronted with the realities of conflicting senses of justice between different groups” (Harvey, 2000. p.545). Cultural groups each have different understandings and practices of justice, based on their ethical institutions and other cultural values, values rooted in their diverse experiences of “places, honors, jobs, things of all sorts that constitute a shared way of life,”, these theories of justice may not be palatable or even compatible with others if they were even possible to distill with any level of accuracy. Any attempt to define them would be an unjust approach, and according to Harvey “To ignore these processes is to risk attempting to freeze existing geographical structures of place and norms forever. The effect would be as dysfunctional as it would be oppressive.” (Harvey, 2000. p.545). To do this would be to take on “the task of rethinking the categories that have governed intellectual life for over two hundred years.” (Harvey,
It is a seemingly impossible task and a far easier route is to continue to earn and spend Yellow Dollars.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

*Crazy Rich Asians* provided us with a performance of progressive ideology, a film that promised the deliverance of Asian American underrepresentation by placing upper middle class Asian Americans in the limelight and has been celebrated as a landmark achievement, a film that has opened studio doors to dozens of Asian American media projects as the highest earning romantic comedy in over a decade and first all-Asian cast Hollywood film in more than 25 years. This work has been subsidized by consumer campaigns, communicative capitalism and the draw or duties of a manufactured community. My theoretical critique of CRA looked at the production, subsidization, and consumption of this film within the context of representation in the US for Asian Americans.

Yellow Dollars were a fundamental factor in the success and the birth of this film. By framing Asian Americans as a market segment that is not to be ignored both through the film itself, economic overviews through the US census, and the model minority narratives this genre of film has been rated as “low risk” giving Asian Americans and their sympathizers the opportunity to purchase this piece of representation. The idea that we must first be viewed as a low-risk but high-yield market brings up many issues, not the least of which is viewing people as only valued by the amount of money they can generate in the capitalist system. As Chao et al (2013) have discussed there is a substantial financial wealth discrepancy among Asian Americans in the USA. Many Asian Americans live in poverty and to group them together as one indiscernible demographic is to group together half of the world’s population coming from more than a quarter of its landmass. If the success of the film that delivers Asian Americans on the big screen comes at the expense of these things, we must question the benefits of this kind of recognition.

Our drive to be recognized, to gain ideological agency, is what puts money in the pockets of Hollywood executives and continues to validate and fuel the system of exploitation that ensures that those on the bottom end of the vast Asian American wealth scope. The imperative of social change is being consumed in and re-sold through affective networks in order to maintain that system. These are the ways that the progressive excitement surrounding *Crazy Rich Asians* is being appropriated by capital
in the way that we use Yellow Dollar activism as our path to recognition, and our humanity as a commodity to be bought and sold through the production, distribution, and consumption of this cultural product.

This film’s promise of recognition is dependent on our financial exploitation and the justice that is given to Asian Americans through the phenomenon of this “heroic” film does nothing to challenge the damaging hegemonic ideas about worthiness, culture and community for Asian Americans. By allowing capital and consumerism to become the strongest part of our action framework, how we see ourselves, define our interests and approach the world, we restrict ourselves to behaving “appropriately” within the system if capitalist recognition, and the terms of recognition become more entangled with the exploitative system of global capitalism.
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