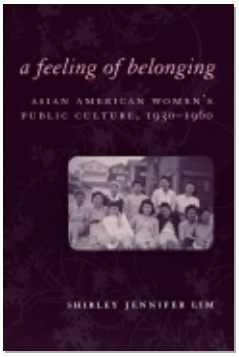
2. “I Protest”: Anna May Wong and the Performance of Modernity



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"I Protest"

Anna May Wong and the Performance of Modernity

In the 1939 movie *King of Chinatown,* one first glimpses Chinese American actress Anna May Wong putting down her surgical implements, taking off her cap and mask after a successful emergency room operation.[1] *King of Chinatown* underscores the professional competence of Wong's character, Dr. Mary Ling, for immediately after the surgery the Bay Area hospital director offers her the position of resident surgeon. In melodious tones tinged with an upper-class British accent, Wong firmly but politely declines the prestigious appointment because she wishes to raise money to bring medical supplies to China to combat the Japanese invasion. Flashing her trademark smile, Wong gracefully strides across the room, Edith Head–designed skirt and blouse highlighting her all-American modern professionalism.

King of Chinatown not only pioneered Chinese American women's film roles; it also examined European American preconceptions about Chinese food and culture. After the surgery, Wong returns home, where her father has supper waiting for her and her guests—a European American nurse and the nurse's boyfriend. While walking toward the dinner table, the nurse's boyfriend rubs his hands together and says, "Lead me to that chop suey!" Mr. Ling replies, "Not many in China know of your great American dish, chop suey! Rice is our national dish." They then dine on "real" Chinese food. While at the dinner table, the nurse's boyfriend chokes on the Chinese beverage offered as a toast, and this time Wong crisply informs him that drinking the unfamiliar alcohol requires "an acquired taste." Based on a real-life Chinese American woman, Dr. Margaret Chung, Wong's role represents a modern American woman who is proud of her Chinese heritage.[2]

Anna May Wong (1905–1961) was the major Asian American actress of the twentieth century. In the late 1930s she starred in three Paramount Studio films, *King of Chinatown, Daughter of Shanghai,* and *Island of Lost Men*—that cast her in breakthrough roles as American professional women.[3] Adding to her national fame, during these years Wong graced the cover of *Look*. Roughly the equivalent of today's *People* magazine, the March 1938 issue comprised a two-page pictorial subtitled "The World's Most Beautiful Chinese Girl," including the famous photograph of Wong flanked by German actresses Marlene Dietrich and Leni Riefenstahl. Although the sensationalized cover depicted Wong brandishing a dagger over her bosom, the inside of the magazine showed a more complex range of her work and life. Such fame and publicity was the result of decades-long struggles to gain leverage in her movie career. It would not be until 1958 that another Asian American motion-picture actress, France Nuyen, adorned the cover of a nationally circulating popular American magazine.[4] With the cover of *Look* magazine as well as numerous articles and features on her that appeared throughout her career, Wong secured the attention not only of her Chinese American community but also of the general American public.

This chapter investigates the historical circumstances that allowed Anna May Wong to portray a Chinese American surgeon and to grace the cover of a national magazine. Since the mid-1970s, the dominant thrust amid the scant scholarship on Wong has focused on her as an exploited actress who only played "foreign" or "negative" stereotypical roles. Instead of investigating good and bad stereotypes in Wong's film roles, I will trace both her press coverage and her cinematic performances of gender and race within the discourses of American modernity.[5]

In the atmosphere of scientific racism that prevailed into the early twentieth century, proving modernity was key to cultural citizenship. According to one of scientific racism's many strands, there was a hierarchy of races and racial traits that could be charted on a linear continuum: savage, barbaric, civilized, and enlightened. This was not just an aesthetic exercise but one that had real political consequences. Indeed, placing indigenous peoples such as those from Africa or the Philippines on the bottom of the hierarchy justified slavery and colonialism. For Asians in particular, scientific racism grafted onto older strains of orientalism, rendering Asians the objects of study and fascination. U.S. colonialism in the Philippines, the Pacific Islands, and Shanghai concessions ensured continuing American material interests in Asia. As cultural citizenship is racial minorities' claiming of full

belonging into the nation-state, Anna May Wong's Chinese American films and iconography intervened in all the above in U.S. culture.[6]

Visual regimes of race and gender intersected in the early twentieth century to produce the space for an Anna May Wong. The importance of Wong's Chinese American film roles and the cover of *Look* magazine was threefold. First, through her portrayal of beauty and modern fashion, as exemplified in her films and press, Wong proved that Asians are human. Proving humanity was the essential step in establishing civilized status within scientific racism. Once established, that civilized status laid the foundation for legal rights, civil rights, and thus cultural citizenship's feeling of belonging to the American nation-state. Although it is debatable whether acquiring "civilized" traits such as European manners, gestures, speech patterns, and upper-class social status are acts of resistance per se (and in a world overdetermined by capitalism, what constitutes "true" resistance?), nonetheless they signal the possibility of access to tools of power.[7]

Anna May Wong was under double scrutiny, for under modern regimes, as gender hyperaccentuates race, women have symbolically represented culture and nation. Thus a leading litmus test for the social fitness of immigrants and third world nations has been the cultural status of their women. Parallel to scientific racism, this paradigm posits a linear model of development that situates first world (white) imperial women as the modern referent and measures all others accordingly, with the greater differences signifying "backwardness" and thus greater distance from modernity. In addition, in an age of cinematic structuring of visuality, women have had a special relationship to visuality as objects of the gaze. In the power of looking relations, men look at women, women look at women, and women see themselves being looked at. Thus women bearing markers of race/ethnicity were under double visual scrutiny.[8]

Second, Anna May Wong's Chinese American films and iconography intervened in reworking the definition of the American nation as white and placed Chinese Americans in the realm of the citizen-subject. The controlling image for Asian Americans was and still is that of perpetual foreigner-alien, and that originated with the Chinese.[9] Representations of China and Chinese people played key roles in the formation of American identity as white.[10] Thus, placing Asians as belonging within the American nation-state was indeed radical. After all, numerous legal and structural elements singled out Asian Americans and rendered them not just second-class citizens but unwanted ones, consigned to outside the nation-state.

Anna May Wong and her portrayals of professional Chinese Americans deserve a separate chapter because it was the Chinese who served as the primary undesired American immigrant group, and the exclusion of all other immigrant groups, Asian and otherwise, resulted from that precedent. For example, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was the first American immigration act to bar a group by name.[11] Moreover, American immigration acts and laws have demonized Chinese American women in particular. The 1875 Page Law, which theoretically restricted the immigration of Chinese American male and female workers and felons, in reality curtailed the immigration only of Chinese American women. Although the 1922 Cable Act stripped all American women of their citizenship if they married Asian immigrant men (aliens ineligible for citizenship), because of skewed sex-ratio demographics and marriage patterns, it applied chiefly to Chinese American women. Given how the American national imaginary had previously placed people of Asian descent in general and Chinese American women in particular outside the nation-state, Wong's Chinese American cinema roles and *Look* cover made key ideological moves by claiming American cultural citizenship.

Third, Anna May Wong's adoption of hybrid Chinese and American iconography reworked modernity.[12] Wong's star persona on- and offscreen established a tension between a modern Western image and a "primitive" or "decadent" Chinese or Asian identity.[13] Imperialism places the "other" in primitive time, the West in modern time; thus backward peoples need the imperial help of "modern" societies.[14] To counter that formulation and to break up the temporal linearity of scientific racism's civilization continuum, Wong deployed hybridity, which is the blending of both Asian and Western cultural traits. Wong used hybridity to disrupt the binary between the civilized (West) and primitive (China) by interweaving China and the West within—and this is key—modern time. Hybridity situated in twentieth-century time rendered Wong central to the project of reworking race within modernity and continued importance in representing the visual.[15]

Movies and fashion lend themselves especially well to the study of the cultural production of modernity and gendered racial difference because their embodiment is visual and performative.[16] In other words, much of how we understand race in the twentieth century has to do with appearance. Photographs and films provide rich sources of visual and oral evidence and act as historical records of Wong's work.[17] The first part of this chapter examines the stardom Wong achieved during her European so-

journ, which she secured through capitalizing on imperial Europe's fascination with the "other." This segment traces how Wong's acquisition of European manners, gestures, and speech patterns allowed her to negotiate the space of modernity in the United States. The second portion of this chapter examines Wong's Hollywood Paramount Studio "B" Chinese American movies. Since they are not widely available and have never received in-depth scholarly attention, analyzing the movies' Chinese American upper-class narratives adds a new dimension to understanding the possibilities of and limits to the performance of American cultural citizenship in the late 1930s. The third segment of the chapter focuses on Wong's hybrid reworking of modernity through fashion and the 1938 *Look* magazine cover.

Anna May Wong Establishes Her Career

Anna May Wong was born at 351 Flower Street near Los Angeles' Chinatown on January 3, 1905, as the second daughter of two American-born people of Chinese descent. Her father was a laundryman, so Wong's work as a successful actress enabled her to transcend her working-class roots. Cutting classes at Los Angeles High School in order to frequent the back lots of Hollywood movie studios, Wong began her career as an extra in the Alla Nazimova's classic *The Red Lantern* (1919).[18] She landed her first starring role in *Toll of the Sea* (1922), the earliest full-length two-tone Technicolor movie. That led to national prominence: she played the Mongol slave in the *Thief of Baghdad* (1924).[19]

Examining Anna May Wong's career is particularly fruitful because of race's centrality to motion pictures' construction of the modern American nation-state. Wong's emergence is especially noteworthy not solely because of her talent but because the racial stakes were so high. As numerous fine studies have shown, U.S. cinema was critical in not only shaping but also creating America as a modern nation. Cinema emerged at a key moment of racialized anxiety around the American nation-state. At the turn of the century, the United States had to cope not only with Asian immigration exclusion but with healing the nation after the Civil War; incorporating former Mexican lands; the place of African Americans under racial segregation legalized by the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* (1896); the extermination or displacement onto reservations of indigenous Native Americans; and empire and conquest in the Philippines,

"Flapper" Anna May Wong.

Pacific Islands, and the Caribbean. The most infamous example of racial anxiety about the American nation-state being reworked cinematically occurred in D. W. Griffith's epic *Birth of a Nation* (1915), which reconceptualized race relations by conjuring up the specter of the black male rapist in order to justify segregation and black disfranchisement. To further complicate matters, whiteness itself was an unstable category that historically, through minstrelsy, and contemporaneously, through the motion pictures and other cultural venues, was being consolidated against all the other racialized groups. By showing that all humans have not been treated equally, race has been the central contradiction to the American ideals of democracy and freedom. American movies shaped the historical imaginary to recreate and deal with those contradictions so that the U.S. nation-state could reinvent itself and its racial origins.[20]

Anna May Wong's cinematic career emerged at a particularly significant historical juncture.[21] Early twentieth-century U.S. orientalisms created a tremendous demand for films with Asian themes and locales. Coined by scholar Edward Said, the term *orientalism* refers to Europe's long-standing fascination with the Orient, through which it used the Orient as a mirror for its own desires and ambitions. Building on that European orientalism, U.S. orientalism geographically shifted its focus from the Middle East to the eastern Pacific. The narrative of American imperialism conjoined the trope of orientalism with that of the American frontier, the deep historical national narrative marking America's difference from Europe. According to the frontier myth, American national formation was unique because class-based conflict could be mitigated by the promise of opportunity and "empty" lands in the West. As the U.S. nation-state borders reached the Pacific Ocean, historian Frederick Jackson Turner famously lamented that the United States had lost its frontier and thus its basis for class harmony. Colonizing Asia and imaginatively extending the American West into the Pacific reinstated the myth of the frontier as safety valve. The Spanish-American war of 1898, which resulted in the United States gaining colonies in the Pacific and the Philippines as well as the Caribbean, reinvigorated the promise of class mobility within the American nation-state. That came at the cost of race. In fact, in the initial 1898 battles in the Philippines, 87 percent of American generals had honed their skills in the wars against Native Americans.[22] Like that in Europe, American orientalism was fascinated with China in particular, as evidenced by the treaty ports and Shanghai concessions, thus strengthening U.S. orientalism and Anna May Wong's cinematic career.[23]

Despite shining as an extra and gaining starring parts, to Anna May Wong's chagrin, in the 1920s European American women dominated the main "positive" Hollywood Chinese roles, relegating her to the "tragic" or "evil" orientalist ones. A prime example is *Toll of the Sea* (1922), whose screenplay was created by the noted writer Frances Marion. Even though Wong was incredibly charming in *Toll of the Sea,* the film reworked one of the most orientalist of all tropes, that of Madame Butterfly. Madame Butterfly, predicated on the fixed signifier of Eastern/female and Western/male, stands in for the dynamics of Western imperialism in Asia. Wong's character, Lotus Flower, has a baby with an American ship's captain (Allen), under the illusion that they are married and he will bring her to America. However, Allen becomes engaged to a white European American woman; he takes Wong's (and his) baby away to America, and, at the

end of the film, she, still in China, commits suicide. The colonial metaphors and tropes—substitute baby for laboring bodies or raw goods that the colonizers ship to the metropole and elsewhere—are rife.[24]

Anna May Wong's clothing in *Toll of the Sea* situated her as nonmodern and thus (both her and China) as a colonial subject. Throughout the movie Wong wears silk Chinese garments. However, when Captain Allen announces his first return to the United States, Wong's character, believing he will take her with him, strives to be brought to America through knowledge of appropriate fashion. Copying from her grandmother's book, Wong's character emerges in full nineteenth-century long skirts, believing her clothes are contemporary chic. The 1922 audience would have howled with laughter, knowing her character appeared fifty years out of date. To underscore that point, when Allen returns to China a second time, his European American wife, Elsie, wears modern short skirts made from softer, lighter materials. Thus her clothing suggests the undercurrent behind Wong giving up her child to Elsie and Allen; she does not know what is modern, she cannot raise a child in a modern era, and thus her son is better off with the modern white couple, to be raised in America. One could extend the metaphor to colonial relations. Colonial subjects do not understand modernity; they cannot rule themselves or their own people. Marion's plot device—that Wong confides in Elsie that the child is Allen's because women around the world unite, which sets up Allen and Elsie taking the child from Wong—rings hollow. Under regimes of slavery and colonialism, white women have gained status at the expense of women of color.[25]

Modernity factored into orientalism and was heightened by the need to manage the "yellow peril" and "Asian menace," which manifested itself in movies of the 1920s such as *Old San Francisco* and the *Fu Manchu* films. Through a strong Americanization movement, World War I set the tone for the ensuing decade's xenophobia. Thus *Old San Francisco,* in which Anna May Wong played a nameless Chinese girl, secured the American West for the European Americans and excised the Mexican American and Asian American contributions by situating them as nonmodern.[26] Genre movies such as the *Fu Manchu* series that highlighted sinister Orientals as being decadent, savage, and nonmodern worked in tandem with legal cases such as *Ozawa* and *Thind,* which situated Asians as nonwhites within the American racial landscape. Both U.S. Supreme Court decisions invoked the "common" understanding of race to rule that Asians were nonwhites, and that common understanding of race had derived in part from

movies such as the *Fu Manchu* series.[27] Within this 1920s racial framework, Wong's options as an actress were limited. "Yellowface," the playing of Asian roles by white actors made up to look Asian, was prevalent throughout the twentieth century. Hollywood orientalism and yellowface in particular could conjure up and ameliorate racial anxieties if and only if actual Asian American bodies were banned.[28] Thus it was impossible for Hollywood actually to embody the Chinese or the Asian as Chinese American or Asian American; instead, it relied on yellowface.

Up to here, my narrative about Anna May Wong's career agrees with that of the current scholarship. However, here is where I depart from past historiography, because I believe that her European sojourn and her 1930s Chinese American films and iconography made significant interventions that allowed a space, albeit a small one, for Asian Americans to claim modernity. Like other racial minority performing artists such as Paul Robeson, Marian Anderson, and Sessue Hayakawa, in 1928, Wong traveled to Europe because limited Hollywood roles discouraged her.[29] Wong's sojourn in Europe paralleled that of contemporary African American performer Josephine Baker.[30] Born in 1906 in St. Louis, in the mid-1920s Baker, like Wong, went to France and Germany to further her stalled American career. Under the ethos of modernity, the racial and primitive "other" was the foil against which Europe proved its civilization.[31] At first glance, Wong and Baker presented the image of the exotic American to European audiences as ethnically "other" and sexually primitive. These are the most enduring tropes of European fascination with the "New World," ones that both Baker and Wong played on and exploited, and to which Europe continues to respond. They arrived in a Europe primed for them by interests in jazz, chinoiserie, and negritude. Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, for example, were just two of the European painters borrowing from African and Asian aesthetics. As Wong's and Baker's American national citizenship was frequently subsumed to essentialized racial categories, they functioned as ambiguous representatives of empire. Working in London, Berlin, and Paris during the height of imperialism, Wong and Baker represented the desired female colonial body (playing women from Singapore and Haiti) as well as the forbidden, dark sexual "other" (both depicted Arab women).[32] As they became established in their careers in the 1930s, both women became legendary for wearing sophisticated designer gowns that contradicted their sexual and "primitive" dance performances.[33]

While in Europe, Anna May Wong acquired the credentials that would allow her to enter modernity. There she gained upper-class social skills

and acting polish that, upon her return to the United States, would win her a broader repertoire of starring theater and film roles. After theater critics decried her American twang, Wong invested in elocution lessons in order to master an upper-class British accent. Later, to lend distinction to her work, she invoked traces of that accent in her American movie parts. In addition, she learned French and German, utilizing her German in films such as *Pavement Butterfly* and to sing in the Viennese opera *Springtime.*[34] Working in theater, Wong garnered top billing over her co-star Laurence Olivier in *A Circle of Chalk* and headlined *On the Spot* in the United States.[35] For private acting lessons, Wong sought out theater legends such as Kate Rork and Mabel Terry Lewis.[36] Living the life of an upper-class socialite, she met the prince of Wales, and her elegance and beauty stopped Parliament when she sauntered into the visitors gallery.[37] While in Europe, numerous periodicals featured Wong, culminating in the covers of the society magazines *Tatler* and *Sketch.*[38]

Anna May Wong's 1931 return to the United States marked a turning point in her status in the American entertainment industry. The newfound privilege conferred by her European training enabled her to headline a Broadway theater production and to reenter Hollywood with more power, especially since "talkie" movies meant that her voice would be an integral part of her work. Not only did her training win her Hollywood roles, but for the next few years she would continue to travel between Europe and Hollywood, for she remained in great demand in English movies. Her British-inflected upper-class tones projected vocal authority while playing characters such as that of a surgeon in *King of Chinatown.* Her stylish mode of dress set fashion trends around the world and ensured that while on screen and stage, all eyes would be focused on her. And that newfound power aided her efforts to control her image and roles.

Many Chinese Americans remembered Anna May Wong's European sojourn as key to her later American success. *Charlie Chan* series actor Keye Luke, who at one point was cast as Wong's love interest in *Hold for Shanghai,* a movie that was to star Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers but was never made, remembered how Wong gained fame in England and on the Continent. Los Angeles casting agent and actress Bessie Loo reminisced: "Anna May Wong was a prominent Chinese actress, but never got ahead in the U.S. before she became famous in England."[39] Loo remarked that Wong's height and appearance aided her fame.

Upon her return to the United States, Anna May Wong played upon her "Oriental" cachet and newfound fame to incorporate the modern into her

acting roles. Emblematic of her long career as cultural ambassador between her Chinese heritage and Western nationality, in 1930, Wong protested what she felt to be an incorrect interpretation of Asian women's proper gait. In the Broadway play *On the Spot,* directed by Lee Ephraim and written by Edgar Wallace, Wong showed her mettle by challenging the director:

> Interestingly, Miss Wong's ideas about presenting a Chinese woman differed considerably from those of Lee Ephraim, who insisted her stage crossings should be made in short, hesitant steps a la Butterfly. But Anna argued her point that Chinese women did not walk in such a manner and her projection of the tragic Minn (who commits suicide) benefited from her innate knowledge.[40]

The director Ephraim confused supposedly Japanese "butterfly" walking mannerisms with putative Chinese behavior, which Wong refused to allow. Perhaps the hesitant steps referred to footbinding. Regardless, Wong strategically used her ancestry to create the protagonist she wanted to portray. Wong played off both her fame and the authenticity ascribed to her by the parameters of Western modernity. In fact, Wong was able to complicate modernity by showing the modern—walking steps—embedded in the traditional. Although past scholarship has emphasized how Wong's character's death signified her professional marginalization, what should also matter is the dignity with which her contemporary critics and audiences felt she invested in her portrayal of Minn.[41]

Contrasting Anna May Wong with Japanese-born actor Sessue Hayakawa shows how Wong was construed as modern and Western. Often compared to silent-movie legend Rudolph Valentino, Hayakawa's expressive facial gestures and smoldering sexuality ensured the success of such films as Cecil B. DeMille's *The Cheat* (1919).[42] In 1931 the fan magazine *Motion Picture* showed how Wong's and Hayakawa's cultural differences were popularly understood:

> Sessue Hayakawa smokes Japanese cigarettes, has Japanese people around him, talks with a completely bewildering Japanese accent, looks oriental, and above all thinks with the oriental attitude. "Never make plan," say Sessue with his difficult accent. "Never plan ahead." Anna May, with Western verbosity, is more explicit in expressing her philosophy.[43]

As the passage shows, the Asian American stars had divergent cultural careers in the 1930s. Even though both worked in Europe, Wong's mastery of British English proved essential to her success in sound motion-picture productions. The above comparison shows the popular belief that Wong was far more cosmopolitan, modern, and Westernized than Hayakawa. The article emphasized Wong's mastery of European languages, including the English accent, as well as her films in Europe. The article further racially differentiated them:

> She is glad to be back.
> She went away a Chinese flapper—and now many tell her that she no longer even looks Oriental.
> He [Sessue Hayakawa] has remained completely Oriental.

Hayakawa's foreign appeal served him well in the late 1910s and early 1920s but not in the 1930s. In a political climate hostile to immigrants, exemplified by the 1924 Immigration Act, it is not surprising that the *Motion Picture* article showed American-born Wong in a far more positive light than immigrant Hayakawa. The inscrutable, unintelligible male "Oriental" was not as palatable as the hybrid, cosmopolitan, Westernized female.

Demonstrating the importance of accent and national origin to claiming modernity, the contrast in the two actors' speaking voices was starkly apparent in a 1931 movie that starred both Anna May Wong and Sessue Hayakawa: *Daughter of the Dragon.* In *Daughter,* Wong's clear, lilting diction rendered all her lines intelligible, whereas Hayakawa's thick accent made him difficult to comprehend. As with many other movie actors in the talking era, Hayakawa's unacceptable voice overshadowed the memorable facial gestures that served him so well in the silent era.[44] *Daughter of the Dragon* became one of Sessue Hayakawa's last major Hollywood roles until the 1957 *Bridge over the River Kwai.*[45]

Although critics praised Wong's lovely voice, she castigated *Daughter* for its negative depictions of the Chinese. In an interview for *Film Weekly* entitled "I Protest," Wong asked:

> Why is the screen Chinese always the villain of the piece? And so crude a villain—murderous, treacherous, a snake in the grass. We are not like that. How should we be, with a civilization that is so many times older than that of the West? . . . I get so weary of it all—of the scenarist's con-

> ception of Chinese character, that I told myself I was done with films for ever. You remember Fu Manchu? *Daughter of the Dragon*? So wicked.[46]

Although Wong was quickly lured back into the movies, *Daughter of the Dragon* marks her last "wicked" film role. Throughout her career, Wong not only protested what she considered to be inappropriate representations of Chinese ethnicity but did everything within her power to create her own counterinterpretations and performances.

In her attempts to perform modernity, Anna May Wong was by no means unusual among Chinese American women. For example, cabaret performer Rose Yuen Ow's life story exhibits striking parallels to Wong's. Defying San Francisco Chinatown's behavioral norms, teenaged Ow first sold tickets at a "[moving-]picture place," then passed out refreshments at San Francisco's largest cabaret, the Tait Cafe.[47] Acting on her boss's jest that if she could ballroom dance, he would place her in the show, Ow mastered the fox-trot, waltz, and cakewalk. Maneuvering her boss into making good his jest, Ow eventually ballroom-danced at the cabaret for $200 a week. Similarly, Raymond Hitchcock brought the "Chung and Rosie Moy" novelty show to New York, whereafter the Chinese American dancers continued to work the vaudeville circuit around the United States. The success of other contemporary performers, such as Dorothy Siu in the circus and the dancers in the Forbidden City USA nightclub, show audiences' interest in Chinese American performance.[48] The foreign image of the Chinese Americans drew European American audiences to the paradox of "Orientals" imitating American song and dance. In other words, it is because Chinese Americans had been racially constructed as foreign and non-American that their performance of American modernity proved so striking.

Even though Anna May Wong had worked to create herself as culturally Western through voice and dress, such traits did not ensure free migration through the exercise of her legal American citizenship. Despite her woman-of-the-world travels to Europe, she was still denied the right to cross borders at will. First, in an era that banned Chinese immigration, Wong had to file travel papers upon leaving the United States so that she could prove her citizenship.[49] Second, journeying from California to New York, Wong disembarked at the Detroit train station to chat with friends. However, when she attempted to reboard the train, Canadian immigration officials refused to let her back on, for the train passed through Canada on its way to New York. Wong was forced to spend the night in Detroit to take

a train routed through the United States.[50] Like U.S. immigration laws, Canadian ones discriminated against people of Chinese descent. Thus Wong's cultural and legal citizenship did not always convince those who enforced the laws.

Despite the harrowing real-life train experience, one of Anna May Wong's most critically acclaimed roles occurred on a movie-set train. In *Shanghai Express* (1932), Wong and Marlene Dietrich have matching personas as Hui Fei and Shanghai Lily, women of ill repute traveling on the Peiping (Beijing)–Shanghai express train. The reputations of Shanghai Lily and Hui Fei are established at the beginning of the movie through the contrast to and interactions with Mrs. Haggerty, a bourgeois Victorian-moraled lady attired in a white lace blouse with cameo at her throat. Haggerty presents them with cards with the address of her "respectable" Shanghai boarding house. Dietrich asks her, "Don't you find respectable people terribly—dull?" After Haggerty professes shock, Dietrich asks her, while looking at the card, "What kind of house?" Haggerty replies, "A boarding house." Dietrich, pretending that she had previously misheard Haggerty as saying bawdy house, says, "Oh," and arches one eyebrow. Indignant, Haggerty turns to Wong and says, "I'm sure you're very respectable, madam." Wong replies in her best upper-class British accent: "I must confess I don't quite know the standard of respectability that you demand in your boarding house, Mrs. Haggerty." Quivering with outrage, Mrs. Haggerty leaves them together in their train compartment.[51] Wong's and Dietrich's costumes emphasize their characters' symmetry: Wong in light colors with dark straight hair, Dietrich in dark dresses with light fluffy hair. Clothing, hair, and makeup visually accent their characters' analogous dangerous sexuality.

Shanghai Express received critical approval. According to many, Wong's role upstaged Dietrich's, and some claimed that, had there been an Academy Award for best supporting actress in 1932, Wong would have been nominated.[52] In fact, a friend of Dietrich viewed the movie with her and, when Dietrich complained about her own acting, the friend mentioned the magnificence of Wong's performance, which apparently caused a distinct chill in the air.[53] Considered to be one of director Josef von Sternberg's finest efforts, the movie earned him a nomination for an Academy Award.

During the 1930s, three historical shifts laid the groundwork for Anna May Wong's Chinese American roles by changing the way that "Orientals" were portrayed on the screen. The *New York Times* on April 14, 1930, casti-

gated Sax Rohmer's novel turned movie *The Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu* for its unreal and overly dramatic "mysterious messages, daggers bathed in blood, opiate druggings, and much gun play."[54] Chinese Americans protested the representation of themselves as Fu Manchus.[55] As a result of such condemnations, liberal pressure drove evil Orientals such as Fu Manchu from the screen.[56]

Second, the 1930s gains in "positive" portrayals in racialized cinema were paradoxically assisted by the 1934 Hays Code, which not only prohibited interracial sexual relations but also forbade ethnic typecasting.[57] Chinese American actors noticed the difference that the Hays Code made in their movie parts. According to oral history interviews, Chinese American actors of the era remembered their roles improving in the mid-1930s. Keye Luke, who played Charlie Chan's number-one son, reminisced about his movie career and found that his roles changed in the mid-1930s: "It seems I was always cast as a good guy and only 2 or 3 Oriental parts as nasty since 1934."[58] Even though he was not explicitly asked about the Hays Code, in examining his movie career Luke pinpointed 1934 as a turning point.

Third, and perhaps more important, the Sino-Japanese War, triggered in 1931 by Japan's invasion of Manchuria, resulted in greater sympathy for China and Chinese Americans. The United States sided with China, which also signaled a turn in race portrayals. Thus in the 1930s, as the United States developed the image of China as a good ally, "Orientals" became ethnicity-specific. In films, Chinese and Chinese Americans gained an identity distinct from that of the Japanese. The changing status of China boosted the value of Wong's portrayals of Chinese patriotism. In the 1932 movie *Shanghai Express,* Wong functions as a patriot loyal to the Chinese nation, whereas in *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931) a year earlier, she depicted a woman who did not have national allegiances but swore loyalty to one sinister man, her father.

Shanghai Express would be one of the last movies of the 1930s in which Anna May Wong played a woman of a "lower" class background. In the 1930s, Wong made three acting-role transitions: from sexually disreputable Chinese women, as in *Daughter of the Dragon*; to upper-class women of ambiguous sexual respectability and differing national allegiance, exemplified by *Dangerous to Know*; and finally to her ultimate incarnation in the late 1930s as upper-class, sexually respectable Chinese American women illustrated by *King of Chinatown.*

Anna May Wong performed Chinese American characters in low-budget, second-tier "B" movies such as *King of Chinatown* because "A" movie

personnel refused to cast her in the appropriate starring roles. Wong showed her awareness of her symbolic importance as a Chinese American in Hollywood. She rejected one of the most important widely circulating film parts of her professional career because she considered it derogatory. In 1935, *The Good Earth* (1937) had one of the largest budgets in cinematic history, $2 million.[59] It has been argued that the book was the major reason why Americans shifted from demonizing the Chinese to allying with them during the Sino-Japanese War, especially after its author, Pearl S. Buck, won the Nobel Prize in 1938.[60] To many, Wong was the logical choice for the lead role of O-lan. However, MGM thwarted Wong's hopes of becoming a major star in a leading "A" feature by casting Luise Rainer, the actress who won back-to-back Academy Awards for best actress, including one for O-lan in *The Good Earth.* MGM invited Wong to screen-test as Lotus, the second wife who ruins the family. Wong repudiated the role because she did not want to be the only Chinese American playing the only negative personality. She stated for the press:

> I'll be glad to take a test, but I won't play the part. If you let me play O-lan, I'll be very glad. But you're asking me—with Chinese blood—to do the only unsympathetic role in the picture featuring an all-American cast portraying Chinese characters.[61]

Wong declined to depict the evil other and a European actress, Tilly Losch, won the role of Lotus. Wong's refusal to act in such a high-profile movie is significant, for it would have increased her visibility in Hollywood. Given the limited number of cinematic acting parts for actresses of any race, Wong's rejection of the role of Lotus demonstrates her conscious decision-making process in how she wished to shape herself as a professional. Echoing her interview "I Protest," in which she denounced evil portrayals of the Chinese in *Daughter of the Dragon,* Wong condemned MGM's desire to cast her as an evil Chinese instead of as the heroic O-lan. Anywhere between five hundred and two thousand Chinese American actors from Los Angeles worked on *The Good Earth,* including Wong's sister, Mary, but not Los Angeles Chinatown's most famous actress.

Anna May Wong herself took advantage of the improved image of China to pay her first visit there. After *The Good Earth* debacle, Wong's highly publicized tour included visits with dignitaries and cultural sites. Wong commented that the possibilities for motion pictures in China were enormous and that Hollywood should create more China-based films.

Upon her return to the United States, Wong actively worked to develop roles conducive to her understanding of how to perform Chinese American modernity.[62]

Performing Chinese American Cultural Citizenship

During the height of Western colonialism and imperialism, Anna May Wong's ability to exploit the space of agency between exoticism and cosmopolitanism allowed her to become an international star. For a brief moment in the 1930s, Wong utilized that star power to negotiate a contract that allowed her to perform distinctly Chinese American roles in movies such as *King of Chinatown* and *Daughter of Shanghai.* In these portrayals and in her public appearances, Wong shifted the category of American cultural citizenship to include Chinese Americans. Theater scholar Karen Shimakawa argues that in late twentieth-century performance, the category of "Asian American" moves between invisibility and visibility, foreignness and domestication/assimilation.[63] I argue that in early twentieth-century cinema, invisibility/foreignness had been the dominant trope, and that this 1930s moment of Wong's Chinese American roles was the one where visibility/domestication first became a possibility.

Unlike other scholars who argue that Anna May Wong's career peaked in 1932 with *Shanghai Express* and *Daughter of the Dragon,* I believe that her movies of the late 1930s, such as *King of Chinatown* and *Daughter of Shanghai,* merit further study.[64] These Paramount B movies differed from Wong's earlier films for three reasons: (1) she portrayed Chinese American roles, (2) the women she depicted on the screen were elite and respectable, and (3) she received star billing. Since her Paramount B features did not require the same advertising and production budget as A movies, there was enhanced potential for progressive and unusual roles.[65] For B films, studios would be more likely to approve an experimental script, since there was less money riding on the project. These films are especially evocative because they both point to the potential for and absolute impossibility of Chinese American cultural citizenship. Through postmodern hybridizing of both Chinese and American cultural markers, Wong's mainstream cultural practices were transformed into distinctly Asian American female practices. However, although the narratives were potentially radical along the lines of race in opening up the possibility of "Chinese American" as a category on screen, they came at the cost of gender conventionality and middle-class/elite normativity.

King of Chinatown marked the pinnacle of Anna May Wong's Chinese American professional roles. Her character, Dr. Mary Ling, has the medical skills to do what no other doctor can do: she saves the life of gangster and "king of Chinatown" Frank Baturin, played by Akim Tamiroff. His enemies have shot him and there is one chance in a thousand that he will live, hence his survival shows her extraordinary surgical skills. Although *King of Chinatown* is a B movie, it was considered important enough to merit national mainstream magazine attention. In a two-page photo essay, *Click* magazine captured Wong's real-life training, in which she witnessed kidney surgery so she could convincingly "wring every ounce of emotion" as Dr. Mary Ling.[66] In the film, since Ling/Wong has already decided to leave the Bay View Hospital to concentrate on the China war relief, she agrees to become Baturin's personal physician for a month in exchange for generous donations to the fund. Wong has another motive for wanting to keep the gangster alive: she incorrectly worries that her father may have masterminded the attempt on Baturin. Baturin's Merchants Protective Association's extortion has troubled Chinatown, and Wong fears her father has decided to kill Baturin to end it. Believing her father to be a potential murderer signals her Americanness in her rebellion as an ungrateful Chinese daughter.

What makes *King of Chinatown* particularly interesting is that instead of circumventing the threat of miscegenation by killing Anna May Wong's character, a henchman-turned-rival assassinates Baturin.[67] This is in direct contrast to movies such as *Limehouse Blues* and *Dangerous to Know,* in which Wong's character dies—not the white male lead's—in order to avoid the threat of interracial sexuality.[68] Thus *King of Chinatown* marks a significant break from cinematic oblivion as resolution. The very last scene of *King of Chinatown* depicts Wong, hardly dead or marginal, with a wedding ring on finger, seated next to her husband, Bob Li, played by Philip Ahn, while flying to China with medical equipment. Instead of Wong's not-so-dangerous sexuality being contained by death, it becomes controlled in a respectable upper-class same-race marriage. Baturin is the danger, not Ling/Wong, and he gets eliminated.[69] Wong's character enjoys Hollywood's best reward for women, namely, marriage. Marlene Dietrich's question in *Shanghai Express,* "Don't you find respectable people terribly—dull?" beautifully captures the potential banality of upper-class gendered respectability.

In his dying breath, Baturin bequeaths his fortune to Mary Ling's hospital work in China, which was part of a broader Chinese American polit-

ical effort known as China Relief. Mirroring real-life Chinese American women, Anna May Wong's on-screen work to raise money for China War Relief is valorized and considered completely in keeping with her American patriotism. China Relief was not merely a cinematic device but an important political endeavor for Chinese American women. Dr. Mary Ling's real-life counterpart, Dr. Margaret Chung, was recognized for her outstanding fundraising and even went as far as to "adopt" the "Fair-Haired Bastards," a group of predominantly European American male aviator Flying Tigers, in her efforts to support China against the invasion.[70] Others turned to literary means to champion China's cause. For example, Jane Kwong Lee wrote two plays about China Relief. The first, *Boycott Silk Stockings,* focused on five Chinese American women who resolved not to buy or wear silk stockings as long as Japan was in China. Her second play, *Blood Stains Rivers and Mountains,* told the story of two female college students who became aviators and went to China to "sacrifice for our country."[71] In keeping with Chung's and Lee's patriotic efforts, the real-life Anna May Wong signed autographs to raise money for China Relief.[72] American support for China meant that raising money for China Relief could extend the definition of American cultural citizenship to include it.

As shown through these cultural portrayals, Japanese imperialism in Manchuria and China proved a turning point for Chinese American cultural citizenship. In the 1930s, the mainstream American perception of China changed because of the Sino-Japanese War. For example, *Time* magazine editor Henry Booth Luce championed the cause of China.[73] Thus Chinese American diasporic citizenship became increasingly acceptable, or, if you prefer, less risky, in the 1930s. In other words, it was not an act of treason for Chinese Americans to support China. What was particularly striking about Chinese American loyalty to China was that many in mainstream American society considered it consistent with American patriotism. With the Japanese invasion, China became the "good" American ally, Japan the "bad" enemy, a dynamic that would remain in place until the post–World War II American occupation of Japan and the "fall" of China to communism reversed it.

Daughter of Shanghai *and Chinese American Cultural Citizenship*

King of Chinatown was not the only movie in which Wong played a heroic Chinese American woman. In *Daughter of Shanghai,* Wong assumed the

persona of Lan Ying Lin, a filial Chinese American daughter who tracks down her father's assassins and breaks up an illegal alien smuggling ring.[74] Lan Ying Lin's father, Quan Lin, has gathered evidence that will incriminate the leaders of a profitable crime ring that smuggles Asian illegal workers into the United States. Quan Lin's American citizenship is further underscored not only because the movie shows that there are illegal Asian workers in the city but because of his determination to halt that illegal immigration. An importer of rare, beautiful Chinese antiques and a venerable member of the Chinese merchants' association, Lin is one of the most distinguished persons in San Francisco. As in *King of Chinatown,* voice is an important marker of class status and American identity. Mr. Lin and Lan Ying speak perfect American English with no discernible pidgin. Audible traces of her English accent underscore the upper-class inflections in Wong's voice. Both characters are loved and respected by their workers and their wealthy European American customers.

Underscoring their admirable deployment of American citizenship, the movie plot of *Daughter of Shanghai* emphasizes the tragic heroism and honor of both Lins in service of enforcing American immigration laws. Representing a triple threat to the crime ring, Mr. Lin refuses to pay the smugglers extortion money; declines to employ the illegal Chinese aliens; and informs a European American society widow, Mary Hunt, that he will denounce the smugglers to the local and federal authorities. Lin's plan to turn in his accumulated evidence spells his death warrant. As he and Lan Ying ride in a taxi to meet with federal agents, the taxi is driven into a truck and he is assassinated.

The modern American female citizen within the cultural logic of *Daughter of Shanghai* is an active heroine. What is particularly telling is that production notes for the film show that before Anna May Wong signed on, the main character initiated very little action, but once Wong committed to the movie, the screenwriter rewrote the character of Lan Ying so that she instigated the major plot sequence.[75] This runs against her previous "passive" victim roles. Though distraught over her father's death in the taxi, Lan Ying uses her ingenuity to escape the assassins. When the criminals check the cab, she feigns death. As they close the taxi door, she thrusts out her purse to hold the door open. While their backs are turned, she dashes out of the taxi and hides under blankets in a truck. When they lower the truck into the water, she flees to safety. Given the change in Lan Ying's character after Wong agreed to star in the movie, one can infer that these action sequences were prompted and perhaps even initiated by Wong.

As a Chinese American female heroine, Lan Ying's feats break up the crime ring and avenge her father's death. The day after her father's assassination, Lan Ying takes over her father's business and vows to bring the assassins to justice. Traveling to Central America, she cleverly employs subterfuge to enter the crime ring's business without arousing suspicion. Inverting gender conventions, she escapes the group's island location by dressing like one of the Chinese male workers, in black pants and shirt with her hair tucked underneath a large straw coolie hat. Working with Kim Lee, a detective on the case played by Philip Ahn, she discovers that her father was killed by the rich widow, Mary Hunt, who had been one of their store's best customers and who had ostensibly been aiding them by arranging a meeting with the federal agents, but who instead kidnapped and betrayed them. Kim Lee and Lan Ying capture Hunt and bring her to justice. Like *King of Chinatown, Daughter of Shanghai* ends with the promise of Wong and Ahn's future marital bliss. Thus these Chinese American films extended the definition of cultural citizenship to show their ideal citizenship to a national audience via the movies.

This public, heroic, crime-stopping female version of cultural citizenship was publicized in the Chinese American community. Chinese Americans heard about Anna May Wong's Paramount movies before they were released. The *Chinese Digest* reported that Wong had signed a three-year contract with Paramount.[76] In a later edition, it reported that she "has played the villainess for so long now she would enjoy a nice role for a change."[77] Hence, the community knew that Wong felt positively about these new Chinese American film roles.

Gender as the Limit of Cinematic Chinese American Cultural Citizenship

Although the upturn in roles for racial and ethnic minorities spelled opportunity for Chinese Americans, any potential of demonstrating radical cinematic Chinese American cultural citizenship in *King of Chinatown* or *Daughter of Shanghai* was thrown into question by the films' conservative gender ideology. Wong's agency is unique rather than typical. Frequently she is the only woman in a world of men, and the only female Asian American, underscoring her exceptionalness. In *Daughter of Shanghai,* the society woman criminal, Mary Hunt, was played by Cecil Cunningham, an exceedingly butch lesbian.[78] Her draglike portrayal of an older aristocratic

woman accentuates Wong's heroic femininity and grace. In *Island of Lost Men* and *Daughter of Shanghai,* Wong searches for her father, and there is no mention of any mother, which removes a potentially powerful female figure.[79]

Gender conventions not only rendered Anna May Wong the only woman in a world of men, but they also affected her ability to show physical might. In action sequences, Wong displays heroic exploits when she is alone, not with men around her. Wong's solo action sequences show the potential for cinematic female physicality. However, when she is paired with Philip Ahn, he, not she, slugs the villains. In the final action sequence, Ahn and the chauffeur Kelly fight the criminals while Wong stands by the wall and screams, showing that Wong requires male rescue.

Likewise, despite *King of Chinatown's* "elevation" of race and class, it is heavily circumscribed by heteronormative gender conventions. Though Baturin falls in love with Ling, the movie only hints at courtship. When Ling informs him that because of his recovery he is now her prize patient, the movie's score and soft lighting intimate romance. Indirectly expressing his growing affection, Baturin asks her if she plans to marry Bob Li, presumably to find out if her affections are engaged. He declares she is beautiful in a tone that goes beyond collegiality but stops short of overt wooing. Implying that his life before knowing her was empty of affection and meaning, he asks her not to go to China and offers to fully equip a local medical practice for her. Throughout these utterances, Ling sidesteps his statements and does not reciprocate his affections.

The lack of overt courtship shows the limits of American cultural citizenship for Asian Americans, namely, the impossibility of interracial romances. Baturin and Ling's romance stalls at veiled conversation because the Hays Code forbade interracial relationships.[80] Named after its creator and implementer William Hays, the new code, self-imposed by Hollywood studios because of pressures from entities such as church groups, teachers, and government agencies, had several goals: "the censorship movement chose several, sometimes contradictory targets: ethnic and racial stereotyping, anti-Americanism, unconventional morality, and the sexual objectification of females."[81]

The Hays Code reflected current antimiscegenation laws, which remained in various states' legal codes until the 1960s and pointed to America's deep racial fears. Though not written into the Constitution, miscegenation laws pointed to racial minorities' second-class citizen status by restricting the right to marry whomever one chose.[82] For Asian American

women, marriage and citizenship were particularly fraught issues. The 1922 Cable Act decreed that a woman would lose her American citizenship if she married an alien ineligible for citizenship (Asian immigrant male). With the ban on interracial sexual relationships, the codes aligned Hollywood with miscegenation laws that had been passed by American state legislatures starting in the nineteenth century. These laws banned marriages between whites and nonwhites. For example, by 1880 section 69 of the California Civil Code, which regulated marriage licenses, forbade intermarriage between "whites and Mongolians, negroes, or mulattos, or mixed blood, descended from Mongolians or negro from the third generation." Section 60 of the California Civil Code, which regulated miscegenation, was updated in 1905 to agree with Section 69 by forbidding marriages between Mongolians and whites. Out of the nineteen Far Western states, five targeted the Chinese, two the Japanese, and eight used the term *Mongolians* to cover both. Six states added the term *Malay* to cover Filipinos. The miscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional in California in 1948, and by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967 in *Loving* v. *Virginia*.[83] Thus Hollywood was relatively late in banning interracial relationships. As actor Akim Tamiroff's (Baturin's) whiteness was in question, he being Russian, the film essentially consolidated his whiteness by making his relationship with Wong forbidden on-screen.

Many have argued that Hollywood cinema of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s was predicated on the controlling gaze of the male camera and the male spectator upon the female body.[84] By the time *Daughter of Shanghai* was made, the dancing and costumes in Wong's movies, though in keeping with those of European American actresses, were nonetheless marked by race. Moments of narrative rupture occur. For example, when Wong played showgirls later in her career, as in *Island of Lost Men* or *Daughter of Shanghai,* the story line unfolded that she was really the daughter of a prestigious man masquerading as a dancer and singer in order to find her father and recover the family's honor. Wong's appearance could be interpreted as emblematic of a "New Woman," signifying modern sexuality in the service of heroism.

Although Anna May Wong's fully clothed, sexually respectable surgeon is a breakthrough role in the history of Asian American women and film, examining her interactions with the male characters reveals servile gender behavior. At the beginning of *King of Chinatown,* Wong portrays an exceedingly competent surgeon, but in later scenes with Tamiroff, she acts bewilderingly domestic. While he is her patient in the hospital, she brings

him a tray of food with tea and toast, and while in his home, she does motherly tasks such as plumping up his pillow. As he accepts his cup of tea, Baturin informs Ling that he never discusses business with a woman, and she does not challenge his misogyny. Though she cannot be expected always to perform complex surgical operations, replacing the scalpel with a tray undermines her radical potential as an Asian American female surgeon. Although there should not be a contradiction between domesticity and workplace competence, depicting Wong as a cross between a nurse and a maid undercut her authority as a physician.[85]

Anna May Wong playing a surgeon and a wealthy art dealer did not reflect the reality of Asian American women's occupations in the pre–World War II era. Instead, these roles promoted a narrow vision of female Asian American cultural citizenship. In the 1930s, Asian American women could not hold professional jobs for which they had trained. Much like the members of Chi Alpha Delta, young Chinese American women, despite their college education, either worked in their ethnic enclaves or were employed in clerical work far below their educational qualifications.[86] So playing elite professional women opened up possibilities that were yet to be achieved in reality. However, emphasizing the professional reified people with power and privilege in capitalist societies. Thus, such a valorization of the professions would boost the worth and power of those who were already in power. Although Wong's role indeed was a cinematic breakthrough, emphasis on her being a surgeon, wealthy, and well educated foreclosed the possibilities of working-class struggle and resistance. Instead the role normalized hegemonic power and work relations and set the class parameters of female Chinese American cultural citizenship.

Race and Ethnicity in Hollywood

Although Anna May Wong's early success in films and as a cultural icon can be attributed to Western imperialism's fascination with the other, her later ability to play Chinese American film roles needs to be evaluated in the context of a changing Hollywood. In the mid-1930s, changing mores meant newly emerging cultural citizenship possibilities for all racial minorities. Film scholars have argued that depression-era Hollywood, especially with regard to race and gender, was ahead of American society.[87] All of Wong's star power meant that once Paramount Studios green-lighted Chinese American–themed films, she would be the one who would win

the starring roles. In other words, Wong was a co-creator in the race and gender realignment of Hollywood.

Scholars of African Americans in film have discovered, as was the case for Chinese Americans, an overall trend of more "positive" portrayals in the film roles of the 1930s. The decade was a turning point for African Americans in movies in that they gained more prominent roles of all types.[88] Though Hollywood continually typecast Hattie McDaniel and Butterfly McQueen as "mammies" and maids, the actresses gained critical recognition for their acting, including Hattie McDaniel's Best Supporting Actress Academy Award for her portrayal of Mammy in the 1939 movie *Gone with the Wind.* Lena Horne, too, gained prominence in mainstream Hollywood during this time.[89] The 1930s films of Oscar Micheaux featured all-black casts in detective stories and dramas, and Micheaux's stories expanded the types of roles that African Americans could play.[90] And when African Americans did not like film portrayals, protests ensued.[91]

Similar "positive" roles were available for Latino/a actors and actresses. In part due to the United States' Good Neighbor policy toward Latin America in the late 1930s, scholar Ana Lopez found, the film roles of Latinos in Hollywood improved: "After decades of portraying Latin Americans lackadaisically and sporadically as lazy peasants and wily senoritas who inhabited an undifferentiated backward land, Hollywood films between 1939 and 1947, featuring Latin American stars, music, locations, and stories flooded U.S. and international markets."[92] Hence stars such as Dolores del Rio, Lupe Velez, and Anthony Quinn enjoyed Hollywood success.

"Ethnic" personnel supported Anna May Wong's stardom. As Jewish Americans "invented" Hollywood, Paramount Studios' Jewish American producer Adolph Zukor backed Anna May Wong's Chinese American movies, such as *King of Chinatown.*[93] Russian American Akim Tamiroff costarred in *Dangerous to Know* and in *King of Chinatown.* Mexican American Anthony Quinn played a Chinese person in the movie *Island of Lost Men.* Quinn also portrayed two European American villains in *King of Chinatown* and *Daughter of Shanghai.* Later in his career, Quinn starred in leading roles such as Zorba the Greek and would win two Best Supporting Actor Academy Awards. Philip Ahn, from one of the first Korean American families in Los Angeles, played Chinese Americans. As many present-day Asian American actors have stated, being cast multiethnically increased opportunities for employment and thus career advancement. Quinn, Tamiroff, Ahn, and Wong filmed several movies together during their Paramount years, and Wong's name led the credits, reflecting her sta-

tus as the star. Despite the advancement of ethnic actors in the 1930s, however, Wong was the only thespian of Asian descent to be hailed as a star by the movie studios and by the general public.

Chinese American Hollywood

Although tremendous charisma, magnetic appearance, and sheer determination allowed Anna May Wong to become a star, she did not do so in a vacuum. From the 1920s through World War II, Los Angeles' Chinatown had a special relationship to Hollywood and thus to the nation. Since movies were not filmed on location in Asia but in Southern California, Hollywood tapped into the Chinese American community as the source for thousands of extras and other actors. In a modern nation-state predicated on wholeness, Chinatowns function as "authentic" other nations within the nation. As a representative of that alternative nation, Anna May Wong embodied "authentic" Chineseness. However, given the 1882 Chinese Immigration Exclusion Act, Wong and the Chinese Americans who inhabited Los Angeles' Chinatown did not have personal knowledge of China but gained it through their work on Hollywood movie sets. Beautifully demonstrating the contradictions and slippages within modernity that knowledge gained from film work was presented to the nation, and to international audiences, as authentically Chinese. In addition, as Chineseness was at a premium, the community benefited economically during the Great Depression.

Anna May Wong emerged out of a specific racialized performance tradition. Growing up in Los Angeles just outside Chinatown and Hollywood, Wong, like many other Chinese Americans, capitalized on early cinema's fascination with race and otherness.[94] What is unique about the Los Angeles Chinese American community is the degree to which almost the entire population was involved in the motion picture industry. As movies about Asia were filmed around Los Angeles, numerous members of the community were part of Chinese American Hollywood, forming a branch of the Chinese Screen Actors Extras Guild and developing community networks for finding jobs in Hollywood. As a woman Wong was a scarce resource, for in 1910 she was one of 147 Chinese women and one of 77 daughters out of a total population of 2,602.[95] Though one of many Chinese Americans to work in Hollywood, Wong did not have to compete with many Chinese American women.

The new spate of movies about China meant great opportunities for Chinese Americans in Los Angeles to supplement their depression-era incomes by working as extras. With the improved Sino-American relations in the 1930s, movies such as *The Good Earth* and *The General Died at Dawn* marked an upsurge in the recruitment of Asian American actors and actresses. Eddie Lee, an extra and a movie-prop store owner, remarked that the movie work opportunities were viewed favorably by Chinese Americans in Chinatown: "I never heard any criticism of the Chinese roles in the motion pictures. The Chinese were happy to take the jobs and earn extra money."[96] In fact, as was the case for *The Good Earth,* so many movies were made about China that not only could every person in Los Angeles' Chinatown who wanted a role could take one, due to the paucity of actors, movie producers were forced to cast in Northern California.

For Chinese Americans, participation as extras on Hollywood movie sets heightened their Chinese American cultural citizenship. Given years of Chinese immigration exclusion laws, American-born Chinese movie extras felt that their "real" experience of China came on the movie sets.[97] Just as it did for mainstream Americans, the movies allowed Chinese Americans to "understand" Chinese culture. In her article "Night Call—In Chinatown," journalist Louise Leung Larson reported that thousands of Chinese Americans learned how to braid their hair into queues and to wear Chinese peasant costumes while on the set of *The Good Earth.* Such an understading gained from the movie sets highlighted how culturally American those extras really were. Yet, like Anna May Wong, courtesy of their race they performed Chineseness for American audiences.

The Chinese American community of Los Angeles knew Anna May Wong as the most famous Asian American actress of her day. The community admired Wong for her filial piety, local ties, and China Relief efforts. Despite her father's disapproval of her career, Wong put her brothers through college and emphasized the importance of education.[98] Swan Yee, an aspiring actor when Wong was at the peak of her career, held her as a model for his own career in show business and recalled: "Anna May Wong was a pretty good actress. She did not have any competition from other Asian actresses."[99] When Yee arrived in Los Angeles, he went to Wong's home to ask for work but was told by her maid that none was available. Prominent journalist Louise Leung Larson included a photograph of herself with Anna May Wong in her autobiography.[100]

In many ways, Anna May Wong symbolized pre–World War II Chinatown. Eating in Los Angeles Chinatown restaurants, Wong was visible in

the community. Lisa See, whose family was prominent in Los Angeles' Chinatown, contextualizes Wong's patronage of the Dragon Den restaurant: "No single person held customers in thrall as much as did Anna May Wong. . . . [D]ressed in silk cut on the bias, with a full-length ermine coat draped over her shoulders, [she] could be found holding court at her own table." As See relates, Wong's behavior was reminiscent of royalty: "She would seductively extend her hand to those who came to pay respects—even those Chinese who scorned and ridiculed her behind her back."[101] Wong headed the parade that opened the new Los Angeles Chinatown, an ethnic community rebuilt after being displaced by Union Station, and planted a willow tree that symbolized her Chinese name, Frosted Yellow Willow. In addition, she headlined community fundraisers.[102]

Not only were Chinatowns places where movie studios sought talent, but they were also locations through which Hollywood movies worked out ideas about race and good and evil. Anna May Wong's Chinese American 1930s Paramount movies reversed the earlier Fu Manchu racial scenarios that had caused her to reconsider her film career. In the Paramount films, Chinese Americans moved to the center stage and European Americans became the villains. In both *King of Chinatown* and *Daughter of Shanghai,* the criminals are European Americans while the Chinese Americans are the heroes. Disorder in Chinatown is not due to Chinese American pathology but caused by persons who do not belong to Chinatown. The heroic actions of Anna May Wong and Philip Ahn restore order to Chinatown, and their marriage will seal familial succession. The resolution of heterosexual nuptials affirms racial purity and class order. Constructing Chinatown as an authentic and pure homogeneous space is paradoxical, for instead of Chinatown and its inhabitants needing to be contained, for fear they would contaminate white society, the situation is reversed.[103]

The worth of Chinese American cultural citizenship was heightened in the 1930s. Chinese identity, versus a pan-Asian "Oriental" one, became a key distinction in the decade. When Japan invaded Manchuria, Chinese Americans publicly began to distinguish themselves from all things Japanese. In a world dominated by European Americans, racial and ethnic groups at the bottom of the hierarchy were pitted against each other.[104] Casting the Chinese as the "good" ethnicity is a variation on the divide-and-conquer strategy, used, for example, by Hawaiian plantation owners, that pitted different Asian ethnicities against each other to prevent labor union solidarity.[105] Thus, in the 1930s, the Chinese were culturally created as the "good" ethnicity. Movies such as *The Good Earth* and *The Bitter Tea*

of General Yen made a point of referencing a geographically specific Chinese culture, not an amalgamation of Asian or Oriental cultures.

Anna May Wong used ethnic particularity to highlight her own Chinese identity. As a Paramount press release stated in 1937, after the Japanese military occupation of Manchuria:

> In view of current events in the orient anything Japanese annoys Anna May Wong, Chinese actress.
>
> She had, up to yesterday, occupied an apartment overlooking a Japanese garden. The view was a constant source of vexation to her, particularly as callers were constantly calling attention to it.
>
> Last night Miss Wong moved to a furnished home in another part of Hollywood, far from any landscaping suggesting Japan.[106]

Given that it is a studio press release, the motives in announcing the move may not be Wong's own. However, though relocating to another home may seem trivial, Paramount's care in announcing such a move speaks volumes as to its symbolic importance. Wong's change of residence and Paramount's accompanying publicity show conscious ethnic differentiation between the good Chinese and the bad Japanese. Wong's or the studio's deliberate marking of her star image not only made for a good story or sound politics; it reinforced her image as Chinese at a time when such distinctions were culturally powerful. Such ethnic differentiation allowed Chinese Americans to consolidate their ethnic identity as Americans. Chinese Americans themselves considered such ethnic differentiation important: for instance, Wong's move away from the Japanese garden was reported in San Francisco *Chinese Digest*'s "Chinatownia" section.[107] And, as Wong had participated in China Relief fundraisers and autograph signings, her support for China was corroborated in other, more reliable sources.

Performing Modern Cosmopolitan Femininity

Anna May Wong used modern fashion to claim beauty, humanity, and modernity for Chinese Americans. Such claims allowed her to counteract scientific racism, orientalism, and the "controlling image" of Asians as perpetual foreigners in the United States.[108] Wong's adoption of cosmopolitan fashion gave her greater attention, fame, and therefore power in her career.

Anna May Wong on the cover of *Look* magazine, 1938.

Such markers of gendered modernity were key to claiming belonging to the nation-state. Arguing against anti-Asian groups, missionaries proclaimed that the Chinese could become incorporated into the United States through adoption of modern styles in fashion, hair, and diction.[109] What is perhaps most remarkable about Wong is that she created a new type of "modern" through hybridity. Rather than adopting 100 percent American or Western styles as advocated by those pro-assimilation missionaries, she brought Asian cultural influences and Western tailoring together in contemporary time, thus negating the "exotic," "ancient" costumes that served to mark Asians as backward and nonmodern.

The cover of *Look* magazine crowned Anna May Wong's status as an American icon. As the "World's Most Beautiful Chinese Girl," Wong

graced the cover of the March 1938 issue. A closer examination of this issue provides a glimpse into Wong's iconography as understood by the greater American public and the establishment of her American cultural citizenship. Founded in 1937, *Look* boasted a circulation of 2 million and a price of ten cents an issue. Now defunct, the chiefly pictorial *Look* featured topics ranging from glamorous UCLA sorority women to raising quintuplets to exposing fascism.

The pages devoted to Anna May Wong highlighted her glamour, clothing, and, not surprising, given the moniker the "world's most beautiful Chinese girl," her physical attributes. The captions and photographs in *Look* displayed both Wong's Chinese ethnicity and her American citizenship. Underneath a still of Wong from the British movie *Chu Chin Chow,* the pictorial explained that Wong had only recently visited China and that, despite her appearance, she was American-born. In case the point was not understood, the next picture clarified Wong's nationality as a sophisticated American citizen: "Anna May Wong, seen here with one of her brothers, Roger Wong, wears clothes unusually well. In 1934 the Mayfair Mannequin society designated her as the world's best-dressed woman. . . . An American citizen, she has given up plans to retire to China." A picture of Wong wearing a modish Western ensemble—long striped tunic belted over a dark skirt, with a jacket whose lining and length matched the tunic, accessorized with a dark hat tilted at a rakish angle and black high-heeled pumps—beautifully complemented the caption and reinforced the point. Although Wong had planned to spend more time in China, her 1936 trip there showed her her cultural differences with the Chinese and demonstrated to her that her true home was in the West.

Look's feature effectively crowned Anna May Wong as the icon of modern hybrid Chinese American cultural citizenship. One caption read: "Umpire Wong. Last summer Anna May Wong showed how completely American she can be, by umpiring a baseball game, in which Lowell Thomas, with her here, was a player. In the movies, however, Anna May usually is a siren type." For the game, Wong dressed in a dark cheongsam with white wavy lines on it as a pattern, appearing almost like chain mail. Although the text calls her all-American, given her cheongsam, the photograph partly contradicts that. The caption and photograph overdetermine Americanness in the face of visible ambiguity so that they evoke wholesomeness. Such a portrait of Chinese American identity alleviates anxiety over race and acculturation. What is interesting is that the Chinese and the Western coexisted and cosignified each other.

In the final photograph, with Marlene Dietrich and Leni Riefenstahl, Wong's cosmopolitan woman-of-the-world status is highlighted for American audiences. She is clad in a completely Western sleeveless flapper dress in dark material with a chiffon overlay, accented by a knotted long single-strand pearl necklace. Like Wong, Dietrich sports a sleeveless flapper dress accessorized by a multistrand beaded necklace. The caption notes: "If Anna May, seen here between Marlene Dietrich and the German actress Leni Riefenstahl, kisses an Englishman in a movie, the scene is cut out by British censors. Despite this, she is very popular in England, where she has made a number of pictures. She first visited China in 1935, was received there like a princess." Despite the caption's claims, British censors did allow the movie *Java Head* to show a kiss between Wong and a British actor. The caption and photo show Wong's international prominence. Association with Marlene Dietrich, dazzling costumes, being called "princess," and travels to Britain all signified woman-of-the-world glamour and a moneyed lifestyle. As biographies of Dietrich show, despite being the same height, Dietrich called Wong her "little China doll."[110] The phrase is implicitly racist for it places Wong in an inferior, nonhuman status in relation to Dietrich.

Anna May Wong's European-inflected cosmopolitanism conferred elite status upon her star iconography, which translated into class elevation in her movie roles. In the 1930s, in her public life as well as in her screen personas, Wong cultivated sophisticated Europeanized femininity. Wong's fashion savvy was recognized in 1934 when the Mayfair Mannequin Society voted her the best-dressed woman in the world.[111] Based on her introduction of the coolie and Mandarin hats in London and Paris, fashion experts in London, New York, Berlin, Paris, Vienna, and Stockholm ranked her the most sophisticated woman on both sides of the Atlantic. Wong did not merely reflect current fashion trends; she determined them. Her ability to be a modern, hybridized, cosmopolitan woman gave her more class and clout than being elite Chinese or working-class American.

American fascination with race and modernity through the female body ensured the success of actresses who occupied positions analogous to Anna May Wong's, such as Dolores del Rio and Lupe Velez. Together, Del Rio and Velez typified many of Wong's roles and much of her appeal, for del Rio represented the upper class, Velez the working class.[112] Just as the Mayfair Mannequin Society proclaimed Wong 1934's best-dressed woman in the world, in 1933 del Rio won *Photoplay*'s "most perfect feminine figure in Hollywood" search.[113] The sexuality that came through in

Anna May Wong in a coolie hat.

Wong's dancing roles resembles that of Velez, the "Mexican Spitfire."[114] It is striking that in back-to-back years these racial minority actresses were considered more beautiful than their European American counterparts. All three women exemplified Hollywood's and the general American public's absorption with gendered ethnicity and racialized otherness. However, current scholarship shows that Mexican-born del Rio and Velez continually enacted "foreign" women and did not enjoy the equivalent of Wong's American roles.

Like the members of the Chi Alpha Delta sorority discussed in the previous chapter, Anna May Wong deployed hybrid cultural practices such as hairstyles, food, and fashion to highlight newly emerging forms of Asian American identity politics. As she did throughout her movie career, Wong demonstrated cultural citizenship through sumptuous clothing, the wear-

ing of which was a proper and patriotic way to be an American movie star during the Great Depression. In *King of Chinatown,* Wong's apparel accentuates her class status and femininity. Leading Hollywood designer Edith Head concocted wonderfully elegant clothing for her. In every scene, Wong dazzles in a different costume. Postmodern pastiches of both the primitive and the civilized, her hats and jackets are the latest Western fashions with Chinese accents. In the final scene she dresses in a long, luxurious cream silk gown with a short jacket and a sweeping skirt. During the Great Depression, many women went to the movies to escape fears of poverty by viewing their favorite movie stars attired in glamorous clothing.[115] Wong did not disappoint them. Her elegant wearing of Chinese-accented American clothing made such fashions acceptable and desirable in mainstream circles.

Along with clothing, voice is one of the markers of class and American-born status. In all the conversational sequences in *King of Chinatown,* Bob Li (Philip Ahn) and Mary Ling (Wong) speak polished, educated, American English, and Mr. Ling, the traditional Chinese physician herbalist, speaks grammatical English with a slight Mandarin intonation. Wong's deployment of educated American English with British undertones, cultivated during her London sojourn, complicates Renee Tajima's assertion that "Asian women in American cinema are interchangeable in appearance and name, and are joined together by the common language of non-language—that is, uninterpretable chattering, pidgin English, giggling, or silence."[116] Through their voice, dress, and actions, both Wong and Ahn show distinct mannerisms that are upper class and American. Their class position is reinforced by comparisons with others in the movie. For example, Frank Baturin's (Akim Tamiroff's) enemy Mike Jordan, played by Mexican American Anthony Quinn, enunciates in working-class tones that betray his lack of formal education.

Other films of the 1930s show Anna May Wong's hybrid modern fashions. For example, luxurious modern costumes and interiors mark *Dangerous to Know,* a movie that illustrates the second developmental stage of Wong's movie roles: upper-class dress and ambiguous sexual respectability.[117] Based on her London and Broadway role in *On the Spot,* in *Dangerous to Know,* Wong played hostess (the implication being mistress) to gangster Stephen Recka, portrayed by Akim Tamiroff.[118] The deliberate elegance of her upper-class appearance effectively enticed viewers. Wong received Tamiroff's guests in a dark gown with a tightly fitted bodice that draped into a fluid skirt, had a high neck and frog fastenings, and was cov-

Anna May Wong dressed by Edith Head in *Dangerous to Know.*

ered by a long, flowing silk jacket that, like a cape, wafted behind her when she walked.[119] The luxurious Edith Head creation combined the latest Western haute couture with Chinese overtones. Head, Hollywood's leading clothing designer, subsequently fashioned Wong's costumes for *King of Chinatown.* Thin and elegant, Wong stood at eye level with her leading man and towered above her European American female counterpart. With clothing and height as chief makers of Wong's visual iconography, she dominated the screen and her dignified and expressive sexuality shimmered across to the audience.

Anna May Wong's costumes for *Dangerous to Know* prompted public dialogue over whether "ancient" or "modern" clothing was more appropriate for her film character. In a poll, "style arbiters" from Hollywood, New

York, London, and Paris unanimously voted that American dresses best suited her. According to designer Travis Banton, who spoke for the group, "I think Miss Wong looks superb in her colorful, exotic, Oriental costumes. But for the role of a dangerous, ultra-sophisticated adventuress it is obvious that her gowns should be those of a reckless, expensively-groomed woman of the world. The Chinese gowns stress a decorative quality, whereas the American gowns which Edith Head is designing for Miss Wong in the film provide the sex appeal men of today look for in women."[120] The fact that it was even worth discussing what types of costumes best suit a modern role speaks to the importance of clothing in situating female film stars. Of course, clothing fashion in China itself was continually changing so that the West was not the only source of modernity in Chinese clothing.[121]

Anna May Wong was by no means the only woman of Chinese descent of the 1930s to attract American public and media attention. The cultural and political impact of Madame Chiang Kai-shek (Mayling Soong) underscored American interest in Chinese feminine modernity. Educated in the United States, as the wife of General Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese nationalist leader and leader of Taiwan, Chiang's modern, cosmopolitan and Western appearance aided their claims to the true China. Though not Asian American, her image paralleled that of Anna May Wong. In 1937 she and her husband were *Time* magazine's "couple of the year" (in lieu of man of the year). Although he was dressed in traditional Chinese robes, she was garbed in a modern Western business suit.[122] Chinese American women in San Francisco learned from her example, and her speaking was so effective in U.S. Congress that some credit her with the repeal of the Chinese exclusion laws.[123]

As befits those negotiating modernity and cultural citizenship, young Chinese American women showed considerable interest in the latest fashions. As many of their mothers were not up to date with the latest fashions, second-generation women relied upon local and mass media for fashion advice. In a 1937 *Chinese Digest* edition, columnist Alice Fong Yu (the same Alice Fong Yu that appeared in chapter 1 as the president of the Square and Circle Club) reported in "Fashion Tid-Bits" that navy, beige, and gray were the vital colors of the year, and that boleros and redingotes were all the rage. Fong Yu did acknowledge that while the current fashions had skirt lengths from 13 and 14 inches from the ground, "for you 'n me [Chinese American women], 12 or 13 inches are dandy."[124] Although Fong

Yu did report on the mainstream fashions, she modified her reportage to suit her audience's needs.

What is particularly ironic is that when Alice Fong Yu reported on movie-star fashion, she focused on Luise Rainier rather than Anna May Wong. In the same "Fashion Tid-Bits" article, she stated, "Luise Rainier as Olan in the 'Good Earth' does not have to worry about her clothes from one season to another," showing that young Asian American women were attuned to film stars as role models.[125] Had Wong agreed to play in *Good Earth,* or had MGM seen fit to cast her in a "positive" role, Fong Yu could have discussed Wong instead of Rainier. Unlike her Los Angeles counterparts, presumably San Francisco–based Fong Yu was not personally acquainted with Wong.

Perhaps one of the most interesting discussion surrounding Anna May Wong's appearance arrives courtesy of a Paramount press release concerning her hair. To match her Chinese American movie roles, the studio commanded her to cut her hair into a bob, which Wong refused to do. As a Paramount press release ruefully documented:

> Hollywood, accustomed to tailoring its personalities to suit its pictures, met unexpected opposition today when it attempted to de-orientalize the most famous Chinese actress in the world. . . .
>
> Miss Wong refused the "modernization" of a bobbed hair dress on the grounds that her exotic roles call for correct Oriental demeanor and that in most foreign lands where her pictures have a great following women still wear their hair long. . . .
>
> Studio officials made bobbed hair a stipulation of the new agreement because the three pictures they have prepared for the Chinese star call for an Americanized oriental actress.[126]

The press release has implications along an interpretive spectrum. On one end, one could argue that, secure in the knowledge that no other actress could play Chinese American roles, Wong utilized her American leading-lady privilege to defy the studios. As for other Hollywood film icons, her star status meant that officials tried to control her image, but it also allowed her to wield power. Wong won this battle, for in movies such as *King of Chinatown* and *Daughter of Shanghai* her hair remained triumphantly long. For this 1938 Paramount contract, Wong strategically used supposed Chinese culture and fashion to shape Hollywood studio

power. On the other end of the interpretive spectrum, it is also possible that, given the source of the information, Paramount Studios used supposed Chinese culture and fashion to generate publicity for their star, which reinforced their hegemonic studio power. Regardless of to what degree either interpretation is correct, two things are noteworthy. First, modernity and appearance were critical to Wong's star persona. Second, Wong, whether or not "really" defiant, was publicly construed as such by her employer.

This long-hair debate provides a contrast to the earlier, 1931 comparison between Anna May Wong and Sessue Hayakawa, in which Wong was portrayed as Western and modern. The change in her performance of modernity may be attributed to a number of factors. With the increasing popularity of China and Chinese movie themes, Wong needed to be both Chinese and American. With the power that accompanied her new studio contract, Wong could express her preferences and thus refuse the haircut. In addition, Wong's act shifted the very definition of modernity to include a cosmopolitan deployment of the foreign embedded in the construction of the term *American.*[127] Wong's (and the studio's) actions were in keeping with those of her community. Made up of second-generation Chinese American women, San Francisco's Square and Circle club, led by its indefatigable president Alice Fong Yu, boycotted silk stockings and had fashion-show benefits for China Relief.[128] The boycott appeared in *Life* magazine. Thus fashion was a key way for women to show political affiliation and activism. Chinese American women's use of fashion was also key to gaining the attention of national American media for their causes.

Conclusion

With the advent of U.S. involvement in World War II, film work for Anna May Wong ended, and, like her movie character Dr. Mary Ling in *King of Chinatown,* Wong officially retired from the motion-picture industry to dedicate herself full time to the China War Relief effort. Reflecting greater American war participation, Paramount Studios chiefly financed war-genre movies that employed male leading characters. Paramount publicized Wong's movie and personal wardrobe auction that benefited the China Relief fund.[129] As befit a hometown legend, in Los Angeles' Chinatown, Wong raised money for Chinese War Bonds by signing autographs in exchange for donations to China Relief.

Anna May Wong's and the Chinese American community's efforts to publicize their patriotism both to China and to the United States was successful. In 1943, favoring China at the expense of Japan resulted in the United States rescinding Asian exclusion by granting China an immigration quota of 105. The cinematic valorization of China alongside China's alliance with the Allied Powers during World War II solidified the relations between China and the United States.

Though Anna May Wong retired from the motion-picture industry, she continued her work in theater and vaudeville. In 1943 she starred in Cambridge Summer Theater's play *The Willow Tree.*[130] Though Wong professed her willingness to continue working as a film actress, studios employed her as a consultant instead. Like many other motion-picture actresses and actors, she entertained the troops during World War II, performing up and down the coast of Alaska.[131]

Anna May Wong was not the only major movie actress to retire during World War II. Other foreign and "ethnic" actresses such as Greta Garbo, Dolores del Rio, and Lupe Velez ended their careers in Hollywood at the same time. For Asian American actresses who played roles as supporting actresses and extras, the war years marked a long hiatus in cinematic opportunities. Focused on masculinity in crisis, the war genre chiefly employed Chinese American men, not women. This was a marked departure from Hollywood of the thirties, when not only Anna May Wong but other Chinese American women such as Soo Yung, Iris Wong, and Lotus Long found regular employment.

Anna May Wong's struggles as the first Asian American actress to play roles featuring women of Asian descent exemplify politicized power struggles over modernity, cultural citizenship, and racialized, gendered performance. In the 1930s, Wong made three acting transitions: from poor, sexually disreputable Chinese women, to upper-class women of ambiguous sexual respectability who held differing national allegiances, to her final stage in the late 1930s playing upper-class, sexually respectable Chinese American women. Wong's negotiations between her Chinese and Western identities showed the limitations and opportunities for racial minority women working in Hollywood.

My historical search for Wong has yielded a complex story of gendered racial production. Wong's life story shows us how the performance of American cultural citizenship changed when constituted by modern European cosmopolitanism, Chinese ethnicity, and hybrid Asian American practices. Over her career, Wong continually negotiated her roles, which

ranged from a Mongol slave to a Chinese American surgeon. Though Wong's attempts to shape the cultural production of race and gender were not always successful, for a brief moment her work grappled with the possibilities of an American-born, modern, educated Asian American woman. No American-born motion-picture actress of Asian descent has yet equaled the range and number of Wong's roles. The paucity of Asian American actresses and actors in contemporary major motion pictures points to the ongoing gender and racial inequities in Hollywood.

While the first two chapters of *A Feeling of Belonging* focused on an ethnic-specific group and a different cultural practices, the remaining three chapters traverse cultural practices and Asian-ethnic groups. During World War II and the postwar period, the American-born female populations increased, ethnic cultures collided and merged, and pan–Asian American activities expanded. Joined by other Asian American women and by other practices such as beauty pageants and magazine reading, the stories of Chi Alpha Delta and Anna May Wong continue into the next three chapters.