

# The Hypersexualization of Asian Women in America:

# From Stereotype to Massacre

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# Abstract:

- ▶ Asian women are no more or less licentious or immoral than any other women. Their hypersexualization in America developed out of anti-immigrant laws passed against Chinese women in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Said differently, the **stereotypes** that persist today are a direct result of American laws and policies that produced **structural racism, misogyny, and classism** against them—these ill-considered policies were deadly then and their unintended consequences continue to be deadly today.





Top row: Yong Ae Yue, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim and Xiaojie Tan. Bottom row: Soon Chung Park, Delaina Ashley Yaun and Paul Andre Michels.





“We saw this coming...this did not have to happen.”

-Trevor Noah

on the massacre in Atlanta of 6 Asian women in three spas on March 16, 2021.



## Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Period of Open Doors



*“... Give me your tired, your poor,*

*Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,*

*The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.*

*Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,*

*I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”*

*“The New Colossus”*

*Emma Lazarus, 1883*

# Samples of Economic Discrimination against Chinese Laborers (men)

- ▶ 1852 Foreign Miners Tax
- ▶ 1855 Capitation tax (\$50 taxed to those passengers unable to become citizens)
- ▶ 1870 Transporting goods using poles across the shoulders is prohibited
- ▶ 1870 No Chinese can be employed by the US government
- ▶ 1873 Laundry Tax (those with no carts pay \$15 fee)
- ▶ 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act (excluded Chinese workers)
- ▶ 1888 Scott Act (Chinese could not return to America after visiting China)
- ▶ 1892 Geary Act (Chinese had to carry registration papers at all times)
- ▶ 1913 Alien Land Laws (Chinese could not own property)

## **Effects:**

- ▶ economic discrimination led to depressed wages: \$1/day  
(still more than the \$3-5/month that could be earned in China)
- ▶ laborers could not afford to bring wives; Chinese = “sojourners”
- ▶ 200,000-300,000 Chinese men came to America; 9,500 Chinese women





Ratio of Chinese women to Chinese men:  
1:20

1890—at the peak the ratio was 1:27

## After the Opium Wars: Tongs and Feudal China

- Bought girls from families too poor to support them
- Kidnapped girls
- Tricked them into fake marriage

\* Hip Yee Tong alone brought 6,000 girls between 1852-1873,  
about 87% of all Chinese women who immigrated





# Chinese Female Immigrants 1849-1900

## Groups

- 1. Merchants' wives
- 2. Servants/indentured slaves
- 3. Self-employed prostitutes (by choice)
- 4. Women forced into prostitution
- \*little diversity

## Numbers

- up to 8% (about 500 out of 6000)
- about 5%
- about 1-2%
- 85-90%

## Sex-based Anti-immigrant Laws Passed against Chinese “Prostitutes”

- ▶ 1854 Ordinance No. 546 “To Suppress Houses of Ill-Fame Within the City Limits.” (SF)
- ▶ 1865 “Order to Remove Chinese Women of Ill Fame From Certain Limits of the City.” (SF)
- ▶ 1866 “An Act for the Suppression of Chinese Houses of Ill Fame.” (CA)
- ▶ 1870 “An Act to Prevent the Kidnapping and Importation of ...Chinese...for Demoralizing Purposes.” (CA)
- ▶ **1875 Page Law (Federal law)**
- ▶ 1903, 1907, 1917 general immigration laws applied against Chinese women to deport them

\*all Chinese women were “supposed” to be prostitutes and targeted as a result = anti-settlement

1. Economic discrimination—Chinese men can't bring wives

(U.S. "action" 1.0)

19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese experience in America

2. Chinese women imported and forced into prostitution

(Tong "reaction" 1.0)

4. Due to few Chinese women, future women forced into prostitution

After 1875 Page Law  
(Tong "reaction" 2.0)

3. Laws passed to restrict "prostitutes" from entering America

(U.S. "action" 2.0)

Asian women hypersexualized  
(unintentional consequence)





## Dragon Lady represents the Asian female as:

- low class
- manipulative
- hypersexual
- untrustworthy
- immoral
- exotic
- mysterious
- diseased
- source of crime/violence
- de-humanized
- threatening/should be extinguished**




## 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Hypersexualization 2.0

### Then came the wars:

- WWII
- Korean War
- Vietnam War
- (Philippine Islands as auxiliary)

Asian women as War Brides in America



# America's international relationship w/ Asia shapes domestic attitude towards Asians

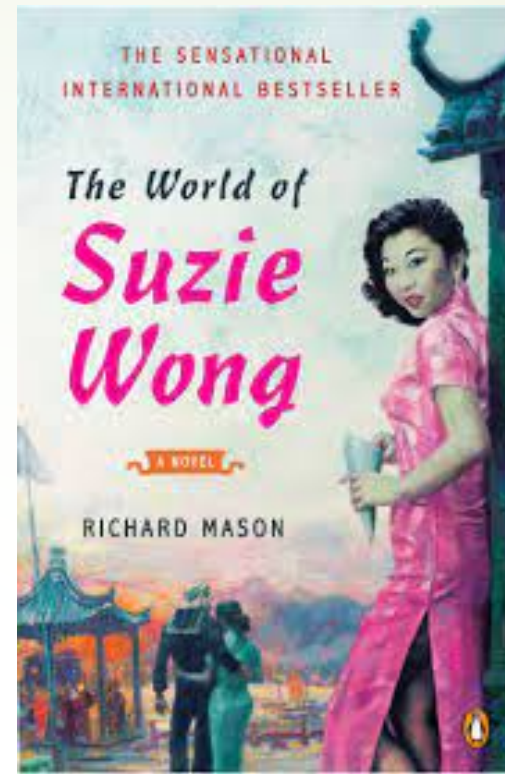
## Laws

- War Brides Acts 1943 & 1945      300,000 Asian women immigrated
  - 52,000 Filipina
  - 40,000 Japanese
  - 15,000 Korean & VN
- Alien Fiancées' Act of 1946
- \*90% Asian entrance in 1948-1953 was Asian women



Suzie Wong as “lotus blossom” and war bride represents the Asian female as:

- destitute in their native countries
- sexualized, exotic
- desperate to be saved by men from first-world countries
- low class
- submissive/passive
- obedient
- objects/chattel
- dispensable**



- “I will do anything you say until you say, ‘Suzie, go away!’”



# Downstream effects of anti-immigrant laws against Chinese women

- ▶ 1. Chinese couples/families were separated for decades and lifetimes, in part, because women were refused immigration and men couldn't earn enough money.
- ▶ 2. Bachelor Chinatowns developed and "mutual aid" societies arose to meet men's social/emotional needs, the things families would normally supply (e.g., arrival and departure help, death rituals, money loans)
- ▶ 3. Chinese settlement in the U.S. was delayed 100 years, changing the face of American diversity
- ▶ 4. An American-born generation with citizenship was delayed 100 years—fostering a stereotype of "forever foreigner," "alien"
- ▶ \*anti-immigration policies = anti-settlement policies




# Some Asian Stereotypes in America:

- **“all Asians are alike”**—no, but we are similarly discriminated against in America
- **“hypersexual”**—no, but the forced prostitution and exclusion of Chinese women stereotyped them in sexualized terms and it has carried over to other Asians. They are no more or less licentious than any other women.
- **“diseased”**—correlation is not causation (cholera, plague, STDs, “Kung Flu,” “China virus,”)
- **“Forever Foreigner,” “alien”**—result of anti-immigrant and anti-settlement laws. We have been in America since 1849.
- **“model minority”**--an ethic of extreme hard work and non-confrontation as a result of poverty and economic discrimination
- **STEM-careers** –pragmatic reaction to a history of economic discrimination. Our “tiger” parents often insist that we find a way to have economic stability, thus math and science foci.







America's history of structural misogyny, racism, and classism against Asian women continues to lead to sexual violence and death

➤ Dragon lady stereotype

Asian women  
are seen as:

licentious,  
immoral,  
diseased,  
  
cunning,  
wicked,  
  
dehumanized,  
  
a threat who  
should be  
extinguished



view thru yellow peril/  
white anxiety

➤ lotus blossom/war bride stereotype



view thru white superiority

Asian women are  
seen as:

poor,  
obedient,  
passive,  
exotic,  
helpless,  
submissive,  
objectified,  
dispensable

\*nearly 4,000 acts against Asians in America in the last year

\*68% against Asian women

Atlanta, March 16, 2021 = massacre



For Discussion



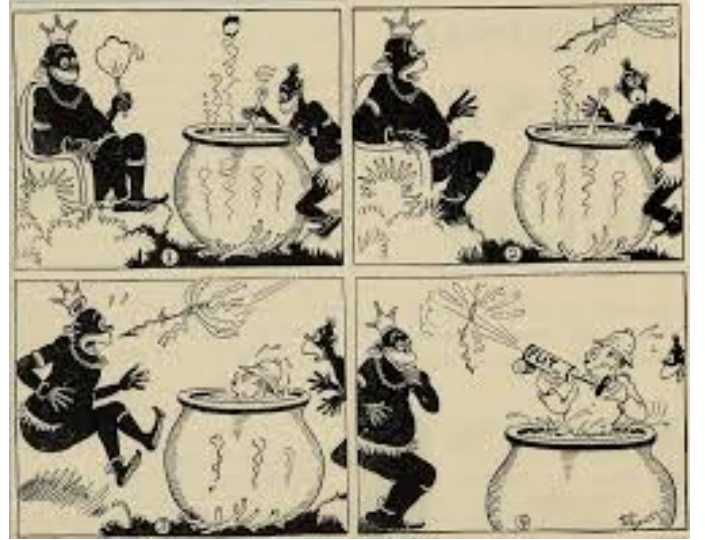


# Where do we go from here?

- ▶ Have you felt hyper/sexualized?
  - ▶ -verbally (e.g., “me love you long time,” was your mother a prostitute?, is your vagina slanted, too?, “I could have you for a dollar!”)
  - ▶ Physically (e.g., touched, ogled,..)
  - ▶ Socially (e.g., you’re Asian, therefore you must be quiet, submissive, good at math and massages...and know my other friend from China)
- ▶ Have you un/consciously thought any of the above?
- ▶ How can we change this together?







they say  
that the reason  
way  
month of May.





Now that you know the history,  
how do you feel about attempts  
to appropriate or glamorize it?

When does/n't this work?





# Further Reading...

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