The Racial Hierarchy of Interracial Dating

The folklore of interracial dating often presents the supposedly utopic vision that "love sees no color," while in fact the reality of interracial dating is that love sees every shade of every color, and places each on a racial hierarchy. The black-white binary oppositional structure of race in the United States has become more complex as larger numbers of Asian Americans and Latinos marry Euro-Americans, African Americans, and each other, but this complexity still follows a certain pattern. For most groups, "endogamy," or marriage within the group, is still highly preferred, with the exception of Japanese Americans, who are more likely to marry outside of their group than within it. When it comes to "exogamy," or marriage outside the group, a strict racial hierarchy emerges, with some regional variations reflecting local prejudices.

The first preference for a marriage partner outside of one's own group is almost always white, with the idea that such a marriage would "elevate" the children and make it easier for them to assimilate into the dominant culture. The next preferred is Asian American, because of their presumed higher class status and educational attainment (consider similar preferences in the racial hierarchy of transracial adoption). After Asians, Latinos are preferred, though this varies by region. The folklore of this hierarchy has an invisible bottom rung: what about somebody black? African Americans are still considered by many parents to be completely outside of the marriage category for their children.

This folklore of interracial marriage racial hierarchy even adheres when families have accepted that their children are queer, so that bringing home a black partner of the same gender, for those who are not black, is unthinkable.

The Goldilocks Chart

Gender differences complicate these folklores of hierarchy. Asian American women are much more likely to marry white men than Asian American men are to marry white women, and this difference is caused at least in part by the folklore of hyperfeminization. Asians and Asian Americans of both genders are hyperfeminized, so that Asian women become feminine ideals while Asian men fall prey to the myth of being less well endowed and overall less masculine than white men. In a closely tied corollary myth, African Americans of both genders are hypermasculinized, making black women seems sexually aggressive and threatening and subjecting black men to the myth of being over-endowed. Just as in the fairy tale "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," this leaves Euro-Americans in the normative middle, so that they are neither too soft nor too hard, too under-endowed nor over-endowed, but "just right."

her first novel *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989), which has been interpreted as finely capturing the legend of Frank Chin.

Chinese American literature in its early years was often centered on life in Chinatown and generational conflicts between foreign-born parents and American-born children (otherwise known as ABCs, or American-born Chinese, which is also the title of Gene Yang's 2006 graphic novel). Such works, in addition to those mentioned above, include Laurence Yep's young adult novel *Child of the Owl* (1990), Frank Chin's *Donald Duk* (1991) (and his 1972 play "Chickencoop Chinaman"), FaeMynne Ng's *Bone* (1996), and even the much-disputed Amy Tan novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989).

The newly developing folkways of practitioners of Chinese American literature move outside the confines of these earlier paradigms, including the development of genre fictions such as romance (Kim Wong Keltner's *Buddha Baby*, 2005 and *The Dim Sum of All Things*, 2004); science fiction and fantasy (Laurence Yep's *Dragon* series, S. P. Somtow's *Starship and Haiku*, 1981, and William F. Wu's *Robot City* and *Robots in Time* series); comic books and graphic novels (Gene Yang's *American Born Chinese*, 2008, Lela Lee's *Angry Little Girls* series, Keith Chow's *Secret Identities* anthology, 2009); and detective fiction (Ed Lin's Robert Chow series, Henry Chang's *Chinatown Beat*, 2007). Even as the folklore of the Chinese American literary gender-wars fades, other Chinese American writers are exploring mixed race identity (Sigrid Nunez's *A Feather on the Breath of God*, 1994; Gish Jen's *Who's Irish?*, 2000; Kip Fulbeck's *Paper Bullets*, 2001; Patricia Caho's *Mambo Peligroso*, 2006; May-Lee Chai's *Hapa Girl*, 2008; and Shawna Yang Ryan's *Water Ghosts*, 2009), and Asian American panethnicity (Shawn Wong's *American Knees*, 1996).

—*Wei Ming Dariotis*

See also: Chinese Americans: Fa Mu Lan; Folklore in Children's Literature; Kingston, Maxine Hong (1940–); The Monkey King (Sun Wukong); Narrative Folktale.

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M. Butterfly

M. Butterfly is David Henry Hwang's 1988 Tony Award-winning play satirizing Puccini's popular 1904 Western opera, *Madama Butterfly*, by addressing issues

of orientalism, imperialism, and racism. Additionally, the play deliberately lampoons the real-life espionage case in which a French diplomat, Bernard Boursicot, finds out that his longtime lover, Shi Pei Pu, a "female" Chinese opera singer lover, is actually a man.

Act one opens in the present time in a Paris prison cell, where Rene Gallimard recalls the time in the 1960s where he worked in the Beijing embassy. Gallimard reminiscences on the plot of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, which centers on the clandestine relationship between an unattractive, dim-witted American soldier, B. F. Pinkerton, and a 15-year-old Japanese girl, Cio Cio San (Butterfly). Pinkerton, stationed in Japan, buys Butterfly for 60 cents and tells his comrade that "Oriental girls like to be treated poorly." Gallimard laments Pinkerton's treatment of Butterfly, whom the soldier leaves to marry an American woman. Upon hearing the news that Pinkerton has remarried, Butterfly commits suicide.

Gallimard recounts this story to the Chinese opera singer Song Liling, who plays Butterfly in the opera, telling Song that he likes the opera for its tragedy. Song scoffs at him and says the opera is one of the West's favorite fantasies of a submissive Oriental woman and a cruel white man. Song asks what if the roles were reversed, if it was a story of a blonde homecoming queen who falls in love with a short and callous Japanese businessman who marries her and then leaves her to go back to Japan? If this homecoming queen then killed herself upon hearing that the Japanese businessman had remarried, would not, Song asks Gallimard, people view this woman as a deranged idiot. Yet, when an "Oriental" kills herself for a Westerner, it is "poetic."

A physical love affair ensues between Gallimard and Song, who, unknown to Gallimard, is really a man and a Chinese spy sent to gather information about French activities in Vietnam. Gallimard, oblivious to Song's male gender, passes many French secrets to Song over the years. He then returns to France and Song is sent to a Chinese reeducation camp for actors.

Years later, Song goes to France to look for Gallimard to possibly gather more information. Gallimard divorces his wife, Helga, to reunite with Song. In France, both are eventually arrested for espionage. The final act, set in a courthouse in Paris in 1968, opens with Song being interrogated by the French judge, who asks how Gallimard could not know he was a man. Song states that Gallimard thought he was a woman because he, like the West, will never know anything about the East, including something basic like gender. To the West, the East is a place of fantasy. The dénouement of the play is Gallimard dressing like Butterfly and committing suicide upon the realization that his perfect woman was actually just a fantasy.

—*Jenny Banh*

See also: Chinese Americans: Chinatown Opera Theaters.

After Lee's death, his films gained a large cult following, and he became a global pop culture icon. *Time* Magazine named him one of the 100 most influential people of the 20th century. A fictionalized biopic, *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*, appeared in 1993. On November 26, 2005, the city of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina honored Lee with a statue as a symbol of peace. The following day, Lee was remembered in Hong Kong with a bronze statue to mark his 65th birthday.

—*Terry K. Park*

See also: Chinese Americans: Chinese Martial Arts.

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Lin, Maya Ying (1959–)

Maya Ying Lin is a Chinese American architect and artist who is most noted for winning the design contest for the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC., as a 21-year-old Yale undergraduate student. While Lin's success might be held up as evidence of Asian "model minority" achievement, the protests that arose against the choosing of a woman of Asian descent to design the Vietnam memorial uniquely highlight the limitations of the model minority theory.

Maya Lin was born on October 5, 1959, in Athens, Ohio, the daughter of Chinese artists who fled Shanghai, China. Her parents were Ohio State humanity professors, and Maya and her brother grew up in this academic milieu. Lin's upbringing was sheltered; she was not aware of the 1960s civil rights movement that was engulfing the country during her childhood. Consequently, she did not understand the ramifications of an Asian American winning a design contest for a war located in Asia. The design contest was open only to U.S. citizens and drew 1,421 applicants, including famous artists and architects.

Lin serendipitously decided to submit her undergraduate architecture class's final project as an entry for the contest. Lin entered the blind contest to design a memorial that was to honor the more than 58,000 Americans who died fighting in Southeast Asia. Her simple one-story black v-shaped design listed the names

of soldiers who died in chronological order and was selected as the design winner. Maya Lin could not predict that her design would catapult her into a national debate among politicians, activists, veterans, art critics, and reporters. A small, politically connected veteran's group spearheaded a movement to select another design for the monument. This group argued that the black design of the memorial connoted disrespect for the Vietnam veterans. Additionally, her Asian American background became conflated with Vietnam and many objected to her design on those grounds, calling her "gook." However, many civilians and veterans supported her design. Eventually a compromise was made by adding a large bronze statue of three soldiers and a flag to the monument. Today, Lin's Vietnam monument is emulated in many cities and dramatically affects visitors, often beginning a healing process for Vietnam veterans.

Maya Lin's subsequent accomplishments include the 1989 civil rights monument commemorating the 1955–1956 Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott. In 1989, Lin designed two landscape commissions for a Peace Chapel at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, and a topiary design for a Charlotte, North Carolina, Coliseum. In 1990, she designed a memorial to honor the presence of women at Yale University. She also designed a sculpture for the Glietsman Foundation in Malibu, California, that honors people who fight for social change. She was also elected to be an Alumni Fellow of the Yale Corporation. In 2000, Lin was the architect for the Confluence project, an outdoor installation in Washington State. A 2000 documentary based on her life and career, *Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision*, won an Academy award.

—*Jenny Banh*

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Literature and Folklore

Once upon a time, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a group of young Chinese American writers searching for their literary ancestors—Asian American writers who had come before them, writing in English about the experience of being Asian in America, and who had left a legacy in print. Unable to locate this legacy with the help of English professors who knew nothing about it, these writers first found each other, then began to search through used bookstores for everything they could find.