

**Reimagining Asian American Masculinities:  
Superheroes and Stereotypes in Marvel's *Shang-Chi* Film**

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**I. Abstract**

**II. Introduction**

**III. Significance of Shang-Chi: Asian American Superhero**

**IV. Problems of Asian American Superhero Representation**

**V. Reimagining Asian American Masculinities in *Shang-Chi***

**VI. Conclusion**

**I. Abstract**

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This paper evaluates the effect of the upcoming film from Marvel Cinematic Universe, *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, from the intersectional perspectives of race and gender by analyzing both the limitations and possibilities of Asian American masculinities. The representation of Asian American masculinities on film is a controversial topic. Male Asian American actors have been chosen to play only a few roles, which are oftentimes stereotyped as effeminate beings. Such a background raised the expectation of the Marvel film, promoted as the first film of an Asian male superhero figure. The upcoming film is anticipated to not only allow major roles to Asian actors but also to alter the effeminate stereotypes of Asian American men. However, the paper questions this promoted representation. The origin of the film connotes racist perspectives that need to be problematized. Furthermore, it simultaneously upholds hegemonic

masculinity as the ideal and assimilates Asian American masculinities into it, rather than challenging and deconstructing the masculinity itself. The paper concludes by promoting the various ways of masculine beings that are prevalent in Asian American masculinities. These reimagined alternatives counter the norms constructed by hegemonic masculinity and encourage diverse and inclusive masculinities.

## II. Introduction

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On July 20th, 2019, Marvel Cinematic Universe officially announced its new upcoming film, *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (hereinafter, referred to as *Shang-Chi*). The announcement took place in Comic-Con International, which is a convention held annually in San Diego with more than 130,000 attendees. The movie is planned to be an adaptation of a fictional Asian/Chinese superhero from Marvel Comic, *Shang-Chi*. According to Marvel Studio, the movie has been rescheduled to arrive in theaters on May 7, 2021; the original date, affected by COVID-19, was February 12th, 2021 (Dinh, 2020).

The announcement from Marvel Cinematic Universe gained widespread attention from the media for its dedication to diversifying its representation of characters. Often referred to as “Phase Four” of Marvel Cinematic Universe, *Shang-Chi* was announced with other superhero films with an obvious intention for further casting diversity. *The Eternals* features deaf actress Lauren Ridloff playing superhero Makkari, and *Thor: Love and Thunder*’s Valkyrie performed by Tessa Thompson will be the first superhero in Marvel films with an LGBTQ background (Smith, 2019). Seeking to diversify its films, according to a *New York Times* film critic Brooks Barnes (2019), Marvel Cinematic Universe attempts to “replicate its theatrical success with ‘Black Panther’, which featured a majority black cast, by adding a standout Asian superhero to its cinematic universe.” Eric Francisco (2018), a

journalist from *Inverse*, also comments that the remarkable box office performance of *Crazy Rich Asians*, a 2018 film with all Asian casting, was a major motivation as well, referring to the increasing numbers of Asian moviegoers both domestically and internationally. Thus, the film is expected to be produced by a majority Asian cast as well. Shang-Chi, the lead role, will be played by a Chinese Canadian actor, Simu Liu. He will be joined by Awkwafina [Nora Lum], and the film will be directed by a Japanese American filmmaker Destin Daniel Cretton (Marvel, 2019).

The new announcement of the film adaptation received quite a number of positive responses. Sociologist Nancy Wang Yuen told *HuffPost* that “having an Asian superhero lead within the same Marvel universe shows the world that Asians can also be saviors,” expecting Simu Liu to challenge the negative stereotypes and caricatures of Asians (Yam, 2019). Richard Newby (2018) from *Hollywood Reporter* said that *Shang-Chi* has the potential to empower its Asian viewers as *Black Panther* did for its African American fans. He comments that the movie can be the “chance to get to know a distinct and highly skilled character faced with challenging the perception pop culture has so often attached to the Asian hero.” *CBC News* (2019) posted an interview with Liu who explained that landing the superhero role was “about being seen in a way that we haven’t before because we know the stereotypes, that kind of plague Asian Canadians [and] Asian Americans [face], particularly of men.” *ET Canada* (2019) broadcast an interview with Simu at the San Diego Comic-Con International when he mentioned the role as “the fulfillment of my dream.”

We can see that the expectation is set quite high for *Shang-Chi*. Yet how can we interpret the upcoming film? Does it have the potential to significantly better the representation of Asian Americans? How will Marvel’s first-ever Asian superhero empower its Asian American male viewers? This paper examines both the possibilities and limitations of the Asian American superhero from the intersectional perspectives of

race and gender. Firstly, the paper analyzes the expectations toward *Shang-Chi* by investigating the historical backgrounds of the film representation of Asian actors as a whole and Asian American masculinity. Then, it aims to anticipate the potential connotations of the upcoming film with intersectional approaches. Finally, the paper proposes an interpretation for the upcoming film which will exhibit possibilities on how we can reimagine Asian American masculinities.

### III. Significance of *Shang-Chi*: First Asian American Superhero

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Considering the attention that *Shang-Chi* is achieving in the media, we have to understand the significance of the upcoming movie in relation to Asian Americans. In doing so, this paper will focus on the following two points; film representation and masculinities. Film representation has been one of the most pivotal issues for Asian American politics. Jigna Desai (2015) defines film as “a significant institution for establishing and maintaining a racial order within the American nation and empire” regarding its power to form the public sense; therefore, “understanding, interrogating, and claiming political citizenship has been accompanied by attempts at seeking self-representation in film and video as a modality of cultural citizenship” (92). For Asian Americans, pursuing the politically correct representation of themselves on film—quantitative in terms of the number of actors and films and qualitative in terms of the cultural authenticity—has become critical for their sense of belonging in the society.

Nonetheless, the reality is by no means idealistic. Brian Hu and Vincent Pham (2017) point out the stereotypical jokes made in the 2016 Oscars telecast and “whitewashing,” in which Asian roles are replaced by white actors, as the evidence for erasure and deprecation of Asian Americans. Statistics also support the lack of Asian American

representation on film. Research conducted by UCLA (Hunt & Ramón, 2020) reports that in 2019, the percentage of actors of color who were given the lead role was 27.6% (n=145) while the U.S. population share is 40.2%. Regarding the fact that white actors took 72.4% of the lead roles while their demographic share is 59.8% (11, Figure 1), we can conclude that racial barriers exist in Hollywood films. For overall cast diversity, the research shows that Asian actors share 5.0% of all film roles (14, Figure 4). This may be read as an adequate representation considering the Asian American population in the U.S. However, Nancy Yuen (2016) calls for more disaggregated data to correctly evaluate the lack of Asian American film representation. She notes that the increase in number is due to the emergence of all-Asian films, reminding us that the statistic does not necessarily reflect the diversification of film. In such a reality, the emergence of *Shang-Chi* may well be anticipated as a breakthrough in the film industry by Asian American audiences.

At the same time, the significance of *Shang-Chi* should be understood in relation to the historical context of Asian American masculinities. Raewyn Connel (2002) theorizes masculinity as “the pattern or configuration of social practices linked to the position of men in the gender order, and socially distinguished from practices linked to the position of women” (44). In this sense, U.S. history shows how Asian American masculinities have been socially marginalized and stigmatized. Yen Espiritu (2008) offers a brief overview of Asian American masculinities as follows:

Materially and culturally, Asian American men and women have been cast as both men and women and as *neither* men *nor* women. On the one hand, as part of the Yellow Peril that needs to be contained, Asian men and women have been represented as a masculine threat of military and sexual dominance and moral degeneracy. On the other hand, both sexes have been skewed toward the feminine side—a manifestation of the group’s marginalization and its role as the passive “model minority” in contemporary cultural lore. (113, emphasis in the original)

This simultaneity of hypermasculinization, effemination and emasculation is what characterizes the predicament of Asian American masculinities (Chua & Fujino, 1999; Shek, 2006). The hypersexualization dates back to the era of the Yellow Peril, when the white employers feared the increasing numbers of imported Asian workers. Then, the effeminate images were created correspondingly with the illegalization of miscegenation, along with the limitation of employment opportunities for jobs related to household affairs. The Immigration Reform Act of 1965 saw the creation of the “model minority myth,” which led to the emasculation of Asian American men by stereotyping them as obedient individuals who would accept lower paying jobs compared to their white counterparts.

The condemnation of Asian American masculinities is also applied to the representation in film as well. In *The Big Aiiiiieee!*, the editors Frank Chin, Jeffery Chan, Lawson Inada and Shawn Wong (1991) lament that “it is an article of white liberal American faith today that Chinese men, at their best, are effeminate closet queens like Charlie Chan and, at their worst, are homosexual menaces like Fu Manchu” (XII). In the recent edition (2019), they bemoan that “the stereotypical Asian is nothing as a man . . . contemptible because he is womanly, effeminate, devoid of all the traditionally masculine qualities of originality, daring, physical courage, and creativity” (15). Celine Shimizu (2012) categorizes the stereotypes of Asian American men in comparison to various caricatures: “the rapacious and brutal (Sessue Hayakawa in *The Cheat*, 1915), pedophilic (Richard Barthelmess in yellowface in *Broken Blossoms*, 1922), masochistic (again Barthelmess, in *Son of the Gods*, 1932), criminal (the Fu Manchu series), treacherous and also romantic (Philip Ahn in *They Met in Bombay*, 1941, *Daughter of Shanghai*, 1937, and *King of Chinatown*, 1939), and quaint (Charlie Chan and Mr. Moto)” (2). Given this historical

context, we can empathize with the expectations that *Shang-Chi* receives from its Asian American male fans.

#### IV. Problems of the Asian American Superhero

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The previous section described the potential significance of *Shang-Chi* in terms of empowering Asian American men. However, this paper problematizes that exact political aim which *Shang-Chi* is expected to accomplish, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, although the film is being promoted to empower its Asian American audiences, we have to remind ourselves that the origin of the *Shang-Chi* story is nothing like its publicized expectations. In fact, the historical context is perhaps the complete opposite, connoting racist perspectives. Peter Lee (2012) points out the politically incorrect notions in the first published issue featuring the character Shang-Chi, *Special Marvel Edition #15* (December 1973). As examples, Lee mentions the phrases (such as “the yellow devil!”, “the inhuman yellow fiend!”, and “cat-green eyes”), the problematic settings (the fact that the story of *Shang-Chi* spins off from *Fu Manchu* {1912-1959}, a controversial series of novels from Sax Rohmer), and the very depictions of the characters (while Fu Manchu’s skin was colored yellow, Shang-Chi’s was pigmented as bronze, implicating his mixed parentage) as the explicitly Orientalist representations which were obvious in the original comic version. Jachinson Chan (2001) offers a more internal analysis of Shang-Chi in relation to Whiteness. Shang-Chi, confronting his Chinese father to save the Western society, implies the absolute superiority of the West over the East. Chan emphasizes that “the dichotomies between the East and West are clearly portrayed in this series and there is, in effect, no possibility of carving out a bicultural space for Chinese Americans. The West only welcomes Asian immigrants if they uphold Western mores and values: they are beneficial

if they can be exploited or manipulated. If they cannot, then it is preferable that Asians return to their countries of origin" (112).

The embodiment of racism and Orientalism seen in the original Shang-Chi is no surprise when we consider the background to its production. The motivation for this creation was the so-called "kung-fu craze" in the early 1970s, in which the cultural products from Hong Kong heavily influenced American popular culture (Francisco, 2020). Seeking to capitalize on this trend, Shang-Chi was originally created by Steve Englehart and Jim Starlin after Marvel failed to obtain the rights to *Kung-Fu* (1972-1975), a popular TV series starring David Carradine. In his critique, Daniel Martin (2018) stresses that the American popular culture at that time "appropriated, absorbed, and Americanized" the Hong Kong cinema for the sake of American consumers, and that this reveals "a consistent fetishization of Oriental society that expressed both Asiaphilia and Asiaphobia" (1522). As defined by Nhi Lieu (2015), such a phenomenon can be interpreted as the "commodification" of Asian culture "[which] functions to transform racial and ethnic difference by repackaging, exoticizing, and making cultural forms and practices more palatable for mainstream consumption" (29). In contrast to the present expectation toward *Shang-Chi*, we should not forget that the origin of the character was by no means purposed to be a form of ethnic and racial empowerment for Asian Americans.

While this "commodification" of Asian culture is a serious issue, this paper will put more emphasis on the more complex issue of how the film *Shang-Chi* will affect Asian American identities. We should be particularly concerned because of the potential influence of *Shang-Chi* on contemporary Asian American masculinities, with masculinity defined as "the characteristics, traits, and qualities that describe how one is gendered male" (Shimizu, 2012). As described in the previous section, *Shang-Chi* is hugely praised for its possibility to challenge the effeminate stereotype of Asian American men. However,



this praise needs more careful analysis. Raewyn Connell (2002) raises the awareness that “contemporary masculinities are implicated in a range of toxic effects” (50). In fact, many scholars who study popular culture criticize the masculine representations of superheroes in comic books. Anthony Easthope (1990) mentions how young viewers internalize what he calls the “super-masculine ideal” (29) by looking up to Superman, a superhero who negates his frail alter-ego (Clark Kent) with his muscular body and herculean abilities. Alan Klein (1993) asserts that “comic-book depictions of masculinity are so obviously exaggerated that they represent fiction twice over, as genre and as gender representation” (267). Jeffrey Brown (2001) builds on this suggestion by expanding the discourse to other perspectives such as sexuality and race. He states that “this myth of idealized masculinity . . . remains dependent upon the symbolic split between masculinity and femininity, between the hard male and the soft other. And in the misogynistic, homophobic, and racist view of this ideology, the despised other that masculinity defines itself against conventionally includes not only women but also feminized men” (169). Furthermore, Brown (2016) extends this debate by adding that this extreme idealization of masculinity “serves not just as a standardized ideal but represents a pattern of characteristics and practices that allows misogyny to remain intact,” contributing to “hegemonic masculinity” (41).

Hegemonic masculinity, according to Raewyn Connell (1995), is “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answers of the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.” This is enabled by the “correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual” (77). In other words, hegemonic masculinity is a socially predominant masculinity that rationalizes the subjugation of those who do not qualify for such categorization. This means that the

subjugation goes beyond sexual differences. Jachinson Chin (2001) notes that “hegemonic masculinity is also defined along racial lines as men of color, on an aggregate level, are systematically excluded from and denied access to the dominant hegemonic ideology” (113). Briefly summarizing the arguments so far, the masculine representation of superheroes perpetuates hegemonic masculinity, which is problematic in terms of fomenting forms of oppression such as misogyny, sexism, homophobia, and racism. Needless to say, Asian American masculinities are no exception to this oppression.

However, this is where we have to take a closer look at the complexity of hegemonic masculinity. Raewyn Connell (1995) notes the notion of “complicity” with hegemonic masculinity. This is a phenomenon which does not strictly align with the exact definition of normative masculinity. However, according to Connell, “the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” (79). This places Asian American men in a complicated position. Though racially disadvantaged but privileged in terms of gender, Asian American men are pressured to abide by hegemonic masculinity in order to gain access to the patriarchal dividend. In his critical essay on Chinese literature, Viet Nguyen (2000) indicates this tendency as the “remasculinization” of Asian Americans:

Although violence throughout American history had been used to emasculate Chinese American men by exploiting their labor and excluding them from American society, young Asian Americans discovered that violence could also be used to remasculinize themselves and the historical memory of their immigrant predecessors . . . . More important, this violence, whose features are nationalist, assimilationist, and masculine, becomes a significant method for claiming an American identity that has a long tradition of deploying violence to define itself. (130)

Many Asian American men feel the necessity to remasculinize themselves. However, this paper insists that the remasculinization of Asian American men should be criticized at all

costs. This is not only because it upholds hegemonic masculinity, but also because it turns Asian American men into the complicit perpetrator of various forms of social oppression.

Unfortunately, we cannot deny the remasculinizing context that the origin of Shang-Chi is based on. Shang-Chi, who shares the similar masculine characteristics with its preceding white male superheroes, can be read as the embodiment of politics to assimilate Asian American masculinities into the masculine norm. Jachinson Chan (2001) insists that “the model of masculinity embedded in Shang-Chi reflects a White masculinity masked by a Chinese body, thereby maintaining a cultural standard that other Asian men should emulate” (99). Yet, even if the remasculinization is realized, Asian American masculinities will still remain as a social stigma. Referring to the problematic model minority myth, Lisa Park (2015) mentions that the assimilation of Asian Americans is “paradoxical by design,” stating it “actually reinforces established racial inequalities and imposes on even subsequent generations of Asian Americans born in the U.S. a precarious defensive dilemma in which they must constantly prove their worth as ‘real’ Americans” (17). Shang-Chi is no exception to this. Chan continues that Shang-Chi “represents a hegemonic model of masculinity yet he is simultaneously marginalized and subordinated from the dominant culture and society” (100). Though we at present do not know how faithful to the original model the film adaptation will be, we must be aware that *Shang-Chi* has the risk of encouraging the remasculinization of Asian American masculinities.

## V. Reimagining Asian American Masculinities in *Shang-Chi*

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Instead of remasculinization, a more positive interpretation would be the reimagining of Asian American masculinities. Remasculinization fortifies hegemonic masculinity rather than questioning and challenging its fundamental discrimination, just as “the

master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984). Jachinson Chan (2001) cautions that "the discourse of remasculinization in the context of nationalism has been so pervasive in debates on Asian American masculinities that alternative forms of masculinities have been displaced" (138). Celine Shimizu (2012) reminds us that "the solution to the problematic representation of Asian American men in the movies is not to add the phallus, which ultimately reproduces sexual heteronormativity and gender hierarchy, but to identify new criteria that dodge the crosshairs of victimization with an accounting of male power and privilege" (2). Thus, an assessment of *Shang-Chi* should not simply replicate the Asian American version of masculine superheroes, but rather offer a criticism of hegemonic masculinity.

In this sense, the academic perspectives from queer critique offer us some hints. As a noun, "queer" is an umbrella term that questions gender-binary and heteronormativity. As a verb, "to queer" can be understood as an approach that "becomes a way to denaturalize categories . . . revealing them as socially and historically constructed identities that have often worked to establish and police the line between the 'normal' and the 'abnormal'" (203, Somerville, 2014). Martin Manalansan (2015) emphasizes the significance of the approach in the field of Asian American Studies, for "a relevant queer approach . . . strongly maintains its link to 'other' marginal subjects and states of being, empowers an ethical stance that decenters the 'America' in 'Asian America', and assumes a humble yet vital way of knowing and being in the world" (202). Building upon these definitions, *Shang-Chi* must queer hegemonic masculinity; it must debunk hegemonic masculinity as a socially constructed category, in connection to and for the sake of Asian American masculinities – the marginalized 'others' of the masculine ideal that have been stigmatized throughout the U.S. history.

How can *Shang-Chi* 'queer' hegemonic masculinity in relation to Asian American

masculinities? The potential exists in the complicated masculinities of Asian American itself. In other words, by respectfully referring to the complexity of Asian American masculinities as its inspiration, the masculine representation of Shang-Chi can possibly dismantle hegemonic masculinity. As Raewyn Connell (2002) insists, masculinity is a social construct. Masculinities are indeed multiple, and as evident in various historical and cultural phenomena, are fluid and alterable. This applies to hegemonic masculinity as well. Connell (1995) once again asserts that “hegemonic masculinity embodies a ‘currently accepted’ strategy” (78), stressing how it can be challenged by other groups to alter its dominance.

Jachinson Chan (2001) recommends the promotion of “ambi-sexuality,” which he defines as “a masculinist discourse based on the framework of ambiguity and ambivalence because of the unique positionality of Asian American men.” He describes how this perspective can be effective as follows:

I have tried to claim an ambiguous or ambivalent sexual identity as a model of masculinity that provides a conceptual foundation from which a more complex understanding of Asian American masculinities might arise. More importantly, an ambi-sexual model of masculinity represents a strategic rejection of oppressive social categories based on gender and sexual hierarchies. (138)

Chan emphasizes here that the embrace of ambi-sexuality will not only allow us a deeper understanding of Asian American masculinities but will also function as a resistance to hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, hegemonic masculinity perpetuates because of its acceptance in society, especially when it is being performed as the one and only way an individual can claim their manhood as legitimate (Connell, 1995). By representing the ambi-sexuality of Asian American masculinities, *Shang-Chi* can demonstrate that ‘masculinity’ can actually be manifold and diverse, thus dismantling hegemonic

masculinity as the absolute status.

As much as many Asian American men feel the social pressure for remasculinization, studies show that Asian American masculinities already contain some aspects that exemplify ambi-sexuality, or the alternatives to hegemonic masculinity. Through their quantitative study, sociologists Peter Chua and Diane Fujino (1999) point out the “two opposing strategies used by Asian-American men . . . related to Asian-American men’s contradictory position in U.S. society” (406). This dichotomy consists of two groups of Asian American men; those that pursue hegemonic masculinity, and the other who construct what the researchers named “flexible masculinity.” In their observations, Chua and Fujino witnessed a considerable number of Asian American men who embrace social characteristics which deviate from the hegemonic masculine traits, such as “being polite and obedient” or “willing to do domestic tasks.” However, they emphasize that “these men are not effeminate; rather they view these caring attributes as part of their power and masculinity, again suggesting a more flexible construction of masculinity” (408). This explanation depicts the conflicting situation that Asian American men are socially situated; they either assimilate into hegemonic masculinity or negotiate their masculinities to new possibilities. From a clinical perspective, William Liu and William Concepcion (2010) indicate the mental complexity that many Asian American men face. Noting the various factors that clinicians need to be aware of when dealing with Asian American masculinities (“acculturation, identity issues, intergeneration differences, differences in cultural values, immigration history, experiences with colonialism, and mixed-race heritage”), they stress that “traditional practices of some Asian American men that may be perceived as effeminate in nature from a hegemonically masculine viewpoint (e.g., sharing personal emotions, domestic housekeeping) may need to be redefined as an acceptable dimension of masculinity” (140). So, which group should Shang-Chi follow? How can

*Shang-Chi* significantly contribute to its Asian American male audiences, who are forced to struggle in their masculine dilemma?

Shifting the argument to film representation, Celine Shimizu (2012) encourages Asian Americans to acknowledge and emphasize the ethical aspects of their masculinities. She mentions that in films, Asian American male subjects (filmmakers and actors) perceive their bodies as “a site of racial wounding, gender grief, and sexual problems in ways haunted by the framework of falling short of the norm . . . where the identification of castration becomes a rally cry for changing and protesting hurtful images that lead to, when unwatched, seduction by patriarchy and heteronormativity” (4). However, rather than assimilating to patriarchal and heteronormative masculinity, she promotes the “ethical manhood” of Asian Americans. As she defines ‘manhood’ as “the inner life of being, becoming, and performing maleness” in comparison to ‘masculinity,’ she elaborates on the term as follows:

My formulation of ethical manhood attends to how the self holds the potentiality of becoming aware of one’s position in a network of power relations and of acting responsibly in wielding and enduring power. . . . I ultimately advocate an ethical manhood that recognizes its power not only to hurt others, but to remap what is valued in our society. (9)

Focusing on ethical manhood over phallic masculinity enables us to appreciate moralities that are undervalued by the dominant masculinity. With its consciousness to both the possession and the lack of power, ethical manhood allows Asian American men to celebrate not only strength but also vulnerability as well. This notion of ‘vulnerability’ is also stressed by Celine Shimizu when she explains the significance of ethical manhood. Shimizu notes that “asserting the presence of both vulnerability and strength, they forge manhoods that care for others. They invest in the most rewarding of relations beyond

propping up the self" (4). By simultaneously respecting both strength and vulnerability, ethical manhood can be realized by Asian American masculinities.

In this sense, Shang-Chi perhaps has its most respectable predecessor; Bruce Lee. Shimizu's (2012) close analysis of Bruce Lee's manhood discovers such ethical aspects. Firstly, she mentions his vulnerability as the major formula of his ethical manhood. Though Lee's muscular body on film is represented as physically strong, Lee does not hesitate to express both his physical and mental vulnerabilities to others, especially women.

This enables others to nurture a sense of compassion towards Lee, as also shows compassion. Shimizu states that "it is vulnerability and power together, as well as the simultaneity of tenderness and ferocity in his touch, that forms Bruce Lee's manhood on screen." Lee does not appear as the so-called 'tough guy' who assumes that expressing his own vulnerability is fatal to his masculinity, but rather as a person confident to show his vulnerability which "formulates an ethical manhood not aligned with patriarchy alone but with a larger field of social relations."

Secondly, Shimizu (2012) elaborates on Bruce Lee's sexuality. Shimizu points out the failure of the preceding studies on Bruce Lee's sexuality, denouncing that "scholarly literature evaluating Bruce Lee's impact tends to celebrate his achievement as the pinnacle of manhood in terms of patriarchy, nationalism, and violence" (80), which are assumedly based on the politic of remasculinization. Indeed, Lee's ability to express his own vulnerability and to build intimacy with others expands the predominant definition of male sexuality, or "a definition of sexuality that centers sexual domination and prowess by men in the penis/phallus conflation" (80). Through various films, Lee does appear as a sexual and desirable being to others. His muscular physique and martial skills that save himself and others from predicaments gather the gaze of desire, from both women and



men. Despite the fact that he deviates from the effeminate stereotype, Lee simultaneously circumvents the process of remasculinization. With ethical manhood, the characters that Bruce Lee portrays consistently thrive to build an intimate relationship with their female counterparts, rather than utilizing women to show their power to conquer others. Shimizu notes that “Lee presents an alternative hero in his relations with women, which don’t always end with achieving sex and love in the movies” (58), hence offering an alternative to the predominant definition of masculinity.

Bruce Lee is surely but only one of the many models that *Shang-Chi* can get its inspiration from in terms of presenting masculinities. ‘Asian American’ is in fact a diverse racial entity, in terms of ethnicities, gender, nationalities, class, immigration status, and so on. Asian American masculinities are also a broad spectrum. In her essay, Lisa Lowe (1991) describes this cultural aspect of Asian American as follows:

I stress heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity in the characterization of Asian American culture as part of a twofold argument about cultural politics, the ultimate aim of that argument being to disrupt the current hegemonic relationship between “dominant” and “minority” positions. On the other hand, my observation that Asian Americans are heterogeneous is part of a strategy to destabilize the dominant discursive construction and determination of Asian Americans as a homogeneous group... I argue for the Asian American necessity – politically, intellectually, and personally – to organize, resist, and theorize as Asian Americans, but at the same time I inscribe this necessity within a discussion of the risks of a cultural politics that relies upon the construction of sameness and the exclusion of differences. (258-259)

This paper resonates with Lowe’s consciousness. We anticipate that *Shang-Chi* will embody the ambi-sexual aspect of Asian American masculinities in order to challenge hegemonic masculinity, yet it must not claim the masculinities it represents as the essential Asian American masculinities. Through her thorough examination of various representations of Asian American masculinities on film, Celine Shimizu (2012) states that

“because of the effectiveness of cinema in presenting dramas of power, we see how Asian American men present masculinities that embrace asexuality, effeminacy, queerness, and multitudinous other sexual formations—in short, plural masculinities” (6). We should expect *Shang-Chi* to contribute to such plurality as well, expanding the definition of masculinities; both of Asian American and beyond, with its ambi-sexual representation.

## VI. Conclusion

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Using the above arguments, this paper critically scrutinized *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*. Many Asian American audiences have hope in *Shang-Chi* to correct the lack of film representation and to defy the stigmatized stereotypes of their masculinities. Such political aspirations involve the risk that the film could be received by contemporary audiences as either a reconfirmation of hegemonic stereotypes or a reimagining of Asian American masculinities. Not only is the origin of *Shang-Chi* based on racist backgrounds, but also it possesses the danger of remasculinizing Asian American masculinities. The remasculinization perpetuates hegemonic masculinity, which upholds various forms of social oppression while maintaining the marginalization of Asian American men. Rather, what we should expect from *Shang-Chi* is to challenge hegemonic masculinity itself by embracing the complexity of Asian American men and asserting the reimagination of Asian American masculinities.

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