

AN ELEGY TO CHARLIE CHAN: CHANG APANA, EARL DERR BIGGERS AND
ASIAN AMERICA

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

AMERICAN STUDIES

AUGUST 2007

By

Mandy R.K. Westfall

Thesis Committee:

Dennis M. Ogawa, Chairperson

Akemi Kikumura- Yano

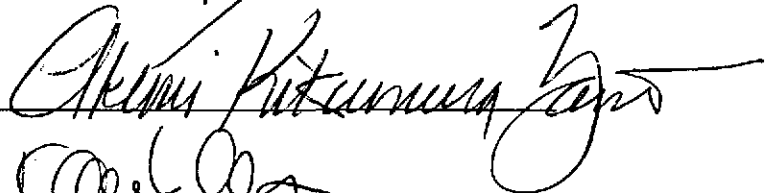
Karen Umemoto

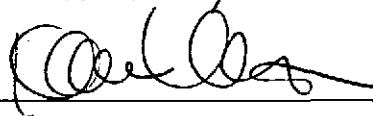
We certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in American Studies.

THESIS COMMITTEE



Chairperson





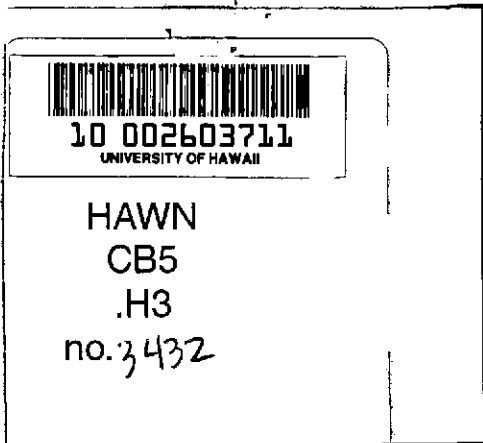


TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	iv
CHAPTER 1:	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2:	
A STEREOTYPE IS BORN.....	12
CHAPTER 3:	
A “YELLOWFACE” TRADITION?.....	20
CHAPTER 4:	
CHANG APANA: THE REAL LIFE CHARLIE CHAN?.....	30
CHAPTER 5:	
EARL DERR BIGGERS: WHITE OPPRESSOR, SYMPATHIZER, OR INNOVATOR?.....	39
CHAPTER 6:	
THE TRUTH IS REVEALED?.....	52
CHAPTER 7:	
CONCLUSION.....	58
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	64

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Warner Oland as Fu Manchu	22
2. Warner Oland as Charlie Chan.....	22
3. Sidney Toler in a publicity photo.....	23
4. Sidney Toler as Charlie Chan.....	23
5. Roland Winters.....	24
6. Roland Winters as Chan in "The Chinese Ring".....	24
7. Peter Ustinov as Charlie Chan.....	27
8. Peter Ustinov in everyday garb.....	27

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

“As they went out, the third man stepped farther into the room, and Miss Minerva gave a little gasp of astonishment as she looked at him. In those warm islands thin men were the rule, but here was a striking exception. He was very fat indeed, yet he walked with the light dainty step of a woman. His cheeks were as chubby as a baby’s, his skin ivory tinted, his black hair close-cropped, his amber eyes slanting. As he passed Miss Minerva he bowed with a courtesy encountered all too rarely in a work-a-day world, then moved on after Hallet. ‘Amos!’ cried Miss Minerva. ‘That man-why he’ ‘Charlie Chan,’ Amos explained. ‘I’m glad they brought him. He’s the best detective on the force.’ ‘But – he’s Chinese!’ ‘Of Course.’”¹

Asian Americans, due to the experiences of their ancestors, are characterized by a “negative” history². While modern day historians and Asian Americanists endeavor to write a new history for “Asian America”, the experiences of immigration and hardship, the group’s encounters with racism and the supposed success of its people as a whole are overshadowed by the role the media has played in perpetuating this negative history. The portrayals of Asians and Asian Americans in American media, more often than not, are stereotypical in nature. In movies and on television, these highly characterized depictions, forever imprinted on film, can be detrimental yet continue to be aired on cable channels across the country and throughout the world everyday. From the Dragon Lady to the villainous *yakuza* boss, from Suzie Wong to Long Duck Dong, “the Oriental appears in various guises throughout American popular

¹ Biggers, Earl Derr. *The House Without a Key*. New York: Avenel Books, 1981. pg. 37.

² Daniels, Roger. *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States Since 1850*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990. pg. 7.

culture, in pictures, songs, paraphernalia, books, and movies and no single image represents the totality of the representation.”³ Although some of the aforementioned characters stick out in our minds more than others, arguably, no other Asian character sticks out more as a thorn in the side of the modern day Asian American community than that of Charlie Chan.

The general consensus within the Asian American community regarding Charlie Chan is fraught with negativity and abhorrence. Charlie Chan is ridiculed and reviled, believed to be the Asian American counterpart of “Sambo” or “Aunt Jemima” in an African American construct, because he is a “fake” Asian American character⁴. His very existence is believed to undermine Asian American objectivity in that he is believed to be highly racialized; a character in opposition to a “real” Asian American identity. Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan, who hold influential positions within the Asian American community (and rightly so), discuss this notion further in their historical essay, “Racist Love.” Charlie Chan as a fictional character for Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan is the product of “racist love”, a notion that exposes the fact that the character occupies an exalted place within white hegemony. “Racist hate” is, in essence, the instrument by which unacceptable models of ethnic minorities make their way into mainstream society, i.e. Geronimo, General Santa Ana, and Fu Manchu.⁵ On the other hand, “racist love” promotes the acceptable model of Asians/ Asian Americans, resulting in characters believed to be non-threatening to the caste

³ Lee, Robert G. *Orientalism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999. Pg. 12.

⁴ Hagedorn, Jessica, Ed. *Charlie Chan is Dead*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993. pg. Xxi.

⁵ Chin, Frank and Jeffrey Paul Chan. “Racist Love”. *Seeing through Shuck*. Ed. Richard Kostelanetz. New York: Ballantine Books, 1972. pg. 65.

system like Charlie Chan. Yet, in an effort to promote a positive perception of Asians within society, Chin and Chan, believe that racist love has left Asian men “completely devoid of manhood.”⁶

“Racist Love”, written nearly thirty years ago amidst the aftermath of the Civil Rights movement and the call for Ethnic Studies programs at college campuses across the nation in the late ‘60s and throughout the 1970’s, has become a staple within the curriculum of Asian American studies, and many have attempted to expand upon the original thesis of the article.⁷ It has become a starting point by which Asian Americans within academia have begun a reclamation of Asian American history. Elaine Kim’s Asian American Literature furthers the discussion of the portrayals of Asians and Asian Americans in regards to their “place” in Anglo-American literature. She successfully shows that within secular literature a polarity exists when Asian/ Asian American characters are weaved into a storyline. At one end lays the “bad” portrayal, the heathen/ barbarian, akin to Fu Manchu. At the other end lies a Hop- Sing like character, kowtowing to his white “master”, a servant/ friend to all. For Kim, Charlie Chan falls into the latter description, for she refers to him as “a non-threatening, non-competitive, asexual ally of the white man, usually contrasted with a parade of Asians in secondary roles as cowardly servants and vicious gangsters.”⁸ Further “reading” of the 46 existing Charlie Chan films reveals,

⁶ Ibid, pg. 68.

⁷ For a more in-depth look at Asian American masculinity, or lack thereof, see David L. Eng’s Racial Castration,

⁸ Kim, Elaine. Asian American Literature. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982. Pg. 18.

however, that Kim's last description of Chan may be limited to less than five of the films in the series.

In the introduction to Charlie Chan is Dead 2, writer Jessica Hagedorn explains the title of the sequel anthology comes from "the yellow-face movie detective Charlie Chan, a character created in 1925 by a white man named Earl Derr Biggers."⁹ She further contends that "Charlie Chan was always played by white actors made up to look 'chinky'- hair slicked back, taped eyelids, long wispy mustaches."¹⁰ True, the lead actors in the more prolific Chan films were indeed white actors playing the role of Charlie Chan and this fact continues to disturb Asian Americans today, even though the last white actor to play Chan did so in 1981's Charlie Chan and the Curse of the Dragon Queen. Placing Charlie Chan into a larger, more secular context, the character enjoys the distinction of continually being popular with various, multi-ethnic audiences around the world. The fact that Charlie Chan's fan base continues to grow today and that more Chan projects are in the works, leads one to believe that Charlie Chan is indeed very much alive.

First and foremost, the issue with Charlie Chan has been that "the ugly visual fakery of a white man in 'Oriental' makeup trained audiences to accept the idea that white men should play Asians, if the role was big and the character was sympathetic."¹¹ Secondly, but more importantly, the argument has been that

⁹ Hagedorn, Jessica, Ed. Charlie Chan is Dead 2: At Home in the World. New York: Penguin Books, 2004. pg. Xxvii.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Paik, Irvin. "That Oriental Feeling." Roots: An Asian American Reader. Ed. Amy Tachiki, Eddie Wong, Franklin Odo with Buck Wong. Los Angeles: The Regents of the University of California, 1971. Pg. 32.

Charlie Chan has created a stereotypical image of Asian American men, one that reveals a “cultural stoicism that promotes a submissive male identity that is content in spite of systemic racial discriminations.”¹² Historically the character of Charlie Chan as “unacceptable model” may stem from the early beginnings of the Chinese in America. Originally, the first Chinese immigrants were male and considered themselves to be sojourners. With the sole mission of earning money working on American railroad construction, these men planned to return home as rich men once their work was completed. The contribution of the Chinese to the building of the transcontinental railroads lies in the fact that these men risked their lives to finish the project ahead of schedule. Upon the completion of the railroads, these men did not have the means to return home to China for although they may have worked hard, it became all too common that the lure of wages and gold were a clever ruse; their hard work and sacrifice literally being ignored by low wages and no bonuses or benefits. As a result, a number of these laborers found themselves taking menial jobs on the West Coast, not to return home but to survive. Already prejudiced by the tales brought back by white travelers to China in the late 18th century leading up to this Chinese immigration to the United States in the mid 1900’s, the Chinese stuck on the West Coast were believed to be “backward people who were cruel, dishonest, immoral, and superstitious.”¹³ The fact that many of these backward people were

¹² Chan, Jachinson. Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee. New York: Routledge, 2001. Pg. 53.

¹³ Olson, James S. The Ethnic Dimension in American History. St. James: Brandywine Press, 1999. Pgs. 74-75.

now commonplace as cooks, laundrymen, and unskilled laborers¹⁴ led to the ignorant belief that the Chinese were trying to “take over” the country and should not be trusted. This notion erupted into “yellow peril” campaigns and would take shape as the anti-Chinese movement would gain momentum in the 1860’s and 1870’s. The movement to prevent Chinese immigration would be successful in that the Chinese Exclusion Act would be passed in 1882 and with it came a “restrictive pattern to which our immigration laws adhered for almost a century.”¹⁵

Although Asian men have had the distinction of being both asexual and a threat to white womanhood¹⁶, it is the former that has prevailed, especially in Hollywood. New research and scholarship aims to confront the stereotypical portrayals of Asian and Asian American men with Charlie Chan being one of the first to be scrutinized. Charlie, in the eyes of many, is a eunuch, completely unsexed and “completely devoid of manhood.”¹⁷ Although he is a police officer and upholds the law in each and every Chan film and novel, his character plays into the asexual characteristics assigned to Asian males. Charlie’s film persona is safe, especially in reference to the women present in the storylines. Because of this quality, Charlie poses no “threat of engaging in miscegenational relationships.”¹⁸ What further complicates Charlie’s sexuality is the presence of multiple Chan offspring but not the actual portrayal of a Mrs. Charles Chan.

¹⁴ Marchetti, Gina. “They Worship Money and Prejudice.” Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness. Ed. and with an introduction by Daniel J. Bernardi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. Pg. 74.

¹⁵ Kitano, Harry. Race Relations. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1974. Pg. 199.

¹⁶ Espiritu, Yen Le. Asian American Women and Men. Lanham: Altamira Press, 1996. Pg. 90.

¹⁷ Chin, Frank and Jeffrey Paul Chan. “Racist Love”. Seeing through Shock. Ed. Richard Kostelanetz. New York: Ballantine Books, 1972. pg. 68.

¹⁸ Chan, Jachinson. Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee. New York: Routledge. Pg. 4.

Perhaps this is due to the fact that when a woman is present as a peripheral aspect to a character “her visual presence tends to work against the development of a storyline”¹⁹; in Charlie’s case it was enough that a Mrs. Chan existed as Charlie had a more important task: to solve the mystery at hand. The portrayal and inclusion of Chan’s children in the films is also a point of contention amongst Asian Americanists. These numbered sons and honorable daughters always played by Asian American actors, “provided the only glimmer of Asian American subjectivity in the movies, but the films’ condescending attitude toward the young Chans and their use of American slang revealed the limits of Hollywood’s willingness to imagine the second generation as full-fledged Americans.”²⁰ Further, their presence is argued to be secondary and unnecessary as Chan’s “reproductive prowess is undermined by his non-sexual interaction with other characters.”²¹

In so many scholarly endeavors by Asian Americans, the message is clear: Charlie Chan is bad. He is supposedly bad because he speaks a hybridized version of English. He is supposedly bad because he is portly and polite. He is supposedly bad because a white actor has portrayed him in the majority of the movies and television shows and these portrayals continue to be aired on television today. He is supposedly bad because Earl Derr Biggers, a white author and perhaps inauthentic creator invented him. Yet what many of the articles and books that negatively discuss Charlie Chan fail to understand is the

¹⁹ Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Visual Culture: The Reader*. Ed. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall. London: Sage Publications, 1999. Pg. 384.

²⁰ Feng, Peter. *Screening Asian Americans*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002. Pg. 3.

²¹ Chan, Jachinson. Pg. 67.

true nature and background of this multi-layered character. Is he solely the product of an over-active Caucasian imagination? Were good intentions a driving force behind the creation of the character? Does a closer perusal of the life of Chang Apana, a real-life Detective with the Honolulu Police Department active during the time the Chan novels were published, uncover the fact that a “real” Charlie Chan could have existed? These questions are the impetus for this research and subsequent investigation.

By investigating the anomaly that is Charlie Chan, my goal is not change the way Asian Americans view the character nor to reinforce stereotypes. Primarily, the research presented thus forth will aim to explain the origins of a character that is looked upon so negatively. It should also be noted that Charlie Chan is not a uniform character; he is multifaceted and has taken on different incarnations throughout time. The Charlie Chan that is often ridiculed and disliked by Asian Americanists is not the same Chan that is revered and adored by mystery buffs. Once the origin of Chan is uncovered and understood, what is revealed may reveal a legacy beyond negative stereotypes. My perspective is not an apologist perspective but one of curiosity and perhaps discovery. I believe that people like me, who may consider himself or herself to be an Asian Americanist, owe it to our community of legitimate and armchair scholars to look unbiased at the character that raises fervor and sometimes protest when he manifests every once in awhile on cable television.

Regardless of the dearth in actual material that fully explains why Charlie Chan is bad for Asian America, enough information exists that contradicts the

accepted myth. Before Asian Americans can finally erase Charlie Chan from their history, they should first acquaint themselves with the Chan phenomena and decide individually what they can infer from books, movies, and articles as each perusal can and will reveal different layers of meaning. More importantly, this examination of Chan should take place outside of the context of which this negativity was created. Today, Charlie Chan is “bad”, yet when the beloved novels written by Earl Derr Biggers were made into films starring Warner Oland, the public poured into movie theaters around the world to see their beloved Detective Chan in action. In viewing the films, one should also not “confuse them with the ‘Yellow Peril’ films of the early 1930’s that demeaned Orientals.”²² They should not be so accepting of the words written by the canon of Asian Americanists, men like Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan, who claim that Charlie Chan is the perfect example of how white America has portrayed Asian American men in a strictly negative light. These men, vital to the birth of Asian American Studies, write from a political standpoint later and following the success of the Charlie Chan films. Their writings do not reflect the historical climate from which the Chan novels and films were born. Thus, it is implicit that one does not apply contemporary thought regarding Asian American characters in the media in their initial examination. And they should realize that Charlie Chan, an *Asian American* detective “is the most prolific detective to appear on film with the exception of Sherlock Holmes.”²³

²² Mitchell, Charles P. “A Guide to Charlie Chan Films.” Part One.

<http://www.classicimages.com/1997/september97/oland.html>. 9 Sep 2001. pg. 1.

²³ Berlin, Howard M. Charlie Chan’s Words of Wisdom. New York: Wildside Press, 2001. Pg. 11.

Charlie Chan, created by Earl Derr Biggers and possibly influenced by real-life Chang Apana, can be a fully developed, human character, capable of showing love and being loved without risking the loss of his masculinity if Asian Americans re-evaluate what they perceive as fact. Inevitably, the value of someone like Chang Apana to Asian America could be the creation of a role model who, although illiterate and unable to write, helped to keep peace and accord in unruly parts of Honolulu. In addition, the value of this research should help bring to light new resources and documents that discuss the Chan phenomena but have been overlooked or excluded from the discussion. Acceptance of Charlie Chan will not occur overnight; for the narrow-minded, acceptance might not ever occur. But Asian Americans owe it to themselves to take a good, solid look at Charlie Chan, a character *believed* to be the root of negative stereotyping before completely dismissing him.²⁴ Most Asian Americans, like Minerva Winterslip in the passage at the opening of this chapter, must not be so ready to accept what they encounter upon first impression or word-of-mouth. For too long, members of the collective group have agreed that Charlie Chan should die since he has been hung in effigy for too long. Yet, if he is “dead”, does he not deserve a proper burial?

²⁴Ma, Sheng-Mei. The Deathly Embrace. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.pg. xi.

CHAPTER 2

A STEREOTYPE IS BORN

The House Without a Key was the first of five novels that featured Charlie Chan as the main character. Published in 1925, Key reveals Earl Derr Biggers' appreciation of Hawai'i and his belief that a Chinese character could indeed be good. What made Biggers' writing so powerful was his ability to paint a picture of a scene in his reader's mind. The novel begins at the residence of Dan Winterslip on Waikiki beach, on Kalia Road²⁵. It is through the descriptions of sweeping *lanai*, *hau* and algaroba trees, and mention of Dan's days as a whaler²⁶ that infer that Dan was no ordinary island resident. Aside from being a part of the upper, *haole* crust, Dan Winterslip enjoys a life a wealth and privilege. Could it be this life of privilege that will eventually prove to be the motivation behind his murder shortly after he is introduced to the reader at the beginning of the story? As the first chapters progress, a number of characters and suspects emerge. Is the murderer Haku, the "dapper Japanese chauffeur"²⁷ who tends to hiss when he speaks? Or is it Amos Winterslip, Dan's estranged brother who, although *haole*, does not have nearly the wealth or privilege that Dan enjoyed? Was it Arlene Compton, a mysterious transplant to the islands, whose reputation of breaking men's hearts and using her feminine wiles to gain expensive gifts is known to all?

As the idyllic island picture unfolds around a bustling crime scene, more characters are introduced. There's Dan's cousin and houseguest, Minerva

²⁵ Biggers, Earl Derr. The House Without a Key. Pg. 7.

²⁶ Biggers, Earl Derr. The House Without a Key, pgs. 5 through 9.

²⁷ Biggers, Earl Derr. TheHouse Without a Key, pg. 14.

Winterslip, on an extended vacation from her proper, civilized life in Boston. Coming to fetch the wayward Minerva is her nephew, John Quincy Winterslip, ivy-league educated and following in the tightly-wound ways of his Puritanical New England ancestors. There's also Dan's only daughter, Barbara, whose hopes of a fun summer vacation at home from college are dashed when she learns of father's death. More characters, mostly all white, are introduced as the chapters progress, some seemingly more guilty than others. By the time Charlie Chan appears in chapter seven, the reader has a cadre of characters to place or remove suspicion on. When Charlie does enter, it is important to point out that his physical appearance is described through the prejudiced eye of Minerva Winterslip. Charlie, via Minerva, is observed as a "grotesque figure"²⁸ with a "high, sing-song voice"²⁹. Although John Quincy initially shares the same negative first impression of Charlie as his aunt, he realizes that Chan is a much needed ally in solving his Uncle's murder. John Quincy also recognizes that what makes Charlie even more invaluable is that he is a *kamaaina*, having lived in Hawai'i for over twenty five years.³⁰ In a sense, Charlie is able to maneuver throughout the local community because he is a part of it and in order to find the murderer. Although he is a police officer, he is able to access parts of the community that John Quincy can not simply due to his physical appearance and cultural background. As a result of prolonged interaction with Charlie, John Quincy as the book progresses sheds his initial biases and eventually will defend Charlie to Minerva, an aunt he has been raised to respect, admire and obey. In

²⁸ Biggers, Earl Derr. The House Without a Key. Pg. 40.

²⁹ Biggers, Earl Derr. The House Without a Key. Pg. 41.

³⁰ Biggers, Earl Derr. The House Without a Key. Pg. 49.

fact, this attitude shift continues as the reader and John Quincy together learn more about Charlie.

What is notable about the novel is the fact that Charlie is not the only Chinese nor Asian/Pacific Islander character in the novel. Biggers in creating a realistic example of Hawai'i introduces servants, working people, and proprietors that are non-white. A scene describing a simple Honolulu streetcar's stops at intervals to "take aboard immigrants, Japanese, Chinese, Hawaiians, Portuguese, Philipinos, Koreans, all colors and all creeds"³¹ truly reflected the diversity of Hawai'i during this time. These characters, while new and exciting to people living in the Continental United States and elsewhere, were indicative of the type of people that lived in Hawai'i. Each character of color is different from the next, characterized not by their ethnicity but by individual character quirks. Charlie's cousin, Willie Chan, although having a small part in the novel may have served as the inspiration for the portrayal of Charlie's children in the motion pictures, television shows, and cartoons that followed the novels. Willie, a baseball enthusiast is somewhat akin to the "assimilated Asian" in that Willie has been able to "coat switch", retaining both his Chinese and American identities. Using expressions like "Hot Dog!"³² one minute and reverting to his native Chinese in another, Willie is able to successfully navigate through two distinctly different worlds without a problem. It is almost as if Biggers has inserted him into the story to show to his mainstream audience that Chinese are a diverse group and, more importantly, like everyone else.

³¹ Biggers, Earl Derr. The House Without a Key. Pg. 57.

³² Biggers, Earl Derr. The House Without a Key. Pg. 87.

By the time the fourth installment in Biggers' Charlie Chan series, The Black Camel, was released Charlie is now "Inspector Chan", promoted as a result of his success in his cases. At the start of the novel, Shelah Fane, a famous movie star, has arrived in Hawaii to shoot a few scenes for her latest picture. En route from Tahiti, Fane has met a dashing, rich globetrotter aboard her steamer ship. This gentleman has swept her off her feet and, after only after a week's acquaintance, has proposed to the actress. Something in Shelah's dark past, however, prevents her from accepting the proposal without first consulting her fortune-teller, Tarneverro the Great. After a clandestine meeting with the seer, Shelah decides she cannot marry her smitten suitor and resolves to tell him at a small dinner party she has planned at her rented beachfront home in Waikiki. A mystery through and through, the plot thickens when Shelah is found murdered in a beach pavilion leaving all the dinner guests to ponder exactly what lurked in Shelah's past and if that past proved to be her undoing. Uncovering Shelah's secret may lead to her murder and no one except for the honorable Charlie Chan can find Fane's murderer.

Chan arrives at Shelah's home ready to uncover the "essential" clue in order to solve the case. However, someone at the Fane residence does not want Chan to uncover the murderer and inflicts bodily harm on Chan. While all the suspects are gathered in the living room, the lights suddenly go out and Chan, clue in hand, is struck over the head and bowled down, losing not only the clue but also his pride. Chan is anything but forgiving over the assault. In contrast to the idea posited by Jun Xing that the "Charlie Chan films have

developed the narrative tradition of depicting Asian males as stealthy and non-assertive, devoid of all the traditional masculine qualities associated with Anglo-American males”³³, Chan, not only vows revenge but retribution to the person who has harmed him: “the person who struck that blow will pay.”³⁴ Further, In a later scene, an interview between Chan and Fane’s proper English butler, Jessop, results in Chan once again asserting himself in a way that is a declaration of both ethnic pride and manhood. While complaining about Fane’s Chinese cook, Ah Kno-Ching, Jessop deliberately insults the Chinese race. Chan, in a tone that chides but is laced with an underlying threat of reprisal if challenged, informs Jessop that the Chinese at a time when “gentlemen in Great Britain were still beating one another over head with spiked clubs”³⁵ were busy perfecting the art of typeface printing, i.e. actively producing tangible culture that would outlast the results of war. A few pages later, Fane’s jilted fiancé demands that a white Inspector be put on the case, one without a fondness for “Chinese penchant puzzles.” Already incensed over the attack to his person as well as having to defend his race, Chan spouts out an aphorism disguised as yet another threat. He asserts, “The man who is about to cross a stream should not revile the crocodile’s mother.”³⁶ At the end of both novels, Charlie will eventually solve the mystery and arrest the murderer. In essence, Biggers’ gives no other character but Chan the power to end the confusion in the novels.

³³ Xing, Jun. Asian America Through the Lens. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1998. Pg. 61.

³⁴ Biggers, Earl Derr. The Black Camel. New York: Avenel Books, 1981. pg. 466.

³⁵ Biggers, Earl Derr. Pg. 474.

³⁶ Biggers, Earl Derr. Pg. 483.

Much speculation has surrounded Biggers' inspiration for Chinese character. In 1919, Biggers visited Hawai'i for an extended vacation. It was during this visit that, as many experts bring attention to, Biggers was introduced to the workings of the Honolulu Police Department and perhaps, Chang Apana (who will be discussed at length in the following chapter), via the daily newspapers. It has been said that Biggers may have been drawn to an article that appeared on the front page of The Star Bulletin in July 1919 since its printing coincided with his Hawaiian vacation. Apana, while only mentioned once, is the only Police officer of "color" mentioned in the case of a drowned woman off of Waikiki beach.³⁷ Biggers, already seduced by the beauty of the Hawaiian Islands was equally intrigued by the idea of an Asian police officer "that a character for a book began to form in his mind."³⁸ Becoming an avid reader of Hawai'i's newspapers upon his return home to New York in 1920, Biggers used the stories he read in Hawaiian newspapers as inspiration in his novels. Looking at archives and back issues of The Star Bulletin today, it was no secret that the Honolulu Police Department found itself under public scrutiny. Beginning in the spring of 1923, The Honolulu Police Department's then Chief of Police, Arthur McDuffie, was faced with graft charges. Accused of accepting bribes, McDuffie was later cleared by a Civil Service Commission, much to the protests of local residents and politicians³⁹. As a result, several of Honolulu's prominent citizens drafted letters to Hawai'i's legal administrators and law enforcement officials to make

³⁷ "Popular Girl Believed to Have Drowned." Star Bulletin. 3 Jul 1919. pg. 1.

³⁸ Schmidt, Kurt. "Earl Derr Biggers." <http://www.charliechan.net/biggers.html>. 9 Sep 2001. pg. 1.

³⁹ "M'Duffie Given Clean Slate by Commission Over Trask's Protest." Honolulu Advertiser. 5 June 1923:1.

“pointed inquiries regarding certain phases of lawlessness in Honolulu.”⁴⁰

Corruption did not end with McDuffie’s predecessor and the failure of the police department in several of Hawai‘i’s more notable criminal cases⁴¹ (namely the Miles Fukunaga murder/kidnapping case as well as the Massie Affair), the call of the local community for legality would later result in a Federal Investigation. The findings of that investigation resulted in a re-structuring within the Honolulu Police Department. These changes in the local police force, while faint, are subplots in the Chan novels. Revealing that Biggers’, regardless of the success and popularity of the Chan character, stayed true to the place that inspired him by including real happenings in his stories.

Regardless of the dearth in actual material that fully explains why Charlie Chan is bad for Asian America beyond his physical characteristics, one can surmise that a brief glance at Biggers’ text challenges accepted myth. Biggers helped to create an authentic image of Hawai‘i, one that was home to a diverse population of different races living in harmony. Charlie, as part of this idyllic paradise, is not a submissive or subservient male; he holds a position of respect and power within in his community using his mind he always retains the upper-hand, especially over the white and prejudiced characters he comes across. Keeping these things in mind, a new “reading” of the films is in order, one that

⁴⁰ “Police Chief of Oakland May Study Local Evils.” Honolulu Advertiser. 5 June 1923: 1.

⁴¹ In 1928, a young Japanese American man named Miles Fukunaga kidnapped and eventually murdered a young *haole* boy, Gill Jamieson, in a kidnapping and ransom plot that went wrong. Fukunaga was eventually convicted of the charges against him and received the death penalty. Only a few years later, the Massie Affair, also brought attention to the Honolulu Police Department and the legal system in Hawai‘i. In contrast to the result of the Fukunaga trial, Grace Fortescue and her son-in-law, Thomas Massie, were acquitted of murdering a Hawaiian man who stood accused of a rape charge. That charge was brought forth by Thalia Massie, daughter of Fortesque and wife of Massie, who believed she had been the victim of sexual and physical violence inflicted by a group of local, non-white young men.

may surprise and refute the arguments against Charlie Chan and Earl Derr Biggers.

CHAPTER 3

A "YELLOWFACE" TRADITION?

During the summer of 2003, the Fox Movie Channel had plans to air a Charlie Chan movie marathon. The idea delighted mystery buffs but enraged Asian American watchdog groups like the National Asian American Telecommunications Association or NAATA and the Organization of Chinese Americans or OCA. Groups like NAATA and OCA claimed Chan was "a hoary stereotype that has dogged Asian Americans for decades."⁴² In comparison, those who have enjoyed and appreciated Chan films argued that those in protest were not entirely familiar with the films.

In a press release dated July 2, 2003, the OCA stated that Charlie Chan remains a "a painful reminder of Hollywood's racist refusal to hire minorities to play roles that were designated for them and a further reminder of the miscegenation laws that prevented interracial interaction even on screen."⁴³ Although Hollywood no longer casts white actors to play Asian roles, the OCA still felt that airing a marathon of Chan films was "completely inappropriate."⁴⁴

After receiving both positive and negative feedback, the channel issued the following statement:

"Fox Movie Channel scheduled these films in a showcase intended to illustrate the positive aspects of these movies, such as the complex

⁴² Morano, Marc. "Fox Movie Channel Bans Charlie Chan Movies". <http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewCulture.asp?Page=%5CCulture%5Carchive%5C200307%5CCUL20030701d.html>. 1 July 2003.

⁴³ Organization of Chinese Americans "OCA APPLAUDS FOX FOR PULLING CHARLIE CHAN FILMS FROM SUMMER LONG BROADCAST." 2 July 2003.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

storylines/characters and Charlie Chan's great intellect. Additionally, numerous subscribers to Fox Movie Channel, as well as film historians, have long requested that Fox Movie Channel broadcast these films,.....In the hope that [the cancellation] will evoke discussion about the progress made in our modern, multicultural society, we invite you to please click CONTACT US to send us your thoughts on the matter."⁴⁵

The debate over whether or not Fox would air its marathon saw many, especially those who identified as Asian American, avidly glued to their e-mail inboxes, internet newsgroups and popular message boards. The situation was also summarized on the pages of the Los Angeles Times. Starting out as an informative piece, the article that appeared would incite public opinion and commentary that would eventually be printed in the newspaper's editorial pages. In addition, Karen Narasaki, Executive Director of Asian American Justice Center, formerly known as the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC), appeared on the popular, nationally televised news show, "Hardball" passionately debating that the issue. As a whole, while Asian Americans had hoped to forget Detective Chan, the controversy was indeed stirring up new interest in the character, both good and bad.

The Charlie Chan franchise, following the death of Earl Derr Biggers, has re-surfaced in a number of different interpretations and forms and continues to do so today. Capitalizing on the popularity of the novels, Chan stories were dramatized into radio programs and in newspaper comic strips. Yet, the images used as examples by the Asian American community to support the notion that Charlie Chan is bad, are usually those of Charlie Chan as depicted on celluloid.

⁴⁵ Morano, Marc. "Fox Movie Channel Bans Charlie Chan Movies". <http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewCulture.asp?Page=%5CCulture%5Carchive%5C200307%5CCUL20030701d.html>. 1 July 2003.

One must recognize, however, that in an analysis of the films, the characterization of Charlie Chan on film is essentially the same characterization depicted in the books. Although the method by which the character is illustrated, i.e. books versus films, is different, the fundamental qualities of Chan are the same in each and can be arguable applied to both analyses. Over 46 films were made with between 1926 and 1949. The majority of them starred white actors in the lead role, some in "yellowface". Yellowface was a common practice in Hollywood from the 1920s through the 1960s. Simply, yellowface was "Caucasians yellowing their skin with makeup and tightly taping their eyelids to appear Asian."⁴⁶ The film version of Camel was the first Chan "talkie" and was released in 1931. What is interesting to note, however, is the fact that numerous sources support the fact that two Asian actors, George Kuwa and Kamiyama Sojin⁴⁷, played Chan in silent versions of "House without a Key" and "The Chinese Parrot" both Biggers novels before being adapted for the silver screen. Unfortunately, these two films are not currently available to the general public and are considered "lost". Also of import, Warner Oland, who would play Chan in sixteen films until his death, did not require "yellow-face" make-up. Swedish in racial extraction, Oland owed his Asian features to "a previous Mongol presence in Sweden."⁴⁸ Ironically, Oland would spend a great amount of his career playing non-white characters convincingly due to his features. In fact he "frequently

⁴⁶ Winfrey, Yayoi Lena. "Yellowface: Asians on White Screens- Is Charlie Chan Really Dead". http://www.imdiversity.com/Villages/Asian/arts_culture_media/archives/winfrey_yellowface_asians_hollywood.asp. 1 April 2007.

⁴⁷ <http://www.geocities.com/chanfilms/>. 20 Sep 2001.

⁴⁸ Berlin, Howard M. Charlie Chan's Words of Wisdom. New York: Wildside Press, 2001. Pg. 13.

played Oriental characters and had played Chan without make-up, only a goatee on his chin."⁴⁹



Figure 1. Warner Oland as Fu Manchu⁵⁰



Figure 2. Warner Oland as Charlie Chan⁵¹

After Oland's death in 1938, Charlie Chan would be played by Sidney Toler. Following Toler's death in 1947, Roland Winters would take over the role through 1949.

⁴⁹ Mitchell, Charles P. "A Guide to Charlie Chan Films." Part One. <http://www.classicimages.com/1997/september97/oland.html>. 9 Sep 2001. pg. 2.

⁵⁰ www.njedge.net/~knapp/irony.htm. 20 December 2006.

⁵¹ <http://charliechanfamily.tripod.com/id85.html>. 20 December 2006.



Figure 3. Sidney Toler in a publicity photo⁵²



Figure 4. Sidney Toler as Charlie Chan⁵³

⁵² charliechangallery.tripod.com/id28.html. 20 December 2006.

⁵³ charliechanfamily.tripod.com/id10.html. 20 December 2006.



Figure 5. Roland Winters⁵⁴



Figure 6. Roland Winters as Chan in "The Chinese Ring"⁵⁵

⁵⁴ www.charliechan.net/gallery/winters.html. 20 December 2006.

⁵⁵ charliechangallery.tripod.com/id48.html. 20 December 2006.

In looking at the pictures of all three actors, it becomes clear that by the time Winters assumed the role of Chan, makeup was required to make him look more “authentic”, possibly because the actors who preceded him had a more natural look to portray Chan. The last feature film in the series would be *The Sky Dragon* in 1949. A television show with Chan portrayed by J. Carrol Naish would surface in 1957 but would be quickly cancelled in 1958. Equally short-lived would be “The Amazing Chan and the Chan Clan” cartoon series that would finally cast Asian American actors in “lead” roles in the 1970s. According to www.imdb.com, not only did Keye Luke, who many remember as Chan’s “Number One Son” in the films that starred Warner Oland, voice Inspector Chan the cast credits also include names that belong to Asian American actors.⁵⁶

While it is the images of Chan as portrayed by Warner Oland, Sidney Toler and Roland Winters that are common in most people’s minds, it is probably the portrayal of Chan by Peter Ustinov in “The Curse of the Dragon Queen” that could be the best example of how Hollywood has manipulated Asian and Asian Americans on screen and how these portrayals can be detrimental. Released in 1981, the film boasts a very impressive cast. Well-known actors like Roddy McDowell, Brian Keith and Angie Dickinson joined a relatively new actress named Michelle Pfeiffer. Stylistically, *Dragon* initially evokes the typical Chan formula- it is a murder mystery with comedic elements. As the film progresses, it becomes apparent that it is a farcical comedy first and foremost. The caricature of Charlie by Ustinov is combination of the depictions of Charlie in the early Chan films; Ustinov wears a white hat and suit, easily recognizable to many as Chan’s

⁵⁶ <http://imdb.com/title/tt0068037>. 20 December 2006.

regular uniform, as well as the “yellowface” makeup employed in the Winters films. He also appears to be about the same age as depicted in the Toler films as well. However, Chan’s once teenage and adolescent children have grown children of their own in Dragon. It is Chan’s grandson, Lee Chan Jr., who is at the center of the storyline. Set in San Francisco, Charlie has traveled from his home on Punchbowl Hill in Hawai’i to witness the marriage of his half Chinese, half Jewish grandson to Cordelia Farenington, a dense but beautiful socialite. Lee Jr. aspires to be a great Detective like his famous grandfather but seems to be his antithesis. Lee Jr. is bumbling, hurried, unsure and cautious to the point of being pitiful. In comparison, Charlie seems to speak only in aphorisms and never seems to be in a rush to do anything, patiently observing the events transpiring around him. The film opens in typical Chan fashion. Gathered in the living room of a Honolulu mansion, a group of suspects have been brought together. Anxiously they await Chan’s arrival knowing that they have been brought together to find out who has killed Bernard Lubowitz (who we later learn will be related posthumously to Charlie via the marriage of Lubowitz’s daughter and Chan’s son, Lee Chan, Sr.). As the title would suggest, the “Dragon Queen” is named the murderer and prior to being whisked away by the local police, she places a curse on Charlie Chan that she cries will span three generations. Decades later, The Dragon Queen is believed to be the culprit of a rash of murders that have coincided with Charlie Chan’s visit to San Francisco. As the story progresses, her presence in the same place that the murders occur seem to be proof enough to everyone- save Charlie- that the curse and the Dragon

Queen are responsible for the murders; it is only a matter of time before she is actually caught. Yet in any Charlie Chan case, or in any mystery for that matter, to automatically assume that the Dragon Queen is responsible would be a gross error in judgment.



Figure 7. Peter Ustinov as Charlie Chan⁵⁷



Figure 8. Peter Ustinov in everyday garb⁵⁸

⁵⁷

http://www.imdiversity.com/Villages/Asian/arts_culture_media/archives/winfrey_yellowface_asians_hollywood.asp. 20 December 2006.

The depiction of Charlie Chan present in people's minds is that of a white actor "playing" Chinese. Yet, if one were to look past the actors who have played Chan, with or sans facial enhancement via make-up, what emerges is a character that has many redeeming qualities. Although spoofed and reinterpreted over the years, a pattern develops as it deals with Charlie Chan beyond his depiction in a very visual culture. This pattern reveals Charlie as an obviously Asian character will always expose the "bad guy" in the end and always has the last word. He is the hero, regardless of who plays him or what he looks like. Surely there is some redeeming quality to Charlie that tests the narrative and beliefs of Asian Americanists, one that is in opposition of the accepted. A closer look at the lives of Chang Apana and Earl Derr Biggers may also facilitate a new perspective in viewing Charlie Chan.

⁵⁸ <http://www.strandmag.com/ustinov.htm>. 20 December 2006.

CHAPTER 4

CHANG APANA: THE REAL LIFE CHARLIE CHAN?

Much to the chagrin of scholarly Asian Americanists, the idea that Charlie Chan was based on a real-life Chinese American prevails in various communities. The folklore of Hawai'i supports that the "real" Charlie Chan was a detective with the Honolulu Police Department named Chang Apana. This mythology, over seventy-five years old, is still widely accepted today⁵⁹. An article dated April 25, 2007 was published in The Honolulu Advertiser entitled "Let the truth be told about the real-life Charlie Chan." In it, Hawai'i- born and based researcher Nanette Napoleon is interviewed. Its printing coincided with an upcoming event coordinated by the Hawaiian Historical Society that featured Napoleon as its keynote speaker. Much of the article focused on how Chang Apana's career with the Honolulu Police Department inspired writer, Earl Derr Biggers. The article later reveals that Napoleon's familiarity with Chang Apana came as a result of 20th Century Fox hiring the researcher to investigate the life of Apana for a short documentary entitled "The Real Charlie Chan" included in a box-set re-issue of several Chan films in 2006. Throughout her local research process, Napoleon learned that that Earl Derr Biggers through Charlie Chan "wanted to base his character on Chang Apana."⁶⁰ In her perusal of Hawaiian

⁵⁹ On April 26, 2007, The Hawaii Historical sponsored a presentation entitled "Chang Apana: the Real Life Charlie Chan." Nanette Napoleon was the keynote speaker for the event. Also presenting were Officer Eddie Croom, historian for the Honolulu Police Department's museum, housed at HPD's Honolulu Headquarters and Steve Hendrick, a librarian for the Hawaii State Library system and film collector.

⁶⁰ Moreno, Loren. "Let the truth be told about the real-life Charlie Chan." The Honolulu Advertiser. 25 April 2007, pg. E3.

archives and old newspaper articles, Napoleon found that Biggers enjoyed reading back issues of Honolulu newspapers and possibly continued to do so as he wrote. She further contends that Biggers also included facets of Chang Apana's personal life in crafting his Chan novels. Speaking on the numerous offspring of Apana due to multiple marriages and the fact that this carried into the Chan books and films, Napoleon asserts that "Biggers must have liked that idea" and thus Charlie became father to various children that would appear during the length of a typical Chan mystery.

"The Real Charlie Chan" also features an impressive group of individuals who have some tie to Hawai'i, Chang Apana or Earl Derr Biggers. Honolulu Police Department Historian and Officer Eddie Croom along with Chang Apana's grandson, Karl Kagimoto, and great grand-daughter, Sheri Kagimoto, provide a character sketch of Apana, both on and off the job. Apana's career highlights, via Croom, are impressive and captivating. Apana to present holds the record for most arrests in one single bust and was the first undercover officer in Department history.⁶¹ With a simple crack of a whip, Apana was also well-known for clearing the streets of children shortly after curfew and helping to round up leprosy or Hanson's Disease sufferers. In each recollection, Chang Apana is described as a scrappy fighter who had no qualms in using violence to do his job. At home, he was a stern but loving family man who took great joy in being with his children. It is also Officer Croom who provides some rationale over why Chang Apana and Charlie Chan came to be thought of as the same person:

⁶¹ Cork, John dir. The Real Charlie Chan. With Nanette Napoleon, Eddie Croom, and Bob Krause. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, LLC. 2006.

“The first people to call him Charlie Chan were his fellow officers. His fellow officers gave him that nickname at first. He resisted initially but it is said that eventually he became quite comfortable even signing autographs and things like this when they called him ‘Charlie Chan’ so he was very pleased.”⁶²

Apana’s ease with being likened to Charlie along with the public’s conception that this was true seemed to amplify as the novels and movies increased in popularity. So much so that by the time of Chang Apana’s death due to diabetes, the “headlines read not Chang Apana but Charlie Chan dies.”⁶³

Scholarship and interest in Chang Apana is not a new phenomenon. In 1990, Gilbert Martines, then a graduate student at UH, dedicated his Master’s thesis to writing the unofficial biography of Chang Apana. Martines’ thesis argues that Apana and Chan were one in the same and, by far, his thesis is the most scholarly research that has been undertaken in illuminating the life of Chang Apana. Yet, for reasons unknown, Martines’ thesis, while available to library cardholders in the UH system, has been relatively obscure, even to the local community in Hawai’i. Upon further examination, it is clear that much of Martines’ information was collected in the early 1980’s. Although his research is more than twenty years old, his interviews with Chang Apana’s then- elderly relatives are a vital and excellent resource in the investigation of the relationship between Chang and Chan.

Briefly, Chang Apana, born Ah Ping Chang, was born on December 26, 1864 in Waipio on Oahu. Like many immigrants and their children who entered into the United States and Hawai’i, Apana’s name, either by immigration officials

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

!

or by those around him, was corrupted. "Ah Ping" took on the influence of the Hawaiian language and became "Apana". Following the Asian tradition of stating one's surname first, given name second, Ah Ping Chang became more widely known as Chang Apana. Apana returned to his native China as a toddler but would resettle in Hawai'i permanently around the age of 7. At the age of 34, Apana joined the Honolulu Police Department. While he is best known for carrying a bullwhip instead of a gun, Apana's law enforcement career began with more gentle duties as a humane officer for the Oahu's Humane society, then operating under the jurisdiction of the local police department.⁶⁴ At the time of his retirement, Apana stated in a newspaper article that he disliked the idea of going to school, and thus could not read nor write English or Chinese.⁶⁵ This fact did not impede his ability to rise to the rank of Detective during his years on the force. Apana's regional notoriety was based on his work in Honolulu's Chinatown. Local newspapers boasted of Apana's exploits as he hunted down opium dealers and illegal gamblers. An interview that Gilbert Martines conducted with Apana's cousin, Walter Ching, provides more insight into the character of Chang Apana. According to Ching, Apana was well known to all as a fair man and a strong believer in justice, so much so that he would have arrested his own brother if his brother had broken the law.⁶⁶ While not a man of many words, Apana possessed a temper and was not afraid of conflict, both on the job and off.

⁶⁴"The 'Real Life' Charlie Chan." The Honolulu Star-Bulletin: Hawaiian Life Weekend Magazine. 19 March 1955: <http://charliechanfamily.tripod.com/id99.html>.

⁶⁵ Tong, Ah Huna. "Chang Apana Had Long and Envidable Record On Force." Honolulu Advertiser. 22 May 1932: pg.1.

⁶⁶ Martines, Gilbert. Modern History of Hawaii. Thesis. University of Hawaii, 1990. pg. 28.

At the age of sixty-eight and after serving thirty four years on the police force, Apana halfheartedly retired from the Honolulu Police Department. This retirement was more than likely due to radical changes that took place within the department around the same time. As mentioned previously, the Honolulu Police Department was subject to many changes as a result of bad decision making and dishonest behavior by a few members of its management. Although his personnel records indicate a promotion to Detective, 2nd grade, in 1925, it is understood that Apana's promotion, as well as another in 1928 were a direct result of the corruption within HPD. However, as a means to regain the public's support, the need for officers who could read and write as well as display fluency in the English language overshadowed the services that only Chang Apana could provide. His contributions as a law enforcement officer, however, had not gone unnoticed by Hawaii's population at the time and Apana was in fact rewarded for it. Three local businessmen who belonged to the Dillingham, Atkinson, and Midkiff families- influential clans that were wealthy and powerful in Hawai'i at the time- "made up the monetary difference between Apana's active and retired duty pay"⁶⁷ as a small token of their appreciation for Apana's diligent crime fighting. The local newspapers also took notice of Apana's retirement. One such article that appeared in The Honolulu Advertiser was a lengthy- over two, information packed columns- homage to Apana. It detailed Apana's exploits on the police force while also providing personal information. What is also interesting is the allusion to a relationship in these articles between Apana and Earl Derr Biggers.

⁶⁷ Martines, Gilbert. Pg. 42.

Perhaps inspired by published reports of Apana's heroic deeds in the archived newspapers and writing to provide a contrast "to the racist Yellow Peril stories that were so popular of that era"⁶⁸, Biggers sought to offer Americans a more realistic portrayal of the Chinese people. In an article from Harvard Magazine Online, Biggers' alma mater, Barbara Gregorich quotes Biggers as stating "I had seen movies depicting and read stories about Chinatown and wicked Chinese villains, and it struck me that a Chinese hero, trustworthy, benevolent, and philosophical, would come nearer to presenting a correct portrayal of the race."⁶⁹ Although he never outwardly admitted that Chang Apana was indeed Charlie Chan, an article appearing in the Honolulu Star Bulletin several years after Biggers' death claims that the author admitted to omitting the "g" from "Chang" to come up with his character's last name, knowing that "the 'original' (might) be annoyed at having his name used."⁷⁰ Supporting the belief that Chang Apana and Charlie Chan were influenced by one another further is an article that appeared in The Honolulu Advertiser on September 11, 1932.

Written by "Inspector Charlie Chan", "The True Story of Charlie Chan As Confessed by His Creator, Earl Derr Biggers" is, upon first perusal, an entertaining addition to the entertainment section of the newspaper. It is stylistically a confessional and uses humor to accentuate the "truth". Contrary to popular belief, Charlie Chan in this article does not speak or write in a singsong, pidgin dialect of English. While there are a few times when Charlie fails to

⁶⁸ Wiseman, Sharon. "A Brief Biography of Earl Derr Biggers."

<http://members.aol.com/meow103476/biobiggers.html>. 9 Sep 2001. pg. 3.

⁶⁹ Gregorich, Barbara. "Earl Derr Biggers: Brief life of a popular author; 1884-1933."

<http://www.harvardmagazine.com/issues/ma00/vita.html>. 9 Sep 2001. pg.1.

⁷⁰ "Creator of Charlie Chan." Star Bulletin. 31 Oct 1938: 1.

conjugate his verbs properly and unintentionally omits certain words from his sentences, he comes across as extremely intelligent. Using words like “epistle”, “peruse”, and “accouchement”. The author of this byline free article not only uses Chan as a narrative device but does so to also legitimize his story. He, possibly Biggers speaking as Chan, tells of how the idea of Chan was born of a newspaper article about Chang Apana, who had, at the time, arrested an individual with an addiction to opium.⁷¹ While not outwardly an effort to portray the Chinese race in a positive light, a short exchange between interviewer and Chan reveals a respect and admiration for the Chinese race as well as positive characteristics that have become synonymous with the Chan character:

Boss glares at me, plenty gloomy. “Good Lord!” he cries, “am I saddled with you for remainder of my existence?”

“You could be saddled with worse,” I bristle.

“But how can I write of Chinese?” he demanded. “I know nothing of same. I could not distinguish Chinese man from Wall Street broker.”

“Chinese would be the one who you the honest securities,” I elucidate.

Soon after this exchange, Charlie reveals that “Chang Apana of Honolulu is original of me”, in essence the inspiration for and the real life equivalent of the fictional Chan.

There is one blaringly obvious similarity between Chang Apana and Charlie Chan. It is the attention that both men, real and imagined, paid to their families. In reality, Chang Apana had ten children, one less than Chan in The House Without a Key and The Black Camel. Returning from the Fane residence in The Black Camel, Charlie encounters three of his children in the dining room of his “Punchbowl Hill” home. Like the Japanese American *nisei*, who lived with

⁷¹ “The True Story of Charlie Chan as Confessed by His Creator, Earl Derr Biggers.” Honolulu Advertiser. 11 September 1932.

their immigrant parents and struggled to form an identity within an American construct, Chan's children, when featured, are the perfect example of a conflicted 2nd generation of Asian Americans. Chan's children and, more than likely, Apana's children no doubt found themselves caught between the values and wishes of their parents and ancestors and in assimilating to the society around them.

To further add to the speculation that Apana served as the inspiration for Chan are subtle similarities in Biggers' novels and later on celluloid. In Camel Chan's oldest daughter is named Rose. Chang Apana and his third wife did indeed have a daughter named Rose. In the novel, Rose is "planning to go to a university on the mainland in the autumn."⁷² In real life, Apana and his daughter Rose were extremely close. Oftentimes, Rose and her father would sit on the family porch and talk. As she neared college age, he expressed his desire that, someday, she would attend college.⁷³ Chan's wife, too, in the novels plays an important albeit small role. While Chan commands the respect of the people around him, it is clear that in his household, there is a sense of equality between Chan and his wife regarding family functioning. In real life, Apana relied on his wife to drive the family car. This included Mrs. Apana driving her husband to and from work since he never learned to drive. In the novel, Mrs. Chan is not a chauffeur but she is a reminder of Charlie's family life. Like her children, Mrs. Chan is curious about who has murdered the famous movie star. While she considered herself a fan of the star and wants to see an immediate end to the

⁷² Biggers, Earl Derr. Pg. 512.

⁷³ Martines, Gilbert. Pg. 43.

case, she is also concerned about her husband's welfare. She orders him to catch the murderer, a task that Chan knows extends beyond his occupational duties; Chan's wife wants her husband to "save face", reminding him of his cultural background. In essence, she reminds Charlie to remain essentially Chinese.

A simple internet search employing google.com and typing in Chang Apana's name pulls up 18,900 links to articles. The vast majority of these articles describe Apana as the "officially-acknowledged inspiration"⁷⁴ for the Charlie Chan character. What is interesting to note is that none of the articles cite a primary resource supporting the belief. None have direct quotes from Earl Derr Biggers supporting the fact and none really go beyond the usual biographical information about Biggers' life. A closer look at Biggers' life and personal letters reveal a different story about Charlie Chan; A story that may still support the fact that Charlie was meant to be a positive Asian character but not directly inspired by the life and exploits of Chang Apana.

⁷⁴"Chang Apana." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. 19 April 2007.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chang_Apana.>

CHAPTER 5

EARL DERR BIGGERS: WHITE OPPRESSOR, SYMPATHIZER, OR INNOVATOR?

On page five of the morning edition of the *Honolulu Advertiser* published January 10, 1945, a small story ran that may be the foundation of the common belief that has continued to permeate in society: the belief that Chang Apana was the inspiration for Inspector Charlie Chan. No more than three paragraphs long, the story focuses on Rose Chang Apana, Chang Apana's previously mentioned daughter. Ms. Apana, in the article, is adamant that her father and no one else was the "real" Charlie Chan. According to the author, Ms. Apana came "armed with a scrapbook, documented with pictures, letters, and clippings from local mainland newspaper and magazines"⁷⁵ So sure is Ms. Apana that she produces, from her scrapbook, an article from a mainland newspaper quoting Earl Derr Biggers to support her case. What is fascinating about the accepted relationship between Charlie Chan and Chang Apana is the lack of attention that has been paid to Earl Derr Biggers and his thought process in creating the character. While he is widely acknowledged as Charlie Chan's creator, he has been overshadowed by his creation and the man who is accepted as his inspiration. Who was Earl Derr Biggers? To Asian American scholars he is an example of white male oppression, an author who has created the stereotypes that they must change. To mystery buffs and aficionados of crime fiction, he is as sacred

⁷⁵ "Daughter Explains About 'Charlie Chan'". The Honolulu Advertiser. 10 January 1945.

and revered as Arthur Conan Doyle. To others, he is a forgotten author who introduced the world to an island chain in the Pacific that seemed to be the best place to commit a murder.

Earl Derr Biggers was born on August 26, 1884 in Warren, Ohio. He attended Harvard University and while a student, *Life Magazine* published one of his verses in 1904. Before graduating in 1907, Biggers sat on the staff of the university's *Advocate* and *Harvard Lampoon*. Naturally gifted in writing, he would later sell stories to magazines *American*, *McClure*, *Red Book* and *Ladies Home Journal* while a night reporter for a Cleveland newspaper. After graduation, Biggers was hired as a drama critic and the author of a humor column entitled "The Fact Is" at the *Boston Traveler*. In his column, Biggers displayed a sardonic sense of humor that would later manifest itself in personal letters and in characters like Charlie Chan. Being a newspaperman did not last long- in 1911 he was let go from his position. An interview published following the success of his earlier novels, Biggers later admitted that his dismissal was a result of his brutal honesty when it came to reviewing plays staged at local theatres.⁷⁶ Unemployed and newly engaged to his future wife, Eleanor, Biggers had to find a way to earn a living and earnestly began a career as a novelist to do so. It would not take long for Biggers to find success as an author.

Bobbs-Merrill Company, established prior to the Civil War and based in Indianapolis, Indiana would be Biggers' official print publisher until his death. The company's archives and records of its day-to-day operations are housed at the Lilly Library at the Indiana University- Bloomington. Accessible to the public,

⁷⁶ "The Fact Is." California Life. November 25, 1924.

the collection contains several folders in direct relation to Earl Derr Biggers. The most useful in regards to finding out more about the author are in the letters Biggers sent to D. Laurance Chambers, a vice president at Bobbs-Merrill whom Biggers was assigned to. The relationship between Biggers and Bobbs-Merrill, while shaky at first, began as one of mutual respect. In a letter written to Chambers in 1915, Biggers does not disguise his satisfaction with the company's successful handling and the excellent sales of Love Insurance which was published in 1914:

"I don't know that I have told you, but I was much pleased with the report on the sales of 'Love Insurance.' When the war broke I looked for very meager sales indeed, and the result was consequently a surprise. I think you did wonders, especially as I realize that the farce story is not in the highest public favor at present. I think I will try in a little more serious vein next time."⁷⁷

Inside the Lines would follow in 1915 and another in 1916, The Agony Column, was a three part serial story (later turned into a novel) that presumably enjoyed a large readership as it was originally printed in a popular magazine during the time, The Saturday Evening Post. One can glean from the letters he wrote to his contacts at Bobbs-Merrill Publishing Company, that Biggers was his own worst critic and, at one point, even tried to prevent The Agony Column from being published. While he was aware of and admitted to the popularity and demands by the public for more of his work, a letter written by Biggers to his publisher on July 26, 1916 reveals his worries and paranoia over the story not yet being printed, in his mind because it was not worthy of being published:

⁷⁷ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 26 March 1915.

}

“I take it you do not want to publish the story, or I should have heard from you to that effect. Indeed, I think you will be wise not to. It is very short, and I am afraid a publisher will make little of out it—though of course a miracle is always possible.”⁷⁸

Necessity and the responsibility to support his family would later overtake his analytical thoughts. Days later, Biggers puts his insecurity aside and asserts: “if it is possible for me to collect a five hundred advance on it from a man who proposes to put it out as a seventy-five cent proposition, it seems to me it is my place to collect the money and say nothing about the possibilities of success.”⁷⁹ He goes onto state that the money will do well as he is finishing a house in Pelham, New York. Further, he will relent in a later letter that aside from keeping his family financially solvent, The Agony Column as a serialized story “has made the biggest hit of anything I ever wrote, letters have come by the dozens, most of them saying it is my best effort so far, and in view of all this I feel that it might have a chance in book form.”⁸⁰ The Bobbs-Merrill collection of Biggers’ letters reveal that he was observant, sometimes overly meticulous and always opinionated. When requested by Bobbs-Merrill to add a subtitle to one of his novels, Biggers rather confidently remarks “that sort of thing went out of fashion with ‘Nellie and the Beautiful Cloak Model, or the Villain Still Pursues Her.”⁸¹ A few weeks later, Biggers considers the market potential of the book by stating “I hope all these who thirst for information really mean to buy the book, and are not

⁷⁸ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 26 July 1916.

⁷⁹ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 1 August 1916.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 August 1916.

just asking with one eye on the local Carnegie Library. At any rate, let's get the book on the stands at the earliest possible moment, before they forget the story in the joy of discovering some new and better tale."⁸²

Ironically, The Agony Column furnished Biggers with even more agony when it was finally published. Although he understood that the book would be short in length when printed, it was released as a gift book rather than a novel. In that format, it was not given the sort of publicity that a novel typically was. Equating the lack of publicity with extremely slow opening sales along with learning that Bobbs-Merrill had sold the rights to the book without his permission, Biggers unhappily wrote:

"Hereafter, when I sell a book, the only thing I propose to sell are the book rights, and not the second serial, the dramatic, the motion picture, the foreign serial and all the other entirely extraneous rights by claiming which you have in the past made a good thing of me without being forced to the dire extremity of selling any of my books."⁸³

A year later, Biggers once again found himself furious with Bobbs-Merrill when another book's rights, those for Inside the Lines, were also sold to a foreign market, namely Great Britain: "I believe you have sold something you did not possess, and you have certainly robbed me of three hundred pounds. This was the first time I have ever known you to do a thing of this sort without consulting me. You can hardly blame me for being extremely indignant."⁸⁴ Perhaps it was the fact that Biggers wanted to see his stories first be adapted into plays and

⁸² Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 19 September 1916.

⁸³ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 14 February 1916.

⁸⁴ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 6 November 1916.

eventually into movies that made him so sensitive when it came to the rights of his novels. After years of writing theatrical reviews, Biggers had naturally developed a love and respect of the theatre. His admiration and respect, and almost unworthiness, of the theatre surfaces in a letter dated March 26, 1915 to Mr. Hewitt Howland an editor at Bobbs-Merrill. Perhaps, too, Biggers knew that he was about to create a character that would bring him more fame and notoriety than he had previously enjoyed:

“As for my own work, your surmise is correct—I have done nothing in the novel or story line on account of the play. I am anxious to try another novel soon, but I want it to come to me—I don’t want it to be one of those things that the author had to go to. So far it hasn’t come. And when it does come I hope it will be, not a giddy farce thinly covering a play, but a fine, real, true story of American life, with plenty of humor and characters that will stand out and be beloved by the readers. Probably there won’t be a play in it—I hope not, for it will be a much better novel if the play possibilities aren’t in the back of my mind as I write.”⁸⁵

Much of the letters in the Bobbs Merrill archives written by Biggers are D. Laurance Chambers’ personal copies, sometimes accompanied by handwritten notes within the lines of the text (Biggers always used a typewriter and rarely made typographical mistakes). They attest to the close relationship that the two men developed over an almost twenty year period and through Biggers’ death. It is Biggers’ letters to Chambers that reveal some of his creative thought processes, especially when it came to the Chan novels and films. As the letters progress and become even more personal, Biggers emerges as a man who is proud while also modest and humble, short-tempered yet repentant in retrospect, a truly multi-layered artist who impacted mystery readers of his time with his

⁸⁵ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to Hewitt Howland. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 26 March 1915.

↓
↓

novels and short stories. For this endeavor, these letters support the claim that Biggers visited Hawai'i prior to the publishing of the Charlie Chan novels and helped to introduce Hawai'i to readers outside the territory and beyond.

After returning to the Continental United States following his extended vacation in Hawai'i that began in 1919, Biggers settled into his home ready and excited to start writing again. In a letter dated October 10, 1920, Biggers exclaims "I seem to have ideas again."⁸⁶ In November of the same year he continues his musing, even more keen on writing a novel that would be made popular as it would be "outside the regular mystery story clientele by the Hawaii appeal."⁸⁷ What stands out in the letters Biggers writes prior to the Chan character being introduced in his books is that Biggers is particularly drawn to Hawai'i as a setting. He does not particularly mention its residents or their exploits and there is no specific mention of people like Chang Apana whom he might have read about in the local newspapers. Rather, He, like many tourists of the day, saw the appeal in an unspoiled Hawai'i, far removed from the aftermath of World War I and the fragile state of world affairs at the time.

In 1924, Five years after his first visit to Honolulu, Biggers completed the original manuscript for the first Chan novel, The House Without a Key. He seemed to take great pleasure in the fact that others around him, especially his wife, enjoyed the novel due to his realistic characters and vivid setting. Biggers felt that he may have found success in Key and noted that unlike other mysteries

⁸⁶ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 October 1920.

⁸⁷ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 3 November 1920.

that went “blah” at the end, his latest endeavors' ending would “make ‘em sit up and take notice.”⁸⁸ Employing the same critical and opinionated approach evinced in his early letters, it could be said that much of the novel's success and the reception of Charlie Chan to the world was due to methods Biggers employed while he wrote. Authenticity was very important to Biggers so much so, he diligently studied the correct spelling and pronunciation for the Hawaiian words used in the novel. The ever-present self-doubt within Biggers, however, would resurface throughout the process of finalizing Key. In determining a title for the story, he was pessimistic but let marketing strategies and his observation of the American public influence his final decision, even going as far to ponder new areas to reach readers:

“I'm not so keen about “The House Without a Key” as I was at first blush.

In fact, I still have a hankering for ‘Moonlight at the Crossroads’. But the Key title is all set for the serial, probably in type, so I presume we must stick to it. It probably is a good enough title for a mystery story, but it will never in the world get any readers outside that little circle of mystery hounds—unless they can be captured by advertising which conveys some idea of background and other elements in the story. I should be only too happy to send you, when the time comes, a few attempts at writing advertising copy. You could use or discard as you pleased. Just let me know when you want them.”⁸⁹

Key, as the first Chan novel, gave Biggers a following and popularity much greater than he previously enjoyed with his other work. With this popularity also came feedback in the form of fan letters from the public who seemed to be thrilled with Charlie Chan. One fan wrote that Charlie was “the only really

⁸⁸ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 September 1924.

⁸⁹ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 December 1924.

authentic Chinese American I have ever come across. I have known many Chinese, some intimately. But I have never seen the Americanized Chinese in fiction.....Mr. Biggers knows Chinese.”⁹⁰ Chan was a character that would have a universal appeal, especially to the citizens of Hawai’i. It is documented that Matson Navigation Company, the company responsible for the transportation of visitors from the U.S. mainland to the islands, not only included the title in its libraries aboard its ships, it also gave away copies of the book as prizes for on-deck games.⁹¹ Probably the greatest honor bestowed on Biggers for using Hawai’i as a backdrop for his first Chan novel came from the very people he wrote about. Biggers, to Chambers, relays a message received from George T. Armitage, Executive Secretary of the Hawai’i Tourist Bureau (HTB) now known as the Hawai’i Tourism Authority, thanking Biggers for writing the book. Armitage felt that the book had been contributing to the boom in the tourist economy by encouraging visitors to vacation in the islands. To show their appreciation, the HTB commissioned a carved *koa* or acacia key, which was on its way to Biggers’ Pasadena home as he wrote. In response Biggers stated, “It isn’t often that one gets any kind words, particularly on the score of accuracy, from the people of a place pictured in fiction. In fact, I was all set for a bawling out from Honolulu.”⁹² Not only did Biggers help to introduce the world to Hawai’i,

⁹⁰ Ayres, C.E. Letter to Bobbs Merrill Publishing Company. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 28 May 1928.

⁹¹ Sellander, W.H. Letter to Earl Derr Biggers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 April 1925.

⁹² Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 25 May 1925.

he would also introduce the world to a Chinese character, one that was in opposition to the examples that prevailed of Chinese during the day.

The fact that Charlie would be something unique and affect the way people would view Chinese people was very much present in Biggers' mind. It was crucial for Biggers to create a positive and authentic character. So important was this fact that Biggers was especially concerned with the depiction of Charlie visually. Biggers understood that an artistically rendered or stylized image of Chan could impact the way a readers viewed the text. In turn, he was concerned with how an image of Chan that was not in line with his own vision would impact the way Asians in American and beyond would be seen, especially as Charlie began to reach a global audience being published around the world and in almost every European country⁹³. For this reason, Biggers strongly opposed including a picture of Chan for Key, its follow-up The Chinese Parrot, and the third Chan novel, Behind That Curtain. As the fourth Chan novel was set to be released, The Black Camel, Biggers could no longer block the inclusion of a picture for the novel for the public and his publishers almost demanded it. Under duress, he would remain highly opinionated and critical of the sample covers, going as far as stating that at one point Charlie "looked like a monkey."⁹⁴ Further, Biggers asserts in the same letter that a picture of Chan on the book cover was detrimental to the novel in that it would result in one of two problems. While he was adamantly against any image depicting Charlie as "sinister and

⁹³ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 25 April 1928.

⁹⁴ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 26 April 1929.

frightening” he also realized that the book would not sell as well, even if the image stuck “to the text and make him smiling and genial”.⁹⁵ After begrudgingly accepting the fact that Chan would be depicted on the cover of the books and still opposed to it, Biggers writes to Laurance in annoyance and pledges “to murder the next artist who draws Charlie Chan with a blue blouse and a velvet hat—after all my attempts to humanize him.”⁹⁶

When Hollywood took notice of the novels and began to purchase the rights for film production, Biggers was very much an active and subjective spectator in the casting of the actor who would be Chan. Although he had been portrayed by Asian actors in silent films, casting Charlie for a talkie proved to be difficult. Biggers lamented that “the motion picture situation is simply maddening. It’s outrageous that the impression should be created that nobody can play Charlie.”⁹⁷ Biggers’ frustration in casting the character had nothing to do with the novels being made into films. Rather, he saw the opportunity for Chan to be introduced to even more people through the celluloid medium. His concern was two fold: that readers turned movie-goers may be disappointed with the actor if he was unable to effectively personify the character and “that they may make Chan a sinister character rather than a loveable one.”⁹⁸ It was for these specific reasons that Biggers had previously turned down offers from various entities to have Charlie star in comic books and advertisements. Ultimately, Biggers knew

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 15 March 1930.

⁹⁷ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 13 December 1929.

⁹⁸ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 22 October 1930.

that successfully depicting Charlie the way he should be depicted would “be the last step necessary to establishing him for all time as the leading sleuth of his generation.”⁹⁹

Effectively finding the right actor was another matter. Biggers, now relocated in Pasadena, was nearby to the Hollywood film studios producing the films and seemed to confide in Chambers as the search for Charlie Chan progressed. The film productions saw Biggers in a new role: consultant. While he would not be one of the final decision makers, his opinion was solicited. Perhaps having learnt from his early dealings with Bobbs Merrill, Biggers took his role almost serenely, adopting an almost optimistic attitude like that of the movie studios.¹⁰⁰ Warner Oland would eventually be cast as Chan and would keep the role until his death. Oland had found success both as a stage and screen actor. Biggers had been a fan of Oland’s and had even suggested him as a possibility to Fox Studios. Immediately after Oland was cast, however, Biggers became worried about Oland’s talent to interpret Charlie, concerned that the actor’s most noteworthy film role to date was that of the “sinister Fu Manchu.”¹⁰¹ Biggers’ worries quickly dissolved as Oland’s depiction of Chan made both Oland and Charlie fan favorites.

As a whole, Biggers actions mimicked those of the over-protective father, taking offense when Charlie was teased but beaming when Charlie was praised.

⁹⁹ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 6 February 1931.

¹⁰⁰ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 November 1930.

¹⁰¹ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 7 January 1931.

The Chan novels *were* a success and allowed Biggers and his family to live in a comfortable lifestyle. Bobbs Merrill records reveal that in 1930 alone, Biggers earned \$17140.89 from book royalties. This did not include foreign book rights or theatrical and movie rights. Accolades would also be awarded to Biggers; both Charlie Chan Carries On and The Black Camel would be named the best mystery novel by the United Press. Conversely, Chan's popularity would also bring about parodies and imitations that did not amuse Biggers. In essence, Biggers would become the proverbial victim of his own success. Shortly before his death, Biggers became reflective on Chan and more importantly, seemed to become more relaxed when he looked back on his success. Realistically, Biggers wrote of Charlie in early 1933, "As it seems to me that Chan is just about now at the peak of his 'run'—what with the omnibus and the radio this winter—my theory is that I had better toss off all Chan stories I intend writing as quickly as possible, before he fades out of the public mind, and get it over with. I don't believe he is immortal, after all."¹⁰² Such thoughts proved to be prophetic as Charlie Chan would be laid to literary rest with the passing of Earl Derr Biggers on April 5, 1933.

¹⁰² Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 18 January 1933.

CHAPTER 6

THE TRUTH IS REVEALED?

In every newspaper editorial, letter, or tribute to Earl Derr Biggers following his death, Biggers and Chan are synonymous. The collective feeling by those who mourned Biggers' death at the age of 48 in April of 1933 was that his career was typified by Charlie Chan and rightly so. According to writer Barbara Gregorich, Earl Derr Biggers had realized the impact that Charlie Chan made on the world and thus, could never separate from it: "He has Charlie Chan say in The Chinese Parrot 'he who mounts a tiger cannot dismount' and I think Biggers sensed that in committing himself to a sequel to Chan he had mounted a tiger and there was no way he was ever going to get off this tiger and write something other than a Chan book."¹⁰³

What appears in the letters and clipping sent to Bobbs- Merrill and housed in their archives following Biggers' death is that those who were fans of Biggers were well aware of the fact that through Chan, Americans had begun to see Chinese in a different, more positive light. These items written by men and women from Maine, Texas, Oregon, California, New York, and Georgia, to name a few, are reverent and melancholy. A brief sampling of these items attest that Biggers' mission to create an acceptable Asian American character was indeed fulfilled:

"When bored with reading heavier works I could turn to one of his detective yarns and find real enjoyment as I followed the adventures of

¹⁰³ Cork, John dir. In Search of Charlie Chan. With Barbara Gregorich, Ken Hanke and Rush Glick. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, LLC. 2006.

that happy, inimitable Chinaman so different from the vicious Chinese that one meets in many other mystery stories.”¹⁰⁴T.C. Harris, St. Petersburg Times

“Too much fiction and too many moving pictures have depicted the unworthy and criminal Chinaman. Our estimate of the Chinese, based on these representations, have been far too low. We needed to be told, as Mr. Biggers told us, that both humor and honor may be found under a yellow skin as well as under one that is white.”¹⁰⁵ Osman C. Hooper, The Columbus Dispatch

“And especially on the fact that in the course of his tales of killing, he killed the wicked Chinaman, the cure of a hundred weak, evasive and disappointing detective stories. He substituted the good Chinaman, and thereby inevitably gave us a glimpse of a real view of goodness.”¹⁰⁶ G.K. Chesterton, Los Angeles Examiner

They also all acknowledge that Biggers was, aside from creating the first Asian American hero¹⁰⁷, also bridging a cultural gap. One S.L. Yu from The Boston Traveler wrote, “Mr. Biggers not only wrote delightful and fascinating mystery stories but taught human nature through his spokesman, Charlie Chan. Earl Derr Biggers has truly created an immortal character. Mr. Biggers’ Charlie Chan stories do not follow the beaten path. They blaze a new trail of inter racial understanding. He dared to act differently.”¹⁰⁸ Further, “Obituaries commended him for aiding the cause of international understanding and for paying tribute to the Chinese role in building the cities, orange groves, and vineyards of the Coast;

¹⁰⁴ Harris, T.C., Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. April 15, 1933.

¹⁰⁵ Hooper, Osman C. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. April 12, 1933.

¹⁰⁶ Chesterton, G.K. “A Good Detective.” Los Angeles Examiner. April 3, 1933.

¹⁰⁷ Cork, John dir. In Search of Charlie Chan. With Barbara Gregorich, Ken Hanke and Rush Glick. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, LLC. 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Yu, S.L. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University.

a *Plain Dealer* editorial called Chan the most appealing super-sleuth since Holmes.”¹⁰⁹

Biggers aside from being celebrated as the creator of the most famous sleuth since Arthur Conan Doyle’s Holmes, did help to introduce Hawai’i to the popular world. The novels were a way in which people could escape to a tropical paradise and were an inexpensive way to take a vacation, especially for those who were not financially able to. Beyond the complex character’s and Charlie’s astute observations, the novels, “contain also some of the best advertising Honolulu’s chamber of commerce and tourist bureau have ever received.”¹¹⁰ Perhaps too, the multiethnic society of Hawai’i also aided in the acceptance of Charlie by mainland audiences. For some who remembered the release of the films, it did not matter that the actor who played Charlie Chan was white, what mattered was the fact that a Chinese character, and a good one at that, was being depicted. In *The Legacy of Charlie Chan*, James G.Y. Ho of the Hawaiian/Chinese Multicultural Museum states that Biggers, via Chan, “was responsible, at last, for the change in the attitude of white America towards Chinese.”¹¹¹ In addition, according to DeSoto Brown, Collections Manager for the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Hawai’i, “to have a hero popular in novels, wildly popular in novels, and movies over a period of twenty-five, thirty years in the United States who was Asian is very significant because during that period in

¹⁰⁹ Gregorich, Barbara. “Earl Derr Biggers: Brief life of a popular author; 1884-1933.” <http://www.harvardmagazine.com/issues/ma00/vita.html>. 9 Sep 2001. pg.2.

¹¹⁰ “We Who Mourn Biggers Mourn More for Chan.” *Des Moines Register*. May 21, 1933.

¹¹¹ Cork, John dir. *The Legacy of Charlie Chan*. With James G.Y. Ho, Jude Narita, and Barbara Gregorich. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, LLC. 2006.

real life Asian people and other minority, non-white people were really not in a position of authority or necessarily in a good place in American society.”¹¹²

What is interesting to note that in the discussion of Hawai'i, Charlie Chan and Biggers, following Biggers' death, Chang Apana is never once mentioned. Delving deeper into the folklore that Chang Apana and Charlie Chan were one in the same, the “similarities” between the two end at shared residential addresses, occupations and number of offspring. Where Charlie is a pudgy man of average height, “Apana was small (about 5 feet tall) and wiry, and while he got as far as the Honolulu docks in hunting down opium smugglers, he was not off solving murders”¹¹³ in exotic places like Chan. Biggers would be made aware of Chang Apana but dismissed the claims that the two were related with bemusement, stating simply: “There are no characters in the House drawn even remotely from life.”¹¹⁴ An interview with Biggers that was printed in the New York Times prior to his death further asserted that the inspiration came not from an individual but rather the negative behavior and beliefs of America. Biggers contends “Sinister and wicked Chinese are old stuff, but an amiable Chinese on the side of law and order had never been used up to that time....If I understand Charlie Chan correctly, he has an idea that if you understand a man's character you can nearly predict what he is apt to do in any set of circumstances.”¹¹⁵

It is the final letters in the Biggers' archives from Eleanor Biggers, Earl Derr Biggers' widow that shed light on Biggers' character and Charlie Chan.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Simpson, MacKinnon. “Chang Apana: The Real Charlie Chan.” Spirit of Aloha. March 2000. pg. 24.

¹¹⁴ Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 29 October 1925.

¹¹⁵ “Creating Charlie Chan”, New York Times, March 22, 1931.

Following his death, Mrs. Biggers assumed the financial affairs of her late husband and continued to work with D. Laurance Chambers in order to sort out the details of her husband's estate. Like her husband, Eleanor Biggers was methodical and careful. Married for over twenty years, Mrs. Biggers was witness to her spouses' creative process and supported the notion that Biggers' motive behind Chan was to break down stereotypes: "I have changed the word 'Chinaman' in it to 'Chinese' whenever I noticed it. After Earl got involved with Charlie Chan, he made a point of never using the word Chinaman, except as an insult, and his readers, possibly remembering that, would be startled to see the word Chinaman used in this story."¹¹⁶ She also understood that many did not want to see the franchise die with Biggers' death. Shortly following Biggers' death, Mrs. Biggers received offers through Bobbs-Merrill from various entities wanting to continue the Chan stories in movies, radio programs, and even comic books. Knowing that her husband had been approached for very similar things but also aware of the fact that Biggers' death would mean a decrease in income for herself and her son, she entrusts Chambers to act in their best interests. Ultimately, any new Chan material, as long as it was "dignified and appropriate"¹¹⁷ would help to appease Charlie's adoring public.

Like her husband, Eleanor Biggers was well aware of Chang Apana and the belief that he was the inspiration behind Charlie Chan. Although Biggers

¹¹⁶ Biggers, Eleanor. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 22 May 1933.

¹¹⁷ Biggers, Eleanor. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 March 1934.

“had to confront the belief that Charlie Chan was based on Chang Apana”¹¹⁸ on numerous occasions, in death it seemed as if the history of the supposed relationship between Charlie Chan and Chang Apana could finally be re-written by those who wanted to believe that the coincidences were fact. In a letter to Laurance Chambers dated January 17, 1934, Mrs. Biggers writes in response to newspaper articles that had been published around the same time. Ironically, Chang Apana would pass away in December 1933, only a few months after Biggers’ death. Perhaps because the deaths of both men happened so close to each that so too did their stories become intertwined. At any rate, Mrs. Biggers was not happy with the stories that were published about Chang Apana and expressed her displeasure rather passionately:

“Perhaps you have seen in the papers items about the supposed connection between Charlie Chan and Chang Apana, the Chinese-Hawaiian detective who died in Honolulu about a month ago. These stories claim that he was the original of Charlie Chan. One paper in Mobile went so far as to say that Earl ‘cheerfully acknowledged that Apana was his model’, and that Earl’s novels were founded on ‘several of Apana’s more remarkable exploits.’ I have written to that editor to find out where he got his information.

As of course you know, nothing could be farther from the truth. Earl had written three Chan stories before he ever heard of Apana, who was the very antithesis of Charlie in every way, appearance, character, point of view and career. It seems cruel, after all the hard work Earl put into creating Charlie Chan, and inventing again and again such original and clever plots, for a lot of hack reporters to claim that it all came from a little Hawaiian cop, whose only activity was running down opium smugglers in Honolulu. The amazing thing is, on Apana’s death, the New York Herald Tribune wired a newspaper man here, a friend of Earl’s, for a story. He phoned me, and I gave him the facts. But the Tribune did not use them, they preferred this more romantic and false story. As a result it has been lifted or syndicated all over the country.

I don’t know if there is any way in which you could help correct the story. But if there is, I beg you to do so. Earl was always so careful never

¹¹⁸ Cork, John dir. The Real Charlie Chan. With Nanette Napoleon, Eddie Croom, and Bob Krause. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, LLC. 2006.

to use any living person, or anything he heard, taking satisfaction in the knowledge that he was creating purely from his imagination, that it distresses me dreadfully to have this idea of him spread all over the country. I am trying with the help of this newspaper man I mentioned, to see if a retraction cannot be made, in the guise of another news story. But I know that this is very hard to do."¹¹⁹

Unfortunately, history reveals that Mrs. Biggers' efforts to correct the misconception were not successful. While it may never be said or accepted that Charlie Chan and Chang Apana are not as interconnected to one another as the world continues to believe, what emerges from the Charlie Chan story are a number of fascinating tidbits and characters, both real and make-believe. What also emerges is a story that has yet to have an ending as chapters are added each day.

¹¹⁹ Biggers, Eleanor. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 17 January 1934.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In an interview in 2005 for her film “3 Needles”, actress Lucy Liu talked about an upcoming film project in which she will play the granddaughter of Charlie Chan:

“It’s been about six years. We are still forging the way to a script that’s feasible. You have to remember that it was a television series that people absolutely loved, but it was also something that was in some ways racially backwards at the time. It was cast with Caucasian people dressed as Asian people so we have a lot of stereotypes to work through. We want to bring what people loved about Charlie then and bring it to light now. I realize that now as I’ve been going through it, you know? When I look back, it’s not a process that is fast. And no, the wall comes down and that doesn’t mean we all have democracy all of a sudden. You face the issue and then you have to sort of break it down and recognize, ‘Okay, what is it we want to achieve as opposed to putting something up and being disappointed and disappointing other people?’”¹²⁰

In another interview Liu explains how she became involved with the character:

“I had very little knowledge of Charlie Chan, because I didn’t even know it was on television. I just thought it was a movie. It was actually a series that was on television, and I started reading about it and realized that it was based on this real person, Chang Apana, this detective in Hawaii, and he was a complete badass. First of all, he didn’t look anything like the Charlie Chan they represented, and he actually was Asian. Secondly, he was incredibly sinewy. At the time, there was a lot of opium trading, which is obviously illegal, and he was the only person who was allowed to carry a whip on the force, like a real whip. He retired and a year later, he died. This is somebody whose entire life is his work, but he was just like a badass! But he was represented differently, like he spoke with fortune cookie like language, and was very affable and friendly, and it was just a very different way of doing it. I like having the idea of the history behind it

¹²⁰ Murray, Rebecca. “Lucy Liu Talks About ‘3 Needles.’”
<http://movies.about.com/od/liulucy/a/liuneedle112706.htm>. 11 April 2007. Pg. 2.

and also knowing where it went. Because for the entertainment, I think they felt that it had to be represented in a certain way."¹²¹

Liu, like many Asian Americans, understands the narrative of Charlie Chan as a negative stereotype and a lucrative Hollywood franchise. She has been well-versed in the rhetoric that accompanies the Chang Apana/Charlie Chan story but has also accepted that history cannot be corrected but it can be altered and even rewritten. Unlike others, she understands that the Charlie Chan issue is one "of an overall identity, not just ethnic identity" and how properly redefining and reclaiming this identity "is critical in modern society."¹²² Perhaps, Liu will be also be the catalyst to change the thinking in regards to what depictions are acceptable and what are not given her power and status in Hollywood. Ultimately, the value of this research can be tied into Liu's re-invention of Chan in that both endeavors seeks to give new meaning to a character that has accepted negatively for the past thirty years.

Liu is not the first Asian American actor who has had their name attached to a modern Charlie Chan project. Actor Russell Wong who found a reasonable amount of success in Hollywood as a star in "Vanishing Son", "Romeo Must Die" and "The Joy Luck Club", had originally been cast as the next Chan descendant to resurrect the franchise. Wong, like Liu, seemed to be the heir apparent to Chan, particularly because of his ethnic background. Wong's Chan was also poised to be a box-office superstar as the Chan movie was meant to be Hollywood's response to the then popular Hong Kong action films and actors that

¹²¹ Douglas, Edward. "Lucy Liu Talks *Charlie Chan*." <http://www.comingsoon.net/news.php?id=13758>. 24 March 2006. Pg. 1.

¹²² Kitano, Harry. *Race Relations*. Pg. 118.

were finding success in the U.S. at the time.¹²³ The project, entitled “The Locked Room”, was met with both negative and positive feedback; the more extreme critics felt that Charlie Chan was dead and “the muthafucka should remain buried.”¹²⁴ For reasons unknown, Russell Wong’s Chan never came to fruition and Hollywood has confidently turned to Lucy Liu as the rightful heir of the Chan dynasty.¹²⁵

Liu’s Chan film is set to be released in 2009 and there is no doubt that there will be some resistance from the Asian American community as its release nears. Perhaps the film will be a positive step in terms of redefining stereotypes because “in order to retire racist stereotypes, one is obliged to first evoke them.”¹²⁶ Unlike her predecessors, Liu is taking an active role in the film, serving as its star and executive producer. In a sense, Liu is a pioneer in Asian American media. She, like her counterparts, will be able to “control the screen images” of the characters in the film and assert her “control over what goes on both in front of and behind the camera.”¹²⁷ It will be important to the Asian American community at the time of the film’s release to not apply a culturally distorted lens; seeing only the negative and denying the potentially positive.

In conclusion, Charlie Chan continues to attract negative attention as one of the most reviled fictional Asian American characters but also positive attention

¹²³ Sengupta, Somini. “Charlie Chan, Action Hero?” <http://charliechanfamily.tripod.com/id161.html>. 10 April 2007. Pg. 2.

¹²⁴ Aquino, Jimmy. “Charlie Chan is Dead.” *City on a Hill Press*. 27 February 1997. Pg. 1.

¹²⁵ Weinberg, Scott. “Lucy Liu to Play Charlie Chan’s Granddaughter.” <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/news/comments/?entryid=223545>. 28 July 2005. Pg. 1.

¹²⁶ Ma, Sheng-mei. *Deathly Embrace*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. pg. xi.

¹²⁷ Xing, Jun. *Asian America Through the Lens*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1998. Pg. 35.

as “the greatest American Detective.”¹²⁸ Where does one, then, come to some neutral ground regarding the character? It can be inferred that Chang Apana, was not the literal inspiration for Charlie Chan. Should he have been, perhaps Earl Derr Biggers’ “work might not have been offensive to so many Asian Americans.”¹²⁹ Apana’s story, though, does require closer examination. At a time in which “the Chinese in the United States became increasingly urbanized, and American Chinatowns became tourist attractions”¹³⁰, Chang Apana attracted true, positive attention because of his daring exploits as a police officer. Although he was not as glib or as socially gifted as Charlie Chan, he performed his job duties with morality, conviction and without corruption. In Chang Apana, a new, positive and authentic hero for Asian America can and will emerge. One that Hollywood may take notice of and develop with an Asian actor in the lead role, independent of Charlie Chan.

While acceptance may never come for Earl Derr Biggers, his efforts to “shatter racist stereotypes and replace them by positive images of Chinese people”¹³¹ should be noted. Critics of Biggers feel that his Chan incorrectly “proclaims himself a representative of the Chinese while he does not speak (or behave) like one.”¹³² Yet, what is the proper behavior of a Chinese or Asian American person? Is there even an answer to this question? As Henry Yu posits

¹²⁸ Cork, John dir. *In Search of Charlie Chan*. With Barbara Gregorich, Ken Hanke and Rush Glick. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, LLC. 2006.

¹²⁹ Chan, Jachinson. Pg. 55.

¹³⁰ Marchetti, Gina. “They Worship Money and Prejudice.” *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*. Ed. and with an introduction by Daniel J. Bernardi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. Pg.74.

¹³¹ Wiseman, Sharon. “A Brief Biography of Earl Derr Biggers.” <http://members.aol.com/meow103476/biobiggers.html>. 9 Sep 2001. pg.3.

¹³² Chan, Jachinson. *Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee*. New York: Routledge. Pg. 68.

in Thinking Orientals, “Asians have been understood within American social thought in two major ways- as a racial ‘problem’ and as a racial ‘solution’.”¹³³ If we are to place the more popular depictions of Asian Americans on opposite ends of the spectrum, Charlie Chan emerges somewhat as a racial solution, especially in comparison to the Fu Manchu and Mr. Moto characters that were also popular when the initial Chan films were released. While Charlie is *not* the solution, he did, in some way, help to dispel some of the prevalent stereotypes of the day. His impact was not just felt by white America but also by Asian America. As Asian American writer Jude Narita notes, “Charlie Chan movies were popular in Asia and probably in many Asian American communities because here was a character who was smart, who solved everything, you couldn’t put anything over him.”¹³⁴ In addition to the sense of pride felt by Asian Americans, the Chan films, television show, and cartoon casted Chinese American actors in supporting roles. Although Charlie Chan was always played by a white actor, the supporting roles portrayed by Asian American actors were essential to the plot of each film. Keye Luke, who enjoyed a successful career as an actor, gained notoriety first as Chan’s “Number One Son”. In this role, mainstream audiences were exposed to Luke’s acting ability, most notably, his comedic talents. Luke, towards the end of his career, would eventually take on the role of Charlie Chan in the short-lived cartoon series, “Charlie Chan and the Chan Clan”, providing voice talents as the inscrutable detective. Other actors like Victor Sen Yung and Benson Fong would

¹³³ Yu, Henry. Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Pg. 7.

¹³⁴ Cork, John dir. The Legacy of Charlie Chan. With Jude Narita, Barbara Gregorich, and Rush Glick. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, LLC. 2006.

also find success following their roles in the Chan films, paving the way for Asian American actors who followed.

Perhaps a closer examination of the Chan novels and the early films are also in order. What may become apparent is that Charlie Chan is not the aphorism-spouting-white-actor-in-yellowface that has been so willingly accepted. In looking at the films in particular, the presence of Asian American actors playing Charlie Chan's children is very important and crucial to the visibility of Asian and Asian Americans in that these roles were reflective of real Asian Americans, "model minority" or not. In fact, these roles helped to increase the presence of Asian Americans on film and in television. While actors like Mako have voiced the concern "that the portrayal or depiction of Charlie Chan and also characters like Mr. Moto, (have) sort of paved the way, even to this day, to some of the filmmakers and writers and producers in the back of their minds to still replay"¹³⁵ stereotypical images, if these writers and producers are including Asian and Asian American characters in their scripts today, the probability that they will be played by Asians and Asian American actors is absolutely certain. The more exposure these actors get, the more likely they are able to be in a position to work with Hollywood studios to create "real" images of Asian Americans and to re-write their own histories.¹³⁶ Lucy Liu initially gained notoriety playing Ling Woo, a stereotypical "dragon lady", on the television series *Ally McBeal*. That

¹³⁵ Adachi, Jeff, dir. *Slanted Screen*. With Mako, George Takei and Cary-Hiroiyuki Tagawa. AAMM Productions, 2006.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

character elicited a negative reaction from Asian American groups¹³⁷ but it helped to springboard Liu into bigger, non-ethnic specific roles which in turn have allowed Liu to star in and produce more creative and personal projects. In this sense, Liu and fellow “Asian Americans have both suffered and benefited from definitions of their exoticism.”¹³⁸ Lucy Liu may not be the best role model for Asian Americans but she is achieving success as an Asian American actress first and foremost. Liu does not have to re-invent the role of Charlie Chan but she is. In a similar vein, Earl Derr Biggers did not have to make Charlie Chan Chinese, but he did. Charlie Chan is not dead because people of all ethnicities are not ready to let him go. It is crucial to accept and understand that there are many aspects of the Chan legend that still require further examination. Additionally, it is the responsibility of Asian Americans to neutrally examine these so-called negative aspects in order to truly decide the fate of Charlie Chan. Until then, the death of Charlie Chan, as it has been said, should be postponed indefinitely.

¹³⁷ Takeuchi, Craig. “Studying Films’ Asian Females.” Vancouver Free Press. 15 December 2005: <http://www.modelminority.com/article1068.html>.

¹³⁸ Yu, Henry. Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Pg. 10.

Bibliography

Adachi, Jeff, dir. Slanted Screen. With Mako, George Takei and Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa. AAMM Productions, 2006.

Aquino, Jimmy. "Charlie Chan is Dead." City on a Hill Press. 27 February 1997.

Ayres, C.E. Letter to Bobbs Merrill Publishing Company. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 28 May 1928.

Berlin, Howard M. Charlie Chan's Words of Wisdom. New York: Wildside Press, 2001.

Biggers, Earl Derr. The House Without a Key. New York: Avenel Books, 1981.

Biggers, Earl Derr. The Black Camel. New York: Avenel Books, 1981.

Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 26 March 1915.

Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 26 July 1916.

Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 1 August 1916.

Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 August 1916.

Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 19 September 1916.

Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 14 February 1916.

Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 6 November 1916.

Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to Hewitt Howland. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 26 March 1915.

Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 October 1920.

Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 3 November 1920.

- Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 September 1924.
- Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 December 1924.
- Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 25 May 1925.
- Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 29 October 1925.
- Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 25 April 1928.
- Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 26 April 1929.
- Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 15 March 1930.
- Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 13 December 1929.
- Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 22 October 1930.
- Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 6 February 1931.
- Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 November 1930.
- Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 7 January 1931.
- Biggers, Earl Derr. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 18 January 1933.
- Biggers, Eleanor. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 22 May 1933.
- Biggers, Eleanor. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 17 January 1934.

Biggers, Eleanor. Letter to D.L. Chambers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 March 1934.

Buck, Elizabeth Bentzel. Paradise Remade : The Politics of Culture and History in Hawai'i. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.

Chan, Jachinson. Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Chan, Sucheng. Asian Americans : An Interpretive History. Twayne's Immigrant Heritage of America Series. Boston: Twayne, 1991.

Chin, Frank and Jeffrey Paul Chan. "Racist Love". Seeing through Shock. Ed. Richard Kostelanetz. New York,: Ballantine Books, 1972.

Cheung, King- Kok. "The Woman Warrior Versus the Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose Between Feminism and Heroism?" Asian American Studies. Ed. Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu and Min Song. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000.

Chesterton, G.K. "A Good Detective." Los Angeles Examiner. April 3, 1933.
Chu, Patricia P. Assimilating Asians : Gendered Strategies of Authorship in Asian America. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2000.

Conner, Edward. "Charlie Chan in Hollywood." Star Bulletin. 19 Mar 1958: 4.

Cork, John dir. In Search of Charlie Chan. With Barbara Gregorich, Ken Hanke and Rush Glick. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, LLC. 2006.

Cork, John dir. The Legacy of Charlie Chan. With James G.Y. Ho, Jude Narita, and Barbara Gregorich. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, LLC. 2006.

Cork, John dir. The Real Charlie Chan. With Nanette Napoleon, Eddie Croom, and Bob Krause. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, LLC. 2006.

Daniels, Roger. Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States Since 1850. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990.

Douglas, Edward. "Lucy Liu Talks *Charlie Chan*."
<http://www.comingsoon.net/news.php?id=13758>. 24 March 2006.

Eng, David L. Racial Castration : Managing Masculinity in Asian America. Perverse Modernities. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.

- Espiritu, Yen Le. Asian American Women and Men. Lanham: Altamira Press, 1996.
- Feng, Peter. Screening Asian Americans. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002.
- Foner, Philip Sheldon, and Daniel Rosenberg. Racism, Dissent, and Asian Americans from 1850 to the Present : A Documentary History. Contributions in American History, No. 148. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993.
- Gregorich, Barbara. "Earl Derr Biggers: Brief life of a popular author; 1884-1933." <http://www.harvardmagazine.com/issues/ma00/vita.html>. Pg. 1-2. 9 Sep 2001.
- Hagedorn, Jessica Tarahata. Introduction. Charlie Chan Is Dead : An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction. Ed. Jessica Hagedorn. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.
- Hagedorn, Jessica, Ed. Introduction. Charlie Chan is Dead 2: At Home in the World. New York: Penguin Books, 2004.
- Hanke, Ken. Charlie Chan at the Movies: History, Filmography, and Criticism. Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1989.
- Harris, T.C., Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. April 15, 1933.
- Hooper, Osman C. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. April 12, 1933.
- Kim, Elaine. Asian American Literature. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982.
- Kitano, Harry. Race Relations. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1974.
- Lee, Robert G. Orientalism. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999.
- Ma, Sheng-Mei. The Deathly Embrace. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Marchetti, Gina. "They Worship Money and Prejudice." Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness. Ed. and with an introduction by Daniel J. Bernardi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Martines, Gilbert. Modern History of Hawaii. Thesis. University of Hawaii, 1990.

Mitchell, Charles P. "A Guide to Charlie Chan Films." Part One. <http://www.classicimages.com/1997/september97/oland.html>. Pg.1-8. 9 Sep 2001.

Morano, Marc. "Fox Movie Channel Bans Charlie Chan Movies". <http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewCulture.asp?Page=%5CCulture%5Carchive%5C200307%5CCUL20030701d.html>. 1 July 2003.

Moreno, Loren. "Let the truth be told about the real-life Charlie Chan." The Honolulu Advertiser. 25 April 2007.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Visual Culture: The Reader. Ed. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall. London: Sage Publications, 1999.

Murphy, Wm. Barry. "Charlie Chan, HPD." The Beacon. December 1972, pg. 12-13.

Murray, Rebecca. "Lucy Liu Talks About '3 Needles.'" <http://movies.about.com/od/liulucy/a/liuneedle112706.htm>. 11 April 2007.

Organization of Chinese Americans "OCA APPLAUDS FOX FOR PULLING CHARLIE CHAN FILMS FROM SUMMER LONG BROADCAST." 2 July 2003.

Olson, James S. The Ethnic Dimension in American History. St. James: Brandywine Press, 1999.

Paik, Irvin. "That Oriental Feeling." Roots: An Asian American Reader. Ed. Amy Tachiki, Eddie Wong, Franklin Odo with Buck Wong. Los Angeles: The Regents of the University of California, 1971.

Palmer, Albert W. Orientalism in American Life. New York,: Friendship press, 1934.

Thompson, Richard Austin. The Yellow Peril, 1890-1924. New York: Arno Press, 1978.

Schmidt, Kurt. "Earl Derr Biggers." <http://www.charliechan.net/biggers.html>. Pg.1. 9 Sep 2001.

Sellander, W.H. Letter to Earl Derr Biggers. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University. 10 April 1925.

Sengupta, Somini. "Charlie Chan, Action Hero?" <http://charliechanfamily.tripod.com/id161.html>. 10 April 2007.

Simpson, MacKinnon. "Chang Apana: The Real Charlie Chan." Spirit of Aloha. March 2000, pg. 22- 25, 31.

- Smith, Colin F. "Detective Charlie Chan had real-life inspiration." <http://www.seniorsgottravel.com/unitedstates/honolulu.HTML> pg. 3-5. 9 Sep 2001.
- Song, Jaymes K. "Charlie Chan' isle's toughest crime fighter." Star Bulletin. 2 Oct 1999. pg. 1.
- Takaki, Ronald T. From Different Shores : Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity in America. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Takeuchi, Craig. "Studying Films' Asian Females." Vancouver Free Press. 15 December 2005: <http://www.modelminority.com/article1068.html>.
- The Black Camel. Dir. Hamilton McFadden. With Warner Oland, Bela Lugosi. Fox, 1931.
- Tong, Ah Huna. "Chang Apana Had Long and Enviale Record On Force." Honolulu Advertiser. 22 May 1932:1.
- Weinberg, Scott. "Lucy Liu to Play Charlie Chan's Granddaughter." <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/news/comments/?entryid=223545>. 28 July 2005.
- Williams, Patrick. "Charlie Chan and the Case of the Cop Who Inspired Him." http://www.apbnews.com/media/celebnews/2000/04/25/chan0425_02.html. Pg. 1-3. 9 Sep 2001.
- Winfrey, Yayoi Lena. "Yellowface: Asians on White Screens- Is Charlie Chan Really Dead". http://www.imdiversity.com/Villages/Asian/arts_culture_media/archives/winfrey_yellowface_asians_hollywood.asp. 1 April 2007.
- Wiseman, Sharon. "A Brief Biography of Earl Derr Biggers." <http://members.aol.com/meow103476/biobiggers.html>. Pg. 1-4. 9 Sep 2001.
- Xing, Jun. Asian America Through the Lens. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1998.
- Yim, Susan. "In Search of Chan." Star Bulletin. 20 Aug 1982: C-1, C-11.
- Yu, Henry. Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Yu, S.L. Bobbs-Merrill Manuscript Collection. Indiana University.
- "Black Camel Kneels at Home of Chang Apana." Star Bulletin. 9 Dec 1933: 1-2.

"Biggers, Noted for Honolulu Novels, Dies." Star Bulletin. 5 Apr 1933: 1, 7.

"Chang Apana." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. 19 April 2007.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chang_Apana.>

"Charlie Chan is Fated for a Wandering Life." Star Bulletin. 11 July 1931: pg. 4

"Charlie Chan Imposter." Honolulu Advertiser. 20 Oct 1967: 5.

"Creating Charlie Chan", *New York Times*, March 22, 1931.

"Creator of Charlie Chan." Star Bulletin. 31 Oct 1938: 1.

"Daughter Explains About 'Charlie Chan'". The Honolulu Advertiser. 10 January 1945.

"Honolulu Arrests Were 'Cheap' Back in 1904."
<http://www.gamblingmagazine.com/articles/40/40-101.htm>. Pg. 1-3. 9 Sep 2001.

"Letters to the Editor." Star Bulletin. 2 Feb 1998: 1.

"M'Duffie Given Clean Slate by Commission Over Trask's Protest." Honolulu Advertiser. 5 June 1923:1.

"Police Chief of Oakland May Study Local Evils." Honolulu Advertiser. 5 June 1923:

"Popular Girl Believed to Have Drowned." Star Bulletin. 3 Jul 1919: 1-2.

"The Fact Is." California Life. November 25, 1924.

"The 'Real Life' Charlie Chan." The Honolulu Star-Bulletin: Hawaiian Life Weekend Magazine. 19 March 1955:
<http://charliechanfamily.tripod.com/id99.html>.

"The True Story of Charlie Chan as Confessed by His Creator, Earl Derr Biggers." Honolulu Advertiser. 11 September 1932.

"Waikiki's House Without a Key", "The Original Honolulu Detective", and "Chang Apana, HPD." <http://royalelephant.com/tgcharliechan.shtml>. Pg. 1-2. 9 Sep 2001.
<http://www.geocities.com/chanfilms/>. 20 Sep 2001.

"We Who Mourn Biggers Mourn More for Chan." Des Moines Register. May 21, 1933.

<http://www.geocities.com/chanfilms/>. 20 Sep 2001.

<http://www.classicimages.com/1997/september97/oland.html>. 9 Sep 2001. pg. 2.

www.njedge.net/~knapp/irony.htm. 20 December 2006.

<http://charliechanfamily.tripod.com/id85.html>. 20 December 2006.

charliechangallery.tripod.com/id28.html. 20 December 2006.

charliechanfamily.tripod.com/id10.html. 20 December 2006.

www.charliechan.net/gallery/winters.html. 20 December 2006.

charliechangallery.tripod.com/id48.html. 20 December 2006.

<http://imdb.com/title/tt0068037>. 20 December 2006.

<http://www.strandmag.com/ustinov.htm>. 20 December 2006.