Renewing Yellow Peril:

North Korean antagonism in entertainment media

Master Thesis Asian Studies: Politics, Society & Economy

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Chapter 0: Introduction

0.1 Introduction of topic

The Other has always held a certain appeal in de minds of people, and played a role in the politics of nations. Be it through positive or negative interactions, few societies nowadays would exist in their current form without having mirrored itself against an Other. These interactions are also important in the shaping of group and individual identities. Old tropes and stereotypes about Others are created and perpetuated in order to ensure that the Self can reflect on everything it is not. Regular interactions between the Self and Other are necessary to consolidate one's own identity, and the perceived identity of the Other.

International relations are a platform on which interactions between domestic and foreign groups are made possible. Migrations of peoples and the diasporic communities they create can be examined in order to gain a better understanding of relations between populations, nations and identity. By tracing interactions between nations, cultures and ethnicities through time, a timeline about how and why they evolved as they did will appear.

For this thesis the main question is not about the shaping of one's own identity, but the identity being forcibly thrust upon the foreign. The potential threat others represent for the domestic leads to anxieties and fears being projected upon the foreign, giving birth to stereotypes and essentialism. In case of trans-Pacific diaspora and relations these anxieties have, in the worst cases, led to anti-Asian sentiments and yellow perilism, the topics of this thesis. The tensions between promises made to the people and the fears of threatened virtues in the West lead to the projection of internal fears onto Others, in this case the East (Tchen & Years 2013: 5). The term "yellow peril" was not coined simultaneously with the emergence of anti-Asian fear in the U.S.. It was instead first used in Europe by a German Kaiser (ibid.: 12) and later become popular around the world. Anti-Asian fears have been a part of U.S. daily life since the 19th century. Yellow perilism has had a

variety of effects on the daily lives of Asian migrants and Asian Americans. From violence against those perceived to be of a certain ethnicity, such as Vincent Chin who was murdered in 1982 because he was mistakenly thought to be of Japanese descent (Shim 1998: 398, Tchen 2010: 280), to daily microaggressions like the "but where are you *really* from"-question (Booker 2013).

Racial aggressions against Asian (American) citizens are part of not only real life, but U.S. entertainment media as well. From the emergence of anti-Asian fears another idea rose: that of the Asian villain. First popularized in magazines, the archetypical Asian villain became popular at the turn of the 20th century, and remained firmly grounded in the narrative tropes for several decades. These early representations of the "yellow peril" were often of Chinese descent, later shifting ethnicity to Japanese and others as political situations called for it. The most famous depiction of this was Asian mastermind Fu Manchu, described by his (British) author as "yellow peril incarnate in one man" (Tchen & Yeats 2013: 7, 210). As relations between the U.S. and Asian countries evolved, so did the depictions of the Asian stereotypes in the media. Depictions of Asian supervillains were no longer the sole representation of people with Asian heritage in media, and the Good Asian (closely related to the idea of the model minority) trope surfaced in the 1940's and started making regular appearances from the 1960's onward (Abreu et al. 2013: 694, Shim 1998: 393).

Another important point in the history between Asia and America is the economic boom of the latter half of the 20th century. The economic growth in Asia in the post-War period has been subject of interest to many people from different backgrounds for a long time. Due to the major players in Asia being able to keep up with and advance Western technologies, new anxieties have sprouted forth, blowing new life into the ancient East-West binary. A new trope has been called to life, combining the barbaric historical Asian stereotypes with modern technological advancements and soullessness. This phenomenon called techno-Orientalism is part of new yellow perilism (Tchen & Yeats 2013: 333).

A new development in the 21st century concerning Asians in entertainment media narraives is the increase of North Korea and North Koreans in antagonistic roles. Whereas the 20th century usually saw the casting of Chinese or Japanese in these roles, nowadays there seems to be a trend towards casting North Korea in the villainous Asian roles. The 2012 remake of the 1984 film *Red Dawn* even went so far as to change the part of the Chinese army to North Koreans, so as not to lose access to the Chinese film market (Hughes 2012).

0.2 Thesis goal

This thesis will focus on this trend of casting North Korea in antagonist roles. This will be done through examining both film and video games produced in the U.S., in which North Korea plays a (major) antagonistic role. Both of these types of media have the ability to reach big audiences, both in national and international markets.

This thesis will be divided into four chapters, starting with a chapter on the birth and evolution of yellow peril, and the results and repercussions of such an ideology. This chapter will attempt to link together historical events with racial ideologies. The next chapter will focus on the media portrayals of Asian (Americans) in the 20th century, starting from the early years of Fu Manchu up to the 80's and 90's, introducing the kung-fu masters as new protagonists. Mostly it will concern itself with yellow perilist archetypes such as Fu Manchu and the Yellow Claw and their place and function in narratives. The third chapter introduces a variety of U.S. produced films and games. This chapter will be split into two parts, the first part outlining the importance of media studies, and providing a brief theoretical background. The second part will highlight a set of three films and two video games whose narratives deal with North Korea and North Korean military aggression in some way. The final chapter will use the information from the third chapter and compare and contrast this with what was discussed about yellow perilism in the first two chapters.

Part will be dedicated to a short section on contemporary U.S.-DPRK relations, and the biggest tension points in the past few decades. Mostly though this chapter will expand on the narratives described in the previous chapter, using the information given throughout the prior chapters to argue the existence of a renewed and/or revived yellow peril with regards to North Korea.

The main goal of this thesis, then, is to compare and contrast the 19th and 20th century trend of yellow perilism in entertainment media, with the rise of North Korean villains in modern film and video games. Is it at all similar, and why the choice of North Korea? By tracing yellow perilism's historical roots and looking at U.S. - trans-Pacific relations I hope to discern a pattern which can be applied to current U.S.-North Korea relations, and thus explain the recent interest in a North Korean villain. The secondary goal of this thesis is to explore the effects of the casting of such a monolithic antagonist on the audiences consuming these types of media.

Chapter 1: Orientalism, Yellow Perilism and the Build-up of U.S. - trans-Pacific Relations

1.1 Paving the way for yellow perilism

Binarism has been part of human thinking for a long time, and is still present in contemporary human thought (Tchen & Yeats 2013: 39). Thinking in opposites such as good and bad, civilised and uncivilised, and East and West have been prevalent throughout history, and are still used today.[1] This binarist method of thinking led to Western (European) countries painting themselves as considerably more civilised than their Eastern counterparts. The roots for what would later become yellow peril were formed during these earlier centuries. Some of the first conflicts between the barbaric East and civilised West were recorded in tensions between groups near the East-West borders of what is now known as Eurasia. Here two vastly different lifestyles on both ends conflicted with each other. In the West, there were sedentary agricultural societies. Their climates were predictable enough to be able to build a stable life and farm, and constant movement was deemed unnecessary. On the other side lived the mounted steppe nomads. Their climate was less agreeable, and thus a lifestyle suited for hunting and constant movement was created. All this took place about four millennia before Common Era (ibid.: 75).

Later interactions between Romans and Persians led to wars between the two groups, in which the Western Romans accused the Eastern Persians of being corrupted by wealth and greed. The Romans, of course, did not believe that the reasons for the corruption within their own ranks was to be found internally. Instead they also laid the blame for this internal corruption with the Persians, claiming they were rotting them from inside out (ibid.: 84). This conflict again resorted to

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[1] Though some may argue that we currently live in a post-everything society, people still suffer from various social institutions such racism, sexism, ableism, homphobia and more. These -isms often rely on a binarist division between two groups, "normal" and "abnormal". People of colour are still mirrored against white people, men and women are often still considered to be on two opposite ends of a straight line, etc.

geographical location as indicative of "right" and "wrong". The later invasions by the Mongols under leadership of Ghenghis Khan also sparked concerns in Europe. They were thought to have come from Greek hell, the Tartarus, and were subsequently depicted as soulless, bloodthirsty, and even vengeful (ibid.: 90).

During the late Medieval period Europe also had to deal with disappointments overseas. In the 14th and 15th century misionaries were sent to convert Muslims in the Middle East to Christianity, with little to no success. The failure of this movement was attributed not to the methods of the missonaries, but to the barbaricness of the Muslim population. They were deemed to literal, barbaric and carnal to understand the messages the missionaries tried to bring them (ibid.: 106), again laying blame with the Other instead of critically assessing their own methods. A side-effect was that all non-Christians, regardless of where they were from, were lumped together to form a single monolithic enemy of the Christian faith.

Images of civilization in the West and barbarians in the East became ingrained in the cultures and minds of people. Europe was transformed from a geographical location into an identity, referring to a system of civilisational values. Civilization was defined by the level of education, and 'liberty' was forced upon non-Western European countries through imperialism and colonization (ibid.: 18). Through this, an even stronger sense of binarism emerged.

1.2 Orientalism in Daily Thought

The idea of Western civilizational superiority is closely tied to concepts such as Orientalism and imperialism. Orientalism is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Saïd 2003: 3). Used as a method of exerting control over the Other, this method of thought contained the idea that Westerners know more about indigenous peoples' culture than the native people themselves, and were thus qualified to speak on behalf of, and especially over the

voices of, the indigenous population. Generally, Orientalism is used as "a distinctive means of representing race, nationality and Otherness" (Bernstein 1997: 2).

The idea of the West (Europe) being civilized and being burdened with the transfer of this civilization to other groups persists in this manner of thought. "Civilization" is used as a slogan of the Western societies' colonialist and imperialist movement, as they set out with the "burden" of bringing civilization to the hordes of uncivilized peoples (Bowden 2013: 151). The European nations who set about bringing their civilization to indigenous people around the world started their journey close to home. The Irish were also considered to be uncivilized, and were initially racialized as non-white, and were subsequently 'helped' (subdued by the English) to become more like a Western country in the Renaissance and early modern period (ibid.: 154). This example is simply used to exemplify the extent to which whiteness (inclusion in that group and access to their privilege) is conditional.

The idea that the West knew just as much, or even more, about indigenous cultures than the people belonging to these cultures, also ensured that most written information on these Others was supplied and written by Westerners (Saïd 2003: 63). It is also no coincidence, then, that during the height of European expansion in the 19th century, institutions and content dealing with what was described as "the Orient" increased sharply (ibid.: 4).

The motif of "the Orient" as a threat is present in imperialist and Orientalist thinking (ibid.: 57). The peoples whose lands were conquered and taken were often given only two options when faced with European expansion: assimilate to the best of their abilities, or risk death (Bowden 2013: 153). Many philosophers of the early modern era (but also as late as the final years of the long 19th century) also thought the conquering and removal of natives from their lands was a natural and inevitable result in a series of events that conform to world-history patterns. Even those who disagreed on the removal of indigenous peoples as a natural result, often still held beliefs that if the indigenous people were to pose a threat to white imperialists they could, and should, be removed

from the land (ibid.: 162). Either way, autonomy was (cruelly) taken from the indigenous people, essentially reducing them to objects to be admired and playthings to be pushed around.

This method of thinking is built on a number of preconceptions. The most important two discussed here are the idea of the civilized West being burdened with having to spread this civilization to all uncivilized corners of the earth and the idea of the Orient as a threat. Both these preconceptions helped justify European expansion and colonialism. By either converting indigenous populations to a civilized culture (and thus 'whitening' them), or destroying them, the "Oriental threat" they posed was also removed.

1.3 Yellow Perilisms at the Turn of the Century

The U.S. saw a rise in immigrants from China, and later Japan and India, in the 19th century. With the rise of Chinese migrants in the U.S. the American Dream and its feasibility came under scrutiny. The unattainability of the American Dream was deemed to be the fault of the Other, blamed on external circumstances, not internal ones (Tchen & Yeats 2013: 222).

The first Asian immigrants formed diasporic communities wherever they settled. The Chinese, and later the Japanese and South Asian, diaspora began to grow (Lee 2007: 538). Fears and anxieties about these groups began stirring in the U.S. public around the same time. Chinese were working in droves at the railroad construction sites at the frontiers of American expansion, yet were met with racialization and malcontent (Tchen & Yeats 2013: 221). Those who weren't considered white before, such as the Irish, were whitened, and the Asian immigrants quickly fell victim to racialized civilizational logic, culminating in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Jung 2008: 630, Tchen & Yeats 2013: 228). At first this exclusion only applied to the Chinese, but as more and more Asians of other ethnicities (Japanese, South Asians, Koreans, etc) moved to the U.S. they were impacted by these actions as well. By the 1930's the Chinese had been all but expelled

from North America (including Canada and Mexico) (Lee 2005: 249).

Yellow peril was a xenophobic response to the mass immigration by Chinese and Japanese citizens (Allred 2007: 78). As an ideology yellow peril was based on the idea that racial characteristics could be mapped and used to explain differences between races and the superiority of white people over people of colour. This kind of racial mapping relied heavily on Orientalism to homogenize Asia, and made it easy to claim a schism between a monolithic West and a monolithic East (Lee 2005: 239). More importantly, these ideas also intersected and overlapped with domestic anxieties about race, class, and gender relations. The Chinese who immigrated to the U.S. were willing to do a lot of work which Americans considered to be 'women's work' (such as laundry and food preparation), and the supposed effeminate ways of Chinese men threatened U.S. gender ideals on masculinity and femininity (ibid.: 239).Not only was the foreign presence of Asian immigrants considered a threat to gender relations, another pervasive stereotype of the Chinese automaton and the Japanese manager existed. When put together, these two forces would be almost unstoppable, according to U.S. politics, a threat to U.S. lifestyles, and a perfect example of yellow peril (Tchen & Yeats 2013: 176/177).

Yellow perilism in the U.S. was also closely connected to the inherent paranoia in the political system. The U.S.'s culture's paranoid logics generated a culture of yellow perilism, Islamophobia, and fears of other foreign presences (Tchen 2010: 278). The political psychology of the U.S. is plagued by (and thrives on) the use of such paranoia style politics (ibid.: 264). The Chinese Exclusion Act is a perfect example of the paranoia ingrained in the U.S. political system. While at first the presence of Chinese objects, and even the Chinese themselves, were considered refined and interesting, mere years later this public opinion changed completely after the demonization of the Chinese by the mass media and politicians (Jung 2008: 630).

1.4 20th Century Asian Antagonists and Model Minorities

As the 20th century progressed, international relations and tensions changed the way the U.S. interacted with nations in Asia. In the 1930's conflict between Japan and the U.S. began to take shape in discussion about civilization in general, but also civilization in China specifically (Davidann 2003: 23). Japan considered itself to be the most civilized and advanced nation in Asia, but in doing so was cast in an almost villainous role against the plans the U.S. had for Chinese civilization (ibid.: 36). Whatever cultural relations the U.S. and Japan held until this point in time were shattered over the China issue. This antagonistic view of the Japanese meant that yellow perilism's scope turned from China towards Japan. The Second World War did little to alleviate this situation, instead ensuring the anti-Japanese sentiment was kept alive. After the 1941 Pearl Harbor attacks the Japanese's place as a villain in the story of the U.S. was solidified, and internment camps for people of Japanese descent were set up and filled. Regardless of citizenship, people of Japanese ethnicity were rounded up and placed in these camps, only to later be released into a society abound with racially motivated violence (Shim 1998: 392).

In the period after the Second World War the Japanese economy started thriving. Its industrial productivity from 1955 to the 1990's outpaced that of its Western counterparts (Forsberg 2003: 250). This Japanese success was met with two almost oppositional voices: that of admiration, and that of unfairness. The U.S. wanted a similar growth for its own economy, but worried about Japan being able to offer unfair competition with quality products offered for little money (ibid.: 256). This same post-war period also saw a growth in other Asian economies, nicknamed the Tigers (Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong). These economies got similar reactions to their growths from the U.S., which in turn negatively affected the U.S.-Asia relations (Shim 1998: 397).

While the success of Asian economies did little to help change the images of yellow peril, it *was* used to transform them into a new stereotype to hold against other minorities. In the pre-War

period, with tensions between the U.S. and Japan rising, Chinese began to be regarded as "the ideal American minority" (ibid.: 392). The Chinese were considered hardworking and the Americans were impressed with their resistance against the Japanese. In this case the Chinese were lifted up to the status of a model minority to be held up and mirrored against the Japanese. The divide between Good Asian and Bad Asian was used to manipulate.

Model minorities are a political construct to manipulate and pit various minorities against each other. In doing so the (white) majority hopes to direct the frustrations of minorities against them towards each other. It is also a method of keeping the minority currently toting the crown of "model minority" in line. The pitting of Chinese against Japanese in the pre-War period was one of the first examples, but from the 1960's on an Asian Model Minority became a regular occurrence.

While the position of model minority might seem enviable at first, such stereotypes hurt all parties involved, leaving white hegemony intact. The Asian model minority gets turned into a racial mascot, to be used as an argument to deflect and defend against allegations of racism (Allred 2007: 69). The toting of a racial mascot also ends up with a fragmenting function, hurting relations between minority groups (ibid.: 72). But at the same time Asian minorities are not accepted as white either. The Asian model minority plays into the idea of the perpetual foreigner (ibid.: 73). They are still racialized and treated as not-white.

By assigning a group (in this case Asian (Americans)) an exemplary function, they are automatically contrasted with other minority groups such as African Americans and Hispanic Americans. This could lead to resentment from these other minority groups over the perceived success of the Asian minorities. In the past this artificial competition between minority ethnicities has already led to racially motivated instances of violence (ibid.: 75). While at first glance being a model minority may seem an improvement to being categorized as villainous, threatening yellow peril, it is essentially still a method of exerting power over a minority by the majority group. Model minorities and yellow peril are simply two sides of the same coin.

Chapter 2: Yellow perilism in 20th century media

Social and political contemporary thought can often be traced through their portrayal of their allies and adversaries in media. If a nation poses a threat, then that is reflected similarly in trends in both news outlets and entertainment media. If nations become allies, that is reflected as well. It is these developments, the good and the bad, that will be identified and traced in this chapter.

2.1 Early 20th Century Portrayals of Asia

As the migration flow from China and Japan to the U.S. started to increase, anxieties about a Chinese invasion began to form. The idea of an invasion by a swarm of Chinese, Japanese, or other non-U.S. nationality began to appear as a recurring theme in science-fiction stories in the early years of the 20th century (Tchen & Yeats 2013: 207).

The flow of migrants was not the only source of anxiety about the power of Asia for the U.S. media. The Boxer Rebellion at the turn of the 20th century also helped reinforce the idea of yellow peril and the supposed danger the Chinese posed because of their numbers (Mayer 2013: 22). Another event factoring in to the rising discomfort of the white U.S. culture about Asia was the result of the Russo-Japanese war. It was the first time an Asiatic nation defeated a European power in modern warfare (Sohn 2008: 5). The perceived irreconcilability between Asian and U.S. lives, together with relative invisibility of the Chinese population combined with yellow perilist ideas and led to the creation of the Chinese villain character hiding in Chinatowns (Shim 1998: 388).

One of the most well-known portrayal of yellow peril of the early 20th century is Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu. While not American in origin, Rohmer was a British national, Fu Manchu nonetheless gained popularity as an icon of yellow perilism in the U.S. Fu Manchu was the

embodiment of the yellow peril sentiment in the early 20th century, a near invisible presence.[2] The early stories about Fu Manchu, in the 1910's, thus zoomed in on anxieties regarding the invisibility of the Asian presence in the West (Mayer 2013: 89). Fu Manchu was also coded as a threat to U.S. (or Western) society because of his combination of Eastern esoteric knowledge and Western scientific knowledge (Tchen & Yeats 2013: 210). This combination of understanding both worlds allowed him to blend in with Western society seamlessly, while simultaneously allowing him to portray the threat of a foreign presence. When Fu Manchu was visible on-screen his make-up style was exaggerated to create abstract, alien features to ensure he was coded as foreign, and therefore villainous (Mayer 2013: 77).

Fu Manchu was the obvious example of yellow perilism in film, but many more films were made with Asian characters. Most of Hollywood's depiction of Asia was rooted in yellow perilisms, and so even films dealing with romance stories tell tales of a 'good, pure West' and a 'barbaric East' (Marchetti 1993: 2). Many romance films featuring Asian characters in the early 20th century featured Asian men who fall for white women. The women are considered a metaphor for Western moral purity, which is subsequently threatened by villainous Asia (ibid.: 10). The interracial romances in the films of this era are coded as 'perverse', there are no happy endings in interracial romances and often the Asian man either dies or is removed from the picture, in order to keep the division between Asia and the West clear (ibid.: 37). These early 20th century portrayals of Asians in film were filled with reflections of the unabashedly racist political and journalistic rhetoric of the time (Shah 2003: 3). The reduction of Asian people and cultures to their essentials (stereotyping) ensured a reading of being wholly incompatible with Western (or white) lifestyles and people.

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[2]   In the first few installments of the Fu Manchu series, the eponymous character was rarely, if ever, seen. He was often partially obscured, hiding in the shadows, or not present at the scene at all.

2.2 Pre-, mid-, and post-War Representations

In the period leading directly into the second World War, Japanese expansionist ambitions became clear to the U.S., and by extension, the West. This lead to a shift of attention from the Chinese to the Japanese as a foreign power to watch out for. Just as the Chinese were consistently cast in antagonist parts in early 20th century narratives dealing with Asia, it was now turn for Japan to assume the role of Asian antagonist (Shim 1998: 391). This same time period also saw the emergence of the Good Asian American trope. While still distinctly Other, the Good Asian is portrayed as an ally to white people, placed opposite of other (dangerous) Asians. These clashing tropes of anything Asian as both ally and enemy serve to show the situational and selective nature of yellow perilism (Tchen 2010: 271). This tension between the Good and Bad Asian tropes were especially apparent during World War Two films, wherein Japanese aggressions against peaceful or otherwise benign Chinese were shown (Shah 2003: 3).

By the end of the Second World War the perceived domestic Japanese threat was neutralized by means of the internment camps, and the foreign threat was subdued by atomic bombs. The image of the Japanese in media was slowly transforming into a more neutral, almost positive one, as the Chinese image fell back into pre-War dangerous stereotypes, due to the perceived communist threat (ibid.: 4). Even though the 'evil Chinaman' trope was almost universally considered a cliché by the 1950's (Mayer 2013: 127), China's association with communism and their fight against U.S. troops during the Korean War saw the Chinaman as yellow perilist trope resurface (Shim 1998: 392).

Despite the dubious honour of being labelled model minorities in the 1960's, Hollywood's attitude regarding (East) Asians had not changed. Stereotypes of old still ran rampant. Asian characters were still portrayed negatively and misleading in film and on television (ibid.: 395). Films which dealt with romance as a theme were more often than not about U.S. soldiers meeting an Asian wife in Asia, who later 'adopted' their Amerasian children and took them back to the U.S.,

removing them from everything related to Asia, in an attempt to remove their 'Asianness'. Romanticized images of children being rescued from communism replaced the documentary images of Asian children running from napalm bombs (Marchetti 1993: 100). Interracial romances in Hollywood could go only one of two ways: the couple either received tragic punishment for crossing the racial barrier, or a happy ending, but only when the Asian partner could be assimilated into the American mainstream (ibid.: 125).

By the 1970's many of the archetypical yellow peril fictional figures died out, or were demoted to minion-status. The Asian mastermind trope became defunct, instead giving way to even greater, often white, villains. However, just because the figures brought forth by the yellow peril ideology, such as Fu Manchu and Marvel's Yellow Claw, lost popularity and status in fiction, does not mean yellow perilism itself became defunct (Mayer 2013: 154), as the ideology behind yellow peril was (and is) still very much alive.

2.3 New Protagonists, Old Mindsets

The later years of the 20th century saw new kinds of Asian (American) presence on screen. Even though Asian kung-fu master films gained popularity, old stereotypes created in the early years of the 20th century still persisted (Shah 2003: 4). Both yellow peril and model minority stereotypes were present in Asian characters in film, often simultaneously (Kawai 2006: 120). The new (on-screen) Asian hero was not one who was assimilated (and subsequently whitened), but an image of ethnic exotism (Mayer 2013: 148).

Overt racism in film has been gradually disappearing, but inferential racism in new media is still at similar levels as before, if not increasing (Shim 1998: 403). The practice of yellowfacing[3] is also slowly waning, although in 2012 the film *Cloud Atlas* managed to bring the conversation on

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[3] Similar to blackface, a white actor who dons make-up and costume to look more Asian is putting on 'yellowface'. A highly controversial practice, it was often used in early film because of either a lack of or an unwillingness to hire Asian actors.

racist practices in Hollywood back to the mainsteam for a short time after release. Fortunately, yellowfacing practices such as in *Cloud Atlas* are in a definite minority, with most roles written as Asian characters going to Asian (American) actors, although not always being sensitive to ethnicity.[4] In the kung-fu genre big names such as Jet Li, Jackie Chan, and Bruce Lee are everywhere. These kinds of films, however, pose interesting questions regarding race and gender relations. Traditionally Asian men in film have been desexualized, so as to negate the threat they pose to white masculinity (Zhu 2013: 405). They were basically asexual heroes with no love interests. In the new kung-fu master genre, however, often a white female lead is cast alongside the Asian male lead, which can lead to a romantic (if not sexual) tension between the two main characters. This may seem remarkable at first, interracial romance has always been considered a taboo in mainstream entertainment, because of the threat it poses to white masculinity, especially with white women involved, but when looking at the way in which these relations play out the establishment of white supremacy is unperturbed.

The women in these movies are shown to be extremely loyal, faithful, and supportive of their Asian co-stars. This helps shift the responsibility of the accomplishments of the Asian leads from their own achievements to the white women. Without their support the narrative would not have played out as it did (ibid.: 410). Another way in which the relation between Asian man and white woman is coded as non-threatening are the narrative overtones of the movement towards whiteness. Whether it's the main character idolizing "being white", or the characters never paying compliment to Chinese (or Japanese, or any other relevant) culture, there is a mindset to be discerned within the narrative that "being white" should be an end goal for those who are not (ibid.: 409). And so, even though Asian protagonists, and even Asian main characters, in the media are increasing, they are still written and coded to be as non-threatening as possible, in order to preserve

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4   This only goes for most contemporary films. In the Fu Manchu days yellowfacing was ubiquitous, and even in the 1960's white actors still donned yellowface in order to portray Fu Manchu. However, ethnicity is still something which is not factored in in film. East Asian actors' ethnicities are often considered to be interchangable, leading to Korean actors in Japanese roles, etc.

the status quo. The kung-fu master may have fighting prowess (masculinity), but he does not possess whiteness (status).

2.4 Techno-Orientalism

Next to developments in films now starring Asian protagonists, a new track of thought in the shape of techno-Orientalism is also making its way onto the big screen. Techno-orientalism combines both old and new fears about Asia to form a new Othering and threatening image of (East) Asia. Techno-Orientalism is a method of thinking which combines the old barbaric, ruthless Asian stereotype with the current technologically advanced, but lacking humanness stereotype (Tchen & Yeats 2013: 333). Techno-Orientalism thus serves to reinforce the idea of "Asian robotic masses", recounting the early fears of an Asian invasion, but this time with superior technology as well as numbers.

Techno-Orientalism rose (and is still rising) to popularity since the 1980's, during which relations across the Pacific were turning sour once again. It reflects the "perceived burgeoning peril to the United States represented by the Asian-Pacific in the 1980's" (Sohn 2008: 8). The growths of the so-called Asian tigers were cause for alarm, as they were getting to be on equal footing with the U.S. with regards to growth, prosperity, and technology, even threatening to surpass the white world at their own 'game'.

The movement from the Evil Chinaman trope to techno-Orientalism can be traced in popular media as well. Marvel's Yellow Claw (hereafter the: the Claw) turned out to be a robot in the penultimate story arc concerning him in the late 70's. Not only does this leave room for the villain to be revived at a later point in time, it is also indicative of the new shape orientalism was taking (Mayer 2013: 13). Techno-Orientalism in this case is the perceived discrepancy between U.S. and Chinese[5] technological prowess. Throughout the story arcs concerning him the Claw is shown to have considerable skill in robotics, having used robots to distract or attack the heroes on multiple

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[5] The Claw, or Plan Chu, was a Chinese national.

occasions.

Next to the technological advancements Asian countries have shown both in reality and in popular media outputs, the narrative of the foreign taking over and subjugating the domestic is still alive and well within techno-Orientalism. The cliché of the warmongering Other invading the U.S. (or any other nation) has been a trope which has been around for as long as yellow perilist ideas existed. Stories in this vein can be found back as early as the 17th century. In 1684 Gobineau wrote the opera *Amadis*, in which waves of Chinese defeated a group of (white) heroes, not through superior tactics and strength, but by sheer number, literally drowning the heroes in Chinese corpses (Tchen & Yeats 2013: 158). This supposed barbaric lack of care for one's own life combined with the technological advancements made in the late 20th century ensure that yellow perilist ideas are updated and modernized, in order to maintain a perceivably valid ideology to work with in various types of media.

Orientalism can be (and has been) used in media as a paradigm for representations of race, ethnicity, and gender (Bernstein 1997: 5). In the creation of a film nothing is incidental. Everything is part of a carefully constructed vision. Choices regarding background noises, languages, and people are also part of this decision making process. Even entertainment media is reflective (or allegorical) of real world social and intercultural relations (Bernstein 1997: 5, Tchen & Yeats 2013: 330). Depending on the genre of the film or the type of media discussed, representation of Asians and Asian Americans conforms to certain tropes. In films in which there is a heroic role for an Asian or Asian American actor, their characters are often emasculated and desexualized, to ensure they are read as as small a threat as possible to the U.S. masculinity. However, when Asians are cast in an antagonistic role they are supposed to be read as a threat to the American masculinity. Thus when the U.S. heroes eventually defeats the Asian armies, their own status as superior against the faceless Asian masses is reinforced.

Chapter 3.1: Analysing new media and why it matters

3.1.1 Constructing meaning

As discussed in prior sections fictional media and social relations in the real world show parallels to each other. It is reflective of the power (im)balances in daily life (Golumbia 2008: 510). It is this representation of power balances which constitutes a major part of the importance of film studies. Through the use of objects and their representations people find and create meaning (Hall 2013a: xix). This meaning is created by following along with the story and reading either into or against the dominant ideology present in the narrative. Most often it is a combination between both readings. The objects on-screen thus do not inherently carry meaning, but their meaning is constructed through the discourse surrounding and involving them (Hall 2013b: 30).

Films, video games, and other new media offer their consumers a constructed reality. In the consumption of media audiences are not simply passive subjects, instead they act as social subjects, able to influence and construct meaning out of the text for themselves (Fiske 1987: 62). In the construction of meaning from a text an important characteristic is opposition. Texts can be, and are supposed to be, read in multiple ways depending on the person reading, viewing, or otherwise interacting with it (ibid.: 67, Hall 2013c: 219). Their lived experiences and privileges all factor into what they will and will not accept as true in fictional worlds.

As two major markets reaching a big audience, film and games both share certain characteristics, and differ strongly on other points. Both are, more often than not, storydriven. With film being culture's principal style of representation (Bolter 2008: 22) it is no wonder that games have adopted certain elements from film. Many of the cinematics in games use filmic techniques and borrow from cinematic conventions (ibid.: 23). Like film and other forms of genre fiction, games are inherently political and ideological (Leonard 2003: 8). Because of this their portrayal of

race matters. They are a cultural product, offering a space to either discuss, consume, or confirm stereotypical ideas about race, gender, and other social issues (ibid.: 7). Unfortunately, even though games have the capacity to address themes such as racism, classism, and others, they often shy away from speaking out about them (Mäyrä 2008: 86).[6]

Any medium with its roots in society, which is every medium, is affected by contemporary politics and ideologies. This means that all these media will also reflect society's values in one way or another (Nakamura & Lovink 2005: 60). This means that "the old" society can be almost seamlessly transported into the texts of "the new" (ibid.: 60). Even if "the old" is altered, narratives about the Other are always present in fiction. Even though the coding of racial and ethnic differences has shifted over time, and will continue to shift, it is still present in popular media (Hall 2013c: 267). The Other, as Hall argues, is necessary to create dialogue through which the audiences construct meaning (ibid.: 225).

3.1.2 Interacting with different kinds of media: films and games

While the field of film studies is still relatively young, when it is compared to game studies it is well established. As has been mentioned, modern video games tend to comply with cinematic conventions (Bolter 2002: 23). Like genre exists in film, so does it exist in game, and different genres offer different levels of immersion (Mäyrä 2008: 109). Genre can not only offer depth of immersion, but also invokes expectation. The viewer (or player) of a certain film (or game) knows what to expect from a medium due to categorisation (Gledhill & Ball 2013: 347). When one watches a film categorized as a war drama, the presumptions about narrative, setting, and character types are different from when a film is categorized as a comedy. A similar case can be made for

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6   That is not to say these themes are not present in games at all. A recent example would be the 2013 game *BioShock Infinite*, in which there are clear references to slavery, racism, classism and other related issues. However, the game merely shows them, and does not condemn or discuss the impact of the presence of these issues. A player might feel uncomfortable when shown these things, but is never forced to think about their actions and their impact on the world around them.

games, in which genre is especially important for both gameplay and narrative reasons. A genre thus invokes ideas about plots, iconography, settings and locations (ibid.: 352).

Even though film and game seem to be similar on some levels, they are still very different types of media. Games can offer a level of interactivity which film does not. They offer the player two layers, a core layer, gameplay, and an outer shell, dealing with representation and a signifying system (Mäyrä 2008: 17). A core difference between film and games arises here: games make meaning through play and action, whereas film allows for the creation of meaning through the decoding of messages and media representations (ibid.: 19). While in films one spectates a narrative and in turn interprets it, games make the player responsible for creating the narrative (Neitzel 2005: 239). Even if the storyline is linear, if the player decides to quit the narrative ends. If a game has multiple branches the player can control and shape the narrative. They have (limited) control on their actions and the outcome of the story.[7]

The more immersed one is in a fictional world, be it film, game, or something else, the better the chance of identification with characters. The key to media popularity is emotional involvement (Raynauld 2005: 84). And the key to emotionally involving people is giving them a reality they can believe in. It doesn't have to be real, the popularity of alternate universe settings in media is proof of that, but it has to have signs or symbols which resonate with the public. The easiest method to make these fictional universes feel 'real' is by transplanting established ideas and symbols. The amount of ideas and ideology behind the ideas being transplanted differs across media. Games can afford to transplant slightly more controversial ideas, simply because their audience is smaller and more limited than most films. Films, on the other hand, often need to reach a large audience, meaning that they need to be cut down and molded into more acceptable shapes for the general public (Young 2008: 235).

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[7]   Various games incorporate a kind of "moral system", in which decisions can be made giving the player either points for being good or for being evil. These points are tallied behind the scenes, and can affect the world in which the player finds themselves, the way they are being treated by the non-player characters, and the conclusion of story events.

Chapter 3.2: Film and game narratives

While by no means an exhaustive list, I have selected the following films and games to look at for their narratives concerning North Korea. The variation in setting between them justifies their place in this thesis. Some of them deal with a North Korean invasion of the U.S. (*Red Dawn*, *Homefront*), others with U.S. military operations within North Korea (*Behind Enemy Lines II, Ghost Recon 2*). By looking at narratives which place North Korea in various positions with regards to the U.S. a clearer image of yellow perilist structure can be seen than if one was to only focus on one type of narrative. In the following sections I will outlines the general plots of these media and mention some noteworthy choices made by the creators. Further analysis will be done in chapter 4.

Films

3.2.1 Behind Enemy Lines II: Axis of Evil (2006)

Behind Enemy Lines II's plot is about giving a fictional explanation of the 2004 Ryanggang explosion. The subtitle *Axis of Evil* refers to the 2002 statements of former president Bush, where he referred to both Iraq and North Korea as being part of the "axis of evil", opposite of the U.S. and its allies (DiFilippo 2012: 30, 96). The movie start off with a highly condensed, sensationalised, 'history' of North Korea. In the first few minutes it's already clear that the film will focus exclusively on militaristic actions, both domestic and foreign. The first few minutes of faux-news[8] segments serve to set a background leading into the plot. It purposely focusses on North Korean militaristic imagery and a sensationalised report about the nuclear crisis in 1994.

      The plot starts off with the U.S. having discovered a North Korean long-range missile,

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[8]   I use the term faux-news to describe a filmic convention of overlaying images with the talking of newsreporters (real or fictional), often with many voices either speaking together or in quick succession, giving the idea of "sensational" news. Often such a segment's goal is to create a feeling of unrest, being rushed, paranoia, and threat.

capable of reaching U.S. coasts. After a discussion with domestic military and political personnel the conclusion of "no viable diplomatic option" (Dodson 2006) is reached, and a decision is made to send in a covert mission to explode the missile silo. Throughout the film focus shifts between the SEALs in North Korea, where most of the action takes place, and the politics in Washington, where a large part of the worldbuilding takes place. After the discovery is made that the missile could be nuclear, and a South Korean emissary condemns U.S. actions as an "act of war" (ibid.), the mission in cancelled, but not before four of the navy SEALs assigned to this mission parachute into North Korean territory. What follows is a trope-filled battle of a few good men (the U.S. SEALs) versus hordes of North Korean soldiers. Eventually the SEALs are captured and tortured. They are later transported by a North Korean, who implies he is unsatisfied with the current North Korean regime, and saved by South Korean special operations soldiers.

In the final story arc of the film Washington calls in an airstrike on the missile bunker after losing contact with the South Korean soldiers and the navy SEALs. Despite warnings against this course of action leading to war between South Korea, North Korea, and the U.S., the projected casualties are deemed as acceptable by the U.S. In North Korea the navy SEALs and South Koreans are en route to the missile location, and manage to destroy it before the U.S. airstrike reaches the location. The North Korean dissident who transported them earlier ends up helping their cause at the missile silo by killing a fellow North Korean, claiming that "we are not all ignorant peasants here in Korea" (ibid.). An all-out war is averted, and the events which have taken place in the film are deemed classified. The narrative concludes with a voice-over news segment speaking about the Ryanggang explosion.

3.2.2 Red Dawn (2012)

A remake of a 1984 original, Red Dawn follows a similar storyline as its original. The major

difference being that the invading forces have had their nationalities switched from Soviet invaders (and allies) to North Korean invaders. Originally the invading forces were cast to be Chinese, but after consideration by the studio, and backlash from China (Landreth 2010), this was changed to North Korea. The opening credits of the film, like *Behind Enemy Lines II*, serves to highlight the global politics leading to the events in the film. They are some real news segments spliced with faux-news texts and images, in which they refer to North Korea as an "immature regime", a "spoiled child", and a "danger to the world" (Bradley 2012).

The narrative consists of an unexpected North Korean invasion in the U.S. A small group of adolescents manages to escape and start a resistance movement. The film follows their actions as they try to cause as much chaos as possible within the occupied city near their hideout. At the halfway point in the movie it is revealed that the North Koreans managed to successfully invade and occupy the U.S. (the fate of the rest of the world is never mentioned) with help of the Russian military. This plays into the disbelief one of the main characters expressed at the beginning about North Korea being able to seize the U.S. so easily. The other reason why North Korea seemingly managed to pull off an occupation overnight is revealed to be through the use of electromagnetic pulses (or: EMP). After some failed, and some successful, assaults on the North Korean forces the film concludes with the group of American resistance fighters continuing their work, crashing a North Korean prisoner camp.

Surprisingly, the presence of North Korea on-screen is relatively minimal. They are present in many scenes, but the focus is almost always on the actions and movements of the Americans. This lack of focus leads the viewer to be in the dark about the workings and motivations of the North Korean invasion. The closest to explanation the film gets is through scenes of the prisoner camps, where a voice over a PA system explains that the U.S. way of life is corrupted, and they are there to help. Also contributing to the relative obscurity of North Korea is the shortage of named, recognisable characters. Only one North Korean army captain is ever mentioned by name (Cho),

and only because he was introduced by an American character. The only other named Asian character in the film is a U.S. marine named Smith, who is only introduced in the last third of the film.

3.2.3 Olympus Has Fallen (2013)

The first film on the list to not to reference real world events in the first few minutes, *Olympus Has Fallen* starts off with the introduction of its characters. The North Korean threat is not displayed through flashy news segments like *Behind Enemy Lines II* or *Red Dawn*, but is mentioned on a televised broadcast stating that North Korean troops are moving along and towards the DMZ, as background noise to a conversation between two main characters. Later in the introduction this North Korean threat is revisited in form of newspaper headlines on a paper another character is reading (see image 1). The North Korean threat in *Olympus Has Fallen* is subtly introduced in these ways, just as the nationality of the villains later are not revealed to be North Korean until it becomes relevant to the plot.

Image 1. A snapshot from *Olympus Has Fallen*. A member of the white house is reading a paper with the headline "Korean Tensions Continue Rising" (Fuqua 2013).

In a following scene, we see a meeting in the white house between staff members, later joined by the South Korean minister. While discussing tactics and plans regarding the North Korean army's movements, a hijacked military aircraft (a Hercules C-130) flies over and attacks Washington D.C.,

civilians, and more importantly, the white house. The president, his staff, and the South Korean visitors are all transported to a safe vault underneath the white house. The aircraft is finally brought down, hitting the Washington Monument on its way down with the monument crashing to the ground.

Moments after these events a troop of guerrilla North Korean terrorists (disguised as tourists) suicide bomb the gates to the white house, and manage to overrun it, after a prolonged gun battle. The chief of security the South Korean minister brought with him reveals himself to be a North Korean (guerrilla) mastermind. He takes the president and other important U.S. political players hostage, while shooting (and killing) the South Korean minister, proclaiming that he is doing everything "for united prosperous Korea" and "to end the civil war *your* country interrupted so long ago" (Fuqua 2013). The mastermind behind the attack, revealed to be named Kang, demands the U.S. 7th fleet be removed from Korea, in order to give the armies of the North access to the Southern part of the peninsula. Not only does Kang want a resolution of the civil war between the Koreas (with the North coming out as victor, in his scenario), he also plans to reduce the U.S. to a nuclear wasteland, by detonating all nuclear missiles in their silos.

The main character of the film, Banning, acts as a one man army throughout the film, being the only U.S. national loyal to the U.S. inside the white house who has not been captured. After eliminating Kang's men one at a time he manages to lock out Kang's video access to the pentagon, forcing Kang to fake his own and the president's death in order to escape. Kang manages to activate the missile detonation countdown, but is killed by Banning soon after. The film ends with the detonations being cancelled, and a speech from the president, with images of the U.S. flag being hoisted up on top of the white house again.

Games

3.2.4 Homefront (2011)

In 2011 THQ published the first-person shooter *Homefront*, developed by Kaos Studios, for

Windows, PlayStation 3, and Xbox 360. Similarly to *Red Dawn*, the plot deals with a North Korean

invasion and occupation of the U.S., and in another similarity, the primary antagonists were also

originally intended to be Chinese (Totilo 2011).[9] The game is divided into 7 missions, together

forming an overarching story of the American resistance to the North Korean occupiers.

Homefront is set in an alternate future, in the year 2027. The game starts with another faux-

news segment, this time made up of fully fictional events.[10] After Kim Jong Il's death, Kim Jong Un

unifies Korea into the Greater Korean Republic in 2013. In 2017 the U.S. retreated their forces from

the Korean peninsula. In 2018 Japan surrenders itself to the now Greater Korean Republic.

Throughout this segment the downfall of the U.S. is emphasized, oil prices rise to the 20 dollar

mark, economically the country is faltering. In 2024 the Korean annexation is still spreading. U.S.

power grids are shut down due to an EMP satellite launched by Korea, and the Korean occupation

reaches the shores of Hawaii (and by extension, mainland U.S.) in 2025.

The game centers around a small group of Americans, part of the resistance, and their plan

to steal fuel trucks from the Korean forces to deliver to the U.S. army so they can launch a counter

attack. The game launches with Korean forces forcibly removing the main character, Jacobs, from

his home and taking him to a re-education camp. However, he is intercepted by two members of the

resistance, and joins them in their fight. After multiple firefights the resistance makes their way

through a labour camp, confirming the existence of mass graves, and gaining access to the beacons

used to tag and track the fuel trucks.

In order to track the fuel trucks the resistance needs to move beyond "the wall" the Koreans

have constructed around the city, inscribed with the quote "we welcome a world of freedom" in

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[9]   This was changed both by fears of a possible backlash from the Chinese public, and because China was deemed "not
      scary enough", considering the intensive trade between China and the U.S.
[10] All events described are as they are explained within the game's universe. Any similarities to real world events, such
      as Kim Jong Il's death, which the game predicted to be only a month apart from the actual death, are purely
      coincidental and will not be noted further.

Korean (see image 2). Ironically this "world of freedom" needs to be locked inside through the use of walls and violence.

Image 2. The Wall in *Homefront*, the Korean text reads "자유의 세계로 오신 것을 환영합니다", or: we welcome a world of freedom (Kaos Studios 2011).

After successfully blowing a hole in the wall the resistance members flee through, and end up in another battle. This time not with Koreans, but fellow Americans, over a helicopter. Eventually the main characters manage to gain access to the helicopter and use it to hijack the fuel trucks, which they promptly deliver to the U.S. army forces stationed near San Francisco. After a long and arduous battle, the U.S. forces manage to take the Golden Gate Bridge, and the game ends, with a concluding segment on the European Union calling a meeting to discuss sending help to the U.S. against the Korean occupation.

3.2.5 Tom Clancy's: Ghost Recon 2 (2004)

Tom Clancy's: Ghost Recon 2 (hereafter: *Ghost Recon 2*), another first-person shooter, was initially released in 2004 for PlayStation 2, GameCube, and Xbox. However the Xbox version's plot differed greatly from the other versions of the game, being set both in a different year, and containing different missions. Both versions of the game are related to each other, with the Xbox version being

a new story in the same world, just at a later date. Both storylines center around the team of Ghosts, U.S. special operations soldiers, and their mission to eliminate North Korean threat and bring stability to the region.

The PlayStation and GameCube versions take place in the year 2007, and center on the rising tensions with North Korea. The Ghosts are deployed in order to subdue North Korea and relieve tension between the U.S. and the DPRK. The missions in-game are used to put enough pressure on Pyongyang to have them back down. The Ghosts are successful in this, and return home. However, several months later one of the North Korean generals, Paik, activates a Taepodong-2 missile carrying nuclear materials, and plans to launch it at South Korea and other NATO countries. The Ghosts return to the DPRK for one final mission, and manage to disable the missile, leading to the eventual suicide of Paik. After Paik's suicide a second general, Jung, is seen to be plotting revenge against the Ghosts, the U.S., and the NATO nations.

The plot of the PS2/GC game leads directly into the Xbox's plot. In-game it's the year 2011, and the North Korean government has realised that by investing in their military as they have done so far, the North Korean infrastructure is unsustainable. The decision is made to cut back on military, and is met with resistance from general Jung, who was seen in the other iteration of *Ghost Recon 2*. He plans (and succeeds) a coup, and ends up in full control of North Korean nuclear and military activities. His plans to start a war among Asian nations is picked up by the U.S. and other NATO nations, and they immediately send forces to stop Jung. While not a covert mission, the Ghosts are sent in as a highly specialised tactical team, part of the American contingent. Throughout the game the Ghosts and allied forces try to cut off Jung's access to supplies and protect civilians, as Jung seizes civilian centers. Due to the Ghosts cutting off Jung's access to, among others, gasoline, he grows increasingly volatile, and ends up planting a nuclear device in a dam near Hamhung. In the final chapters of the game the Ghosts disable the nuclear device and apprehend Jung.

Chapter 4: Modern Politics, Analyses and Comparisons

4.1 North Korea: Growing Threat, Growing Peril

After the Korean War had ended, daily life in the DPRK became "isolated, xenophobic, ruthless, profoundly disciplined, inured to hardship, and committed to unrelenting struggle in a hostile world" (Buzo 2007: 90). It is also around this time that the North Korean government started pouring funding into its military. By the 1960's the strain of this military funding became visible in other parts of the economy (ibid.: 92). The DPRK's military continued to grow throughout the 1970's, reaching a number of approximately 1,000,000 members in the later years of that decade (ibid.: 119). The 1970's were also the era in which the gulf between the DPRK and its allies began to widen. Due to its ambitions the DPRK had managed to alienate most other countries by 1980, making its self-reliance policy not just an ideal, but a necessity (ibid.: 122).

The 1980's saw some talks between North Korea and other nations, but without much success, as North Korea suspended all activity in these talks in 1986 (ibid.: 140). Levels of worry over the DPRK once again rose in 1993 with the firing of the Rodong missile, coinciding with a climax of the first nuclear crisis between the DPRK and the U.S. (DiFilippo 2012: 2). Finally, in 1994 an agreement was signed between the U.S. and the DPRK, freezing five of North Korea's plutonium-related production facilities (Buzo 2007: 167, DiFilippo 2012: 2). Although this Geneva Framework Agreement (hereafter: GFA) was supposed to ensure the death of North Korea's nuclear programs, doubt about North Korean possession of nuclear material remained.

The late 1990's showed some progress in talks between North and South Korea, but due to North Korea's consistent militaristic offensiveness, the talks again fell flat. In 2002 the Bush administration caused another international stir, not only by calling the DPRK part of an "axis of evil" and being "deeply hostile to the U.S." (DiFilippo 2012: 96), but also by accusing the DPRK of

having a uranium enrichment program (ibid.: 97). The Bush administration also adopted a hardliner policy towards the DPRK, with little success. This policy failed to deliver any significant progress in the nuclear issue, and on top of that was even used by the DPRK to justify their military first policy (*songun*) (ibid.: 99).

In 2008 the U.S. removed the DPRK from their terrorist list, but not before the DPRK reactivated their (initially shut-down) Yongbyon reactor (ibid.: 125). Multilateral talks between the U.S., North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia (in any composition), have not led to any significant solutions or agreements. The DPRK remains rooted in its *songun* policy, and remains suspicious of U.S. movements, both on and off the Korean peninsula. It uses U.S. movements and actions to justify displays of militaristic prowess, such as the 2009 missile launch (ibid.: 131), and continues to do so today.

4.2 Transplanting yellow peril to modern times

As we have seen, yellow peril originated in the U.S. during the 19th century as a response to the flow of immigrants from China, and later Japan, Korea, India, and other Asian countries. The perceived inexhaustibility of the Chinese workers combined with the stereotype of the Japanese as good managers and their aptitude at using Western technology led into a general anti-Asian anxiety, and yellow peril (Tchen & Yeats 2013: 176/177). Yellow perilist ideology evolved from the anti-Asian sentiment inherent to the response of white Americans to increased diversity. Portrayals of Asian characters such as Fu Manchu were not intended to give an accurate image of Asian diaspora, instead allowing the characters to be defined by others, thus releasing the "phantom of the yellow peril" (Mayer 2013: 21).

At the same time the Other is needed to be able to define oneself. This often goes hand in hand with the stereotyping and essentializing of the Other. By reducing an Other to simple

base characteristic it is easier to posit oneself as being "not that". This way of thought creates two monoliths: Us and Them, with no room for deviation or individuality.

Stereotypes and essentialist ideas about minorities were used to establish superiority of white Americans over non-white immigrants (and non-white Americans). The best way to spread these ideologies and reach a big public is through media. While early yellow perilist characters saw themselves often (partially) obscured, hiding in the shadows, with long, pointy fingernails, this image died a silent death during the second half of the 20th century. The supposed Asian mastermind working behind the scenes was no longer a valid fear, but had become a cartoon of itself (ibid.: 154). Instead Asian presence in cinema and television was now influenced by the perceived threat of the technological (and economical) advancements being made in Asia. The fear of technological efficiency and capitalist expertise by someone other than the white U.S. caused a certain level of anxiety, which reflects the survival of white supremacist ideals.

4.3 Symbolism and memory in entertainment media

With the unstable relations between the DPRK and other nations, the recurrent displays of militaristic prowess by North Korea, and the constant threat of nuclear weapons, North Korea is lining itself up to be a perfect target for the next wave of yellow perilism. Entertainment media such as film and video games are, after all, sensitive to global political circumstance in their screenwriting and narratives. Fictional works often contain socially and politically relevant themes and topics for the audiences they reach (Mulligan 2013: 123). Fictional media not only draws from reality for inspiration to create new storylines and plot developments. People consuming these types of media in turn draw from these fictionalised realities to form their own opinions on social and political matters. It is not unheard of for people to draw real world implications, perceptions, beliefs, and judgements from fiction (Mulligan 2009: 22).

Keeping the effects fictional politics can have on real world mentalities in mind, trends which continuously cast one group of people as antagonists could do more harm than intended. Public concern regarding the Soviet Union was found to be heightened in the aftermath of a miniseries, *Amerika*, dealing with a communist invasion in the 1980's (Mulligan 2013: 124). The continuous portrayal of North Korea and its armies as ruthless, soulless, and downright sadistic at times might adversely affect public opinion, similarly to the effect *Amerika* had on public opinion about the Soviet Union. Through usage of symbols, metaphors, images, and more, an "interpretive package" is created (Mulligan 2009: 6), and audiences are offered a ready-made meal of political and social commentary, whether they realise it or not.

Through the use of symbols not only can one identify what is coded as threat in entertainment media, symbolism can also be used to link together multiple instances which recall periods of instability and anxiety. Such images-turned-symbols serve to ensure an emotional response from the public. For example imagery from the 9/11 terrorist attacks is a popular reference to the "war on terror(ism)", and many times references to nuclear bombs and missiles recall images of the Cold War, with a red Communist Soviet Union as danger looming over the world. As long as the public is able to interpret these symbols and connect with the emotions behind these past events, they will couple the current displayed threat on-screen with the feelings from the past, combining (and possibly conflating) the two. Symbols are part of the creative stockpile which industry professionals are glad to use to fill their films, videos, texts, and games. Through symbolism emotional connections can be secured, narratives can be given more depth, or a whole new narrative can emerge.

4.4 Image and narrative in contemporary entertainment media

4.4.1 Recalling nuclear and red threats

In the previous chapter five different narratives dealing with North Korea as a threat were introduced, two dealing with a North Korean invasion of the U.S. (*Red Dawn, Homefront*), two dealing with a U.S. military detachment in North Korea (*Behind Enemy Lines II, Ghost Recon 2*), and one dealing with a North Korean terror cell overtaking important political structures in the U.S. (*Olympus Has Fallen*). While all of these media mention North Korea's nuclear capabilities, the only two in which North Korea's nuclear power is important to the plot are the ones dealing with U.S. armies in North Korea. In the other three the DPRK's nuclear power is only mentioned in passing, although in *Olympus Has Fallen* America's own nuclear missile capabilities are important to the plot.

The threat of nuclear activity from the DPRK serves a dual purpose in these narratives. First it serves as a reminder that the DPRK does indeed possess the technology to go nuclear, as has been seen in real world events multiple times. Despite the creation of the Geneva Framework Agreement in 1994, the DPRK later continued their nuclear programs at Yongbyon, and other locations, resulting in their 2005 announcement of their possession of nuclear weapons (Buzo 2007: 209). Secondly, it recalls the international tensions during the Cold War period, where the U.S. and Soviet Union entered a stalemate regarding the production and use of nuclear weapons.

Many pieces of entertainment use at these (prior) real world tensions and conflicts as staples in order to keep the narrative both engaging, believable, and entertaining. The link to fears regarding the Soviet Union becomes especially apparent when one realises that the original *Red Dawn* from 1984 featured Soviet communists as main antagonists. And they make a return in the 2012 remake as well: the North Korean army is seen to be working together with the Russian special forces, the Spetsnaz, effectively doubling the fear of the Other invader. These fear play into

the perceived threat to American daily life and lifestyles. Both *Red Dawn* and *Homefront* introduce re-education camps in their narratives. These camps serve to "arouse political awareness" and promise their inmates freedom from "the American culture of greed and irresponsibility" (Bradley 2012). In *Homefront* the existence of labour camps represent "Korea's version of America", according to characters in-game, complete with mass graves, proving that North Korea is "an enemy that wants to dehumanize [us]" (Kaos Studios 2011). The camps themselves are a sad sight to behold, dreary circumstances lead to a feeling of despair and aversion when the player reaches the location (see image 3).

Image 3. A dreary looking labour camp, as seen in *Homefront* (Kaos Studios 2011).

When questioned about the choice to cast North Korea as villain in *Homefront*, Tae Kim, consultant with Kaos Studios on the storyline in *Homefront*, replied that "for years games have made the Soviets, Russians and Chinese as major threats, and we chose North Korea because it was the only country that we could argue and make a case for plausible motivation" (Ishimoto 2011). Considering the DPRK to bear a similar narrative function to Soviets, Russians, and Chinese, this confirms the connection between these nations and their similarities with regards to threats they posed to the U.S. at various points in time. As Ishimoto notes, regardless of the entertainment value of *Homefront* (and similar premises), there are clear racial implications behind it (ibid). In the case of *Red Dawn* and *Homefront*, the protection of American culture and values from the threatening,

Asian invader.

4.4.2 Recalling 9/11

Moving away from the North Korean military presence in the U.S., *Olympus Has Fallen* deals with the U.S. military presence on the Korean peninsula and in the waters. While the U.S. claims only to have their troops stationed both on land and on the sea in order to ensure South Korea is protected from North Korean attack, the terror cell who take over the white house feel differently about this. *Olympus Has Fallen* is also a film punctuated by symbols and symbolism. It features shots of the U.S. flag, iconic for U.S. liberty and identity, being shot apart and taken down at the beginning of the film, signifying the loss of stability and freedom, and punctuating the threat the main characters are now facing, that of the loss of U.S. values and ways of life. But the film concludes with a new flag being hoisted up on top of the white house, featuring a speech from the president concluding how American liberty is the greatest commodity worth protecting.

Olympus Has Fallen features more than just these American flag images. It strongly recalls the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the early scenes from the film. A U.S. military aircraft is hijacked, flying over populated areas and into a restricted area. A hijacking alone would be enough to (tentatively) relate it to the 9/11 events, but the film stretches the references, symbolism and parallels to the limit. After the aircraft is shot down, it dramatically crashes into the Washington Monument with its wing, creating an image eerily reminiscent of the planes crashing into the twin towers in 2001 (see image 4). With similar location of where the towers and the monument were hit, the parallel is completed with the (partial) collapse of the Washington Monument.

Image 4. The hijacked plane burning in the background, the Washington Monument is shows here smoking, seconds before collapse (Fuqua 2013).

Olympus Has Fallen not only offers a flashback to the events which transpired on 9/11, but also gives us a glimpse into the "war on terror" which followed. Post-9/11 anxieties about terrorist attacks, suicide bombers, and all-out war were heightened. The film plays into this by also having two North Korean undercover tourists with bombs strapped to their chests bomb the gates to the white house, effectively opening up a path into the heart of America. Out of nowhere, North Korean terrorists start appearing, hiding in garbage trucks and the like with high powered weapons, decimating the defences of the white house. These suicide attacks and hidden enemies are part of the fears of foreign powers present and able to strike at any time, without warning. It can also be related back to the first anxieties felt by the white U.S. citizens when Chinese immigrants first started pouring into the U.S. Their presence was fairly obscure, and they attempted to adapt to U.S. life as well as they could, while still remaining in their own diaspora and their own cultures. Fears of what could be hiding underneath the surface are reflected in the fact that these tourists, who are at first portrayed as benign foreigners, end up as the source of a terrorist attack.

4.4.3 Militant militarism

In all entertainment media mentioned so far North Korea is omnipresent. If not through literal

soldiers visible everywhere, the red star from the flag of the DPRK can be seen everywhere. It is

used as a symbol throughout to give the public a constant reminders as to who the enemy is. A side-

effect of this constant reminder of North Korean presence is that the presence is completely

militarised. The only time a non-military (non-aggressive) North Korean person is shown is in

Behind Enemy Lines II, where a short scene takes place in a North Korean mountain village. The

villager in question runs away with her son, scared of the U.S. SEALs, and yells for the North

Korean military to help.

All media discussed in this thesis have had militaristic prowess and power relations as a

theme. From overpowering militaristic force to the threat of nuclear weapons, North Korea is

clearly depicted as a nation to be wary of. The North Korea as seen in popular entertainment media

is textbook techno-Orientalism. The human part of the machine that is the DPRK is seen as

inhumane, even barbaric, while the technologically savvy parts are on par with (or exceeding)

Western, white, technology.

In *Red Dawn* and *Homefront* the use of EMP technology, a technology which the U.S. is not

shown to have, allows North Korean troops to essentially mount a surprise attack on the U.S.,

meeting with very little resistance. In *Behind Enemy Lines II* and *Ghost Recon 2* the DPRK's

possession of (possible) long-range nuclear weaponry puts it on par with the U.S. and other world

powers. In *Olympus Has Fallen* the DPRK's technology is not necessarily better (the aircraft was

hijacked from the U.S. airforce), but they manage to conceal the weapons, essentially smuggling

them in right under America's nose. They are also shown to be technologically competent by

hacking white house security and codes for the missile detonations. These technological

advancements with which they are essentially placed on a footing similar to the U.S. contrasts with

the people *using* the technology. As mentioned, the examples used in this thesis contain (close to) only military presence in their representations of North Korea. These members of the military are dehumanized and reduced to essentialist tropes of antagonist groups. North Koreans are portrayed as ruthless and willing to go great lengths to get what they want. In *Behind Enemy Lines II* a North Korean agent tortures, and even seems to enjoy torturing, one of the navy SEALs in order to get information. The rigid power structures within the military itself also serve to magnify the lack of humanness of the North Koreans, even though similar power structures exist everywhere.

The body language and speech of North Korean characters in these media is also noteworthy. With the exception of Kang from *Olympus Has Fallen* they all speak either broken or no English. This creates an extra layer of tension between the U.S. domestic and the DPRK foreign, as the fluency of English is often used as a (subconscious) indicator of foreignness, as found in microaggressions Asian Americans face in day to day life (Booker 2013). The body language of most high-ranking generals is best described as stately, standing upright (and uptight), seemingly unfazed by many of the events occurring around them. The main antagonist from *Red Dawn* doesn't even flinch when he shoots the main characters' father in the head. Colonel Jeong from *Homefront* seems to be a highly calculating, almost emotionless, robot both when entering the main characters home in the opening scene of the game and when confirming the main characters are not hiding in a mass grave at the labour camps, ordering his soldiers to shoot at the corpses. And *Olympus Has Fallen*'s Kang is basically the epitome of almost robotic calmness during the first three quarters of the film. On the U.S. side of things most personnel is shown to be more expressive and emotional, especially when it comes to their own people. Their movement, stances, and facial expressions have a far larger range than that of the North Korean military powers.

The cold, heartless villain trope, then, is alive and well when it comes to North Korean portrayals. But similarly the barbaric, unpredictable trope is often mixed in as well. It is not a trope exclusively applied to Asian antagonists, but in the case of *Ghost Recon 2*, *Olympus Has Fallen*,

and arguably *Behind Enemy Lines II*, applicable to at least some of the North Korean characters introduced. In both *Ghost Recon 2* and *Olympus Has Fallen* the main antagonist is thwarted by the heroic main character(s), and as their plans begin to unravel around them, they take increasingly risky steps in order to ensure their own victory. Kang sacrifices most of his hostages and his own team in order to escape with the president, and Jung plants a nuclear device in a dam in Hamhung, which would take the lives of thousands if detonated. The ruthlessness of the North Korean tactics are also visible in the phosphor bombs used by the U.S. characters in *Homefront*: the ethics of using such harsh, even cruel, weaponry is immediately questioned by one of the main crew members, after seeing the carnage and fires it started in a battle with North Korean forces. While at first it may seem that the U.S. tactics have gone too far, it is quickly revealed that these weapons were stolen from North Korean troops. The implication being that North Korean troops would have used the very same weapon against both the resistance fighters and the civilians, had they still possessed them.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Findings

This thesis set out to examine yellow peril ideology in entertainment media, tracing it through history and comparing it with recent trends of the North Korean antagonist. Through tracing yellow perilism, from it's first encounters in pre-modern Europe to the 19th century anxieties in the U.S. about Chinese immigration, the internal logic of anti-Asian sentiment becomes clear. Combined with a history of Orientalism, colonization, and white imperialism, yellow peril is the embodiment of xenophobic fear of the Asian Other. This thesis has concerned itself with the identity of the foreign which is projected onto the Other through the anxieties and fears of the domestic. By identifying the stereotypes and tropes in entertainment media and the effects this has had on the audiences of these media the effects of this forced identity become clear in society.

Since entertainment media such as TV shows and cinema rose to popularity, narratives concerning themselves with the Other also made their way on to the screens. Essentialist tropes of Asia and its various peoples and cultures were created, with no regard for differences between ethnicities (Kawai 2006: 111). The Other in film is often used to both explore and reaffirm the perceived superiority and masculinity of the domestic group. The conservation of the social status quo is often the (mainstream) entertainment media's goal. To achieve this the Other needs to be a threat, or be made subservient. This is done by, for example, continuously casting Asians and Asian Americans as unassimilable, as the perpetual foreigner (Nakamura 2009: 110). In doing so, the actions the (white) U.S. fictional heroes undertake are justified, and the consumer is eased into a silent affirmation of social hierarchy.

Narrative creates discourse, and discourse creates meaning. But this only works if the viewer is able to place themselves in the place of the subject (Hall 2013b: 40). Though some may argue that fiction has no basis in reality, and therefore should not affect anything in real life, it has been

shown that this is not the case. Fiction often uses real world political and social relations as inspiration for their plotlines and narratives. During the Cold War the very real anxieties about the Soviet Union were used as plotdevelopers in many films and TV shows, and after 9/11 the increasing fear of terrorist attacks ensured a rise in Middle Eastern bad guys on TV and in film. In turn people draw on fiction to help with their own understanding of the world around them (Mulligan 2009: 22). Fiction has function. It both serves as a form of entertainment, something to watch, read, or play in one's spare time, but it also serves as a method of creating identity. Identification with fiction is important in the acceptance of that world as 'real' or 'realistic', and helps with the suspension of disbelief required to make those works of fiction so enjoyable.

The 21st century has seen a rise in both news outlets and fictional ones dealing with North Korea, be it as invading force, a nuclear threat, or on human rights issues. Noteworthy here is that in some cases, such as *Red Dawn* and *Homefront*, the initial plan was to cast China in the antagonist's role. Complaints from China and fear of alienating the Chinese market were cited as reasons for the eventual change to North Korea. The real world issues spoken of on television and in the newspapers often make their way into fictional world as well, be it real, fake, or even warped versions of events that may have transpired. These narratives are supposed to make you feel emotion, even anger, at whoever is cast in the antagonist's role. North Korea is a perfect fit for the renewed yellow peril. It is featured in news items enough to seem terrifying, seen through both nuclear tests, military excersices, and the occasional firing of shells at South Korean military ships (BBC 22 May 2014), making it easier to reduce the country to only a few characteristics without serious retaliation from the public. The unstable relations and tensions between the DPRK and the U.S. also allow for an easier casting of North Korea as undisputed 'bad guy'. With the loss of the Soviet Union as archetypical villain from the Cold War, and the loss of China as yellow peril combined with red threat due to access to the Chinese market, not many other ethnic groups remain to be targeted as the U.S. opponent. The DPRK, however, has been in the news at a relatively

consistent pace since the turn of the century, often featuring their military and/or weaponry. What better enemy to paint than an isolated country, ruled by one man (or so various media sources would have us believe) with nuclear capabilities?

The examples of entertainment media featuring North Korea in this thesis all fit within the yellow peril ideology. Especially when techno-Orientalism is added to the mix. The films and games described all purposely cast North Koreans as unredeemable bad guys. Only one North Korean man is seen to be purposely spared by the U.S. military (in *Behind Enemy Lines II*), but he is also implied to be a dissident, and carries a fascination for all things American (and thus is morally redeemable). All examples deal with North Korea possessing technology which can be considered a threat to U.S. security and civilians. What the chosen examples exemplify is that North Korea works as a threat of annihilation, with the threat of nuclear weapons destroying the U.S., and as a threat of invasion, where superior technology and numbers ensure a North Korean victory over U.S. citizens, and by extension their cultures and lifestyles.

Returning to the issue at hand in this thesis, the identity forced upon the foreign, North Korea, by the domestic, the U.S., is a purely militaristic, threatening one. With one of the creators of *Homefront* coming out and describing the goal of the game as "make[ing] you feel emotion" (implied to be mostly anger and feelings of injustice) (Totilo 2010) the general idea behind these types of narrative is clear. It is to urge viewers to identify with the American heroes, on their missions to liberate the U.S. from a foreign threat. This is done by either removing the threat from the DPRK by destroying their nuclear capabilities, or by resistance movements fighting back to reclaim a land overrun with North Korean military. It all plays into the establishing and protecting of U.S. masculinity, superiority, and power, against an (almost) inhumane enemy, one who would threaten the entire U.S. culture, with all its values and freedom, would they be successful in their nefarious schemes.

Because of the ability of fiction to influence worldviews, the casting of a monolithic, essentialised nation as antagonist carries some dangers with it. The very fact that these narratives are all fictionalised, yet still invoke emotions strong enough to condemn the DPRK in real life for events taking place in-universe shows that, yes, fiction *does* impact worldviews. These narratives are able to conjure up strong emotions. And these emotions are not always contained within the fictional universe. Because of the effects fiction can carry into the real world, narratives dealing with North Korean antagonism can spur people, who are not aware of anything North Korean apart from what they see on television, to form real opinions of the DPRK on basis of entertainment media. When looking at comments made on trailers of the films, or gameplay videos, online, they show that even though the distinction between fiction and the real world are made by the audiences, the emotions they experience in the fiction carry over and are transplanted in their real world ideas about North Korea.[11]

Switching the antagonist's ethnicity from Chinese to North Korean is not uncommon. Often when questioned about the switch creators would respond with the complaints they received from China about their choice of villain. However, it also has to do with not wanting to alienate the Chinese market. North Korea has also expressed indignation at being cast the as villain in many U.S. films, such as the 2002 Bond-film *Die Another Die* and the 2004 film from South Park-creators *Team America: World Police* (Lee 2014). Most of the protests from North Korea against U.S. film depicting them in a negative manner have gone unnoticed by the mainstream media. However, the still to-be-released 2014 film *The Interview*, in which two men are sent to assassinate Kim Jong Un, has evoked a strong reaction from the DPRK. Likening the film's plot to an act of terror, North Korea has threatened violent retaliation should the film be released (BBC 26 june

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[11]   Many comments involve strong language, and threats towards North Korea. These comments are especially frequent on videos of *Homefront* gameplay, which shows that while the game does what it was supposed to do according to the developers, there are dangers attached to such openly antagonistic portrayals.

2014).

The casting of North Korea as a monolithic entity, showing only military, conveniently seeming to forget that there are non-soldiers in North Korea as well, makes for easy to follow storylines and plots. But at the same time it is a method of dehumanizing, essentializing and Othering an entire population. There is no denying that the DPRK has posed problems in the past and continues to pose problems today with regards to international relations, security, and human rights issues. But by enforcing an image of a nation, loyal to its regime with no room for doubt, a part of humanness is lost. The overpowering image of advanced warfare, complete with a dehumanized military leaves the audiences with little material to help create a more nuanced opinion on the DPRK.

According to entertainment media North Korea is the next generation of yellow peril. North Koreans are coined as antagonistic with no chance at redemption. Public awareness and consciousness on real issues are affected by these developments. The impact of stereotypes in fiction on public opinion should not be underestimated. The anti-Asian sentiment kicked off by the first waves of yellow perilism persist today due to the persistence of Asian (American) stereotypes and essentialist representations. And continuing to cast an Asian villain linked to techno-Orientalism does nothing to alleviate the racism Asian (Americans) face every day in the U.S. Even though North Korean and U.S. relations are unstable at best, reducing any party to a one-dimensional (two-dimensional if the people in the entertainment business are feeling generous) villain does not help the situation. While such narratives make for exciting, fast-paces entertainment, their effect on the real world works like a poison. It slowly infects the public with toxic ideas and tropes, effectively ensuring they feel hostile towards a nation they know very little about.

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