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AARON HAN JOON MAGNAN-PARK (朴漢峻)  
University of Hong Kong

## Leukocentric Hollywood: Whitewashing, Alohagate and the dawn of Hollywood with Chinese characteristics

### ABSTRACT

1. Hollywood's long-standing practice of leukocentrism is condemned as a false and
2. out-dated adherence to an aspect of commercial determinism whereby whitewashing
3. a film is held to ensure its profitability, universality, popularity and social meaning-
4. fulness, especially when it involves Asian and Asian American characters. Criticism
5. of this practice came to a head in what became known as 'Alohagate', which started
6. with the miscasting of Emma Stone in *Aloha* (2015) and continued with *Doctor*
7. *Strange* (2016), *Birth of the Dragon* (2016) and plans for the live action version
8. of Disney's animated *Mulan* (2020). Asian American filmmakers protested via
9. their #WhiteWashedOut Twitter campaign and drew attention to the targeting of
10. Asians for racist jokes at the 2016 Oscars. The Hollywood response is one of inno-
11. cent ignorance, which only highlights rather than dispels the deep-rootedness of
12. leukocentrism. These individuals are identified as *hūpō haole*, Hawaiian for 'clue-
13. less Caucasian/foreigner', who are granted an opportunity to become enlightened by
14. abandoning their leukocentric bias.

### KEYWORDS

Alohagate  
commercial  
determinism  
double Asian pivot  
Hollywood with  
Chinese  
characteristics  
*hūpō haole*  
leukocentrism  
whitewashing

(2020)



## LEUKOCENTRIC HOLLYWOOD

When it comes to the depiction of Asians along with the casting of actors of Asian descent within its cinematic Dream Factory, Hollywood's track record is abysmal because it is undermined by leukocentrism, a commercial determinism operating under the false belief that a film requires whitewashing to make it more profitable, universal, popular and socially meaningful. Combined with a risk-averse profit-maximizing strategy, Hollywood finds within leukocentrism a convenient conceptual convergence where past box-office accolades, profit-enhancing formulas and highly popular A-list stars all 'naturalize' whiteness as the common denominator that secures repeating financial returns on entertainment investment. Hollywood's long-standing hegemony over global cinema as the paradigm-defining commercial cinema without equal is self-validated by the dual logic of 'might makes right' along with 'profit makes right'. This racist tautology remains rooted in the market realities of a past that is out of synch with reality where both the demographics of the domestic and international cinematic markets are increasingly becoming less white.

While the term leukocentrism is not prevalent in film studies, the concept is in regular use within religious studies and literary studies. In the former, Suzana Marjanic defines leukocentrism as the 'act of reducing other skin colours to white' (2015: 171, n ix). The late science fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin, honoured in 2000 by the Library of Congress as a 'living legend', condemns leukocentrism as the continuation of white imperialism's power move to co-opt non-white peoples and cultures to create a 'totally invented fantasy world' (2004) where only white people exist as important agents of historical impact or worthy of narrative inclusion. Simply put, leukocentrism highlights the misguided mind frame that values whitewashing as some form of natural, necessary and neutral act. While the focus is on Hollywood, this practice of leukocentric whitewashing predates Hollywood since one of the greatest acts of European leukocentrism is the visual transformation of suntanned Semitic Jesus into a porcelain white Jesus as the Europeanized face of Christianity's Messiah. Susannah Heschel's research reveals the most blatant and extremist racist twist to the whitening of Jesus with the creation of an Aryan Jesus to religiously legitimize Nazi Germany (2010). The ominous rise of the alt-right movement across the United States and Europe harkens a return to this Aryan fantasy with a Jesus who is becoming even whiter than white to personify a leukocentric Jesus that could surpass even what the Nazi's had imagined as possible. Regardless, it is still white Jesus that stands as the face of Christianity today.

Leukocentrism serves as a better term than Eurocentrism or more appropriately the clumsier but more geographically accurate Euro-Americentrism. Eurocentrism is linked to Europe's self-aggrandizement of itself after successfully colonizing the planet during the ages of imperialism from the fifteenth to nineteenth century and new imperialism spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As such, it is a comprehensive qualitative over-valorization of all things white as the ultimate paragon of merit surrounding human culture, intelligence, evolution, achievement and standing. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam encapsulate Eurocentrism as that which 'sanitizes western history while patronizing and even demonizing the non-west; it thinks of itself in terms of its noblest achievements – science, progress, humanism – but of the non-west in terms of its deficiencies, real or imagined' (1994: 3). Leukocentrism predates Eurocentrism as a human practice since it was also practised outside of Europe

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1. prior to the ages of imperialism whereby epidermal whiteness was a societal  
 2. preference. Within the context of this argument, leukocentrism is presented  
 3. as the wilful act of eradicating all other non-white epidermal possibilities in  
 4. favour of whiteness with whiteness perceived to be an automatic guarantor  
 5. of massive profits for Hollywood on a global scale. Laura Mulvey identifies  
 6. one of the complicating factors in the creation of an evolving 'homogenous  
 7. culture which would erase the various differences between the immigrant  
 8. groups', a process that began in 1910 but completed only in the late 1920s  
 9. and continuing into the present as one where 'the American industry was very  
 10. much an apartheid industry that, although it created a homogenized address,  
 11. it was very much a white and non-ethnic address' (2003: 26). Thus, the cultural  
 12. uniqueness of non-white cultural otherness, when retained, is performed by  
 13. a white character and thereby erases non-whiteness into epidermal insignifi-  
 14. cance. Under this scenario, non-whites are ultimately worthy of non-repre-  
 15. sentation at best and complete erasure at worst. Without doubt, leukocentrism  
 16. becomes an intentional act of representational racial genocide enacted against  
 17. all non-white races.

18. Daniel Bernardi spearheads a critique of Hollywood's deep-rooted leuko-  
 19. centric entertainment logic as one centred on the 'persistence of whiteness'  
 20. (1996a, 2001, 2008b) where, given the social constructedness of race, both  
 21. on-screen and off-screen, 'there are no "true" white people [... but instead]  
 22. only people who pass as white' (2008a: xvii). Under Bernardi's framework, *...* [but  
 23. the racial game in America is to 'become white' as the very definition of whiteness  
 24. metamorphosizes across time where 'the physiognomic, legal, and representa-  
 25. tional marks of Eurocentrism have consistently been the degree to which an  
 26. individual or group counts or doesn't count as "white"' (1996b: 4). As poignant  
 27. as Bernardi is, he does not address in any of his three anthologies the more  
 28. distasteful practice of whitewashing where non-whites are not even granted  
 29. a chance to aspire to whiteness on-screen since white actors replace them  
 30. outright.

31. Hollywood's leukocentrism is dependent on racial whiteness as the foun-  
 32. dational anchor that commercially overdetermines the nature of its story-tell-  
 33. ing strategies encompassing its choice of characters, locations, conflicts and  
 34. fantasies. Nancy Wang Yuen contends, 'By making white men the center of  
 35. nearly every narrative, Hollywood films and television shows naturalize their  
 36. positions of power in every institution' (2017: 19). Moreover, Yuen also asserts,  
 37. 'Hollywood's dominant narratives of whites as heroes and actors of color as  
 38. sidekicks or villains legitimate and reproduce the racial hierarchies existent in  
 39. US society' (2017: 7). These are then expanded to reproduce the racial hierar-  
 40. chies existent globally. Furthermore, these Hollywood leukocentric narratives  
 41. are additionally touted as automatically 'universal' stories that go on to repeat-  
 42. edly secure spectacular domestic and overseas box office success. In effect,  
 43. leukocentric Hollywood is in the business of profiteering by repeatedly enact-  
 44. ing narratives centred on a false white racist fantasy.

#### 45. ASIAN DIMENSIONS AT THE 2016 ACADEMY AWARDS

46. While Hollywood's leukocentrism exists, it is not without its detractors who  
 47. call for a less leukocentric approach so that Hollywood can better represent  
 48. the multi-ethnic composition of the United States beyond just the desires  
 49. of its historic ethnic white majority, as well as to better connect with the  
 50. world outside of its borders so that its 'universal' stories can indeed transform  
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1. For an earlier case of leukocentrism regarding the live action cinematic adaptation of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* animated TV series, see Gruenewald (2015).

themselves into becoming, in fact rather than in fiction, more universally inclusive narratives. In both instances, Hollywood needs to take a double Asian pivot, willingly or unwillingly, both domestically and internationally, if it wants to continue to retain its dominance over the global box-office.

Hollywood's discomfort with its double Asian pivot revealed itself during the 2016 Academy Awards ceremony. At a time when African American film artists levelled a collective intensified critique of Hollywood's leukocentrism in its #OscarsSoWhite Twitter campaign, African American master of ceremonies Chris Rock and Jewish British actor Sacha Baron Cohen unceremoniously singled out Asians as the 'safe' ethnic target for their racist jokes where even Asian children were not immune to this dehumanizing double onslaught. The fact that both Rock and Cohen are members of two of the most victimized racial minorities on the planet does not exonerate them from the inherent scapegoat racism underlying their version of acceptable mainstream comedy. Cohen's joke about Asian men's penises runs,

I know what you was thinking when I walked on, here comes yet another token Black presenter. But it ain't just me brethren who has been overlooked, it is all people of all colors. How come there's no Oscar for them very hard-working little Yellow people with tiny donges. You know, them minions.

Rock's joke references perceived Chinese superiority in math and in business acumen with a sly Jewish connotation by proclaiming,

As always, the results of tonight's Academy Awards was tabulated by the accounting firm of Price, Waterhouse, and Cooper. They sent us their most dedicated, accurate and hard-working representatives. So I want you to please welcome Ming Zhu, Bao Ling, and David Moskowitz.

This joke is visually completed once three Asian children dressed in black tuxedos and carrying black leather briefcases walk onto the stage. Connecting both jokes is the refrain, 'hard-working', which is coded racial language depicting Asians as America's model minority who will avoid controversy by intentionally remaining silent and invisible. But you cannot be a 'hard-working' Asian in Hollywood if there are no jobs for you in Hollywood.

Additionally, the same 2016 Academy Award ceremony is also the moment when Hollywood reached out to its two biggest Asian markets, China and South Korea, by granting Jackie Chan a Lifetime Achievement Award and inviting actor Lee Byung-hun to co-announce the winner for Best Foreign Language Film. Absent in this decision are the many American Asian and Pacific Islanders who struggle for Hollywood recognition, respect and roles. Consequently, Asian Americans created their own Twitter campaign in #WhiteWashedOut to raise the more damaging critique of the whitewashing of Asian roles across time and the more frequent omission of Asians within Hollywood's leukocentric narratives.<sup>1</sup> This campaign featured Asian American celebrities such as John Cho, Margaret Cho, Keith Chow, Ellen Oh, George Takei, Ming-na Wen and Constance Wu.

These two parallel events at the 2016 Oscars reveal Hollywood's mixed motivation in coming to terms with the industry's double Asian pivot: one internal and the other external. Internally, it is the demographic transformation of the United States where Caucasians will no longer represent the



1. majority of the domestic population. Externally, it is the rise of China as the  
 2. national film market that is predicted to soon eclipse the United States to  
 3. become the world's most profitable single national film market. While at first,  
 4. they may appear to be separate but parallel events, in reality these two forces  
 5. merge together into one powerful Asian tsunami challenging and disrupting  
 6. Hollywood's leukocentric foundation. A paradigmatic moment has arrived in  
 7. Hollywood as demographic and market forces require it to shift away from  
 8. its traditional leukocentric 'universal' narratives. The internal transformation  
 9. is linked to Alohagate, and the external transformation is linked to what I  
 10. will term 'Hollywood with Chinese characteristics' where the lure of the more  
 11. significant and expansive epic explosion of the Chinese box-office requires  
 12. Hollywood to reformulate its blockbuster formula so that it can now pass  
 13. Chinese government censorship and thereby profit from the sale of Chinese  
 14. tickets. Both forces require Hollywood to abandon its leukocentric predisposi-  
 15. tion if it desires to remain the world's most profitable Dream Factory.

#### 18. LEUKOCENTRIC HOLLYWOOD AND THE RACIAL ORDERING OF ASIANS

19. Gina Marchetti reveals the depth of Hollywood's leukocentrism since it  
 20. parallels America's underlying racial fear of Asia and the accompanying  
 21. 'yellow peril' paranoia (1993). Collectively, they inform the entire gamut of  
 22. Hollywood's existence covering the Silent Era, Classical Hollywood, New  
 23. Hollywood and present-day Hollywood marked by media convergence and  
 24. hyperglobalization. Under this white American racial order of things, Asians  
 25. are delegated to obediently fulfil our designated roles as cinematically absent  
 26. via yellowface, emasculated and in need of rescue via the white male knight as  
 27. saviour fantasy and demonized for extermination as one of many evil racial-  
 28. ized Others (Marchetti 1993). Given Hollywood's leukocentrism, Peter Feng  
 29. expands and updates Marchetti's position by uncovering the many actions  
 30. that Asian American film artists undertake to contest this Hollywood legacy  
 31. to advance instead a multitude of other narrative possibilities based on Asian  
 32. American lived experiences and perspectives that pluralize, problematize  
 33. and prioritize a more racially informed mode of cinematic Asian and Asian  
 34. American self-representation (2002).

35. Despite these important academic interventions, Hollywood still remains  
 36. entrenched, practicing, perpetuating and profiteering from a leukocentric  
 37. racial politics of Asian misrepresentation and miscasting by remaining fixated  
 38. on the all-important commercial imperative of box-office profit maximization  
 39. as its sole defining key objective in its economic calculus, with all other consid-  
 40. erations snuffed away. Chief behind this capitalist logic of commercial deter-  
 41. minism is the perceived necessity of at least one white A-list Hollywood star  
 42. serving as the anchor to guarantee box office run-away success both domesti-  
 43. cally and internationally even if the original story was based on a non-white  
 44. character. Within Hollywood's leukocentric universe, the success of Ang Lee's  
 45. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) stands as one case where this logic was  
 46. broken since it was a Hollywood blockbuster film centred on an Asian narra-  
 47. tive with a complete Asian cast that became a global box office success with  
 48. universal appeal plus four Oscars for Best Foreign Film, Best Art Direction,  
 49. Best Original Score and Best Cinematography. Bruce Lee is also important  
 50. to include here since *Enter the Dragon* (Clouse, 1973) was the very first big  
 51. budgeted American/Hong Kong co-production between Warner Brothers and  
 52. Concord Productions, Bruce Lee's independent film production company, that



nullified the false belief in Hollywood that no Asian actor could achieve mainstream crossover appeal in America, nor become a global box office superstar. Despite these two clear examples, Hollywood still rigidly embraces leukocentrism as the misguided *prima facie* marker in its ability to create avarice-driven 'universal' stories for the entire planet.

Hollywood's leukocentric universal narratives worked domestically given America's origins as a white majority settler nation with white Americans also enjoying the majority share of the nation's economic pie. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s challenged this racial disparity, and since then, racial minorities have had an impact in calling for changes in how we are represented on-screen and how we are allowed to participate as proactive agents of positive change within Hollywood's Dream Factory. Unfortunately, leukocentric Hollywood is perversely parsimonious to its non-white members where the legally condoned absence of equal opportunity discloses an uneven white playing field.

Nancy Wang Yuen reveals two strategies that 'liberal' Hollywood employs to legally remain leukocentric in both its hiring and representational practices. First, Hollywood successfully lobbied and campaigned against the application of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). After a one-day hearing in March 1969, the EEOC found ample evidence of racial discrimination and the Justice Department was ready to sue six of the seven major film studios, the Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers and the International Alliance of Theatrical State Employees, but the legal papers were never served. Second, it employs a legal loophole based on the First Amendment and 'freedom of speech' to circumvent the existence of non-discrimination labour laws (Yuen 2017: 12–13). In effect, the judiciary granted Hollywood the *de facto* legal right to continue its practice of racial discrimination. This in part perpetuates leukocentrism with dire cinematic consequences since it negates the possibility of on-screen proportional racial representation.

These legal loopholes give Yuen grief and add ammunition to her critique of Hollywood's historical over-representation of white characters and white narratives as one that do not provide racial population parity *vis-à-vis* the demographic reality of the American population. Even though ethnic minorities comprised 37.4 per cent of the population in 2013, on-screen they held only 16.7 per cent of the lead roles across 174 Hollywood films (Quoted in Yuen 2017: 5, originally from Hung and Ramon 2015: 9–10, n6). This in-front-of-the-camera scenario is perpetuated because the behind-the-camera scenario is even more disproportionately white and male in the decision-making fields of media ownership, studio executives, directors, executive producers, writers, talent agents and casting directors (Yuen 2017: 32–48). She identifies 'color-blind racism, or the attribution of white dominance to individual merit and cultural explanations, while denying institutional discrimination' (2017: 50) as the ideology that fuels Hollywood's leukocentric mindset. Yuen further identifies three particular reoccurring rhetorical excuses that centre on blame: blame the talent, blame 'what you know' and blame the market (2017: 51–68). Each blame is then aligned with its corresponding refrain: 'right for the part' (2017: 54), '[w]rite what you know' (2017: 57) and '[i]t's not a black or white issue, it's a green issue' (2017: 61), respectively. While Yuen stops here, I take these blame refrains to the leukocentric limit by rephrasing them: 'White for the part', '[w]hite what you know' and '[i]f you want to be in the black, then the green issue requires you to go white'.



1. Stacy L. Smith, Marc Choneiti and Katherine Pieper's analysis of 800  
 2. popular Hollywood films from 2007 to 2015 supports Yuen's position. Smith  
 3. et al. reveal that out of 35,205 cinematic characters representing an independ-  
 4. ent speaking or named character on-screen, when it comes to race, there was  
 5. basically 'no change in the percentage of white, black, Hispanic/Latino, Asia  
 6. or Other races/ethnicities' from the previous year's data (2016: 2). For the top  
 7. 100 films of 2015, the most recent data, 73.7% of all cinematic characters were  
 8. white, 12.2% black, 5.3% Latino, 3.9% Asian, less than 1% Middle Eastern,  
 9. less than 1 per cent Indian/Alaskan Native, less than 1% Native Hawaiian/  
 10. Pacific Islander and 3.6% Other or 'mixed race' (2016: 2). The data are even  
 11. worse when it comes to Asians since '[n]ot one lead or co-lead was played by  
 12. an Asian actor' (2016: 2). Additionally, '[e]ven more problematic, Asian char-  
 13. acters were missing across 49 films' (2016: 2) with only eighteen films that  
 14. provided proportional representation based on the Asian share of the US  
 15. Census, standing at 5.6 per cent (2016: 18). When it came to being described  
 16. as 'attractive', Asians were at the bottom of the racial order of attractiveness  
 17. with Asian females standing at 4.3 per cent and Asian males standing at 2.7  
 18. per cent (2016: 19–20). Consequently, Hollywood is wilfully profiteering from  
 19. ethnic representational genocide, especially against Asians.

20. However, by 2050, the Pew Research Center predicts a paradigmatic  
 21. realignment in the racial demographic of the United States. While white  
 22. Americans will continue to retain their historical status as the nation's larg-  
 23. est racial group, the Pew Research Center projects that they will represent just  
 24. 47 per cent of the total population, with Hispanics to stand at 29 per cent,  
 25. blacks at 13 per cent and Asians at 9 per cent (Anon. 2008). Collectively, the  
 26. Hispanic, black and Asian population will command 51 per cent of the total  
 27. American population, and thereby transfigure the United States into a new  
 28. ethnic minority-led majority nation. This projected dramatic change follows  
 29. a gradual decrease in the ethnic white majority population from 85 per cent  
 30. in 1960 to 67 per cent in 2005 before dropping down to 47 per cent in 2050  
 31. (Anon. 2008). Yet with Asians comprising the smallest percentage amongst  
 32. America's four major races, Asians will continue to be stigmatized as America's  
 33. invisible model minority.

34. Given America's superpower status in the post-Second World War era,  
 35. especially as the world's leading economic behemoth, the North American  
 36. film market encompassing historically the United States and Canada formed  
 37. a unified 'national' film market that still remains as the most lucrative single  
 38. national box-office on the planet. This has granted Hollywood a privileged  
 39. position to produce the largest budgeted films than any of its national compet-  
 40. itors since its own protected domestic market could easily recoup Hollywood's  
 41. super ambitious tent pole blockbuster films where the original production and  
 42. marketing expenses along with a handsome return on investment were largely  
 43. guaranteed. Under this framework, the overseas market was viewed first as a  
 44. bonus for an even larger return on initial investment as well as a second-  
 45. chance venue for Hollywood should a film flop domestically. Hollywood's  
 46. leukocentric narratives worked well overseas since western Europe and the  
 47. British Commonwealth of nations were the primary overseas markets given  
 48. their collective economic clout and the ease by which Hollywood's leukocen-  
 49. tric narratives blended in with their historic ethnic white majority popula-  
 50. tions. Conveniently, this white cinematic bloc overlapped the Cold War global  
 51. realpolitik that housed these nations under America's leadership over NATO  
 52. and the free world. Additionally, as Jeremy Tunstall highlights, Hollywood



piggybacked on the anglophone foundations of the British Empire, its global reach and the rise of English as the new lingua franca (1977). The historical fact that global economic power concentrated primarily in the United States and western Europe in the post-Imperial world order is one key factor that encouraged Hollywood to remain leukocentric. All other continental markets stood qualitatively and quantitatively on a lower rung, and thus these other foreign markets were considered pocket change and therefore racial inclusiveness was not a priority.

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**LEUKOCENTRISM IN ACTION: WHITEWASHING, ALOHAGATE AND HŪPŌ HAOLE**

All of these forces come together to explain the inherent leukocentric logic behind Cameron Crowe's decision to enact whitewashing as well as the resulting avalanche of critique levelled against him that became known as Alohagate. Crowe's stated 'research' into Hawaiiana failed to fundamentally master Hawai'i's two most defining characteristics: its famous spirit of *ohana* (the all-inclusive extended family) and its equally famous practice of *aloha* (love). Instead, Crow revealed himself to be a vulgar *hūpō haole* (clueless Caucasian/foreigner) who can only engage with the world solely via his myopic parochial leukocentric world-view.

DELETE

The Hawaiian-English website dictionary *Nā Puke Wehewehe 'Ōlelo Hawai'i* translates the Hawaiian term *hūpō* literally to 'swelling darkness' but it is more often translated denotatively to 'ignorant, foolish, unintelligent, stupid; fool foolishness' (2003). *Haole* in Hawaiian is first defined as a foreigner and then later specifically to a white person or Caucasian (2003). On the vernacular connotative level, it is also used at times to describe a Caucasian in a very derogatory and condescending manner (2003). Therefore, a literal translation of *hūpō haole* becomes 'the foreigner who is engulfed in swelling darkness'. More colloquial translations range from a combination of 'ignorant/foolish/unintelligent/stupid' with 'foreigner/Caucasian/white person'. 'Stupid white person' is a real possibility but it is too harsh and it does not grant the person an opportunity to learn and therefore become enlightened. This is why I have chosen instead 'clueless white person' as the first preferred translation for *hūpō haole* with the possibility of expanding the word's range to also include non-white foreigners; hence, the second preferred translation would be 'clueless foreigner'.

Collectively, Alohagate encompasses Crowe's white racist rush to commercially exploit Hawai'i in a leukocentric racial fantasy at odds with the film's very premise. Simply put, it is commercialized racism and the lame defences that are uttered in its defence are all acts of unpersuasive whitewashing skullduggery. Furthermore, Alohagate becomes a new critical concept to address the self-outing of Hollywood's *hūpō haole* community. Not surprisingly, Alohagate is not an isolated incident but instead endemic to Hollywood's profit-driven leukocentric logic that positions the historical 'magic' formula to domestic and international box-office success as dependent on whitewashed characters and whitewashed narratives.

Alohagate became a rallying point for an Asian American campaign focused on the recent racially insensitive cinematic casting blunder in Cameron Crowe's *Aloha* (2015) (Dockterman 2016). In this film set in Hawai'i, the very white multi-European Emma Stone, who is of Swedish, English, German, Scottish and Irish ancestry but not a single iota of Asian or Pacific



1. Islander, is miscast in the role of Captain Allison Ng. As a character, Ng represents  
 2. Hawaii's majority mixed ethnic community by being half Swedish, a  
 3. quarter Hawaiian and a quarter Chinese (Yamato 2015). This makes her *hapa*  
 4. *haole*, which in Hawaiian translates to someone who is part Caucasian and  
 5. part Asian Pacific Islander. The guilt behind this intentional whitewashed  
 6. miscasting reveals itself within the film since there are five scenes where  
 7. Ng's Hawaiian ancestry is vocally highlighted: (1) when Ng self-discloses her  
 8. Hawaiian ethnicity to Brian Gilcrest in the airplane, (2) in the 'Night Marchers  
 9. of Waimanalo' scene, (3) at Tracy Woodside's kitchen when Ng reveals her full  
 10. ancestry profile (Illustration #1), (4) when Gilcrest and Woodside joke about  
 11. Ng repeating her Hawaiian roots 'like fifty times' and (5) when Ng confronts  
 12. Gilcrest about his unethical behaviour for intentionally lying to her fellow  
 13. Hawaiians. This overcompensation is pronounced since Classical Hollywood  
 14. established the 'rule of three' where any important narrative point required  
 15. just three utterances to make it impactful and permanent: 'once for the smart  
 16. viewer, once for the average viewer, [and finally] once for the slow Joe in the  
 17. back row' (Bordwell et al. 1988: 31). In *Aloha*, the extra fourth and fifth utter-  
 18. ances reveal both a lack of understanding of this basic narrative protocol, as  
 19. well as an ineffective strategy to gloss over its whitewashing decision. The  
 20. fourth iteration and the use of 'fifty times' is also a poignant symbolic reference  
 21. to Hawai'i as the 50th state to join the Union. A better casting choice is Kelly  
 22. Hu. Hu was crowned Miss Teen USA 1985 and Miss Hawai'i 1993 as well as a  
 23. Hollywood actress. Hu fits Allison Ng's *hapa haole* profile almost exactly since  
 24. she is herself half Chinese, a quarter English and a quarter Hawaiian, with the  
 25. added bonus of being a distant descendent of King Kamehameha.

26. Hawai'i is the sole American state where whites are not the racial major-  
 27. ity and multiracial individuals rank a significant quarter of the population.  
 28. Based on 2017 estimates from the 2010 US Census, Hawai'i's population of  
 29. 1.4 million people are 37.3 per cent Asian, 26.7 per cent white, 23 per cent  
 30. two or more races, 9.9 per cent native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander,  
 31. 2.2 per cent black or African American and 0.5 per cent American Indian and  
 32. Alaska Native (Anon. 2017). Thus, a film set in the only American state where  
 33. ethnic whites are a minority, Cameron Crowe in the role of the film's 'visionary'  
 34. scriptwriter, producer and director created a grand narrative involving not just  
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 48. Illustration #1: Emma Stone, as Captain Allison Ng, disclosing her character's  
 49. *hapa haole* ethnic heritage in *Aloha* (Crowe, 2016).  
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2. All individual film production and box office figures presented in this article are from the website *Box Office Mojo* unless stated otherwise.
3. A section addressing whitewashing in Rupert Sanders' live-action *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) starring Scarlett Johansson was presented at several conferences but deleted for this article to focus on films that match the concerns of this special issue.

a whitewashed character but also a whitewashed film where the aloha state's ethnic Asian and Pacific Islander majority are intentionally forced to become a token minority. By doing this, Crow is guilty of being a leukocentric *hūpō haole* who enacted representational racial genocide. In the end, *Aloha* did not do well at the box-office. For a film produced for \$37 million, it only attained \$26,250,020 globally with \$21,067,116 or 80.3 per cent earned domestically and just \$5,182,904 or 19.7 per cent overseas.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, leukocentrism is not a guarantor of box-office success domestically or overseas.

*Alohagate* is not isolated to just Crowe's *Aloha*. Not surprisingly, *Alohagate* continues unabated with *Doctor Strange* (Derrickson, 2016), *Birth of the Dragon* (Noñi, 2016) and *Mulan* (Caro, 2019).<sup>3</sup> We should keep in mind that whitewashing is not new to Hollywood, is better than yellowface and remains a racist practice that should be discontinued outright.

### ALOHAGATE AND DOCTOR STRANGE

The continuation of *Alohagate* and the *hūpō haole* self-outing occurs for director Scott Derrickson and the live action cinematic adaptation of the Marvel Comic character in *Doctor Strange*. The most damaging act of whitewashing involves Derrickson intentionally replacing the Tibetan male Ancient One with a white female by casting the Scottish, Northern Irish and English Tilda Swinton in this altered role. Within the Marvel Comic universe, Doctor Strange, a Caucasian, becomes a master magician of the occult as the Sorcerer Supreme because he undertakes a pilgrimage specifically to Tibet, which allowed him to learn these secrets from a male Tibetan mystic. However, in the live-action film, Doctor Strange travels to Kathmandu, Nepal to learn the Asian mystic arts from a whitewashed Swinton. Barry Hertz bluntly attacks the film since '[t]his is a film that revels in whitewashing' by eliminating Tibetans outright and includes only one minor Asian character despite being set mostly in Nepal and Hong Kong (2017). This leads Kenneth Lowe to bemoan,

we are left with a story in which a white woman is schooling a white man in Wisdom from the East while all the other people who are actually from the East have next to nothing to do with it.

(2017)

Instead of completing the whitewashing process by having the protagonist travel to Stonehenge and simply learn European mystical powers there from a Celtic druid, Derrickson retained an Asian element but one that was transformed from the original.

In an interview, Derrickson claims that he intentionally sought to avoid repeating the racist depictions of Asians from the 1960s when Doctor Strange first appeared by doing away with the Fu Manchu and Dragon Lady stereotypes but then learned about the equally racist practice of whitewashing only after the Swinton controversy surfaced (Yamato 2016). It is just not plausible to believe that for Derrickson, only Swinton and no single Asian actress could be 'domineering, secretive, ethereal, enigmatic, [and] mystical' (Kyriazis 2016) all at the same time. These desired attributes in Tildon's performance are overshadowed by her stark baldness and her lack of mystical gravitas, which even CGI could not improve. All the more, Doctor Strange's most powerful magical spell could not change this silliness by which Derrickson's 'insight' could stand as the only possibility. Derrickson also celebrates how he enhanced the character of

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actor or



1. Wong from a Chinese manservant to a librarian who also doubles as Strange's  
 2. mentor (Yamato 2016), but this just exacerbates the equally racist portrayal of  
 3. Asian men as nerdy intellectuals who cannot use our own formidable skills to  
 4. rise up to the heroic challenge to become heroes in our own right. Derrickson's  
 5. logic is voided when he claims that 'What I did was the lesser of two evils, but  
 6. it is still an evil' (Kyriazis 2016). For a film director creating a blockbuster super-  
 7. hero film centred on arcane magic, why not use this same arcane magic as a  
 8. good excuse to replace two evils with at least one good?

9. In her leukocentric critique of whitewashing in *Doctor Strange*, Donna  
 10. Dickens invokes the 'Bowl of Chocolate Covered Raisins Rule' regarding the  
 11. casting of major fictional characters, where replacing original white characters  
 12. with non-white characters is always fine but not the other way around since  
 13. then it would be, plain and simple, a racist act of whitewashing (2015). Thus,  
 14. it is not a surprise to see that Dickens does not grant Kevin Feige, President of  
 15. Marvel Studio, respite for invoking the novelty of 'change' as his justification to  
 16. celebrate the 'interesting idea' (2015) of miscasting Swinton.

17. Shaun Lau of the website *The Nerds of Color* evaluated eight film reviews  
 18. of *Doctor Strange* and found only one that addressed, let alone understood, the  
 19. whitewashing critique. *The Daily Beast* is the only one to receive an 'A' grade  
 20. for its nuanced completeness because Jen Yamato, a fellow Asian American,  
 21. wrote the review. Predictably, the remaining seven received grades ranging  
 22. from a high of C+ given to *ScreenCrush* to outright failing grades given to the  
 23. other six: an 'F' for *IGN* and *Polygon*, an 'F-' for *IndieWire*, 'Wax on outta here  
 24. with this' for *Variety*, '100 per cent pure poop' for *USA Today* and 'Two stamps  
 25. of my tiny feet' for *The Hollywood Reporter* (Lau 2016). Sadly, the very issue of  
 26. whitewashing was whitewashed away by white film reviewers despite being  
 27. well aware of the whitewashing critique levelled against *Doctor Strange*.

28. Doctor Strange's origin takes on an even greater significance since he  
 29. himself underwent a strange process of leukocentric metamorphosis. Originally  
 30. created by Steve Ditko, Doctor Strange first appeared for Marvel Comics in  
 31. *Strange Tales* #110 on July 1963 as a bonus story entitled 'Dr. Strange master  
 32. of black magic!' (Illustration #2) following the main feature, a story about the  
 33. Human Torch of the Fantastic Four. Kurt Busiek, a writer for Marvel Comics  
 34. who is most famous for his stint with *The Avengers* (1963+), makes a compelling  
 35. case via a number of Tweets that originally Doctor Strange was visually concep-  
 36. tualized with Asian features to match the Tibetan Ancient One with slanted  
 37. eyes, forked eyebrows, a less prominent Fu Manchu mustache and yellow skin  
 38. tones when Strange is depicted in medium shot or further away (Illustration #3),  
 39. but once a close-up shot is involved, Strange is given Caucasian features to  
 40. reverse his Asianness (Evan 2016). This holds true for the first three comic book  
 41. appearances of Doctor Strange. However, by the fourth appearance, featuring  
 42. the origins story, Strange undergoes a permanent leukocentric transformation  
 43. into a Caucasian with just a few traces of his former Asianness retained for  
 44. some incarnations of his astral projected form (Evan 2016) as a racialized hard-  
 45. boiled egg, white on the outside and yellow on the inside. Henceforth, Doctor  
 46. Strange (Evan 2016) becomes the marshmallow Doctor Strange, white on the  
 47. inside as well as white on the outside (Illustration #4). It is this leukocentric  
 48. Doctor Strange that is favoured in the 2017 cinematic adaptation.

49. Charles Pulliam-Moore interprets this leukocentric transmutation as one  
 50. where 'More realistically, though, it's likely that Marvel saw the opportunity  
 51. to capitalize on Strange's growing popularity and felt that an Asian super-  
 52. hero wasn't ready for primetime' (Evan 2016) in 1960s America. This is the

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Illustration #4: The fourth appearance of Doctor Strange in *Strange Tales* #115, December 1963. The origins backstory includes close-up shots of Doctor Strange before he undertook his mystical pilgrimage to Tibet with more distinct stylized white facial features. Note the 'new' marshmallow leukocentric Doctor Strange now that this character is worthy of his own title.

and have him be in Tibet [...] If you think it's a good idea to cast a Chinese actress as a Tibetan character, you are out of your damn fool mind and have no idea what the fuck you're talking about.

(Anon. 2016)

This in part explains casting Swinton and changing the location to Kathmandu, Nepal but it simultaneously reveals the extent to which some people in Hollywood are willing to kowtow to the golden calf that is now the Chinese box-office. This holds since China considers Tibet to be integral to its national identity, whereas Tibetans desire their political, cultural and religious independence so that they can practise their own traditions without persecution. However, given the fact that visually Doctor Strange began his comic book life as an Asian character, Derrickson could have gone all out and portray the cinematic Doctor Strange as Chinese and thereby be true to Ditko's original portrayal of the character as Asian and secure a slam dunk approval from the Chinese censors in an act of arcane magic to destroy leukocentrism outright. At the very least, if you decide to change the location to Nepal, then complete this with a parallel change so that the Ancient One becomes ethnically Nepalese.

Given the whitewashing controversy, Tilda Swinton reached out via e-mail to Margaret Cho and exchanged a series of five e-mails on 13 May 2016 with the subject line 'Strange matters' in an attempt to understand why her casting as the Ancient One qualifies as a controversy and to distance herself as an *hāpū haole*. The two had never met in person before, nor have



they communicated since their repartee. What started out as a private two-way turned into a public event when Cho told Bobby Lee in a *TigerBelly* podcast interview, originally held on 14 December 2016 before becoming available on YouTube two days later, that she experienced the exchange as one not between equals but rather between unequals in a master–servant type of relationship where Cho was expected to play the role of the ‘house Asian’ (2016) and assuage Swinton’s damaged ego. Swinton responded by publicly releasing their e-mail exchange to *Vanity Fair* as one that on paper comes across as largely amicable (Desta 2016). Gene Demby best elucidates the resulting Swinton–Cho controversy by delving into the racial incongruity of their exchange as one where ‘What I think Swinton wanted from Cho was some kind of exculpation. What Cho wanted was for Swinton to “get it”’ (2016). Patrick Healy provides the best interpretive analysis of this controversy via an annotated step-by-step commentary of their original e-mail exchange, highlights of Cho’s *TigerBelly* interview and Cho’s final statement that ‘Asian actors should play Asian roles’ by exposing Hollywood’s leukocentrism (2016). Presently, Cho has the ‘last word’ after Rebecca Sun volunteered an open letter to Swinton on 21 December 2016 offering unsolicited advice to raise her racial awareness as to why whitewashing matters so much to the Asian American community. Sun singles out the original Alohagate controversy, stresses that ‘[s]killed filmmakers rewrite characterizations, not characters’, reminds us that films like *Doctor Strange* create ‘cinematic universes that appropriate Asian cultural elements as literal set dressing, but do not allow Asian people themselves to be seen, much less to tell the stories’ and closes by reminding Swinton that ‘So much of our decision making is driven not by intentional prejudice, but by unconscious exclusion. So here’s a cliché that is true: Awareness really is the first step’ (2016). Simply put, Sun provides Swinton with a primer on how to get ‘woked’, to become racially conscious, and thereby end her *hūpō haole* status.

*Doctor Strange* was produced for \$165 million and grossed over \$85 million domestically in its opening weekend across 3882 theatres. Its global box-office amounted to \$677,718,395, which makes it the best-performing Marvel Universe film. The American domestic box office came to \$232,641,920 representing 34.3 per cent of global revenue. From the \$445,076,475 obtained from overseas markets, \$109,194,913 was derived from China. This represents 16.1 per cent of global revenue and 24.5 per cent of overseas revenue. Of course, in true leukocentric fashion, the Swinton controversy did not interfere with the film’s box-office performance, which unfortunately, in turn, can be dispelled since it diminishes the controversy altogether as commercially insignificant. But Swinton was never designed to be one of the film’s primary attractions.

#### ALOHAGATE AND BIRTH OF THE DRAGON

The third major case of Alohagate and the self-outing of another *hūpō haole* moment occurs in *Birth of the Dragon*. In director George Nolfi’s Bruce Lee biopic centred on Lee’s 1964 kung fu duel against Wong Jack Man, Hollywood’s leukocentrism reveals itself again in the film as well as the initial trailer that promoted the film. Whitewashing occurs despite the fact that the film’s title and narrative premise centre on Bruce Lee. Instead of taking centre stage, Lee’s character becomes a sidekick within his own biopic narrative, while Steve McKee, an artificially invented fictional white

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1. character, is elevated to become the film's protagonist. The two Chinese kung  
 2. fu experts matter only because they mentor McKee to become the white  
 3. kung fu wonder he is 'destined' to become. Unfortunately, this is a destiny  
 4. that only sparkles in Nolli's leukocentric fantasy world. Given this case, *The*  
 5. *Miraculous Virgin Birth of the Incomplete White Savior Dragon* would be a more  
 6. accurate film title since unheroically, McKee requires the two kung fu masters  
 7. to rescue him and his Chinese romantic interest. In other words, McKee is a  
 8. failed white kung fu hero.

9. The choice of Steve McKee as the white enabler for audience identification  
 10. is not an innocent one since he is constructed as the Steve McQueen replicant,  
 11. the legendary Hollywood action star who trained with Bruce Lee and gave  
 12. him insights into how Hollywood operated. Like the real McQueen, McKee  
 13. hails from Indiana, rides a motorcycle, wears a leather jacket and even sports  
 14. a similar haircut. McKee differs from the original in that he learns Mandarin,  
 15. falls in love with a Chinese woman and becomes the only white man who can  
 16. navigate through the many Chinatown power brokers to grant meaning to  
 17. Bruce Lee and Wong Jack Man's individual mastery of their martial arts. In an  
 18. interview with *Deadline.com*, Nolli asserts,

19.  
 20. To be able to watch this white guy [McKee] become a fully formed man,  
 21. with Bruce Lee and Wung Jack Man becoming these surrogate father  
 22. figures to him, even though they were about the same age [...] I thought  
 23. that was very unusual in Hollywood filmmaking.

(Chen 2016)

24.  
 25.  
 26. What Nolli fails to understand is that his perspective is 'business as usual' in  
 27. whitewashing Hollywood and his statement reveals just how bona fide an *h p*  
 28. *haole* he presents himself to be. The only thing 'unusual' about his film is that  
 29. he could imagine that it was 'unusual' in the first place since he lives within a  
 30. bubble of white privilege where non-whites are disposable sidekicks for the  
 31. advancement of white entitlement and exceptionalism.

32. If Nolli's objective was indeed the desire to do something that was 'very  
 33. unusual in Hollywood filmmaking', Bruce Lee's life provides two compel-  
 34. ling narratives deserving of cinematic coverage: Linda Lee Cadwell and Jesse  
 35. R. Glover. The historical stories that are left out of Nolli's leukocentric racial  
 36. fantasy include the real romantic story between Bruce Lee and Linda Lee  
 37. Cadwell. At a time when interracial marriages were frowned upon and even  
 38. illegal in some parts of America until the US Supreme court ruled it uncon-  
 39. stitutional in 1967, the two fell in love and married in 1964, with their first  
 40. child Brandon arriving a year later. While it was common for Asian women to  
 41. marry Caucasian men, the reverse was much less common since white racists  
 42. would equate this as 'stealing our women' and therefore punishable by lynching  
 43. in the most extreme cases, especially in the antebellum south. This is the  
 44. romance that should be one of the central narrative elements within *The Birth*  
 45. *of the Dragon* but one that is blaringly absent since Lee Cadwell is a complete  
 46. nonentity in the film.

47. A better Bruce Lee student for inclusion as a supporting or even enabling  
 48. character in the film is Jesse R. Glover, an African American man who became  
 49. Lee's first American kung fu student and also his first assistant instructor.  
 50. Glover's own martial arts journey is worthy of cinematic coverage as detailed  
 51. in his book, *Bruce Lee Between Wing Chun and Jeet Kune Do* (1976). If there  
 52. is a martial artist who was actually with Bruce Lee, who witnessed Lee's

hnp



metamorphosis from Wing Chun kung fu to Jeet Kune Do, then Glover and his book provides the best written source from which to create a cinematic masterpiece. Glover experienced first hand the racial barrier prevalent within the Asian martial arts community whereby one had to be a member of a particular ethnic community before one could be taught that community's martial art. One judo academy in Seattle refused to teach him since Glover was not Japanese (1976: 2). The same held true for Chinese kung fu. This is why when Glover asked Lee for lessons in Wing Chun kung fu, Lee insisted that they had to do it in secret, and therefore, these lessons were taught in Glover's own living room in 1959 with the extra stipulation that his two housemates had to be elsewhere during the length of these lessons (1976: 13). Along with Glover, Lee continued to break racial barriers by accepting in his earliest cohort of martial arts students Taky Kimura and Ed Hart, who were Japanese and Caucasian, respectively.

Michael London, one of the film's five main producers, defends the film's whitewashing as an unintended consequence due to the economic need to eviscerate the film's Asianness and commercially 'rescue' it by adding one white fictional male protagonist. Speaking before potential buyers for the film after the trailer was screened at the 2016 Toronto International Film Festival, London explains,

[the addition of the fictional McKee] was made primarily to allow distributors to see the film as a marketable proposition. From a Hollywood standpoint, *Birth of the Dragon* looks like a foreign film: It has a largely Asian cast, it was financed by Asian financiers, there's only a single white actor. What's so funny was that, while we have been accused of tokenism over the portrayal of Asian characters, during the making of the movie we were concerned about tokenism for the exact opposite reason, because we only had one white character.

(Philip 2016)

Philip is correct to pinpoint the inherent leukocentrism behind London's empty defence before ending his online critique with a video of himself directly facing the camera so that he can conclude by giving the middle finger in an unmistakable condemnation against London's leukocentrism: the necessity of a white character to ensure box-office success, Asians as perpetual foreigners who are still not accepted as bona fide Americans and the false belief that the casting of a single white character is an act of reverse tokenism (2016).

Shannon Lee, Bruce Lee's daughter, rightfully distances herself from this 'inspired by' rather than 'based on' cinematic abomination since *Birth of the Dragon* replicates a pattern whereby 'Bruce Lee' films are ignorant of their primary character. Like *Crow* with *Aloha*, Nolfi's research into Bruce Lee's biography failed to grasp anything of substance regarding the film's *raison d'être*. Shannon Lee is spot on correct in identifying Nolfi as yet another *hāpō haole* Bruce Lee *poseur* without 'a complete understanding of his [Bruce Lee's] philosophies and artistry' (Chen 2016). Moreover, she targets the film as an outright 'travesty' that is 'inaccurate and insulting' (Philip 2016). Given this repeating pattern of whitewashing, Shannon Lee concludes, '[t]he only way to get audiences to understand the depth and uniqueness of my father is to generate our own material' (Chen 2016). Moreover, proper research into Bruce Lee's life quickly reveals that he was a quarter German on his



1. mother's side, and thus Bruce Lee already fulfilled Nolfi's desperate need for  
2. a white character.

3. Produced for \$31 million (Rainey 2016), the film is nowhere near break-  
4. ing even. It was released domestically on 25 August 2017 and grossed a mere  
5. \$6,901,965 after a run of just five weeks. The film was picked up in just three  
6. overseas markets: Russia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. Collectively,  
7. the three markets added a miserly \$168,465. It is significant that no Asian  
8. market has agreed to release this misguided film. Yet, a release in China is  
9. possible since Kylin Pictures, a Chinese firm that had previously funded half of  
10. *The King's Daughter* (AKA *The Moon and the Sun* [McNamara, 2017]) (Rainey  
11. 2016), fully financed this film.  
12.

### 13. ALOHAGATE AND MULAN

14. The power behind Shannon Lee's stance becomes even clearer with the fourth  
15. example of Alohagate, one that makes the above three film examples pale in  
16. comparison. Disney concocted a 'brilliant' plan to extend its profitable string  
17. of turning former animated blockbuster films into live-action remakes with  
18. *Mulan* as the next candidate. Disney's 'original' animated *Mulan* (Bancroft and  
19. Cook, 1998) was its only Asian-themed project and it created an Asian warrior  
20. 'princess' in Mulan that went on to command over \$303.5 million in global  
21. box-office revenue on a \$90 million budget (Anon. n.d.). Disney was looking  
22. for a fresh new perspective to make its version of the Mulan story even more  
23. appealing for an even greater share of the global audience. In 2015, Lauren  
24. Hynek and Elizabeth Martin delivered a spec script to Disney entitled *The*  
25. *Legend of Mulan* that did just that in spectacular leukocentric fashion.  
26.

27. On 10 October 2016, an anonymous person who had advance access to  
28. the spec script raised the whitewashing alarm bell on the *Angry Asian Man*  
29. blog. Identified simply as 'ConcernedForMulan', the anonymous writer  
30. revealed that the two scriptwriters remained faithful in enacting their rigid  
31. belief in leukocentrism's magical power over the box-office by centring  
32. more than half of their spec script on a 30-ish playboy and profit-driven  
33. European male trader who voyages to China and upon laying eyes on  
34. Mulan, who is slated to be cast by a Chinese teenager aged 16–17, decides  
35. to come to the aid of the Chinese Imperial Army (ConcernedForMulan  
36. 2016). Instead of Mulan saving China as in later versions of the Chinese  
37. story and in Disney's 1998 animated film, she is replaced by a paedophile  
38. white saviour inflamed with a bad case of Yellow Fever who rescues both  
39. Mulan and China, as well as replacing Shang, Mulan's Chinese male love  
40. interest in Disney's animated *Mulan* (2016). With the original anonymous  
41. poem set during the Northern Wei dynasty (386–536) when life expect-  
42. tancy was shorter and women being married off at the age of fifteen to  
43. men twice their age was not uncommon, the retention of this element for  
44. Disney's contemporary audience who live in societies where the legal age  
45. of consent is set usually at eighteen makes this narrative detail a family  
46. unfriendly version of Mulan given the paedophilic implications of the  
47. white saviour's lecherous attraction to Mulan, who is at least one year  
48. away from reaching legal adulthood.

49. Louise Edwards recounts a historical sweep of the many different versions  
50. of the original Mulan story, each one connecting to the latest social ideology  
51. that is dominant in China. The original poem, 'The Battle of Mulan', appeared  
52. in 568. It was composed of 62 lines and 332 characters and provides the key



details of Mulan, whose actual historical existence cannot be verified with certitude (2010: 179). Edwards highlights four key details from the original poem that are then changed in later versions. First, Mulan's brother is too young to answer the Khan's conscription decree; therefore, Mulan takes the place of her father in an act of filial loyalty. Second, there is little mention of her time as a soldier disguised as a man for over twelve years where there was always a threat against her sexual virtue. Third, at the end of her illustrious military service, the Khan offers her an elevated position within his cabinet but she declines, requesting instead a camel so that she can return to her family. Upon returning home, she changes back to women's clothing and her former comrades-in-arms cannot believe that Mulan was a woman masquerading as a man in their midst for all that time. Given these narrative details, Edwards asserts,

The poem makes no mention of Mulan's enthusiasm to defend the realm, the Khan's empire or the 'Chinese nation' – she is inspired out of filial sacrifice for her father and her position in relation to the central state is one of obedience, not devotion.

(2010: 180)

Despite the many changes that occur to the Mulan narrative, for Edwards, the core that remains constant across time is the central dilemma within the 'Chinese moral universe and social universe – how individuals manage the competing demands from their families and from the central state' (2010: 177). At no point in any of the past versions of Mulan was there ever a white man present.

Concerned for Mulan's disclosure presents a clear case of yet another epic enactment of leukocentrism, the first for Mulan and one in a long series for Hollywood in general; it compelled the start of a #MakeMulanRight Twitter campaign to demand from Disney a racially progressive rather than a racially regressive live-action version of Mulan. On the same day, Teresa Justino joined the fight and reported on *The Mary Sue* website that Disney had hired Rick Jaffa and Amanda Silver to rewrite Hynek and Martin's whitewashed spec script. Nevertheless, Justino asserts that what is really needed is a 'complete overhaul [...] in which the spec script] needs to be a *different script*' (2016, original emphasis). In response, Disney issued, later on the same day, a commitment that 'Mulan is and will always be the lead character in the story, and all primary roles, including the love interest, are Chinese' along with the promise to conduct a global search for a Chinese actress for the lead role (McHenry 2016). To make sure that Disney is looking at the right set of viable Chinese actresses, two lists were generated online to showcase the top candidates: seven on the *People's Choice* blog (Gocobachi 2016) and twenty on Ranker.com (Altebarmakian 2016).

This leukocentric travesty is unwarranted, especially from a global entertainment conglomerate operating not one, not two but three Disney amusement parks in Asia in the cities of Tokyo, Hong Kong and most recently Shanghai, as of 2016. So today, there are three in Asia, two in the United States and only one in France. This means that half of Disney's six amusement parks are located in Asia. As a global entertainment conglomerate, Disney is already half-Asian based on the location of its amusement parks alone. Needless to say, only Disney's top executives and imagineers can envision this as 'amusing' since they function under the 'business as still normal'



1. myopic corporate mindset of blatant racial insensitivity since historically,  
 2. white racist narratives have led to one box-office blockbuster to the next *ad*  
 3. *infinitum*. The fact that Disney too sees Asia as its growth market does not  
 4. mean that it has taught itself how to become independently more racially  
 5. enlightened, inclusive, conscious or sensitive. It is no wonder that news of  
 6. this racist rationale motivated Natalie Molnar to start an online petition enti-  
 7. tled 'Tell Disney You Don't Want a Whitewashed Mulan!' (2016). The objective  
 8. was to halt Disney's racist corporate policy of symbolic genocide by demand-  
 9. ing from Disney a casting commitment to choose Asian artists to properly  
 10. represent an Asian story, with Chinese as the preferred ethnic group since  
 11. the story of Mulan is originally from China. Disney's project would also  
 12. benefit by hiring an Asian director, but when approached, Lee Ang declined  
 13. Disney's invitation (Rocky 2016). Presently, Nikki Caro has agreed to direct  
 14. the film (Rowney 2017). After a year reviewing nearly 1000 actresses, Disney  
 15. signed Chinese Liu Yifei for the lead role in late November 2017 (Sun and  
 16. Ford 2017). Disney thereby fulfilled its promise to keep Mulan Chinese.  
 17. While this is a positive outcome, the greater concern of a leukocentric script  
 18. has yet to be dispelled.

Ang Lee

#### 20. POSITIVE BABY STEPS IN REVERSING LEUKOCENTRIC WHITEWASHING

21. As 2018 begins, we are three years out from AlohaGate and two years out from  
 22. the 2016 Oscars. Still, leukocentric whitewashing continues to erupt nearly  
 23. unabated as business as usual. Nevertheless, we may be witnessing the start of a  
 24. sea change in Hollywood with three visible examples. The first involves the case  
 25. of Kevin Kwan's very Asian novel entitled *Crazy Rich Asians*. Jon M. Chu will  
 26. direct the film adaptation in *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018). At an early stage, one of  
 27. the prospective film producers stated in no uncertain terms the desire to trans-  
 28. mogrify Rachel, the lead female Asian American protagonist, into a completely  
 29. white character (Jasper 2017). Kwan passed on this offer and shared the support  
 30. he found across America when he attended book clubs composed of white  
 31. Americans who recoiled at this whitewashing possibility. Kwan recounts,

34. Every time I mentioned it to a book club, the women would just scream.  
 35. They would be irate. They would go, 'Oh my God, that's missing the  
 36. point completely and why do people in Hollywood just think that all we  
 37. want to do is see white people on screen? We love this book because it  
 38. is about Asia. It's about Asian characters'. They get it and they love it and  
 39. they're hungry for it. They want more of that.

(Paras 2017)

42. Kwan's narrative is particularly poignant because it is based on an encounter  
 43. with a group of 30 white American Texan women who qualify eloquently as  
 44. mainstream white Americans.

45. The second bright spot occurred when actor Ed Skrein volunteered to resign  
 46. from the *Hellboy* (Marshall, 2018) remake film once he learned that the origi-  
 47. nal Major Ben Daimio character was Japanese American (Li 2017). Instead of  
 48. claiming ignorance or eschewing any responsibility such as Stone and Swinton,  
 49. Skrein did the right thing and sagaciously chose not to join Hollywood's rank  
 50. and file as an *hāpō haole*. Instead, Korean American actor Daniel Dae Kim  
 51. was hired for this role (Chen 2017). In the true spirit of *aloha*, Kim, formerly  
 52. with the hit TV series *Last and Harrow Five-O*, thanked Skrein for being part of



the solution rather than being part of the problem surrounding whitewashing (Mumford 2017).

Kogonada's *Columbus* (2017) provides a third positive example. The film centres on John Cho playing a Korean American character addressing a very human situation where his Korean ancestry naturally inflects the story in an unexpected place in the heartland of America, the city of Columbus in the very Midwestern state of Indiana. He connects with a young white woman around architecture, pursuing one's dreams and the obligation one has to one's parents. While they come from different cultural backgrounds, the centrality of these three issues as transcultural human concerns deny the immediate and irrevocable separation of east and west. They engage with each other simply first as fellow Americans and more importantly as fellow humans. One can only hope that these three film examples harken the start of a new era in Hollywood where the false idea that leukocentrism made Hollywood great and will continue to make it great forever will be abandoned once and for all. In its place, the hope is that Hollywood will begin proactively to create narratives that are inclusive of Asians and other non-white peoples, where multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity will now become the new recognized formulaic guarantors of domestic and global box office profitability.

#### THE DAWN OF HOLLYWOOD WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

In the present era, China is challenging to usurp Hollywood's supremacy given its meteoric demographic and economic numbers. Here the issue is not of 'if' but rather of 'when'. In 2012, the Motion Picture Association of America officially acknowledged that China had outperformed Japan to become the world's second-biggest box-office territory to stand right after America: the United States generated \$10.8 billion in box office revenue, China \$2.7 billion and Japan \$2.4 billion (Pulver 2013). Furthermore in 2012, Ernst & Young predicted that China will surpass the United States to become the world's most lucrative film market by 2020 (Child 2012). The 2017 global box-office ended at \$39.92 billion with the United States accounting for \$11.12 billion or 27.9 per cent (Tartaglione 2017). China's share stopped at \$8.58 billion or 21.5 per cent (Zhou 2018), a figure that is still short of the \$11 billion threshold that China needs to reach before it can have a good shot at beating Hollywood at its own game (Shoard 2016). Nevertheless, China now surpasses America in the number of screens with a total of 50,776, a good quarter more than America's 40,000 (Zhou 2018). Unlike China, America has reached saturation point in the number of cinemas that its national market can sustain, and thus there is no possibility to even contemplate matching or surpassing China's epic scale of rapid screen expansion. In fact, no other national film market can come close to replicating China's impressive year-on-year rise in film admissions (Shoard 2016). It is no wonder that every national cinema wants a slice of this lucrative box-office cash cow. At the front of this line with a special pass is none other than Hollywood.

China implemented a number of policies to protect and cultivate its own national film industry so that Hollywood could not become the local box-office juggernaut. Patrick Brzeski outlines limiting the annual number of foreign film imports to just 34 revenue-sharing films (there is an additional but lesser mentioned smaller quota for foreign film imports under a flat-fee scheme), granting additional import slots for co-productions and 3D films and furthermore requiring censorship approval. State censorship requires



1. the elimination of material depicting China and the Chinese in a negative  
 2. light, the necessity of securing an official certificate of exhibition so that each  
 3. and every film can be seen by all ages (this largely invalidates most mature  
 4. Hollywood films with an R rating or greater), the requirement that all crime  
 5. films must end with the police victorious and also the outright avoidance of  
 6. ghosts, homosexual romances, religion and nudity (Brzeski 2015). In effect,  
 7. we have the imposition of a Chinese Production Code with its own list of  
 8. Chinese Dos, Don'ts and Be Carefuls that Hollywood must now internalize  
 9. and perfect to automatically self-censor itself to make its films appealing to  
 10. China's state censors. Another way to interpret these censorship protocols  
 11. is to see Hollywood's need for a modern-day Chinese censorship-approved  
 12. version of *Chapayev* (Vasiyev and Vasiyev, 1934), the famous Russian Soviet  
 13. film that defined the paradigmatically safe 'master plot' for socialist realism as  
 14. well as being Joseph Stalin's favourite film (Kenez 1996: 390). Furthermore,  
 15. Brzeski lays out the less than well-known phenomenon of China's heavy-  
 16. handed oversight over the release parameters for Hollywood film screenings,  
 17. such as premiering blockbusters on weekdays instead of Friday, scheduling  
 18. big budget films to premier against each other to cannibalize each other's box  
 19. office results and finally excluding them from the most profitable holiday and  
 20. summer release dates (Brzeski 2015).

21. Hollywood's 'sudden' external Asian pivot is driven by the fact that China  
 22. is Hollywood's number one overseas market to the point that economically  
 23. speaking, continuing its leukocentric practice of racial insensitivity at best and  
 24. racial antagonism at worst becomes box-office poison since Hollywood oper-  
 25. ates as the prime paragon of globalized commercial filmmaking, economically  
 26. yes but racially no. To secure its bottom line, Hollywood has to now enact its  
 27. own external Asian pivot to address the Chinese as critically important, if not  
 28. more important, than its traditional white audience in America and Europe.  
 29. Complicating matters for Hollywood are the many Chinese government  
 30. red tape measures in place to protect its own nascent national film indus-  
 31. try from being eviscerated by the Hollywood behemoth. So far, China, along  
 32. with South Korea and India, has found a successful national film strategy to  
 33. command the majority share of its domestic box-office despite the importa-  
 34. tion of Hollywood blockbuster films.

35. Ben Child observes that up to 2015, the Hollywood films that have  
 36. done well at the Chinese box office did so by individually securing one of  
 37. the 34 profit-sharing import slots, obtaining censorship approval and creat-  
 38. ing 'special-effects-heavy science fiction and fantasy productions with little  
 39. or no racy content or politically motivated architecture which might upset  
 40. the famously prudish state censors' (2015). Moreover, Child highlights that  
 41. Guillermo del Toro's *Pacific Rim* (2013), Michael Bay's *Transformers: Age of*  
 42. *Extinction* (2014) and Alan Taylor's *Terminator: Genisys* (2015) would not have  
 43. done well globally had the Chinese market not rescued them from box-  
 44. office failure in America. *Pacific Rim* had a global box office of \$411 million,  
 45. with the United States accounting for \$101.8 million or 24.8 per cent while  
 46. China accounted for \$111.9 million or 27.2 per cent. For *Transformers: Age of*  
 47. *Extinction*, the global box-office reached \$1.1 billion with \$245.4 million or  
 48. 22.2 per cent gained in America and \$320.0 million or 29.0 per cent in China.  
 49. In the case of *Terminator: Genisys*, the numbers reflect a grand total of \$440.6  
 50. million with the American box office claiming \$89.8 million or 20.4 per cent  
 51. and China \$113.2 million or 25.7 per cent. For all three films, no other single  
 52. national film market provided a six-figure box-office performance. These



Chinese box-office successes were also enabled by the inclusion of characters, locations and funding originating from Hong Kong and China.

Yet the examples that Child presents pale in comparison to the success of Duncan Jones' *Warcraft: The Beginning* (2016), a videogame adaptation. The film was produced for \$160 million but completely bombed during its opening week in America, earning a heart-attack-inducing sum of just \$24.4 million. Critically, it was universally lambasted in America. However, when this same box-office dud was released in China, it earned a staggering \$156 million in just five days. The amount that *Warcraft: The Beginning* grossed in its first five days surpassed the total theatrical run of J. J. Abrams' *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015), which amounted to \$124 million, and *Warcraft: The Beginning* nearly doubled that amount by the end of its theatrical run (West 2016). Its total global box-office gross came to \$433.5 million with just \$47.2 million or 10.9 per cent generated from America. The remaining \$386.3 million or 89.1 per cent was earned overseas. China was the top performing market with a total box-office intake of a staggering \$220.8 million or 50.9 per cent of the film's global total. These numbers led Jackie Chan to posit,

*Warcraft* made 600 million yuan [US\$88.8 million] in two days. This has scared the Americans. If we can make a film that earns 10 billion [US\$1.5 billion], then people from all over the world who study film will learn Chinese, instead of us learning English.

(Lee 2016)

Chan's assertion holds water since Hollywood has already begun envisioning, in the near future, making films exclusively just for the Chinese market, its 1.4 billion population and, most importantly by 2020, a market worth \$15 billion (West 2016).

The centrality of China as the definitive overseas market that can guarantee an augmentation to box office success or deliverance from box-office failure in America leads to a new Hollywood production reality split between epic blockbuster fantasies that can successfully acquire Chinese censorship approval with a \$150 million threshold production budget versus more modest non-action genres designed for success that do not care to seek release in China (Child 2015). This new reality has already been digested by the Hong Kong film industry since the start of the 1 January 2004 Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between mainland China and Hong Kong. Veteran Hong Kong action film director Johnnie To states, 'Everyone who makes expensive films will have to make compromises, because China is where the money is. It's that simple' (Sala 2016). Mirana M. Szeto and Yun-Chung Chen present this dilemma as an 'ontological crisis' (2012: 117) because the process of mainlandization creates

[...] [a] profusion of films about vaguely defined legends with outlandishly armored warriors fighting in oddly Baroque-oriental sets is the result not of the lack of research but the collective attempt to avoid historical specificity [...] because Chinese narratives must undergo a) tailoring of cultural content to what SARFT [State Administration of Radio, Film and Television] perceives as acceptable or not in mainland China.

(2012: 120)



1. Zhang Yimou's *The Great Wall* (2016), a co-production involving America,  
 2. China, Hong Kong, Australia and Canada with Matt Damon cast as the great  
 3. white saviour, is a showcase example.

4. The main route to bypass the strict import quota of 34 films per year is  
 5. to engage in co-productions with China, which comes with more stringent  
 6. censorship protocols since there are at least two levels of censorship: at  
 7. the initial script level and again at the tail end in negotiating the release  
 8. print. Filmmaker Jevon Au provides greater detail on the extra co-production  
 9. requirements: 'half of the cast and crew has to be Chinese. The censors  
 10. have the last word' (Sala 2016). Oftentimes, as has been the reality for  
 11. Hong Kong co-productions with China such as Peter Ho-Sun Chan's *The*  
 12. *Warlords* (2007) and more recently Wong Kar-wai's *The Grandmaster* (2013),  
 13. outside of the top 'above the line' creative talents, everyone else who are  
 14. 'below the line' were from mainland China. Then there are cases where  
 15. Hong Kong production funds are not required at all, just the participation  
 16. of Hong Kong's key cinematic luminaries in films such as Tsui Hark's *The*  
 17. *Taking of Tiger Mountain* (2014) and Stephen Chow's *The Mermaid* (2016).  
 18. While this was fine for the already established Hong Kong cinematic  
 19. superstars, it requires the sacrifice of the next generation of Hong Kong  
 20. film talent since their mainland counterparts replace them on set as well  
 21. as staffing the majority of postproduction positions. Hopefully, for Chinese  
 22. American film talent, they too could be included as Chinese cast and crew,  
 23. but this is a grey area and one that could prove contentious if the Chinese  
 24. American has publicly criticized China. For a Hong Kong filmmaker such  
 25. as Au who has long enjoyed greater freedom of creative expression, work-  
 26. ing under China's co-production regime is a big compromise. Au states,  
 27. 'It's kind of a trap. The moment you fall into it, you change. You hurt your  
 28. creativity' (Sala 2016).

29. According to Roger Garcia, the executive director of the Hong Kong  
 30. International Film Festival Society, the desire to access the Chinese box office  
 31. limits a filmmaker to focus on

33. either a romance or a big special-effect movie. If you want to do horror,  
 34. or other genres, you cannot be in China. You can make a budget sci-fi  
 35. movie in Hollywood, but Chinese audiences will not like that. They like  
 36. huge, costly productions. So I think that China should not be the total  
 37. sum of everything, it is a mistake. It is limiting. For Hong Kong, it was  
 38. a mistake to obsess about China. And things are changing now that  
 39. Hollywood is doing the same.

40. (Sala 2016)

42. These Hollywood obsessions about the need and desire to enter the  
 43. Chinese film market has taken many twists and turns as individual  
 44. films learn from first-hand experience what could, will and will not pass  
 45. Chinese censorship in a process that is not as straightforward as it would  
 46. at first appear. While Chinese censorship is a danger, the greater danger  
 47. is with Hollywood self-censorship as its economic avarice to conquer the  
 48. Chinese box-office overdetermines the creative stories it chooses to imag-  
 49. ine into reality and transform itself into Hollywood with Chinese charac-  
 50. teristics where kowtowing to the mighty Chinese yuan becomes its new  
 51. economic obsession.



## CONCLUSION

Changing demographics within the United States and the rise of the Chinese film market provide Hollywood with two compelling reasons to abandon its rigid allegiance to leukocentrism. Hollywood can choose to end Alohagate for good and instead spread some real *aloha* globally by fully enacting a proactive decision to racially diversify its narratives so that not just Asian Americans and Chinese can benefit but everyone outside of the leukocentric nucleus. Hollywood can indeed remain the global Dream Factory par excellence by embracing the world in one big *ohana* hug of inclusiveness. The world is racially diverse and narratives that reflect this racial fact can only enhance rather than diminish Hollywood's incessant desire for commercial success. To continue to do otherwise is to validate the critique levelled against Hollywood that it is a Dream Factory promoting a false white racist fantasy where only whiteness must and can reign supreme. Rather than remaining fixated on the straight and narrow road defined by leukocentrism, Hollywood should adopt the path less travelled, one defined by the spirit of *aloha* in a multicultural and multiethnic universe. At the end of the day, as I am on record with Al-Jazeera regarding whitewashing,

Stars are made, stars are promoted, stars are marketed. So if they [Hollywood] invest as much as they have on these white A-list stars, they can easily create an equally compelling list of non-white A-list stars and this is something that Hollywood is not doing.

(McBride 2017)

Becoming Hollywood with Hawaiian hospitality is the best option. In the end, there is no honour or redeemable profit in continuing to define oneself as a diehard leukocentric Hollywood *hūpō haole*.

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## GLOSSARY

"The Battle of Mulan"	《木蘭詩》	31.
Jackie CHAN	成龍	32.
CHAN Peter Ho-Sun	陳可辛	33.
Stephen CHOW	周星馳	34.
<i>Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon</i>	《臥虎藏龍》	35.
<i>Enter the Dragon</i>	《龍爭虎鬥》	36.
<i>The Grandmaster</i>	《一代宗師》	37.
<i>The Great Wall</i>	《長城》	38.
HUA Mulan	花木蘭	39.
Jeet Kune Do	截拳道	40.
Ang LEE	李安	41.
Bruce LEE	李小龍	42.
LEE Byung-hun	李炳憲	43.
LIU Yifei	劉亦菲	44.
<i>The Mermaid</i>	《美人魚》	45.
Northern Wei dynasty	北魏	46.
<i>The Taking of Tiger Mountain</i>	《智取威虎山》	47.
TSUI Hark	徐克	48.
<i>The Warlords</i>	《投名狀》	49.
		50.
		51.
		52.



1. Ming-na WEN  
 2. Wing Chun kung fu  
 3. WONG Kar-wai  
 4. ZHANG Yimou  
 5.  
 6.

溫明娜  
 詠春功夫  
 王家衛  
 張藝謀

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11. **CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS**

12. Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park is assistant professor in the Department of  
 13. Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong. He specializes in  
 14. poly-Asian cinema from a global perspective, with a focus on action aesthet-  
 15. ics and ethno-cultural nationalism. His articles appear in *Asian Cinema*, *The  
 16. Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema*, *The Journal of Korean Studies and Post  
 17. Script*. He has published anthology chapters in *Chinese Connections: Hong Kong  
 18. Film, Hollywood and New Global Cinema*; *Korean Wave*; *New Korean Cinema*; *The  
 19. Politics of Community and Towards Sustainable Economic and Security Relations  
 20. in East Asia*. He is co-editor of *The Handbook of Asian Cinema* (Palgrave, forth-  
 21. coming). He has held academic appointments in France, Hong Kong, New  
 22. Zealand and the United States.

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Assistant Professor