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Yellow Pacific on White ice : transnational, postcolonial and genealogical reading of Asian American and Asian female figure skaters in the US media

Jae Chul Seo
University of Iowa

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YELLOW PACIFIC ON WHITE ICE:
TRANSNATIONAL, POSTCOLONIAL, AND GENEALOGICAL READING OF
ASIAN AMERICAN AND ASIAN FEMALE FIGURE SKATERS IN THE US MEDIA

by
Jae Chul Seo

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in Health and Sport Studies
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

December 2014

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Catriona Parratt

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the cultural meanings of Asian/American and Asian female skaters through an examination of the US media narratives of them from a period beginning in the early 1980s and ending in the late 2000s. Main subjects are Tiffany Chin (Taiwanese American), Kristi Yamaguchi (Japanese American), Michele Kwan (Chinese American), and a group of Asians such as Japanese skaters (Midori Ito, Yuka Sato, Shizuka Arakawa and Asada Mao), Chinese skaters (Chen Lu), and Korean skater (Yu-Na Kim). Drawing on Reading Sport Project as a methodological tool and the Sporting Black Atlantic as a theoretical tool, I deploy what I call the Sporting Yellow Pacific as a theoretical reading frame for this project. It refers to a genealogical space that is geographically transnational and historically neo colonial, in which the difference of Asian females is epistemologically subjected as ‘Other’ in the ontological space of American white national imagination. With this frame, I attempt to conceptualize the skaters as what I call the yellow female skater, a racialized and gendered sporting icon, which signifies a number of sets of complex and sometimes ambivalent images: nationally American but racially Asian; culturally favored as a model minority but also perilous and foreign as yellow peril; naturally primitive and/or childish but also hyper-sexual and exotic; and, biologically talented or superior but aesthetically underdeveloped. Through an analysis of these images in relation to representation, discourse, and power, I eventually write this dissertation as a genealogy that traces a historical trajectory of the yellow female skater.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the cultural meanings of Asian/American and Asian female skaters through an examination of the US media narratives of them from a period beginning in the early 1980s and ending in the late 2000s. Main subjects are Tiffany Chin (Taiwanese American), Kristi Yamaguchi (Japanese American), Michele Kwan (Chinese American), and a group of Asians such as Japanese skaters (Midori Ito, Yuka Sato, Shizuka Arakawa and Asada Mao), Chinese skaters (Chen Lu), and Korean skater (Yu-Na Kim). What these athletes signify has oscillated between a number of sets of complex and sometimes ambivalent images: nationally American but racially Asian; culturally favored as a model minority but also perilous and foreign as yellow peril; naturally primitive and/or childish but also hyper-sexual and exotic; and, biologically talented or superior but aesthetically underdeveloped. Through an analysis of these images and representations, I attempt to conceptualize what I call the yellow female skater, a racialized and gendered sporting icon that is imagined by the US media. This icon of Asian femaleness is an American invention located in women's figure skating, a cultural site that is saturated with White ways of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world, sport, and race. Beyond describing the icon and imagery and discussing what they signify, I discuss their gender and racial significance, situate them historically, and critically interrogate their creation, representation, and reproduction.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Yellow Dominance on Ice

In the essay “Asian women in sport,” Joyce S. Wong (1999) introduces her personal stories about her career path as an Asian/American¹ woman physical educational practitioner. Because of her love for sport and her athletic talent, Wong believed that going to college for P.E. would be a good career choice. However, her parents were hesitant and wanted her to study math, science, or engineering, believing that it was unacceptable for an Asian/American woman to become an athlete or physical education teacher. As Wong states, for her, “there were no Asian female role models in sport (p. 42).”

Nowadays, there are significant numbers of women of Asian descent participating and achieving great success in a range of sports such as figure skating, swimming, basketball, golf, gymnastics, and diving. But it may be figure skating in which they have developed the strongest presence and dominance, not just in the US, but in the world. As Joel S. Franks (2010) writes, “probably no sport is more associated with Asian Pacific American women than competitive ice-skating (p. 230).” In the context of the US, Asian/American female participation has recently soared with eight of the twenty-three female senior skaters at the 2010 United States National Championships (nationals) of Asian descent. This phenomenon is also documented through the popular media, which features headlines such as “Figure Skaters of Asian Descent Have Risen to Prominence” (*New York Times*). As the 2008 nationals’ champion Japanese American skater Mirai

¹ Following Palumbo-Liu (1999)’s point, I use “Asian/American” as a term to signify American people of Asian descent. It is more detailed in page 35 in this dissertation. In addition, the ‘Asian’ by which I mean is used as an emblematic term of racial groups which refer to people in four countries of the North-East Asia such as China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. Thus, what I call Asian/American also means American people whose descent are China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan.

Nagasu says, “maybe Asians are switching from studying to sports (Longman, 2010, January 23).”² For these younger generations, unlike Wong’s, it is likely that there are in particular two important Asian/American role models, both singles’ figure skaters: Kristi Yamaguchi and Michelle Kwan.

The fourth-generation descendant of Japanese immigrants, Kristi Yamaguchi made her senior debut at the 1989 nationals, a year after she had earned the 1988 World Junior Championships. Following on from this, she won three silvers in a row at the nationals, and captured her first senior world championships in 1991 worlds, at which event three American skaters swept the medals: Tonya Harding placing second and Nancy Kerrigan third. American female skaters’ sweep at the worlds was the first in the seventy-three years of women’s figure skating history and it was Yamaguchi who led the way to this historical landmark for the United States. Her dominance continued in the 1992 season when she swept the three major titles of the nationals, the worlds, and the Olympics, thus becoming the first Asian descent skater and the first non-white skater to win a World Championships and Olympics gold medal in women’s figure skating.

In the 1992 season, while Yamaguchi dominated the senior skating world, Michelle Kwan, the daughter of Chinese immigrants made her senior debut at the age of twelve. She had begun to demonstrate her top-level performance by placing second behind Harding at the 1994 nationals.³ Then, in 1995, she placed second again at the nationals and fourth at the worlds. But it was in 1996 that Kwan opened her heydays, sweeping all six major events⁴ and becoming the youngest US female champion and the

² The number of Asian American female skaters was 8 among the 22 skaters at the 2011 Nationals, and 7 among the 19 skaters at the 2012 Nationals. As for the 2012, the following skaters attended and competed: Mirai Nagasu (Japan), Caroline Zhang (China), Vanessa Lam (China & Cambodia), Christina Gao (China), Angela Wang (China), Nina Jiang (China), Joelle Forte (Azerbaijan), and Yasmin Siraj (Iran).

³ For this result, Kwan has a spot for the 1994 Olympics, but it was given to the 1993 National Champion Kerrigan, who had been sidelined by Harding’s assault. Later, Harding’s win as well as the spot for the Olympics were striped, thus Kwan flew to the Olympics as an alternative for Harding, but eventually couldn’t have a chance to compete.

⁴ It included World Figure Skating Championships, United States Figure Skating Championships, Skate America, Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final, Skate Canada International and Bofrost Cup on Ice.

third youngest world champion at the age of fifteen.⁵ The following year Kwan shared the major titles with Tara Lipinski, winning three major events, but losing out to Lipinski at the others, including the nationals and the worlds. In the 1998 season, Kwan demonstrated her dominance again, winning five major titles including the worlds, but also taking her only silver of the season at the Olympics when Lipinski won the gold. After the 1998 Olympics, Kwan continued to carry her dominance until injury forced her to withdraw from her spot on the US team for the 2006 Olympics. Throughout her career Kwan earned forty-three championships, including nine US nationals, five worlds, as well as two Olympic medals, a silver in 1998 and a bronze in 2002.

But before Kwan and Yamaguchi, in the mid 1980s there was a Taiwanese American skater, Tiffany Chin. After winning the 1981 World Junior Championships, Chin had placed fifth at her senior debut event of the 1982 nationals, and then third and second, respectively in the 1983 and 1984 competitions. She finally won the Nationals in 1985 when she became the first Asian/American to do so. Along with this, she also won the bronze at the 1985 worlds, becoming the first non-white female to win a medal in that competition. Being troubled with a growth spurt and injuries, Chin retired before the 1988 Olympics, though she later turned professional and became a coach.

Asian skaters' presence and dominance dates from around this time. At the 1988 Olympics famous for 'the Battle of the Carmens,' East German Katarina Witt won gold and American Debi Thomas settled for the bronze. But it was Japanese skater Midori Ito, along with Canadian skater Elizabeth Manley, who received the only standing ovations from the crowd, as they both performed more technically difficult programs than Witt and Thomas. One year later, Ito won the 1989 worlds and became the first Japanese and Asian champion, performing the triple Axel jump, thought to be the most difficult jump

⁵ Winning the 1996 U.S. Nationals and World Championships, Kwan became the youngest U.S. female champion since Peggy Fleming in 1964 and the third youngest female world champion behind Sonja Henie in 1927 at age fourteen, and Oksana Baiul in 1993 at age fifteen.

to the extent that until then only a few male skaters were capable of it. Ito, the first women to achieve the triple Axel thus marked one of the remarkable pages in the history of women's figure skating. Many tagged her as the favorite skater for the 1992 Olympics but in the end she had to settle for silver behind Yamaguchi.

Along with Ito, there were two other Asian female world champions in the mid 1990s, Japanese Yuka Sato who won at the 1994 worlds and Chinese Chen Lu who won the 1995 worlds (should you look at these, too?). Yet, it was especially from the mid 2000s, after Kwan's era (the mid 1990s~the mid 2000s), that Asian skaters began to stand out again. Japanese skater Shizuka Arakawa won the championships at the 2004 worlds, and became the fourth Asian world champion. She further earned the gold medal at the 2006 Olympics, becoming the first Asian Olympics gold medalist. At the 2007 worlds, three Asian skaters swept the medals: two Japanese skaters, Ando Miki and Asada Mao, won gold and silver respectively, and Korean skater Yu-Na Kim placed third. After that the next following four World Championships went to Asian skaters: Asada Mao for the 2008 and 2010 worlds, Yu-Na Kim for the 2009 worlds, and Ando again for the 2011 worlds. Finally, in the 2010 Olympics, Kim won gold and Mao silver. Thus, during the last decade, Asian skaters took 7 out of 10 world championships and the gold medals at two Olympics.

Purpose of the Study

The present study attempts to investigate the cultural meanings of these Asian/American and Asian female skaters through an examination of the US media narratives of them from a period beginning in the early 1980s and ending in the late 2000s. Main subjects are Tiffany Chin (Taiwanese American), Kristi Yamaguchi (Japanese American), Michele Kwan (Chinese American), and a group of Asians such as Japanese skaters (Midori Ito, Yuka Sato, Shizuka Arakawa and Asada Mao), Chinese skaters (Chen Lu), and Korean skater (Yu-Na Kim). My purpose is twofold: to examine how the media have represented and further constructed Asian/American and Asian

female skaters as a particular type of imaginary and to consider what historical, political, social, and cultural meanings are embedded in this construction process.

Throughout the last three decades, there has been a continuous struggle over the meaning of the Asian/American and Asian female skaters who have dominated the sport. These meanings first appeared and began to be circulated when Tiffany Chin made her debut and received nationwide attention in the early and mid-1980s. Following Chin, through Yamaguchi and Kwan to the group of Asian skaters who have most recently dominated, what these athletes signify has oscillated between a number of sets of complex and sometimes ambivalent images: nationally American but racially Asian; culturally favored as a model minority but also perilous and foreign as yellow peril; naturally primitive and/or childish but also hyper-sexual and exotic; and, biologically talented or superior but aesthetically underdeveloped.

Through an analysis of these images and representations, I attempt to conceptualize what I call the yellow female skater, a racialized and gendered sporting icon that is imagined by the US media. This icon of Asian femaleness is an American invention located in women's figure skating, a cultural site that is saturated with White ways of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world, sport, and race. Beyond describing the icon and imagery and discussing what they signify, I discuss their gender and racial significance, situate them historically, and critically interrogate their creation, representation, and reproduction.

Theoretical and Methodological Outline

Two scholars' theoretical and methodological frameworks are integral to the present dissertation. From the methodological standpoint, in the first, this project is inspired by Mary McDonald's & Susan Birrell's (1999) *Reading Sport Critically*, a method for reading sporting incidents or individuals through mediated narratives at the articulation of power relations. "Rather than attempting to capture an essence of

existence,” the *Reading Sport* project focuses “on a particular incident or celebrity as the site for exploring the complex interrelated and fluid character of power relations as they are constituted along the axes of ability, class, gender, and nationality (p. 284, 292).”

Media narratives are a useful source for reading sport because they produce “the important cultural signifying systems...to proclaim a particular world view (p. 292).”

Following this approach, I read Chin, Yamaguchi, Kwan and a group of Asian skaters as cultural texts through which the capillaries of social/cultural/political power lines that are embedded in the ice as well as our larger social and global world may be traced.

In order to theoretically read such skaters, I build my theoretical framework adapting from Ben Carrington’s project of what he calls the *Sporting Black Atlantic*. I believe Carrington’s framework, which considers both the spatial sense of transnationalism and the temporal sense of post/colonialism⁶ can be applied to my project, that is, to study different racial subject/object of Asian/American and Asian female skaters; different aspect of gender in terms of emphasized femininity in the feminized sport of women’s figure skating; different geographies of power relation in the US-Asia Pacific; different historical contexts of the internal colony of Asian/America and post/colonial Asia within the US’ imperial relation to Asia. Considering these points, I deploy what I call the *Sporting Yellow Pacific* as a theoretical framework for this dissertation and further detail it in Chapter 2.

Drawing on these theoretical/methodological frames, I eventually write this dissertation as a genealogy that traces a historical trajectory of the yellow female skater. I understand genealogy as a form of postmodern historiography that attempts to account for the constitution of ideas, discourses, and knowledge (Foucault, 1980; McWhorter, 2005; Birrell, 2005; Booth, 2005; Parratt, 1998; Phillips, 2001). Thus, my goal is neither

⁶ Carrington (2010) use of the virgule is intended to signal “the moment ‘after’ the colonial is itself caught in ambivalent tension between, on the one hand, the surpassing of formal colonial governance and on the other, the continuance of neocolonial relations. The virgule can mean ‘or’ as in a divide between two different words. It can also be used to mean ‘and’ implying a strong association (p. 5).” Following this point, I also use it in the same way in this dissertation.

to uncover the transcendental truth nor to excavate the accurate facts about the skaters who are the subjects of my study. Rather, I am investigating how particular ways of understanding, seeing, and knowing them have been formed, and how these ways relate to networks of gender and racial power. This point will be further detailed in Chapter 2.

Significance of the Study

To situate my project within the fields of sport studies and sport history I build on Carrington's ideas about the way in which scholars have theorized and examined race and sport and bring these into conversation with Susan Birrell's arguments and suggestions in two articles: *Racial Relations Theories and Sport* (1989) and *Women of Color, Critical Autobiography and Sport* (1990). In the following, I first summarize how Carrington assesses and evaluates the scholarship on sport from the standpoint of race. Then, I lay out three points by which to illustrate the significance of the present project. These are: 1) the dominance of the Black-White binary paradigm of race 2) bringing race more centrally into the scholarship on women/gender/feminism and sport, and 3) moving towards a more critical, theoretical, and interpretive approach in the study of sport and Asian/American and Asian.

Carrington bases his suggestions about theorizing race and sport on a critique of two dominant research traditions: works that employ hegemony theory and are inspired by John Hargreaves' and Richard Gruneau's class-centered works, and works using the global sporting diffusion model associated with Allen Guttmann's modernization thesis. With regard to the former, Carrington acknowledges that they open up sport as a contested site for freedom and human agency. Despite the promise, however, he argues that such studies did not consider race substantively, but rather reduced it to an additional or subordinate category while focused primarily on class relations; did not recognize sport as a key aspect of colonial governance; and failed to embrace race as a marker of empire.

As for work that follows Guttman's model, Carrington argues that these have contributed to producing a "myth of Modern Sport (p. 25)" that is closely bonded with the imagined idea of the nation and a Eurocentric model of the global sporting diffusion. In such work, the history of the sporting development focuses on codes of national and international governance. As the relations between and among these the nation-states are also understood as hegemonic, histories of world sport tend to tell culturally imperialist narratives of global sporting diffusion, or the idea that the sporting cultural process flows from the European incubator and cultural center of the civilized toward the non-European implantee and cultural periphery of the uncivilized or underdeveloped.

In addition, Carrington points out that sports scholars have often overlooked historical forces that have played a crucial role in constituting white supremacy. He notes that although some scholars have analyzed sports in postcolonial contexts, especially in societies that were once formally colonized, their use of post/colonial theory is limited and they have tended to simply note or cite some post/colonial theorists' comments in their introduction or conclusion without further exploration. Reminding us that the modern establishment and codification of sport coincided with the proliferation of Western colonialist imperialism, Carrington urges moving beyond mere descriptiveness, towards a more serious engagement with postcolonial theory and thus a fundamental interrogation of the way in which white supremacy has exercised its power through global system of sporting colonialism and imperialism.

De-centering the Black-White Sporting Paradigm

The black-white relationship has been the central category of racial relation in the study of sport and race in the US. Most works have exclusively focused on either 'black male athletes' as objects for reading or 'whiteness' as a theme of the subjectivity within the black-white relationship in the sporting world. Many scholars have been critical of the exclusive attention on black male athletes and Birrell (1989) early argued for its problems making four points: other races are obscured, because "race" is equated with

Black; gender is erased through another equation in which “the black athlete” usually references the Black male athlete; inter-racial or other intersecting relations between race, sport, and other critical categories are neglected; and “race/class” is often read as “race,” with class being almost completely evaporated (p. 213-4). Commenting on these dominant tendencies, Birrell judges that sport scholars “have yet to launch any sort of sophisticated analysis of racial relations in sport,” rather treating race as “a variable...than [as] a relationship of power (Birrell, 1990, p. 186).”

Since the time of Birrell’s suggestions for a more critical analysis, many scholars have engaged in and contributed to the study of sport and race (Hylton, 2010). In particular, a new approach emerged as a notable trend, that is, critical whiteness studies of sport, which proliferated in the field throughout the 1990s and 2000s (King, 2005; McDonald, 2005). There are numerous contributions in terms of how whiteness is constructed and practiced, how it has become an invisible, naturalized and universal norm, how it has been infused through various institutions, and so on. Despite such significant work, I also sense there are few works about other races in such studies of whiteness and sport, something that is well illustrated in the special issue on Whiteness and Sport in the *Sociology of Sport Journal* (September, 2005). The contributed essays each engage with divergent and multiple understandings of whiteness within various sporting sites including women tennis (Douglas, 2005), climbing (Erickson, 2005), skateboarding (Brayton, 2005), space of locker room (Fusco, 2005), and so on. Within these articles, however, it could also be argued that race is analyzed as an operation of either blackness or whiteness, or as constructed only through black/white relations.

The black/white paradigm is not simply a research issue, but a societal matter that significantly influences people of color who are not black. Many scholars have critiqued the bi-racial paradigm of multi-racial America as not explaining the growing phenomenon of multiracial identities and not adequately considering other ‘colors’ or other categories such as class and gender that might intersect with race (Brown, 2005;

Iijima, 1997; Perea, 1997). One pernicious effect of the paradigm is that non-black minorities' racial identities are often incoherently created or positioned as oscillating between Black and White. In the case of Asian/Americans, Claire Jean Kim (2001) argues that there is a process of "racial triangulation," which consists of two simultaneous things: the dominant group of whites relatively valorizes Asian/Americans as a subordinate group of blacks, and also ostracizes them as immutable foreigners who are unassimilable with whites (p. 39-40).

The black/white paradigm for Asian/American is an equally serious matter in the sporting world. Beyond the question of misrepresentation, or where one is positioned in a particular way in/between black and white, the most problematic issue is the way in which Asian/Americans are often erased, excluded, or effaced from the sporting world because it is believed to be a bi-racial space only for black and white. As one dominant sporting ideology of black is related to the myth of the superhuman whose athletic ability is inherently natural, so in the case of Asian/Americans is the idea or perception that they are not expected to play or coach sports. In this way, as C. R. King (2011) argues, sport has been fostered as "an unexpected place for Asian/Americans (p. 175)."

For instance, many Asian/Americans athletes often recall that they had found themselves out of place, when they entered sporting worlds. Fans, media, athletes and coaches have commonly made jokes about Asian/Americans athletes in a way that their existences are effaced (King, 2006). American collective memory has also often forgotten Asian/American athletes and their outstanding accomplishments. Almost every American knows and celebrates Jackie Robinson as an hero who broke the color barrier in professional baseball in 1947, but knows little if anything about Wat Misaka who played for the *New York Knicks* in that same year (Franks, 2010; King, 2011, p. 174). In this way, cultural violence of underrepresentation has not only reinforced the dominant idea of the unexpected relationship between Asian/American and sport, but also perpetuated the black/white understandings of the sporting world.

In sum, my point is not to reject the black-white paradigm outright, but argue that it might be dismantled or decentered and moved toward a more complex research approach on sport and race. If the black-white relation continues as the ‘center’ of all other racial relations in sport studies and sport history and a bi-polar view of race is maintained, it will limit our understanding of the multiracial aspects of sport. Also, care should be taken in the study of whiteness and sport, for it could rather reinforce a white-centered knowledge production in sport studies and sport history. As C. R. King (2005) warns:

Within and beyond the sport studies classroom, there is grave danger that whiteness studies will be whitewashed. Absorbed by white studies, I fear, it will become a white-centered, white-dominated, and white-identified social field, a context in which white perspectives and practices (ways of thinking and learning) shape the organization and dissemination of knowledge about largely white actors and authors within spaces marked by white-centered norms of civility and sociality (p. 403).

I believe that to fight racism in an academic way requires connecting between particularized understandings of racism, looking at how these work together, and further integrating them into a mutual criticism.

Global Sporting Sisterhood beyond (White) Patriarchy

A second and related point by which I highlight the importance of my project has to do with the way ‘race’ is treated in studies of women/gender/feminism & sport. First, the contribution of these studies to the field should not be overlooked. Many scholars have contributed to paving a way for a crucial shift from ‘sport her-story’ to ‘history of gender & sport’ or ‘gender history of sport.’ I understand this movement is still ongoing in a promising way along three dimensions. In terms of epistemology, scholars of women/gender/feminism and sport have continued to see historical knowledge not as the truth that depends on accuracy and objectivity, but as a constructed discourse that interprets the sporting past as a part or aspect of it. Also, with regard to methodology, critical theories are more actively embraced, not as vehicles that test whether historical

facts occurred, but as tools for a perspective from which to interrogate power relations as a way of better studying the sporting past. As for the form of representation, sport feminist scholars have also continued to consider various ways of writing of presenting studies of the past as historical knowledge (Booth, 2005; Parratt, 1998; Struna, 1984; Vertinsky, 1994).

What I want to highlight is two interrelated points: the function of ‘whiteness’ and the relative absence of women of color. The importance of theorizing difference regarding women athletes of color has long been suggested, acknowledged, and discussed in the sporting academy. Arguing for bringing the critiques of black feminist scholars to studies of sport, race and feminism, Birrell (1990) early anticipated that many theories and conceptualizations commonly used would not be appropriate in explaining and interpreting the sporting world for women athletes of color. She writes:

Racial relations scholarship, produced almost exclusively by men, has alienated many women of color who find that they are neither the subjects of racial relations theory nor the intended audience of such tracts. Perhaps as a result, few women of color are attempting to join that tradition and produce explicit theories of racial relations. Nor are they comfortable with most feminist theory, which, while focusing on gender, too often obscures race.

White feminists were seen as equally ignorant and unsupportive of the concerns of women of color. White feminists were harshly criticized for setting political agendas filled with their own middle-class issues and producing theories that were abstract, inaccessible, and based on only White experiences (p. 187).

In this respect, she suggested that women sport scholars of color might engage in writing critical autobiography as a promising form for theorizing their difference, one through which to “learn their theory in their lives...[and] write their lives as theory (p. 193).” But despite Birrell’s suggestion, much of the sporting experiences and identities of women athletes or scholars of color have still to be written by them or examined as a theme by other scholars.

In addition, I want to bring up the point of ‘whiteness’ again in relation to the study of women/gender/feminism and sport. From the viewpoint of understanding ‘white’ as “just another ethnic group (Hall, 1991, p. 21),” I believe it is possible to characterize a group of works that focus on this subject as a kind of ethnic study of white women and sport or white feminist sport studies/history. According to Richard Dyer (1988), the power of whiteness lies in its unspokenness, through which it is rendered natural, normal, or universal. In the study of women/gender/feminism and sport, I think of ‘whiteness’ as functioning in this way, as an invisible norm that maintains racial power by not speaking about how it privileges white women. Because of this the possibility of compromise and feminist alliances that include women of color is undermined.

As a useful illustration of this, I draw attention to the 2012 forum of *Journal of Sport History*, “Feminist Sport History in the Past, Present, and Future.” As Patricia Vertinsky (2012) the author of a commentary in the issues well summarizes, the forum:

sets out to use feminist theory as a kind of hermeneutic of suspicion that surfaces critiques of existing theories and practices in sport history. It claims to offer new... ways to look at sporting discourses, cultural practices, and the mapping of public and private spaces; challenges ideology from outside and hegemony from within (p. 479-80).

The forum highlights two points. It shows how young feminist sport historians are engaging in their works in a critically, theoretically, and methodologically reflexive way through six empirical papers.⁷ And it discusses both the legacy of earlier generations of feminist sport historians and the potential future of feminist sport history through a multi-generational dialogue between eight scholars from three generations who started their

⁷ Their works can be summarized in terms of how oral history is meaningful to explore subjective identities (Adams, 2012); how groups, not individuals, can be useful to study women’s past (Marfell, 2012); how autoethnographic writing is a reflexive form of historical writing (McParland, 2012; Popovic, 2012); how to theoretically embrace queer engagement (McLachlan, 2012); how male scholars are also reflexive in examining women and men’s gendered sporting experiences (Klugman, 2012).

works during the mid 1980s and early 1990s, the late 1990s and early 2000s, and the late 2000s and early 2010s.⁸

What is of importance for me is that there is almost no discussion of or attention to ‘race’ is seen in contributions to the forum. Indeed, the word ‘race’ appears only twice. Vertinsky brings it up in her commentary, offering ten points for the hopeful future of feminist sport history, the fourth one being to “continue to question how feminism relates to itself across time, positionality, race, region, class, sexuality, occupation, and generation (p. 485).” Here the idea of race is suggested as one of eight categories that need to be more related to feminism but without any further indication of how this might be done and why it is important. In another case, the multi-generational dialogue, race is discussed as part of a question that Susan Cahn asks about how feminist sport historians can do/write more theoretically driven work. Holly Thorpe (2012) lays out her thoughts on this in the following:

Interestingly, Douglas Booth recently asked similar questions in relation to the ways sport historians study race, ultimately arguing that “knowledge about racism in sport for its own sake serves little purpose: knowledge needs utility,” before suggesting that “socially responsible narratives might provide that utility.” As with historians studying race in sport, feminist sport historians would also do well to “consider their ethical responsibilities and thus the politics of ‘doing’ history.” (p. 389)

Thorpe (2012) highlights a point of ethnical responsibility, taking away from studies of race and sport. However, what is interesting to me is why the idea of race itself is not discussed as an actual category or theme for doing better feminist historical works.

Deconstructing ‘patriarchy’ is a fundamental goal that links the past, present and imagined futures of feminist sport history, as Vertinsky (2012)’s title of the commentary highlights: “Is there a ‘beyond patriarchy’ in feminist sport history (p. 479)?” In thinking about this question, I see myself, as a young scholar who belongs to the third generation

⁸ Scholars who represent the first generation consist of Patricia Vertinsky, Susan Cahn, and Catriona Parratt. The second does Tara Magdalinski and Jaime Shultz. And the third are the editors of the form, Holly Thorpe and Rebecca Olive, and Megan Popovic (Thorpe & Olive, 2012).

of sport studies and sport history feminists, wanting to contribute to the multi-generational dialogue. I begin by reiterating that women of color who are athletes or sport scholars have not readily identified as sisters of the white women who have been in the forefront of feminist sport scholarship. My suggestion is that we think about a kind of global sporting sisterhood that goes beyond white patriarchy by first recognizing that the patriarchy is a dominant form of gender oppression in sport worldwide. Paraphrasing bell hooks (1981)'s famous expression, it could be argued that if all women athletes are White and all Black athletes are men then in the globalized sporting world we need a more powerful sisterhood and feminist sport scholars have to make themselves a fundamental part of this.

Toward Critical Studies of Sport and Asian/American and Asian

Asian/American and Asian sport has been a topic, theme, or subject for some scholars although it has not received a great deal of attention. I organize this work into three groups: 1) a kind of ethnic studies that discovers, reconstructs, explains, and interprets Asian/American sporting experience and identity in the past and the present and 2) a kind of representation studies that is concerned with how mainstream society and the media have seen, understood, and portrayed Asian/American and Asian athletes or people in a particular way, and 3) a kind of area studies that focuses on Asian sports as a regional issue, topic, or theme.

Some sport historians have explored the Asian/American sporting experience and identity in the past through historical archival research (Dustin, 2002/2003; Mullan, 1999a, 1999b; Park, 2000; Regalado, 1992, 1995, 2000; Wrynn, 1994; Yep, 2010; Zieff, 2000). Their findings and interpretations can be summarized in three points. First, sport played crucial roles in Japanese and Chinese American communities in mainly three ways: as a vehicle for cultural assimilation to the mainstream society; as a focus for social gathering and means of preserving their own cultural heritage or traditionally held values; and as a site for displaying their ethnic pride as well as integrating their

communities. Second, there were often inter-generational conflicts between the second generation's quest for Americanization through sports and the first generation's desire for preserving their traditional values and cultural heritage. Third, individual and community passion for and effort in often met with derogatory sentiments and institutionalized discrimination from mainstream society.

In addition, some sport studies scholars have shown a particular interest in Asian/American women's sporting participation, access, constraint, or exclusion, using social scientific surveys, ethnography, or literature reviews. Some work points out the significance of stereotypes of Asian/Americans such as frailty, passivity, athletic inferiority, and women's marginal role in their communities, arguing that these socio-cultural factors work to create barriers for female access to sport and physical activity (Wong 1999; Vertinsky, 1998). Other work finds evidence that Asian/American women have positive attitudes about sports, physical activity and exercise (Lee, 2005; Hanson, 2005). These mixed and contrasting findings aside, these studies share three ideas in common: Asian/American women continue to be largely invisible and absent in research on sport; they are less involved in sport than Asian/American men; and because Asian/American communities and Asian/American women are not homogeneous, the complexity and diversity of gender effect across groups of Asian/American women's sport participation should be considered.

A second group of studies specifically examine how Asian/American and Asian athletes have been represented in both national and international sporting events. Mayeda (1999) analyzed the content of media portrayals Japanese baseball players, Hideo Nomo and Hideki Irabu, and argued that these perpetuate and reinforce Asian/American and Asian stereotypes such as the model minority for Nomo and the yellow peril for Irabu. Analyzing Japanese media representations, Hirai (2001) shows how Nomo is portrayed as either pioneer who has made his dream come true or as a defector who is considered selfish. He also discusses Nomo with regard to the impact of

globalization on Japanese sport, one consequence of which is an increase in the number of Japanese athletes who prefer to play overseas. Nakamura (2005) examines how Japanese baseball player Ichiro Suzuki is perceived in the US and Japanese media. Viewing the migration of sport labor as a cultural product of the globalization, he argues that the discourses of nationhood in both countries are inscribed into the representation of Ichiro, and that this further reflects a creation of a transnational space where national identity is re-articulated beyond the boundaries of the nation-state and in a global world. Using a similar frame of two geographies, Sun (2011) also examines how the Taiwanese baseball player Chien-Ming Wang is represented by both the media in the US and Taiwan. While Wang is portrayed as a symbol of ‘Americanization’ and associated with many aspects of Taiwanese local nationalism, his race and foreign nationality are emphasized through the image of the model minority: a shy, quiet, exotic, reticent, and obedient Asian player. King (2006)’s work does not specifically focus on athletes but his larger argument is that humor and jokes, which have been naturalized and unquestioned as a form of representation in the US media, are harmful devices of linguistic violence that work to efface and erase Asian/American’s sporting identity within a dual frame of the sporting world as black and white.

Lastly, there have been also the studies of so-called Asian sport, which might be thought of as the area studies. Among a number of topics, agenda, and themes, the following have been emphasized in the Western sport academia: the modernization of sports in Asian countries; the influence of sports such as baseball on Asia or the nature of baseball in Asia; Asian athletes’ presence or participation in the Olympics; the three ‘Asian’ Olympics Games which held in Tokyo in 1964, Seoul in 1988, and Beijing in 2008; specific sporting incidents, governmental policies, and the development of sporting systems in Asian countries; traditional or indigenous sports; the socio-cultural sporting dynamics in the specific contexts of Asian social groups, communities, and societies; and

the dominance of Asian athletes in certain sporting events such as Korean LPGA players, Chinese female swimmers, and Taiwanese little league baseball.⁹

All of these works have made meaningful contributions to the field. They envisioned Asian/Americans' sporting lives as significant cultural forms for self-actualization, just as they are for dominant groups. They also examined Asian/Americans as a victim or marginalized group who experienced and faced cultural constraints, barriers, and oppression by, through, and within sport as much as other minorities did. Despite these contributions, which I hold in great respect, I cautiously suggest that, from the viewpoint of race, studies of sport and Asian/American and Asian might need to be more critical, theoretical, and attentive to the power inherent in what can be called white-yellow relations.

This brings me back to Carrington's transnational perspective as it can be argued that cultural discussions of Asian immigrants' sporting experience and identity have been confined somehow within the boundary of the US nation-state. This spatial containment grounds previous work, resulting in what might be understood as a US centric frame, in which explanation and interpretation focus on reading and exploring the Asian/American sporting experience/identity primarily within the domestic context of US politics. The consequential effect of this approach, I believe, is the dominance of an assimilationist narrative, in which important racial aspects of Asian/Americans seem to be silent, neglected, and reduced to or absorbed into other categories of class, ethnicity, or even politically neutral sense of migrant.

I would argue that Asian/Americans' identity of belonging might be more usefully placed within the broader context of transnationalized geographies of power

⁹ These categories are not all dimensions of the studies of Asia (n) & Sport, but they totally come from my personal perspective. I briefly surveyed *Journal of Sport History*, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, *International journal of the history of sport*, and *International review of sport sociology*. I have a plan to develop and more intensify this analysis in a separate chapter of the theoretical framework after the proposal presentation.

relations of the US-Asia Pacific. In the multiracial time and space that is America, the idea of race has been of great significance not only for Black people but also for non-black people of color, particularly Asians. For instance, the history of legal exclusion and disenfranchisement of Asian immigrants is closely associated with racial ideas, prejudices, and hostile sentiments about Asian people that have long circulated in mainstream society. In this respect, I suggest that studies of sport and Asian/Americans or Asian/America go beyond either discovering marginalized sporting voices and celebrating them, or descriptively adding 'the sporting Asian/America' to the diverse list of the American multi-ethnic studies of sports.

In addition, I also think that one might need to draw more attention to the historical forces of the dominancy, such as the exclusionary and the colonial power not only within the US, but also in relation to Asia, by raising critical questions about the invisible mindset of the US imperialism. An historical perspective that grounds previous work that may be defined as such 'sport history from the below' is inspired by the liberal idea of demographic democracy (Parratt, 1998; Booth, 2005). This argues that it is important to listen for and try to hear the marginalized group's voice by asking 'sport history for whom' yet I also believe that we must investigate what historical forces have put some groups 'below.' These forces have taken various forms such as exclusion, racism, imperialism, and other cultural violence associated with gender, sexuality, nationality, and so on. In examining Asian/Americans' sporting history and experiences, therefore, it is necessary to question and problematize how power has been reproduced, reinforced, and reaffirmed within the relationship between dominant groups in the US and Asian/Americans. In the following section, I discuss how I build my theoretical framework on these points, situating this in the literature on figure skating.

Literature on Figure Skating

Figure skating is an especially rich site for exploring the significance of white-yellow relations. Scholarly work on the sport has mainly focused on four themes or

issues: over-determined or emphasized femininity as a dominant norm of sexuality and gender (Fabos, 2001; Feder, 1998); an ideal type of class and family (Foote, 2003; Kestnbaum, 1995; Stoloff, 1995); nationalist concerns embedded in the international contexts (Creef, 2004; D'Erasmus, 1995; Feuer, 1995; Kinder, 1995); and the implications of individuals' struggles in relation to over-conformity in the sport (Grenfell, 2003; Ryan, 1995).

To be more specific, the predominant concern has been with discussing, exploring, and interrogating anxieties relating to an over-determined or overly emphasized kind of femininity. For instance, Abigail M. Feder (1998) critically examined how the media dichotomously framed female figure skaters as either artists or athletes, by reading the print media's narratives of athletes who competed in the 1992 Olympics such as Kristi Yamaguchi, Nancy Kerrigan, Tonya Harding, Surya Bonaly, and Midori Ito. Taking these skaters as objects, Bettina Fabos (2001) also conducted a content analysis of the US television networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) and argued that televised narratives framed them as fairytale of princesses. Such feminism-based critical approaches proliferated after the shocking incident of the so-called Harding-Kerrigan Saga. Cynthia Baughman (1995) published an edited collection entitled *Women on Ice* that comprises eighteen feminist essays on the scandal. These are concerned with not only about over-femininity, but also offer comprehensive discussions of how the belittlement of women's athleticism intersected with the category of class (Kestnbaum, 1995; Stoloff, 1995) and the notion of national identity (D'Erasmus, 1995; Feuer, 1995; Kinder, 1995). In addition to these works focusing on the micro-level of the sport's femininity-nexus, Mary Louise Adams (2011) published *Artistic Impressions: Figure Skating, Masculinity, and the Limits of Sport*, what she calls "a gender history of figure skating," which explored and interrogated how figure skating has been feminized in a particular way.

What I want to point out here is that the idea of race has rarely discussed in this literature on figure skating and that this pattern might be a sign of how the academy

contributes to constructing figure skating as a site of whiteness which is of interest largely to white scholars. As Bailey & Zita (2007) argue, “the absence of color talk in philosophy is a marker of the discipline’s whiteness (p. vii).” In women’s figure skating, from a different stance, it might be also possible to re-phrase this and suggest that a discussion of color has been absent because there have been few non-whites skaters in the sport. However, what I also want to do is to pick up from some preliminary discussion of race and color regarding Asian/American and Asian female skaters and develop this further.

In her book *Culture on Ice*, Ellyn Kestnbaum (2003) references and offers an explanation for the presence of Asian/American and Asian female skaters and their particular characteristics, writing:

It has not been until the latter part of the twentieth century, in the era of global mass communications, that skaters from Asia (most notably the relatively cold and wealthy nation of Japan since the 1960s) have achieved standards of skating comparable to those of the Europeans and North Americans, with skaters from China, Australia, and Korea entering international competitions beginning in the 1980s and 1990s (p. 60).

A growing population of Americans and Canadians of Asian descent have also been attracted to figure skating in recent decades, more girls than boys, as is true of the skating population as a whole in these countries, with notable success particularly in U.S. champions Tiffany Chin, Kristi Yamaguchi, and Michelle Kwan, the latter two of whom have also won major international titles (p. 69-70).

Profiles on foreign or nonwhite skaters often render them exotic, from American “China Doll” Tiffany Chin of the mid-1980s to made-in-Japan Midori Ito, black French skater Surya Bonaly’s supposed origins on the remote African island of Reunion (later revealed to be a tale invented by her coach), and 1995 world champion Chen Lu, “the skater from the other side of the world” (p. 19).

What I read from the above narrative is three things: a certain Marxist understanding about sporting involvement that explains it as environmental or economic determinism; the great influence role models based in one’s ethnic or racial community; and a certain essentialist idea that foreign or nonwhite skaters contain their own exoticness and perform their natural beauty.

I question all of these commonly held ideas and assumptions about Asian/American and Asian female skaters. And I hope that in doing this, my project of a “[race] history of skating makes...contributions to the study of sport more generally (p. 7),” just as Adams (2011) set out to do with *Artistic Impression*. Highlighting the historically discrete and contingent process through which meanings are made, she writes that, “even in academic work, gendered sport categories are too often taken for granted (p. 7).” With this project I extend Adams’ concern with what is too often taken for granted to the issue of race and women’s figure skating.

Sources

For this project, I searched the databases of Lexis-Nexis and ebscohost and found newspaper articles which offer narratives representing the skaters’ details of performance, skating styles, personalities, appearances, work ethics, family stories, ethnic backgrounds, and so on. These articles are primarily from *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Baltimore Sun* and *Chicago Tribune*. I also searched American weekly news magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek* and a number of sports magazines and periodicals: *Sport Illustrated*, *ESPN*, *Women’s Sports & Fitness*, and *Skating*. All of these sources were critically examined for constructions of female figure skaters and for indications of relationships of power. In addition, I have searched for visual sources, such as TV broadcasts, documentaries of the skaters, and images that accompanying the text in newspaper articles.

As far as secondary sources regarding figure skating are concerned, I have collected and reviewed both academic and popular works including: *Culture on Ice: Figure Skating & Cultural Meaning* by Ellyn Kestnbaum, *Little Girls in Pretty Boxes: The Making and Breaking of Elite Gymnasts and Figure Skaters* by Joan Ryan, *Artistic Impressions: Figure Skating, Masculinity, and the Limits of Sport* by Mary Louise Adams, *Women on Ice: Feminist Essays on the Tonya Harding/Nancy Kerrigan Spectacle*, edited by Cynthia Bau, *Skate Talk: Figure Skating in the Words of the Stars* by Steve Milton,

Edge of Glory: The Inside Story of the Quest for Figure Skating's Olympic Gold Medals by Christine Brennan, and *Skating For The Gold: Michelle Kwan & Tara Lipinski* by Chip Lovitt.

Chapter Outline

The second chapter is dedicated to developing my theoretical framework, the Sporting Yellow Pacific. It explains how transnational and postcolonial perspectives inform and shape my approach in this project and gives a more detailed consideration of important literature, including Carrington's *Sporting Black Atlantic* and a number of works from Asian American studies. The final section of the chapter deals with how I apply the frame to the project of reading the skaters in each chapter.

The third chapter examines how the media described, portrayed, and represented the first non-white and Asian/American national champion, a Taiwanese American skater Tiffany Chin beginning with her senior debut in the 1982 season to 1988 when she retired. I argue that Chin's debut and presence in the ice are indicative of an important moment, the birth of the yellow female skater. In this respect, I am interested in the initial images and media representations of Chin as a noteworthy Asian/American female skater and I lay out in the conditions that made these possible and available, focusing on two contextual points: the multicultural turn and the oriental style of representation practices in the popular culture of 1980s America.

Chapter four of the dissertation analyzes media coverage of the first Asian/American gold medalist, Japanese American skater Kristi Yamaguchi, from her senior debut in 1989 to the 1992 season. In this chapter, I discuss the media's portrayal of Yamaguchi within a dichotomous rhetoric that characterized female skaters as either artists or athletes, and in comparison and contrast with three other skaters: Tonya Harding, Nancy Kerrigan, and Midori Ito. Then, I detail two ways that the media represented Yamaguchi's identity of belonging. One is the construction of her as a role model for multicultural America, and the other is related to a diasporic entity that made her neither

real American (Occidental) nor real Japanese (Oriental). In the last part of the chapter, I conclude by interrogating how these representations reflect the politics of the multicultural management of race connecting this to transnational critiques that call attention to the ambivalence of constructions of Yamaguchi.

Chapter five examines media representations of a Chinese American skater, Michelle Kwan. In this chapter, I detail how the media used another dichotomous frame within which to represent Kwan, one that portrayed female skaters as either girls or ladies, a framing that depended on comparisons and contrasts to other girl skaters, particularly Oksana Baiul and Tara Lipinski. The primary focus of my reading is directed to a particular incident, the so-called ‘transformation’ of Kwan in the 1996, which involved her appearing on ice with heavy make-up, sexualized costumes, and other similarly themed accessories and ornamentations. I read this incident in relation to two stereotypes of Asian/American and Asian, that of “looking young” and that of the hypersexual exotic woman. I argue that these stereotypical projections on to and representations of Kwan can be understood as a certain neo-colonial rhetoric that has been historically constructed and still persists today.

Chapter six of the dissertation is concerned with how the media described, portrayed, and represented a group of Asian female skaters. These narratives coincided with the dominance of skaters of Asian descent that was noticeable from the 2000s. The main focus in this chapter is to explore how the media have struggled in dealing with and discussing this phenomenon. More specifically, it examines how the media understood the success of Asian descent skaters, what their dominance meant for US women’s figure skating, and how to come to terms with the decline of American, albeit Asian/American prowess in international skating. In detailing these points, I argue that the media conflated the skaters into a racially and gendered marked Other – the yellow female skater. Employing a concept of bio-cultural power that derives from Foucault’s bio-power and Etienne Balibar’s differentialist or culturalist racism, I demonstrate how racial

ideas of the biological and the cultural are inscribed to create a mixed image of iconography of the yellow female skater in this period.

In the concluding chapter I summarize what I have examined and offer an interpretation and discussion of my findings. I also lay out my some concluding thoughts about the role of sport as well as the sport media in relation to studies of Asian/Americans and sport.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter details the theoretical framework that grounds this dissertation. I begin by introducing Carrington's theoretical framework of the Black Atlantic, focusing on how he thinks about sport and race in complex ways in terms of both the transnational and the post/colonial. Applying his perspectives on race to the different shores of the Asian Pacific, I develop in this present dissertation a project that explores the racial/gendered significance of sport in white-yellow relations. More precisely, I imagine the Asian Pacific or Yellow Pacific as a metaphorical rim, a symbolic space of the cultural landscape in which the media have represented Asian/American and Asian female skaters particularly style or iconography, what I call the yellow female skater. To analyze and develop the process of this construction, I deploy the key theoretical frames of a white American national ontology and a white American imperial frame, and associated with these four key discourses or tropes: the model minority, the yellow peril, the trope of the child and/or the primitive, and the stereotype of the hypersexual and exotic woman. After discussing my understanding of these frames and concepts, I conclude by outlining the remaining chapters of the dissertation, in which I build up the details of a genealogy of the yellow female skater or a kind of postmodern history of US women's figure skating.

Carrington's Sporting Racial Project

In *Race, Sport and Politics: the Sporting Black Diaspora*, Carrington (2010) conceptualizes the black (male) athlete as a racially trans-nationalized as well as historically colonized diasporic figure, thus arguing for sport as a racial project for discussing political struggle, resistance, and change. He argues that the idea of the black (male) athlete is a cultural product invented by western white supremacy that references "a semi-humanized category of radical otherness," whose meanings have oscillated

through time and place to construct a “submissive and threatening, often obedient, occasionally rebellious, revolting and in revolt, political and compromised...commodity (p. 2-3).” In order to deconstruct this racial construction of black athletes, Carrington argues for theoretical approaches to studying race and sport that are conscious of both time and space.

The theoretical cornerstone of Carrington’s project consists of two critical perspectives of race. One replaces nation-state based relationships among sports, community, and place with a transnational perspective of *diaspora*, and the other interrogates the conjuncture sport, race, and colonialism with a postcolonial perspective. Taking spatial construct of the transnational, Carrington challenges dominant understandings of the nation and national identity, and argues for actively embracing the idea of *diaspora* as an analytic concept that unsettles “the popular images of natural nations”; disrupts “the fundamental power of territory to determine identity”; breaks “the simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location, and consciousness”; and destroys “the naïve invocation of common memory as the basis of particularity (p. 24).” He explains that cultural meanings of the black athlete cannot be fully understood within the ideology nation-state nationalism that is often forged by conservative mono-cultural ideologies. In the global media-scape, for example, black star athletes such as the Williams’ sisters, Kobe Bryant, Tiger Woods, Lewis Hamilton, and Usain Bolt can be trans-nationally identified as racial figures rather than being recognized in terms of their nationalities.

In this, Carrington calls for a new spatial frame and transnational analyses that seek to attempt to rethink the relationship between sport, space, and identity. Adapting Paul Gilroy’s notion of the Black Atlantic, he deploys what he calls the Sporting Black Atlantic as a way to comprehend the significance of sport and athletes as a crucial arena and crucial subjects in the formation of a sporting black diasporic space. Carrington explains:

The sporting black Atlantic can be defined as a complex, transnational cultural and political space, that exceeds the boundaries of nation states, whereby the migrations and achievements of black athletes have come to assume a heightened political significance for the dispersed peoples of the black diaspora: the sports arena thus operates as an important symbolic space in the struggles of black peoples for freedom and liberty, cultural recognition and civic rights, against the ideologies and practices of white supremacy (p. 55).

In this way, he seeks to highlight sport as another crucial arena alongside music, fashion, film and television in the transnational formation of an alternative black identity that Gilroy sought to counter to the apolitical history of modernity.

From a historical perspective, the diasporic nature of the Sporting Black Atlantic implies a complex, historically cultural and political reality encompassing both the colonized past and post/colonial present. He adopts the idea of the post/colonial as an analytic concept to view race as a marker of empire, to situate sport within the cultural institutions or practices of colonial racial governance, and to understand colonial racism as a dominant historical force of the white supremacy. To interrogate these complex conjunctures among sport, race, and colonialism, Carrington adapts Joe Feagin's notion of the White Racial Frame, a "worldview that is based on whites' racially constructed reality of how the world works (p. 4)" and reconfigures it into a more historicized version of the colonizer's worldview.

Carrington deploys the notion of the White Colonial Frame as a racial epistemology of the western colonialism that has structured the dominant ways of seeing and understanding the sporting world. He explains that "the white colonial frame is a concept that seeks to highlight how both the lived experience of white supremacy (as a social and cultural phenomenon) and the systemic features of colonialism (as a political and economic institution) come together to produce forms of anti-black racism, both historically and contemporaneously, even after the formal dismantling of European colonial regimes (p. 4)."

The key factors in this racial framing are European colonial (political, cultural, economic) institutions, through which so-called white ways of seeing and knowing have been firmly established as a universal version of worldview. Sport is one such colonial institution that has played a crucial role in making and remaking whiteness as an invisible norm naturalized in the practices and structures of physical culture. Intersecting race with colonialism in this way, Carrington reads black male athletes as post/colonial figures, subalterns who cannot speak or represent themselves and who have been always controlled within white colonial masculinist systems of desire.

***My Sporting Racial and Gender Project*¹⁰**

I understand race, racism, and white supremacy as global ideas, phenomena, and systems of power. As Howard Winant (2001) has famously described, the “globality of race” has been integral to the development of modern nation-states within the “world racial system.” White supremacy should be also understood as a global power that “goes beyond racism [and] means that God put you on the planet to rule, to dominate, and occupy the centre of the national and international universe—because you’re white (Gabriel, 1997, p. 18; Jordan, 1995, p. 21).” It is through this globality of white supremacy that I connect and situate this dissertation within Carrington’s Global Sporting Racial Project, by reconfiguring it on different shores, those of the US-Asia Pacific.

Carrington’s notion of the sporting racial project argues for considering sport as a seriously useful site for doing racial projects. “A racial project,” according to Michael Omi & Howard Winant (1994), can be defined as “an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics (p. 56).” It is political in nature and affects “racial formation,” that is, “the socio-historical process, by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed (p. 55).” Thus, a series of these action, practices, and movements that have an impact on ideas about race constitute various types of racial

¹⁰ I am indebted this attempt to Matt Hodler, one of my friends at the University of Iowa.

projects and formations. They help to explain, for example: why the “far right” can base claims for white supremacist policies on “biologicistic and racist views of difference”; “new right” projects that argue for “color-blind views,” while manipulating “covertly...racial fears”; and how “the left” can simultaneously “invoke notions of racial difference in combination with egalitarian politics and policy (p. 58).” It is within this spectrum of the multiple politicization of race that Carrington intervenes with his conceptualizations of and the political import of the racial significance of sport.

For Carrington both race and sport are interdependently significant as having contributed to the development of modern western society. That is to say, ideologies of race have structured sports as a site of political domination and sports have also played a central role in reproducing the dominant understanding of race. Rejecting the discourse of the socio-cultural determinism of sport, Carrington argues that it could and should be understood as “an important arena for forms of cultural resistance against white racism (p. 3) beginning with critically understanding that cultural representations of race and sport pave for way not only establishing the social structure of sporting realities but also racial discourses (p. 66).

Following from Carrington I argue for the racial *and* gendered significance of sport, which can be seen in the historical and contemporary role that women’s figure skating has played in making and remaking the white-yellow race and gender relations, including those beyond the sport itself. In other words, I understand that racial and gender ideas, beliefs, stereotypes, or ideologies regarding Asian/American and Asian women are circulated in particularly systematic way in the US white sporting media. So the symbolic arena of this specific sporting world has helped to reproduce White ways of seeing, knowing, and representing race and gender.

My sporting racial and gender project attempts to conceptualize the yellow female skater as a racially trans-national and neo colonially gendered entity, who

struggles against the epistemological violence of cultural representations. The yellow female skater is a fictional or invention of mainstream white American culture into which historical and contemporary meanings of Asian/American women and Asian women have been essentialized in particularly racialized and gendered ways. As a mixed iconography, what the yellow female skater signifies oscillates within a range of ambivalent images: docile and submissive but a super-hard-working machine; possessing a natural talent for risky jumps with a body that is also perilous; youthfully exotic but childlike and primitive; nationally American but racially foreign because Asian; and aesthetically underdeveloped, but hyper-sexually attractive.

I argue that such descriptors and contradictory meanings do not convey a transcendent truth, but rather reflect a particular meaning-making process that is inscribed by the power relations between white and yellow in the US-Asia Pacific. This can be understood metaphorically as the yellow pacific, a distinct style of US media representations and framing of race. More precisely, the yellow pacific refers to a genealogical space that is geographically transnational and historically neo colonial, in which the difference of Asian females is epistemologically subjected as 'Other' in the ontological space of American white national imagination. I argue that by understanding the yellow female skater as being discursively recreated, circulated, and reproduced in the global sporting and popular culture, we can begin to disrupt widespread naturalized race and gender order embedded in these representations.

Imagining the Sporting Yellow Pacific

The cognitive mapping of the Pacific region as a particular space-time configuration has been long deployed by so-called Pacific theorists and a group of scholars in Asian American studies. Through the currency of various terms such as 'Asia-Pacific,' 'Pacific Rim,' and 'Pacific Basin,' they have discussed a wide range of

socio-cultural, historical, political and economical issues relating to these geographic imaginaries and the people who inhabit and transverse them. As Donald Nonini (1998) explains:

The ‘Asia-Pacific’ or ‘Pacific Rim’ can best be understood as the trope for a set of economic, political, and cultural processes creating relationships within a supraregion of Asia and the United States that have been under way since approximately the mid-1970s—processes arising from what the Marxist geographer David Harvey has called the ‘spatial displacements’ or ‘spatial fixes’ of contemporary capitalism (p. 75).

One useful way of understanding such ideas or discourses, according to Arif Dirlik (1992), is to “define them by specifying *whose* Pacific—and *when* (p. 55).” He goes on to note that “two terms best capture the realities of the Pacific region, terms that are quite different (almost antagonistic) but equally indispensable to comprehending the region as a region: Asian Pacific and Euro-American Pacific (p. 64).”

From the viewpoint of the former, Carrington or other critical scholars of the *Black Atlantic*, like Gilroy, may imagine the metaphorical rim of the Pacific as referring to an anti-national space in which Asian/Americans, Asians, and other Asian Pacific Islanders have diasporic connections across, within, and around the Pacific. Indeed, many scholars have claimed alternative possibilities for self-consciously counter-hegemonic practices that integrate transnational identity, diasporic perspectives, and postmodern border-thinking circulating through the Pacific region while race and critical legal theorist Keith Aoki (2011) uses the term “Yellow Pacific” in the title of an article that conceptualizes a world region of ‘Asia’ as “an extremely ambiguous geographic and racial/ethnographic formulation (p. 900).” For Aoki, the Yellow Pacific is a racial metaphor that highlights the complex formation of Asian diasporic subjectivity, and in this it closely resonates with Gilroy’s and Carrington’s frame.

However, what I refer to as the sporting yellow Pacific means a transnational and neo-colonial framework by which the US has invented, discursively circulated, and continuously reproduced a particular imagery of the

Asian female skater. This framework is sustained by two powerful forms of white supremacy, one located in the nation state, a white American ontology, and one emerging from historical narratives of the nation, a white American Imperial Frame. These two frames of White power have incubated four key discourses: the model minority, the yellow peril, the trope of the child/primitive, and the fantasy of the hypersexual exotic. In what follows, I explain and these discourses how I hope to problematize from the perspectives of transnationalism and post colonialism.

White American National Ontology

I understand American racism as a metropolitan center of and source for global racism. As Arif Dirlik (2008) argues, “it was Europeans who invented modern racism as they colonized the world, but it was on the fertile soil of the Americas, and especially the United States, that racism flourished (p. 1367).” And it is immigration and immigrants that have continuously replenished the sources of US racism, at least with respect to people of yellow or Asian descent, throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth century (Balibar, 2007). While white Anglo-European immigration has been a taken for granted aspect of US national origins, the influx of Asians, associated with securing a source of cheap labor, has led to a different version of immigration history that is tied up with American anti-Asian racism (Cho, 2009; Lowe, 1996).

The history of Asian immigration has been generally understood as falling into five periods (Daniels, 1974, p. 450-1). The first (1849-1882) was a time of heavy Chinese immigration that began with the Californian gold rush, was punctuated by anti-Chinese sentiments towards Chinese sojourners, prostitutes and coolie laborers, and ended with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The second (1884-1924) represented an “initial period of Japanese immigration” marked by the arrival of sugar cane workers in Hawaii, and featuring increasingly anti-Japanese and anti-Asian movements that produced the Alien Land Acts (1914) prohibiting noncitizens from owning land in

California and the Immigration Act of 1924, which excluded all Asian immigrants except for Filipinos. The third (1924-1952) was “the period of Asian exclusion,” the fourth (1952-1965) was “the era of the McCarran Act” which eliminated all racial bars to immigration but replaced them with token quotas for most Asian nations. The fifth period (1965 to present) opened with the Immigration Act of 1965, which abolished all racial and ethnic quotas, and has seen a rapid grow of Asian immigration that has contributed tremendous diversity to the racial and ethnic composition of the United States population.

Within this history, Asian immigrants’ identity of belonging has continuously fluctuated between the poles of nation and race. Dominant tellings of US history show that being an American is equated with being white, but being American for Asian immigrants has always meant being hyphenated. This hyphenated status, according to David Palumbo-Liu (1999), “begs the question of the precise constitution of the totality presumed to inhere beneath the signifier ‘American’ (p. 1).” As a way of making this bifurcated totality visible, he suggests writing “Asian/American” instead of “Asian American,” using the *slash* or *solidus* to highlight the contradictory link between race and the nation, or, to express it another way, to point to the way in which the Asian-ness and American-ness of Asian/Americans is constantly brought into question.

In a similar vein, Mia Tuan (1999a) addresses this as the “authenticity dilemma.” That is, Asian/Americans commonly confront and have to negotiate other Americans’ perceptions of them as “neither real Americans nor real Asians (p. 106).” Importantly, too, the authenticity dilemma that the ambiguity between racial and national boundaries raises is comparatively different from the challenges other non-white groups, especially black Americans face. As Neil Gotanda (1992) writes:

There are...social distinctions [that] roughly correspond to ‘alien’ and ‘citizen’...I will use ‘foreign’ and ‘American’ to describe [these]. For African Americans and Whites....there is presumed a close correlation between U.S. citizenship and social status as an American.... My argument is that these presumptions are *not* present for Asian

Americans... Rather, there is the opposite presumption that [Asian Americans] are foreigners; or if they are U.S. citizens, then their racial identity includes a foreign component (p. 1095-6).

In this way, a white national American mindset has continued to inscribe otherness on Asian/Americans, simultaneously racializing them as non-white unassimilable foreigners.

A key to the convergence of race and the nation with respect to Asian/American identity is the idea of 'foreignness,' whose contingent meaning in a particular context can determine whether an Asian/American is an American citizen or an Asian foreigner. In general, Asian/American foreignness has been described, represented, and interpreted in a dialectic way between two dimensions. One is the seemingly positive or assimilationist view that is often represented in the model minority trope and the other is the negative or ostracizing trope of forever foreign or yellow peril. I briefly detail what these entail, beginning with the latter.

Forever Foreigner/Yellow Peril

The notion of forever foreign means that Asian/Americans are often commonly considered as people who come from or have stronger national ties with faraway countries in Asia. This perception of Asian/Americans as foreigners is so pervasive in society that Asian/Americans confront it regularly in the workplace and their daily lives and in mainstream popular and consumer culture (Aoki, 1996; Ki, & Khang, 2008; Lee, C., 1995; Reyes & Lo, 2009; Tuan, 1998; 1999a; 1999b). Often assumed to be not American, Asian/Americans are regularly questioned and spoken to in terms such as: "Where are you from?" "How long have you lived in the United States?" "Are you a kung fu expert?" "You speak English very well" (Hing, 2002; Wu, 2001) One day, for example, former politician Norman Mineta, who served as the US Secretary of Transportation in President George W. Bush's Cabinet, was invited as the honored guest of a congressman to attend a celebratory event for General Motors. A senior executive of GM appreciated Mineta's visit and then complimented him on his English, asking, "how long have you lived in our country (Hing, 2001, p. 15)?" Mineta is an American who

was born in a family of Japanese immigrants in San Jose, California in 1931. He speaks English perfectly without any trace of an accent and has worked for in the service of his country, the US, for more than thirty years.

This is a serious issue for the perception that Asian/Americans are foreigners can be fatal as when it occurs in association with mistreatment by the legal system and in racial hate crime. The case of Vincent Chin in 1982 is an example the latter (Hamamoto, 1992; Hing, 2001). A young Chinese American, Detroit Chin was murdered after having a party with friends in celebration of his upcoming wedding when Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz, who recently had been fired from an automobile company confronted him. Allegedly Ebens instigated a fight, saying, "it's because of you little motherfuckers that we're out of work!" The two men beat Chin to death with a baseball bat. Later, it was noted that Ebens thought that Chin was Japanese. Another noteworthy example recent example, is that of Wen Ho Lee, a Taiwanese American nuclear scientist working at Los Alamos National Laboratory, was accused of being a so-called Chinese spy (Ch'ien, 2006; Gotanda, 1999; Hing, 2001). In December 1999, a federal grand jury indicted him of stealing secrets about the US nuclear arsenal for the Chinese government. Lee lost his job and spent almost a year in jail but because federal investigators were unable to prove his guilt, he was eventually released. As such cases indicate, the presumed disloyalty of Lee and the misunderstanding of Chin as Japanese are a reflection of how problematic the perception of Asian/Americans as foreigners can be.

The notion of yellow peril consists of a racial understanding of Asians and Asian/Americans as cultural, economic, and political threats who are likely to undermine the Western way of life and culture. Its origin extends at least as far back as the medieval period and the Mongolian invasion of Europe led by the Great Khan (Keevak, 2011), which fuelled fears that Eastern, Oriental, or Asian hordes might invade and undermine or eventually overtake Western Civilization. The term gained much popular currency in the late nineteenth century, in part through reproductions of one painting in which

German Kaiser Wilhelm II inscribes the warning: “‘Nations of Europe, defend your holiest possession’ against the threatening danger of the East [which is] portrayed in the form of Buddha in the original painting (Okiihiro, 1994, p. 118-9).” And so the idea of the yellow people of the East being dangerous threats to white Christian culture and likely to contest white supremacy carried through into the modern era.

In the US context, the notion of yellow peril has survived throughout the twentieth century with varying intensity and in different forms. It has been applied indiscriminately to many Asians who are represented in derogatory terms and imageries of physical contamination, racial miscegenation, cultural pollution, and economic threat (Okiihiro, 1994; Saito, 1997; Kwai, 2006; Shim, 1998; Lee, E., 2007; Stanford, 2000). Mapped on to major periods of national history it is captured, projected, expressed, and reflected in, for example, the ‘Chinese Problem’ in California’s Gold Rush era (Peffer, 1986); the internment of Japanese Americans during the World War II (Creef, 2004); paranoia over the ‘Red Menace’ of China during the Cold War (Shim, 1998); the economic fear that the ‘Japan-Bashing’ movement in the 1970s and 1980s entailed (Morris, 2011); and contemporary ‘Sino-phobia’ as a response to China’s rise as the US’s new military and economic rival or threat (Ono & Jiao, 2008).

The notion of yellow peril also came to be bound up with a sporting aesthetic addressed to Asian and Asian/American female skaters. The sports media often analyzed these yellow skaters in terms of their having a natural ability for mastering technically difficult and dynamic jumps that was explained as a result of their body type – small, thin, and light. This biologically charged explanation led in turn to the dominance of Asian descent skaters in the 2000s being represented as a source of crisis and threat to a women’s figure skating culture in which white American artistry operated as an aesthetic norm. This exclusionary representation of such skaters’ as foreign and a peril is discussed in a more detail in Chapter 4 and 6. In the next section I introduce the other side of Asian foreignness, the notion, stereotype, or myth of the model minority.

Model Minority

The construct of the model minority might be the most pervasive and dominant of contemporary perceptions, stereotypes, and myths about Asian/Americans (Kawai, 2005; Shim, 1998). It generally conveys an image of them as successful achievers who have fulfilled their American Dream. There were two influential articles that contributed to the emergence and dissemination of the model minority idea. In January 1966, the *New York Times Magazine* published a long article headlined “Success Story, Japanese-American Style” that praised the efforts of Japanese Americans in their struggle to enter the mainstream of American life (Peterson, 1966, January 9).¹¹ And in December of that same year, the *U.S. News and World Report* also published a similar piece entitled “Success Story of One Minority in U.S.,” focusing this time on Chinese Americans as a model minority (1996). The following excerpts from these articles illustrate key elements of the construct:

At a time when Americans are awash in worry over the plight of racial minorities—One such minority...is winning wealth and respect by dint of its own hard work...

Visit “China Town U.S.A.” and you find an important racial minority pulling itself up from hardship and discrimination to become a model of self-respect and achievement in today’s America...

How Chinese get ahead...The large majority are moving ahead by applying the traditional virtues of hard work, thrift and morality. Success stories have been recorded in business, science, architecture, politics and other professions.

Basically, the Chinese are good citizens. The parents always watch out for the children, train them, send them to school and make them stay home after school to study. When they go visiting, it is as a family group. A young Chinese doesn’t have much chance to go out on his own and get into trouble.”...

Efforts at progress. Over all, what observers are finding in America’s Chinatowns are a thrifty, law-abiding and industrious people---ambitious to make progress on their own...“The Orientals came back, and today they have established themselves as strong contributors to the health of the whole community.”

¹¹ I detail this article in Chapter 3.

As the above quotations indicate, representatives of the mainstream print media believed that Chinese Americans should be lauded for their remarkable achievements and Chinatowns should be praised as places and communities of peace and prosperity.

Since the 1960s, many forms of the popular media and press have continued to portray Asian/Americans as successful achievers who have “made it” in American society, typically showing them as hard working, intelligent, industrious, family-oriented, academically talented, technologically savvy, and law-abiding (Suzuki, 2002; Zhang, 2010), or even extolling them as “honorary Whites” or a group that “out[whites] the Whites (Suzuki, 1989).” In sports studies, too, some scholars have examined how the media projects the stereotype on to Asian athletes like Hideo Nomo (Mayeda, 1999) and Suzuki Ichiro from Japan (Nakamura, 2005) and Korean player Chan Ho Park (Joo, 2000). All three have been offered as a type of model-minority athlete and described as hard working, diligent, quiet, self-sacrificing, technologically competent, etcetera. A crucial point to make about the work on these particular athletes is that it highlights how readily and easily white Americans conflate Asians and Asian/Americans because while the stereotype of model minority derives from understandings of Asian/Americans in the American domestic context, it extends to and functions for Asian athletes such as the three named above.

The model minority notion has been questioned and criticized in terms of two points: its inaccurate theorization and political implications. To begin with, it is a hyper-generalization that does not resonate with the lived experiences of many Asian/Americans but rather distorts, misleads, and obscures the fact that their realities are more complicated (Suzuki, 1989; 2002). In political terms, too, the construct has served as a kind of controlling image, invented by white dominant groups in service of their political interests and purposes (Dalisy & Tan, 2009; Hamamoto, 1992; Kim, L. S., 2004). Importantly in this regard it is often deployed with the intention of valorizing

Asian/Americans in comparison to other minority groups in terms of diligence, family solidarity, respect for education, and self-sufficiency. Thus, it carried more sinister messages that might be understood as conditional inclusion or a kind of glass ceiling. Asian/Americans might be worthy of praise in contrast to some other non-white racial groups but they are still very foreign and even forever foreign.

The trope of the model minority has been very central in media narratives of female skaters. Placing great emphasis on cultural traits and attitudes in numbers of success stories saturated with the trope of the model minority, the media seems to argue that minority skaters of Asian descent have fulfilled an American Dream on the ice. However, this inclusive or incorporative rhetoric is never unproblematic but only seemingly positive because it rhetorically manages the skaters' difference under the name of the diversity. More crucially, the idea of race that Asian foreignness carries still remains unresolved in the nationalist frame that the media deploys in order to put skaters' positive characteristics in the service of an assimilationist agenda. That is, they are available for political consumption by the dominant racial group. This deconstructive reading of how the model minority is inscribed yellow skaters is detailed in particular relation to Kristi Yamaguchi in Chapter 4.

So far, I have discussed how a transnationalist racial framework informs this dissertation. In the following section, I introduce the temporal framework of the post colonialism perspective of race and indicate how I utilize it in the study.

White American Imperial Frame

Adapting Carrington's construct of a white colonial frame, I suggest that it is useful to think of a white American imperial frame, a set of ways of seeing, knowing, and framing the world that has been historically established through a specific set of US imperial and colonial practices, technologies, and institutions. I understand race and racism as a global idea and phenomenon but I wish to highlight 'Asian/America' as a kind of internal colony within the American imperial nation and 'Asia' as a historically

subordinated space with respect to the imperial relations between the US and Asia. The reason for framing this as imperial rather than colonial comes from Ania Loomba (2005)'s distinction between colonialism and imperialism:

One useful way of distinguishing between them might... think of imperialism or neo-imperialism as the phenomenon that originates in the metropolis, the process which leads to domination and control. Its result, or what happens in the colonies as a consequence of imperial domination is colonialism or neocolonialism. Thus the imperial country is the metropole from which power flows, and the colony or neo-colony is the place which it penetrates and controls. Imperialism can function without formal colonies but colonialism cannot (p. 6-7).

In Loomba's terms, a historical force of American white supremacy perfectly fits into imperialism rather than colonialism. Although the US has had no formal colonies except for the Philippines, an imperial desire seems to have been constantly produced from the American metropole and exercised its power in the Asia-Pacific region.

The influence of this imperial hegemony is not so much territorial but rather a cultural or symbolic oppression that controls representation (Ashcroft, 2011; Shohat & Stam, 1994). As various scholars have argued, one of the intolerable burdens for the colonized is "epistemic and historiographical violence and domination (Legg, 2007, p. 265)," that means they cannot represent or speak about themselves, but must be only represented and spoken (Said, 1978; Shohat & Stam, 1994; Spivak, 1985; 1988). What is more crucial, I think, is that lingering effects of this symbolic violence of representation has lingering effects even today, and thus imperial or colonial relations are firmly imprinted in the post colonial present. As David Spurr (1993) explains:

[(Neo) colonial modes of rhetoric] must be understood as more than merely literary or philosophical; they are the tropes that come into play with the establishment and maintenance of colonial authority, or, as sometimes happens, those that register the loss of such authority. There is nothing especially conscious or intentional in their use; they are part of the landscape in which relations of power manifest themselves (p. 3).

In this sense, one purpose for the kind of post colonial reading, critique, or resistance I attempt in this study is to expose and reveal the hidden function of the neo colonial textuality that underlies and discursively works in contemporary sporting imperialism.

In women's figure skating, I argue, the white American imperial frame has exercised symbolic, epistemic, and historiographical violence through targeting Asian skaters in two common forms of representation. One implies of a childlike or infantilized subject that is closely associated with the perception of the colonized as a primitive. I understand this trope or rhetoric as a colonial residue of American benevolent or paternal assimilationist racial ideology that emerged as an aspect of the US imperial relations with Asia. The other is a certain sexual desire that projects a hypersexual and exotic image onto Asian women. This stereotyping has been seen as a neo colonial fantasy that reflects the history of American military, economic, and cultural power in Asia that involved Asian women being compelled into sexual submission and exploitation and suffering violence at the hands of white men. In the following, I detail these ways of seeing and knowing as tropes of American imperialism, where they come from, and how they are manifested and directed to Asian female athletes in the sport of figure skating.

The Trope of the Child

The trope of the child is a style of representation that describes, imagines, or represents the colonized subject as a child (Shohat & Stam, 1994). It was of great importance to western imperialists, its metaphoric function being to shape the relations between the colonizer and the colonized as paternal and benevolent and thus to smoothly reaffirm and justify colonial domination (Wallace, 1994; Ashcroft, 2001; Stella, 2007). For instance, scientific racism tended to theorize Black adults as white children in an anatomic and physiological sense as well as intellectual (Gould, 1981). In everyday US life, Black people were also often called 'boys.' According to Frantz Fanon (1967), "a white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child and starts smirking, whispering, patronizing, [and] cozening (p. 31)."

The implication of the child was also commonly deployed in white-yellow relation. Along with theorizing Black adults as white children, anatomists sought to prove that “adult Mongolians [were] like white adolescents (Gould, 1993, p. 91-92).” Habitually, the term ‘boys’ was also applied to Asian males, so-called ‘houseboys,’ when the first generation of Asian male immigrants found their employment opportunities limited to labor such as cooks, laundrymen, and household servants. The houseboy image became one of the most persistent stereotypes of Asian males; for example, the role of the Asian houseboy was commonly seen in Hollywood films such as *King Kong* (1933), *The Falcon’s Brother* (1942), and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) (Fung, 1998, p. 123).

This infantilizing perception of yellow people is an epistemological product of US imperialist relations with Asia. The establishment of colonial rule in the Philippines provides a good case for understanding how the US has deployed the trope of the child in its interests. In 1898, the American government decided to assert sovereignty over the Philippines through a combination of military intervention with benevolent policies following the so-called debate over American Imperialism (Miller, 1982; Gems, 2008). Anti-imperialists objected to annexation, arguing that it not only betrayed American principles of freedom and democracy, but also expressing an anxiety about race mingling. They argued that the Filipinos were “incorrigibly inferior” in terms of “biology, blood, and stock,” and that their inferiority was “interminable” and could not be overcome (Go, 2004, p. 47). Consequently, America should not be mixed with “Asiatic pottage” for this would bring “the ultimate destruction of the civilization of the higher (Miller, 1982, p. 124).”

Opposing or appeasing the anti-imperialists, imperialists in the McKinley administration favored keeping the Philippines using an invented and lofty rhetoric that justified colonial domination as a benign extension of the American frontier of Christian

spirit (Gould, 1981; 1982; 1993). President McKinley later proclaimed this action to be a policy of benevolent assimilations whose mission was to civilize the Filipinos:

a people redeemed from savage indolence and habits, devoted to the arts of peace, in touch with commerce and trade of all nations, enjoying the blessing of freedom, of civil and religious liberty, of education, and of homes, whose children...shall for ages hence bless the American republic because it emancipated and redeemed their fatherland, and set them in the pathway of the world's best civilization. (Gould, 1982, p. 119)

Rather than conquering the Philippines in the colonialist fashion of controlling and inhabiting territory, in other words, the US was presented as a liberator, destined by the providence of God to go to the Philippines for the purpose of the salvation of humanity.

The policy of benevolent assimilation was associated with a distinct idea of race. According to Julian Go (2004), the imperialists specified the Filipinos as 'Orientals' and 'Malays' under the so-called "Lamarckian scheme," a form of social Darwinian thoughts, which emphasized the environmental and historical determinant as a key factor to explaining human behavior. That is to say, Filipinos were "unfit" for self-government because they were "locked in a feudal or medieval stage of development." This social inferiority was not "interminable," because it could be understood as only a lag in environmental and historical development. As 'nurture' could surpass 'nature,' the gap "indexed by race" between Americans and the Filipinos "could be reduced, if not eventually erased (p. 39, 47)." Therefore, the Filipinos could be civilized, uplifted, and raised into adulthood by the efforts of a race of the parents, White Anglo-Saxon Americans and their civilized high cultures.

This style of a paternal or benevolent framing of race has not been confined to the colonial past of the Philippines, but still persists to the present, producing a neo colonialist order over people of color in the Asia-Pacific. Its significance in the postcolonial context is its close association with the emergence of the term "development" that widely used for the 'Third World' in theories of globalization. While it originally

meant “a sense of unfolding over time,” according to Bill Ashcroft (2001), in recent provenance the term has come to be more “understood as a preoccupation of public and international policy to improve welfare and to produce governable subjects (p. 38).” The crucial point in this shift is that the idea of development transforms former European imperial centers into the ‘developed world,’ thus marking the post colonial states of non-Europeans as ‘undeveloped world’ that is permanently constituted as lacking (p. 38). I think that this is why the perception of the infantilization remains as a residue of colonial discourse that still haunts not only people of color like Asians and Asian/Americans, but also diasporic people who live in the post colonial reality or in the ‘Third World.’

My dissertation focuses on the neo colonial function of the child trope in contemporary media representation of Asian female skaters. More precisely, I attempt to trace the infantilization that the media, through its gaze and perceptions, addresses to Asian/American and Asian female figures skaters. The trope of the child has been closely associated in the sport with the idea of youthfulness, indeed has been one of the key characteristics in media representations since Norwegian heroine and Hollywood film star Sonja Henie entered her first senior competition at the age of twelve in 1922. However, the media’s concerns for girl skaters’ age, youthful look, and physical maturation, I argue, have been somehow differently applied to skaters of color. In a similar way to the Lamarckian scheme, the media seemed to define Asian/American and Asian girl skaters’ youthfulness as a blank page of aesthetic development or a kind primitive stage on which more artistry should be inscribed. While this infantilizing perception is a colonial remnant driven from the paternal or benevolent frame, the following part discusses another aspect of the colonial rule, that is, sexual exploitation.

The Hyper-Sexual/Exotic

The erotics of Empire have a long history of physical and rhetorical control and exploitation of the colonized female as a sexualized entity (Spurr, 1993). US imperialist relations with Asia has also produced a particular style of gendered and sexualized

images of the Asian woman, what I call in this project the hypersexual and exotic figure. Although the idea of sexuality is applicable to all women, it is not universal or monolithic but is a social construct that produces a different manifestation of power shaped by, through, and within historically specific times and spaces. Celine Shimizu (2007) explains this well by making a comparative point: “While the figure of the Black woman...as animalistic and intrinsically available lashes out from the historical debasement of black women in slavery, the Asian woman, presented as culturally prone to sexual adventure and exotic difference, emerges from the colonial encounter of war (p. 143).” I also pay attention to the colonial past of the US-Asia relation as a crucial context in which American version of the stereotype has been created, reproduced, and re-circulated both inside and outside America.

The perception of Asian women as a hypersexual and exotic figure is a direct result or the legacy of American political (military), economic, cultural domination of Asia during which Asian women were compelled into sexual submission, exploitation, and subjected to violence by white men (Shimizu, 2006; Woan, 2008). The stereotype has been constructed through three interrelated processes: 1) rape and war as colonial practices whose vestige tied Asian women to perverse sexuality 2) a system of prostitution and sex tourism that developed into the sex industry and 3) a syndrome of Asian fetishism and pornographic phenomena in popular culture.

Rape in wartime has historically been commonplace, as is reflected in the fact that warriors in the past considered the women of the conquered land as spoils of war (Aydelott, 1993, p. 585). In the history of American military encounters in Asia, a similar style of sexual violence or crime has been revealed in regard to particularly the Philippine-American War, World War II, Korean War, and the Vietnam War. For instance, American military men’s adage while occupying the Philippines was that Filipino women are “little brown fucking machines powered by rice (Shimizu, 2007, p. 185; Woan, 2008, p. 283).” As Sunny Woan (2008) sees it rape and war are “two pillars

of white male domination (p. 284)” and American colonial and military domination of Asia was synonymous with the sexual domination of Asian women.

In the post/colonial contexts of Asia, colonial infrastructures such as the prostitution that was parasitic on military bases have been transformed into an economic industry of sex tourism. According to Emily Chang (2001), the US military authority during wars in Asia “consistently allow[ed] and [even] encourage[d] the development a sex industry,” and therefore various forms of sexual entertainment sprang up to cater American servicemen (p. 621). Woan (2008), also reports that during the Vietnam War, around 70,000 American GIs visited Thailand for sex tourism and that after the war the sex industry was further developed through various promotions targeting white men as the predominant buyers and sexual consumers of Asian women (p. 284).

This vestige of the colonial war-rape and sexual commodity in turn fostered the rise in popularity of the hypersexual and exotic objectification of Asian women in global popular culture and in the US. According to Shimizu (2007), “Asian/American women comprise their own special genre in American pornography (p. 140).” James S. Moy (1993) also argues that the overwhelming majority of masochistic and demeaning styles of pornographic representations feature Asian women: “Asian Anal Girls, Asian Ass, Asian Slut, Asian Suck Mistress, Banzai Ass, China deSade, Oriental Encounters, Oriental Sexpress, Oriental Lust, Oriental Callgirls, Oriental Sexpot, Oriental Squeeze, Oriental Taboo, and Oriental Techniques of Pain and Pleasure (p. 136-7).” Not only through pornography, but also through the massive diffusion of various forms of the semi-pornographic portrayals of Asian women in the mail-order bride phenomenon and an Asian fetish syndrome, the hypersexual, exotic image of the Asian woman has come to be an international stereotype (Montgomery, 2008; Nubla, 2009).

The triad of war-rape, sex-industry, and pornography has been discursively inscribed into the history of Asian women’s immigration to America, too. As Shimizu (2007) summarizes:

At the turn of the century, Chinese female prostitutes were routinely harassed on the streets. Japanese women entered the United States as “picture brides” at the beginning of the twentieth century and as “war brides” after World War II. In Filipino American history, a woman was stoned to death for adultery, which was considered a gender and racial traitorship. Korean “war brides” arrived in the United States with their American GI husbands after the Korean War. Catalogs introduce mail-order or pen pal brides from the Philippines today (p. 144).

Just as American military men brought back the stereotype to the US with their sexual experiences, Asian women were also believed to travel to the US as sex workers. In this way, the history of the US sexualization of Asia has lumped women of yellow color into a single category of the hypersexual and exotic.

I argue that such stereotypical representations are fictive creatures of a certain US white neo colonial fantasy (Said, 1978; Kwan, 1998). Looking relations are never innocent but are always bound up with power and knowledge. Laura Mulvey (1993) famously pointed to the gender dynamics inherent in the looking relation with the phrase of “woman as the image and man as bearer of look (p. 19).” In this respect, the stereotypical image does not simply denote the visible aspect of the eroticized body of Asian women. Rather it allows white spectators to enter into a sexual fantasy of imperial nostalgia and enables their voyeuristic consumption of the pleasures of Asian sexuality. As somehow a part of this psycho-social process, unconscious though it may be, I believe the stereotypical representation further contributes to the hegemonic constitution of the white male neo colonial subject.

In women’s figure skating, the projection of the hypersexual and exotic image on Asian/American and Asian female skaters is absolutely one of the dominant narrative characteristics in the media. Describing skaters’ appearance, dress, make-up, and the role of the program in distinctive terms and ascribing uniquely differential value to them, the media often frames skaters of yellow color as demonstrating an inherently exotic beauty and sexual attractiveness. The main point of my argument is not to suggest this reading of the sexually exotic as an objective reality or transcendent truth, but rather as a

historical remnant of a colonial fantasy that is served up for the sexual consumption of white male audience.

A Genealogy of the Yellow Female Skater

This dissertation eventually aims to build a genealogy of the yellow female skater as a contribution to a critical history of women's figure skating. By genealogy I mean a form of postmodernist historiography that attempts to account for the constitution of ideas, discourses, and knowledge (Foucault, 1980; McWhorter, 2005). Its goal is neither to uncover transcendental truths nor to excavate accurate facts. Rather it seeks to investigate how a particular way of seeing, knowing, and understating has been formed as taken for granted within networks of power. In this epistemological respect, I understand a genealogical approach and writing as a postmodernist approach that reconsiders history as a discipline for examining constructed discourses about the past (Birrell, 2005; Booth, 2005; Parratt, 1998; Phillips, 2001).

My goal in this genealogical approach to race is to not only interrogate how skaters of yellow color have been objectified as a particular style of 'Other', but also reveal how women's figure skating has been constructed as a space of whiteness. According to Ladelle McWhorter (2005), "power necessarily makes subjectivity prior to the exercise of power (p. 537)." In women's skating, I argue that whiteness has been constructed or continuously self-constructs itself as a particular style of an invisible, natural, and unproblematic norm, a universal position from which identities of Asian/American and Asian female skaters come to be marked by their difference.

I reference this construction of difference through the racial metaphor of yellow, a process of racialization in which the media have represented Asian/American and Asian female figure skaters as a racially and gendered marked Other. More precisely, it signifies a mixed image or iconography that has certain timeless attributes of the biological and the cultural. This essentialist style of representation is neither neutral nor apolitical. Rather, I argue for its political significance in terms of bio-cultural politics, a

power that systematically controls not only at micro-level of disciplining the individual, but also macro-level of population management with a concern for biological and cultural reproduction.

The biological domain that I imagine is explained by what Gilroy (1994) has called a form of ‘racialized bio-politics.’ He writes:

It is a mood, a mood in which the person is defined as the body and in which certain exemplary bodies for example, those of Mike Tyson and Michael Jordan, Naomi Campbell and Veronica Webb become instantiations of community...Racialised bio-politics operates...to establish the limits of the authentic racial community exclusively through the visual representation of racial bodies—engaged in characteristic activities--usually sexual or sporting that ground and solicit identification if not solidarity (p. 55).

I read Chin, Yamaguchi, Kwan, and other Asian skaters as certain exemplary bodies for the media to imagine an authentic group of yellow females.

Michel Foucault’s biopower is a key concept to understanding why such instantiation takes place, for whom and how biopolitical interest or concerns are exercised on Asian and Asian/American female skaters. According to Foucault (2003b), there are two types of power that function in normalizing society: disciplinary power and biopower. While disciplinary power addresses itself to the individual body, “man-as-body” and disciplines the individual’s abnormality into a docile body, biopower applies to a population, “man-as-species,” as a way of taking control of “birth, death, production, [and] illness (p. 242).” For the media, Chin, Yamaguchi, and Kwan are of course individual skaters whose specific body images are concerned. From the biopolitical domain, however, they are instantiated into a group of yellow or Asian bodies and as such threaten the aesthetic welfare of the sport and therefore should be systematically controlled in a mass. To be more specific, the media’s biopolitical interest or concern can be seen in the way in which it seems to theorize that Asian/American and Asian female skaters have a ‘jumping gene’ in common. This point will be further detailed in Chapter 6.

Cultural ideas, beliefs, and perceptions are also constitutive of the process of instantiating race in Asian skaters, for the media also seem to theorize that there are some patterns of cultural traits, attitudes, or characteristics that skaters of yellow color have in common. This anthropological sense of the cultural framing of race is informed by what Etienne Balibar (2007) has called ‘culturalist racism,’ a form of neo racism whose racist function is justified or covered by the name of ‘difference’ and which has been often unchallenged and reproduced as a seemingly unproblematic discourse. Balibar (2007) argues:

Biological or genetic naturalism is not the only means of naturalizing human behavior and social affinities... Culture can also function like a nature, and it can in particular function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin (p. 85).

In the media narratives of female figure skating, this culturalist view of race is also a crucial factor in the instantiation process of the yellow race. More precisely, the media seemed to argue that skaters of yellow color share a kind of ‘cultural gene’ based on the idea of an ‘Asian culture’ that guarantees their success on ice and is handed down from generations to generation.

From this idea of bio-cultural politics, I conceptualize a genealogy of the yellow female skater as a discursive, discrete, and contingent process constructed through a signifying system of knowledge production in which five key tropes or discourses are to be seen to operate. They are: 1) the trope of yellow jumping machine as aesthetic peril, 2) the trope of model minority as an inclusive language of hyphen-Americanization, 3) the perception of the forever foreign Asian as an exclusionary language of Asiatic racialization, 4) the trope of the child that sees exotic youthfulness as a form of neo primitivism and 5) the projection of the hypersexual, exotic image as a form of neo colonial sexual fantasy.

In the following chapters, I write a history of the yellow female skater, with each chapter detailing the tropes and discourses detailed above in relation to the media narratives of Tiffany Chin, Kristi Yamaguchi, Michelle Kwan, and a group of Asian female skaters.

CHAPTER III
READING TIFFANY CHIN: THE BIRTH OF THE YELLOW
FEMALE SKATER ON WHITE ICE

This chapter examines how the media described, portrayed, and represented Tiffany Chin, the first Asian/American female skater to compete for a team representing the United States in the world championships or the Olympics. Chin won the 1981 World Junior Championships and made her senior debut at the US nationals in the same year. Initially the media put her in the spotlight and she went on to demonstrate her potential and establish herself as the acknowledged leader among US female skaters, by placing fifth at the 1982 nationals, third in 1983 and second in 1984. Earning a berth in the team for the 1984 Sarajevo Olympics, Chin participated in the games as the youngest member of the US team at the age of sixteen, and finished fourth behind Katarina Witt (Germany), Rosalynn Summers (the US), and Kira Ivanova (Russia). In the following year she at last won her first national championships and also earned the bronze medal at the World Championships. But she never again performed as well as she had in 1984 and 1985, something that was attributed to her suffering from “muscle imbalance.” Chin qualified for and was supposed to compete in the 1988 Olympics but did not, instead she retired and turned to professional skating.

This chapter argues that the presence of Chin on ice and the media narratives of her can be understood as the birth of the yellow female skater. More precisely, I argue that the media’s narratives of Chin offer an insight into how the ‘difference’ of the Asian/American female skater initially registered and was constructed and communicated in a racially gendered way and vice versa. In support of this claim, this chapter lays out three things: a narrative of the history of American women’s figure skating, an account of media narratives of Chin, and an interpretation that brings these two together and situates them in the historical context as the birth of the yellow female skater.

The first section draws on written histories of the Winter Olympics and figure skating with a particular focus on whiteness. I attempt to trace a historical trajectory of the figure of the white American princess skater as a way of making visible how racialized and gendered aesthetics of whiteness has come to be a dominant and invisible norm in the sport. I then detail the media narratives of Tiffany Chin, focusing on the way in which they describe and portray her individual skating style, personal character, age and youthfulness, and her family. To ground my interpretation of these narratives, in the final part of the chapter I lay out some significant contextual matters. Situating the representation of Chin within a particular trajectory of white women figure skating in the US, I argue that Chin signifies the birth of the yellow female skater by way of 1) the multicultural turn and 2) oriental styles of representation both of which emerged, were broadly current, and somehow established as a convention in 1980s US popular culture.

Figure Skating as a Site of Whiteness

Whiteness is but one if a quite particular type of ethnicity (Hall, 1991). This strategic naming is a starting point for deconstructing the power of whiteness, a way of making it visible because according to Richard Dyer (1997) “as long as race is something only applied to non-white people, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, [white or whiteness] function as a human norm (p, 1).” So whiteness should not be taken to refer to a set of certain natural characteristics possessed by a given ethnic group but rather, as a social product constructed through various interrelations of power. Thus, as John Gabriel (1998) argues, it is a constellation of power, ideology, and/or space deployed by “a set of discursive techniques...in the context of...cultural representation and instructional materialization (Gabriel, 1998, p. 37).” Taking this perspective, numbers of scholars have examined the power of whiteness, arguing that this lies in its ability to render itself normal, invisible, unspoken, natural, exnominate, universal, and many other ways that are not immediately obvious (Dyer, 1988; 1997; Gabriel, 1998; Giroux, 1997; Hall, 1991).

In sport studies scholarship, critical studies of whiteness emerged in the mid-2000s when some scholars began to seriously discuss it as a key concept for understanding social and racial relations and cultural processes in the sporting world. As Stuart Hall reminds us, sport is a contested terrain of race. That is, it is not only a political site of struggle and resistance for athletes and other people of color, but it is also a culturally privileged site in which whiteness as subjectivity is reproduced and reaffirmed in a particular way.

Over the past two decades, working from this perspective, sport scholars have offered theoretical and methodological suggestions for studying whiteness and/in sport (Hylton, 2009; King, 2005; King, Leonard, & Kusz, 2007; McDonald, 2005). These include works that discuss how whiteness is infused in the sporting media texts on athletes and sporting events (Butterworth, 2007; Douglas, 2005; Erickson, 2005; Kusz, 2007); how particular sports have been constructed as a racialized spaces or institutions that invisibly naturalize or universalize White ways of understanding and doing sports (Brayton, 2005; Walton & Butryn, 2006; Harrison, 2013); and how whiteness is entangled with other cultural practices and structures such as the polity, leisure, the media, and others (Darnell, 2007; Long & Hylton, 2002; McDonald, 2009).

In the context of whiteness studies' arrival in sport studies, I want to draw attention to a certain academic trend in which the Winter Olympics and other winter sports are explored as sites for studying whiteness. To begin with, it has been argued that many modern sporting competitions (in particular the Olympic Games) are a racially exclusionary site for a white occidental cultural festival that celebrates and manifests white cultural and physical supremacy. As David Rowe (2012) notes, "the [Olympics] Games were, in the first instance, Occidental" (p. 2231). Carrington also argues that the nature of modern sports has produced "a homosocial space for the projection of white masculinist fantasies of domination, control and desire for the racialized Other (p. 4)." Most of all, in the critiques that some sport historians have recently offered through re-

reading the writings of Pierre de Coubertin, the historical foundations of the Games and the philosophy of Coubertin's Olympism are saturated with European ideas of racial humanism and colonial modernity (Brown, 2012; Carrington, 2004; Chatziefstathiou, 2008; 2011; Real, 1996; Rowe, 2012; Schantz, 2008).

In his famous essay, *Why I Revived the Olympic Games*, for instance, Coubertin highlights the whiteness of the festival in the following way:

[The Olympic Games] must be lasting, to exercise over the sports of the future that necessary and beneficent influence for which I look-an influence which shall make them the means of bringing to perfection the strong and hopeful youth of our white race, thus again helping towards the perfection of all human society (Coubertin, 1908, p.).

In his other writings, the superiority of white Europeans is often clearly expressed as opposed to the inferiority of primitive and uncivilized peoples in Africa and to a lesser extent Asia. "The yellow men," he writes in another essay of *An Olympiad in the Far East*:

seem to us to be admirably prepared to benefit from the athletic crusade that is taking shape. They are ready individually and collectively. They are ready individually because endurance, tenacity, patience, racial flexibility, the habit of selfmastery, of keeping silent, and of hiding pain and effort have shaped their bodies most effectively... For a while still, clearly, athletic Asia will grow and become strong where it is. Yet it is quite probable that contacts with the West will be made and, at Berlin in 1916, the yellow teams will be able to show what they can do. (Coubertin, 1913: lines 49-64, mphasis added)

Coubertin's ideas about race are resonant with a social Darwinism that believes the white race is destined to take a leading role as the civilizing force in a global sporting world, while the Asian race is inherently inferior and might possibly be developed under white western paternalistic guidance.

Another group of scholars has examined some winter sports similarly as sites for studying whiteness. For instance, C. R. King (2007) examined white nationalist, separatist, and supremacist readings of the 2006 Torino Olympics and highlighted the entanglement between the Winter Olympics and White power, arguing that the games

matter for white power groups because they can function to reaffirm “Whiteness as a source of pride, marker of civilization, and expression of naturalized superiority (p. 93-4).” Anthony Kwame Harrison (2013) also analyzes racial discourses circulating in the recreational level communities of downhill skiing, and concludes that the sport is predominantly a social space for white people as everyday racism works to restrict the participation and representation of Black skiers. In addition, according to Kelly Poniatowski & Erin Whiteside (2012), television commentaries of the Olympics represent white hockey players as “having exceptional physical bodies, intellectual aptitude, and moral righteousness (p. 1),” thus valorizing white heroism, morality, and privilege while Ann Travers (2011) explores women’s ski jumping as an exclusionary site in which three key mechanisms of power, “sex segregation, whiteness, and class privilege (p. 126),” operate silent and unacknowledged.

Like these other winter sports, figure skating is also widely perceived as a White sport. A Euro-America centric trend is very evident in the sport in terms of at least three points: participants and organizers of the games have been predominantly white Europeans and Americans; the athletic and aesthetic characteristics of sport have largely drawn on European ideals of rationality and gentility; and the majority of the international events were have been staged in industrialized countries located in Europe and North America (King, 2007).

The crucial point beyond these descriptive patterns is that figure skating matters to whiteness. It has been a racially exclusionary site, space, or institution that is saturated with white cultural and physical supremacy. Ellyn Kestnbaum (2003), the author of *Culture on Ice*, notes that cultural meanings of figure skating “have been shaped by the social practices and values of its founders, that is, primarily northern Europeans and North Americans of European ancestry from the upper-and upper-middle social/financial strata (p. 69).” In a similar vein, Mary Louise Adams (2011), author of another important book, *Artistic Impressions*, also highlights the “inseparability of class formation from

processes of racialization,” arguing “the maintenance and reproduction of class status and privilege are tightly entwined with the production of whiteness (p. 26).”

Along with these recognitions, a small number of scholars have made visible some particular aspects of whiteness in women’s figure skating. Elizabeth Krause (1996) argues that the media represented Tonya Harding as “white trash” and that this construction illustrates the way in which the emphasized femininity of whiteness is unmarked and reaffirmed through the marking of a different kind, Tonya’s *flawed* whiteness. In her ethnographic fieldwork on the Canadian site of amateur women’s figure skating, Karen McGarry (2005) argues that Caucasian skaters such as Jennifer Robinson and Elizabeth Manley were favored as a Canadian ideal of the feminine, while skaters of color like Midori Ito and Surya Bonaly were valued for their exotic style while also being considered a threat to white femininity. McGarry thus highlighted the hegemonic status of what she calls “a racialized aesthetics of whiteness” as the dominant norm that functions in the production of gendered identities of the Canadian nation.

In such works as these, figure skating has been recognized as a cultural site for promoting particular hegemonic ideals of white emphasized femininity. It is to this literature that I hope my attempt to make the “racialized aesthetics of whiteness” in women’s figure skating historically visible and I begin this by tracing a brief trajectory of media portrayals of some great American female skaters.

A Brief Trajectory of White Princess Skater

Figure skating is one of a number of gendered aesthetic sports that are commonly judged as feminine and so not quite suitable for men. The aesthetic aspect of sporting competition is one of the most discussed topics in discussions of the modern sports development. Although, As Gary J. Smith (1988) writes, “a splendid athletic performance rivals any great work of art (p. 58),” sports have been predominantly constructed within a masculine naturalist aestheticism, and other aesthetic ideas, beliefs, and understandings of sports have been also gendered. This gendered perception of sport

is not to be explained by biology but is historically contingent, at least in the case of figure skating. As Mary Louise Adams (2011) has recently demonstrated in “a gender history of [white] figure skating (p. 26),” the sport evolved from being the almost exclusive pastime of upper-class men to becoming feminine, a sport one that is widely perceived as being really just for girls and women.

What is at stake for me here is that figure skating was from its earliest organization and formalization, a racialized site, both before and after it was feminized. Originally invented by and for upper-class gentlemen as a leisure activity in which they could exhibit the refined characteristics of manly grace and elegance, Adams (2011) writes that the sport was initially a kind of white masculine imperial project:

The specific upper-class masculinity that shaped nineteenth-century English figure skating stemmed from a racialized world view that saw elegant activities like skating as symbols of ‘civilized society,’ an idealized community of interests that was seen as the exclusive domain of privileged white Europeans. Such ideas—and the activities and pastimes through which they were expressed—helped to justify and to bolster the imperialist projects being engineered around the globe by the class inhabited by men who skated (p. 6).

In the late nineteenth century when sport more generally increased in popularity as part of an overall expansion of leisure activities, women also took to ice skating in local clubs. From then, the sport developed as a kind of gender-neutral activity and men and women skated together on relatively equal terms—the technical dimensions were no different and in some events they were allowed to compete against each other. This relative gender balance was broken and figure skating came to be a feminine sport in the 1930s and 1940s.

It was Sonja Henie’s popularity and prominence that was the most important factor contributing to the feminization of the sport (Adams, 2011, Fabos, 2001; Kestnbaum, 2003). She won Olympic gold medals in the 1928, 1932, and 1936 winter games, and ten consecutive world championships from 1927 to 1936. Described as the “Kewpie Doll (Fabos, 2001, p. 189),” or the “first full-time champion (Adams, 2011, p.

145),” Henie was a major force in figure skating, responsible for technical advances as well as developing a unique choreography combining athleticism, artistry, musicality, and balletic movements. She also brought stylistic advances to the sport, such as short skirts, white boots, and other fashionable accessories. After the 1936 Olympics, Henie retired from the sport, moved to the United States, and transformed herself into a film star in Hollywood. Her attractive imagery of youth and cuteness combined with her amazing record of victories transferred well to the screen, and her films introduced figure skating as a popular entertainment to a large public.

Thus, Henie as a historical agent figures in a crucial moment of what may be called the birth of white female skater, the emergence of a hegemonic process that emphasized the white femininity of the sport. For instance, introducing Henie as the first skater to be “idolized,” Bettina argues that she was the starting point for a particular narrative form in the sport, that of the fairytale. “The princess metaphor evolved out of 80 years of mass media coverage of women Olympic skaters (p. 189),” she notes. Adams (2011) also cites an excellent example of the media texts that employ the princess metaphor. Published in 1931, the magazine *Skating* describes Henie thus:

She is more than a skater, she is an artist... Her figures were executed almost flawlessly... Her free skating was the ecstasy of all beholders... Her opening spiral was done at terrific speed, with marvelous control, in fact so was her entire performances. Her Axel Paulsen was simply a dream and its landing extraordinary; I have never seen a better one. Her spins are astounding, for they are longer and faster than ever, and are finished on a inner back edge in beautiful positions. Miss Henie is unique in one thing, and that is an appealing attraction which is hard to describe in words. It is, perhaps, a combination of personality, charm, and perfection; but whatever it is, it blossoms forth to captivate her many followers (p. 146).

As the above narrative indicates, the media represented Henie as a visual icon or face of figure skating that embodied ideal types of feminine images. Not surprisingly, this style of representation echoes in the present day media, too.

My point is that what Henie represented was not only a gender ideal, but also a racially significant one in a crucial, initial moment when whiteness and femininity

combined in a particular way. According to Diane Negra (2001), Henie's ethnicity as much as her skating talent was decisive to her stardom, as her white image always operated as a thematic subtext for her persona. For instance, *American Magazine* published an article in 1937 illustrating this: "Sonja sleeps at least ten hours a night in a white bedroom, drives in a snow-white automobile, dresses in white (Negra, 2001, p. 88)." More precisely, Diane Negra (2001) argues that Henie's whiteness was constructed through her cuteness, foreignness, and sporting prowess:

[Henie's] cuteness was an indicator of her status as both assimilated and apart. In the Henie persona cuteness was reflected by both the star's body and her language, for not only were her skating performances coded as innocent dance numbers on ice, but her rushed, accented style of speech also gave her the effect of a childlike lisp (p. 89).

In this way, what Henie signified was an ensemble of whiteness and femininity in which her youth, skill, and foreign nationality contributed to constructing a certain kind of whiteness, that is, "the unproblematic character of uncontroversially white ethnic groups in the United States (Negra, 2001, p. 98)."

In this respect, it might be argued that Henie's appearance and dominance on ice and the American public's enthusiastic according of her stardom can be marked as the moment when what might be called the white princess skater entered into the history of women's figure skating. According to Bettina Fabos (2001), Henie was the first female skater to "establish an image of [white] northern European beauties on ice," and it was from this that an enduring princess metaphor for women Olympic Skaters developed (p. 189). Greatly influenced by the imagery developed around Henie, women's figure skating has turned out many such American white princess skaters portrayed as the protagonists of a fairy tale: Tenley Albright, Carol Heiss, Peggy Fleming, and Dorothy Hamill. In what follows, I move to the culminating period in the construction of the American white princess skater by focusing on the latter two skaters, Fleming and Hamill.

Although Albright won the gold medal at the 1956 Olympics and Heiss was also the 1960 Olympics gold medalist and continued her career as an actress in the Hollywood, I want to highlight Fleming, the gold medalist at the 1968 Olympics, renowned as the first Olympic heroine that captivated an American audience during her competition for the gold in a live broadcast in the opening era of color television.

Fleming had won her first national championship in 1964 at the age of fifteen. Her success and potential initially hinged upon her technical proficiency. According to Kelli Lawrence (2011) who has written a broadcast history of Olympic figure skating, “what kept her on top...was a solid arsenal of jumps executed with deceptively simple grace (p. 38).” The commentator for ABC, Jim McKay, talked in a similar way about Fleming on *Wide World of Sports*: “Since this girl is only 15, she has all her jumps, she has the power—all she needs now is maturity, and a little more experience...you can really imagine four years from now, in the 1968 Olympics...she could probably win a gold medal for us (p. 35).”

In the 1968 Olympics, when Fleming won the gold medal, her popularity was attached to a number of widely circulating images. As “the darling of the international press,” she was portrayed as “doe-eyed, fragile, the leggy wisp, and America’s shy Bambi (Hilton, 2003, November 19)” or as “a teenage beauty, a heartthrob, and a girl next door (Fabos, 2001, p. 190).” Her performances were televised live on ABC and American audiences were captivated by her grace and beauty. As Lawrence (2011) argues, the phrase “the Fleming effect” spoke to this one skater’s impact, for she made her sport a glamour event while she also became a marketing sensation (p. 37).

Fleming’s aura was recalled in the late twentieth-century media, too. In 1994, *Sports Illustrated* produced a cover story honoring her as one of forty individuals who most significantly changed or advanced their sports (Swift, 1994, September 19). “She launched figure skating’s modern era,” this story went and continued:

Pretty and balletic, elegant and stylish, Fleming took a staid sport that was shackled by its inscrutable compulsory figures and arcane scoring system and, with television as her ally, made it marvelously glamorous. Ever since, certainly to North Americans, figure skating has been the marquee sport of the Winter Games and an increasingly popular staple of prime-time television.

Fleming became the original American ice princess, incongruously so, since she was not, by nature, glamorous. Off the ice she was small-town America through and through: unpretentious, hardworking, middle-class, level-headed. But she carried herself like a star during performances. On the ice she was stylish in a manner more reminiscent of ballet dancing than figure skating, and she was inoffensively sexy, teeming with femininity and energy. All these charms translated beautifully over the picture tube.

Fleming's combination of innocence, glamour, and prettiness earned her the favor of the ice-skating establishment and the American media.

It was Dorothy Hamill who followed Fleming in the role of American ice princess. In the 1976 Olympics, she won the gold medal with all nine judges' voting unanimously for her on the basis of her interpretation of the music, fluid skating, and infectious charm. At the age of seventeen, with her sweet face, winning smile and bobbed hairstyle, Hamill was instantly crowned as "America's Sweetheart" (Kestnbaum, 2003).

What I want to draw particular attention to is the way in which the media portrayed Hamill's determination and her father in light of an incident during the 1974 World Championships. The seventeen-year-old had recently won three consecutive national championships from 1974 to 1976 and came into the long program with a strong chance to medal, having placed third after the compulsory figures and the short program. After the German skater Gerti Schanderl finished skating, Hamill went on to the ice and began warming up. The audience began to boo, in response to the judges' scores for Schanderl, believing that her marks were too low in light of her excellent performance. Hamill was announced as the next skater, but the crowd again erupted in more boos, catcalls, and whistles. Left on the ice, she misunderstood the booing, thinking it was for her, burst into tears, and fled from the ice and into the arms of her father. After the

audience settled down, Hammill returned to give a gutsy and lyrical performance, and eventually won the silver medal.

On the ABC live television broadcast at the time, commentators Dick Button and Jim McKay were saying: “She’s an emotional girl...This is a miserable way for this audience to behave...[The referee] said she could take a rest period, and she said ‘Oh no,’ burst out, away from her father, and now the crowd is cheering for Dorothy Hamill (Fabos, 2001, p. 191).” And so through televisual manipulations, the incident was framed as a drama about Hamill’s “skating ambitions...in terms of a fragile princess ascending a throne” and told via a crucial medium that portrayed her as “a captivating...character acting out her emotions and reaching for her dreams in a modern fairytale (p. 191).” Hamill’s father was also given a share of the spotlight, described as “a proud man” and “supporting actor to Hamill’s leading role in the fairytale (p. 191).”

After the 1980 Lake Placid Olympics when US figure skating was without a golden girl, the sport entered the 1980s hoping for the next American ice queen who would succeed Fleming and Hamill in time for the 1984 Olympics. It was at this time that a sixteen-year-old skater, Tiffany Chin, the daughter of a Taiwanese American father and a Taiwanese mother, competed for the US and placed the fourth. From then on, the media gave a lot of attention to Chin, comparing her with and likening her to “former U.S. Olympians Peggy Fleming and Dorothy Hamill (Harvey, 1989, January 25).” There was a particular focus on her promising future for the 1988 Olympics. For instance, the *New York Times* observed that Chin had “a star quality...the same that set Peggy Fleming and Dorothy Hamill apart as stylish Olympic champions (Amdur, 1984, February 13).” In what follows, I sketch in more detail the symbolic world of American women’s figure in the 1980s, focusing especially on how the US media represented the nation’s first Asian/American female skater.

The Media Representation of Tiffany Chin

On February 3 1981, a young Asian/American girl skater appeared on ice rink of San Diego Sports Arena to compete for the US National Championships. The skater was Tiffany Chin, a thirteen-year-old Taiwanese American from Toluca Lake in California, who had won the World Junior Championship and was making her senior debut as the youngest skater in the senior competitions. Capturing this moment of her presence and performance with a laudatory headline, “Tiffany Chin, a Road to [the 1984] Olympics in Yugoslavia May Be San Diego Freeway,” the *Los Angeles Times* detailed:

Her forte is athleticism—triple jumps and other taxing maneuvers’—and she’s known as a daredevil. She has unusual strength but also is technically adept. One observer says she has “superb flow”...

Described by her coach as a stubborn child with fantastic natural talent, Chin has expressive eyes, a mouth full of braces and a charming way...

She keeps her room neat, makes her own bed, has an easy time passing up junk food—“It doesn’t appeal to many Orientals”—and looks at boys, distantly, as “friends.”

Chin said the discipline demanded by her coach and her father, a mechanical engineer with a Ph. D. from the University of California-Berkeley, has made it easy for her “not to get a big head...”

“If she makes it to the top, that would represent a lift to all Orientals,” said Mrs. Chin, who was born in Nationalist China. Her husband was born in Oakland. “I think we have the support of Orientals in this country,” Mrs. Chin said, “In my heart I think it would be fun if she wins the gold medal. That would say to people, if you’re good, you can get what you want” (Cobbs, 1981, February 3).

The above media accounts reflect a particular form of representation in which Chin is constructed as a mixed iconography that revolve around her skating style, personal character, and her family. Taking these descriptions as a starting point, I develop the theme of media representations of Chin and explain why I interpret them as the birth of the yellow female skater. The media narratives of Chin can be summarized with three points: 1) she had a unique and distinctive style, including a very different skating style, 2) ideas about and attitudes to her age and youthfulness were complex and

ambivalent and 3) her parents and family background were an important part of her profile.

First, the media represented Tiffany Chin as a distinctively unique and different skater, who had a natural talent for jumping and an exotic, oriental appearance and attractiveness. Media accounts highlighted her athletic prowess, naming a new jump that she introduced after her – the ‘Chin Spin’. For instance, the *Chicago Tribune* noted: “She is, of course, especially on the ice. The most obvious standard is the move... a move so original it is called the Chin Spin. Rocking and twirling, she creates the illusion of a hundred arms and legs all spinning at once (Hersh, 1985, February 3).” This unique jump, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, made Chin “a rare gem among American skaters.” The piece continued, “[she combined] an artistic, graceful style with gravity-defying jumps and spins like no one else has before or since. At 16, she already had a spin named for her, the Chin Spin (Harvey, 1989, January 25).”

On the other hand, the media often introduced Chin as “the first American with an Oriental background to qualify for a team representing the United States in the World championships or the Olympics (Amdur, 1984, February 13). Along with this, her artistic and graceful characteristics were often described as an image of the ‘China Doll’ or a distinctively ‘Oriental’ style. Noting that “her exotic beauty... announced this country’s superstar-to-be (Hoffer, 1985, December 14),” the *Los Angeles Times* emphasized the point that, “in a sport where appearance is vital, Tiffany, her dark Oriental features setting her apart from the other women, had all the required elements (Harvey, 1989, January 25).” Similarly, the *New York Times* discussed Chin’s exotic feature and her artistry in relation to the metaphor of the China Doll:

Tiffany Chin is not a figure-skating china doll, contrary to what some people have tried to suggest. Sweet-looking, yes. Artistic, definitely... But china doll? “It’s a wonderful little phrase,” John Nicks, Miss Chin’s coach, said in recalling how a television announcer had tried to pin the nickname on her after an interview.” But china doll is fragile and gives you the impression it’s going to break. That’s where the comparison ends.

Tiffany can be pushed much harder than she looks. I don't hesitate to push her either, and she doesn't mind" (Amdur, 1984, February 13).

Her mother, Marjorie Chin, also often talked to the media about Chin's big brown eyes, drawing attention to how pretty her daughter was in terms of exotic beauty (Cobbs, 1981, February 3; Harvey, 1989, January 25; Hersh, 1985, February 3).

A second important characteristic of the media narratives of Chin was a certain ambivalent attitude concerning her age and youthful appearance and features. In one version of this, the media framed Chin as a girl skating prodigy, who still needed more time to become an ice queen. Before the 1984 Olympics, for example, the *New York Times* predicted that her age might be an issue noting that, "if Miss Chin does not win a medal at these Winter Games because most judges...feel she is too young for such instant rewards, the groundwork will be dug for the future (Amdur, 1984, February 13)." This point about seniority, on the other hand, was mixed in a complicated way with concern for Chin being "a little ahead of time (Leavy, 1984, February 17)." The *Washington Post* expressed this thus:

Chin obviously hasn't heard about too much too soon. "The sooner the better," she said...In figure skating, danger lurks in winning too early, peaking too soon. Heights are hard to sustain. Four years ago, Elaine Zayak was the prodigy who couldn't miss in 1984. She is 11th after today's competition. "Right now, it's (the 1988 Olympics) still a ways off," Chin said. "It's my goal,...I don't think I've peaked yet. I think I'm still rising" (Leavy, 1984, February 17).

In this way, Chin's young age of sixteen and her youthfulness caught the media's attention and became a topic for debate around two narratives in US women's figure skating: 'too much too soon' and 'the sooner the better.'

The media also drew attention to Chin's family, portraying it as a kind of super-working unit of a docile but disciplined daughter and well-educated, determined, and dedicated parents. With regard to her manners and personality, Chin is "polite and smiles easily, but...displays little emotion [and speaks] of becoming desensitized (Harvey, 1989, January 25)." In the rink and at school, Chin becomes a hard-working, hard-training girl

who had managed “her grueling daily schedule” since she was eight. According to the *Los Angeles Times*:

[It] starts with practice in a North Hollywood rink at 6:30 a.m., continues with a few hours of class at Providence and concludes with yet another practice at a Costa Mesa rink[, which] is nothing new to the teen-ager, who started her meteoric rise at the age of 8 by mimicking other skaters as they practiced. It leaves little time for the dating, movies and dances that are the usual trappings of high school life, a factor she says she rarely considers (Rae-Dupree, 1985, February 7).

This image of Chin was further overlapped with representations of her parents as setting up a type of Asian/American middle-class family. Focusing on ethnic background, educational achievements, and professional status, the media introduced Chin’s parents as:

Born in mainland China, the daughter of an officer in Chiang Kai-shek’s army, she moved to Taiwan when she was 11 and came to Los Angeles 10 years later in 1960. She married Ed, whose parents immigrated to the United States when they were young from the Canton region of China. Ed was born in Oakland and has a Ph.D in engineering from Berkeley (Harvey, 1989, January 25).

Always looking for investment possibilities, Marjorie is an astute businesswoman with a master’s degree from USC. Her interests range from real estate to a taco restaurant to vending machines. She is opinionated and outspoken (Amdur, 1984, February 13).

In addition to this typical profile of Chin’s family, the media paid most attention to Chin’s mother Marjorie and her style of mothering.

The media introduced Marjorie as a “Dragon Lady” or “Tiger Mom,” who is “fiercely protective of her child and unafraid to cuff her verbally, as tigers do more forcefully to teach their young (Hersh, 1985, February 3).” Along with Marjorie’s stern discipline, her dedication to Chin was also highlighted. Pointing to the sacrifices that both mother and daughter had made and characterizing them as a “different life style,” the *Los Angeles Times* reported:

Marjorie began commuting four days a week between San Diego and Burbank, 260 miles round-trip, so that Tiffany could work with Carroll. Still in her pajamas, Tiffany slept in the back seat while Marjorie drove

her to 6 a.m. lessons and then back to San Diego for afternoon elementary school classes.

“I don't really think I've sacrificed too much,” she said, . . . awaiting her in the school's gymnasium.

“Sure, I don't get to do a lot of the things normal kids do, but I get to do the traveling and meeting new people and seeing different cultures that other kids can't get from school” (Rae-Dupree, 1985, February 7).

In this way, Marjorie's style of mothering was key factor in the media's understanding of Chin's family as a different style of family, what might be called an oriental family.

The Birth of the Yellow Female Skater

Media representations of Chin mark the initial moment that the *yellow female skater* is created in the history of US women's figure skating. Since Chin's appearance on ice, this style of representation has become prevalent, almost applied like a formula to other skaters of yellow color. For instance, Chin's image as a docile but super-human like training machine is commonly seen in descriptions of Kristi Yamaguchi and Michelle Kwan as well. Not only the exotic implications of the oriental beauty or attractiveness, but also profile of the middle-class California family is also ubiquitous in the descriptions of these skaters. I consider that these rhetorical patterns closely resonate with discourses of the yellow female skater that I have introduced previously such as the model minority and return to again in later chapters.¹²

Here, I discuss the way in which such patterns and styles of representation are contingent upon certain social, cultural, political, and historical contexts. As Thomas Foster (2005) argues, “a historical articulation of textual practices . . . cannot be reduced to body of texts but has to be read as the articulation of a number of discrete series of events, only some of which are discursive (p. xvi; Park, 2010, p. x).” What is at stake here is the issue of what contextual factors contributed to the emergence of yellow female skater as a cultural product of racial formation in the 1980s and how this construction can be

¹² More specific interpretations and discussions will be detailed in the following chapters reading Yamaguchi, Kwan, and a group of Asian descent skaters.

understood in relation to Kristi Yamaguchi and Michelle Kwan in the 1990s and to Asian skaters of the 2000s.

As key contextual factors in the emergence of the yellow female skater and recalling the major forces of American white supremacy, I pay attention to two particular ideas, discourses, or ideologies: the ‘multicultural turn’ that was widely spread in the early and mid 1980s of America and the so-called ‘oriental style,’ a genre of representation that became established as various forms of practices in the US popular culture in the 1980s. Further, I consider multiculturalism as a national force of white American national ontology and discuss orientalism in relation to the historical force of the white American imperial frame. In what follows, I explain how I understand both ideas and apply them in this project.

The Multicultural Turn on Ice

Espoused in the context of an explosion of talk about diversity, the idea of multiculturalism has been deployed as one of the major themes through which to re-think and re-understand communities, societies, and nations, both culturally and politically. Despite its ubiquitous presence, the term multiculturalism is still an amorphous concept often used as a kind of umbrella notion whose meanings circulate in multiple ways (Dominguez, 1994; Gordon & Newfield, 1996). For some people who are conservative, it a new way of talking about ‘Anglo conformity’ and the dominant culture of WASP (Gordon & Newfield, 1996, p. 1); for others who may be liberal, it invites all racial or ethnic groups to compete equally in capitalist society, based upon the idea or belief that structural level of social, historical, and cultural barriers can be modified or reformed (McLaren, 1995, p. 40). For still others who may be more critically minded, it might mean a descriptive fact of diversity in which five major groups of pan-ethnicity are organized and displayed like a spectacle, but one that covers up the power, privilege, and hierarchy of oppression vested in dominant groups (Davis, 1996; Hall, 2000; McLaren, 1995).

Informed by Anne-Marie Fortier (2005)'s perspective, I understand and define multiculturalism as a form of post/nationalist discourse, which refers to "reworking of the nation as inherently multicultural (p. 560)." The idea of the nation commonly means an imagined entity often congruent with a form of western state whose foundational characteristics are: "historic territory, legal-political community, legal-political equality of members, and common civic culture and ideology (Smith, 1991, p. 11)." At the turn of multicultural era, however, it became impossible to imagine the nation without taking account of such key words as diversity, ethnicity, race, or minority cultures. Thus, in the context of the US, multiculturalism might refer to an idea, thought, or discourse that re-imagines or re-defines 'America' from a mono-cultural to a multi-cultural imagined community, a new nation that is and always has been inherently multicultural.

To a certain extent, multiculturalism seems to challenge dominant understandings of the modern nation, because its welcoming and celebration of diversity and minor cultures seems to mean that these are embraced as crucial parts into the national culture. The problem is that it has been so loosely deployed that the issues of difference, struggle, and inequality rarely surface, but rather are dissolved into a palatable, colorful and apolitical diversity. As Angela Davis (1996) explains, "multiculturalism has acquired a quality akin to spectacle (p. 45)." Thus, it has become common for many ethnic and minority groups to "have their own national heritage/history month dedicated to celebrating and teaching about their culture and contributions to the nation (Kim, C. J., 2004, p. 990)." In the context of the US, this spectacle of the multi-cultural has a long been described using metaphors such as the melting pot or the salad-bowl.

I understand the melting pot model or theory to be a form of cultural blending based upon the assimilationist ideology of Anglo-conformity. The metaphor hinges around a belief that all immigrants can or should become 'Americans' by emulating the standard or core values of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. This technology of assimilation seemed to be the dominant trend in most research on cultural understandings

of America as a nation until the 1960s. Under the phrase of “beyond the melting pot,” however, the discourse of multiculturalism began to emerge from the 1970s, coinciding with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which removed racial quotas for immigration (Chametzky, 1989; Derienzo, 1995; Henry III, 1990, April 9; Hirschman, 1983). As American socio-cultural composition became more radically different in terms of race and ethnicity, voices for moving beyond the melting pot demanded re-considering the possibility or desirability of a monolithic American culture.

During the multicultural turn accompanying the diversity boom of the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the melting pot metaphor seemed to be displaced by a salad bowl which symbolized a new plural style of multicultural blending (Davis, 1996; Lerner, 1990). As a salad bowl consists of a mixture with many colorful ingredients, it is an appropriate metaphor for a multicultural society. It seems to advertise America as a space in which all different people can live in freedom and in pursuit of their dreams, all the while keeping their own culture, rather than as a pot in which multiple ingredients of race, ethnicity, and religion are melted or dissolved. The salad bowl metaphor of American society has broad currency signaling that a belief in a certain level of acceptance with respect to cultural diversity or difference exists and that there is broad tolerance in terms of language, food, traditional customs, and other aspects of heritage.

It is within this metaphorical context of salad bowl or re-emerged melting pot of America that I situate the media narratives of Chin as a mark of the birth of the yellow female skater. According to Mark Dyreson (2003), the “long history of making American Olympic teams into ‘emblems of the multiethnic fabric’ or ‘a union of all races’ reinvigorated melting pot stories in the 1980s and 1990s (p. 11).” Kristi Yamaguchi is suggested as a crucial example in his argument that “the melting pot appeared...forcefully at the 1998 winter games in the person of Kristi Yamaguchi and other figure skaters (p. 11).” Then Dyreson (2003) goes further to argue that this melting pot vision continued to

appear in the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Games, at which Michelle Kwan was portrayed as among “America’s new Olympic diversity heroes (p. 3).”

In this respect, I would like to argue for including Chin into Dyreson’s formulation and make connections between her and Yamaguchi and Kwan using the trope of the model minority and the perception of forever foreign Asian. In the cultural and political space of the neo-melting pot or salad bowl, the model minority thesis was also revived as an effective tool for Regan administration’s conservative policies that aimed to dismantle affirmative action and welfare programs (Hamamoto, 1992, p. 169-170). The ‘family’ especially was invoked as a core element of the notion. For example, it was deployed in overt racial comparisons that were made between the successes of Asian/Americans and the failures of other ethnic minorities (Bascara, 2006, p. 4). On the other hand, it was saturated with culturally based explanations of Asian/American families whose differences from (white) American families were highlighted in a racially neutral or seemingly non-problematic way.

According to Homi Bhabha (1988), “critical theory rests...on the notion of cultural difference, not cultural diversity (p. 18).” He further explains:

Cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements of culture or on cultural differentiate, discriminate, and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability, and capacity...[However]...Cultural diversity is the recognition of pre-given cultural ‘contents’ and customs...[and] it gives rise to anodyne liberal notions of multiculturalism (p. 18).

In regard to the term hybridity, Hall (2000) expresses a similar point to argue that the concept should not be understood as “a reference to the mixed racial composition of populations (p. 226).” These perspectives lead me to the idea that difference is not based on certain inherent, natural, or static attributes, but it should be rather understood as an outcome of social, cultural, and political relations. Thus a multicultural understanding of cultural plurality can function politically as a strategic tool for dominant groups to be able

to control and manage the problem of difference and further sustain the hegemonic construction of mono-cultural America.

I argue that Chin's appearance on ice signaled the multicultural turn in women's figure skating in which economies of inclusion and exclusion began to oscillate between the nation and race. What I want to call attention to in making this claim is a certain ambivalence embedded in the ways in which the media have imagined, narrated, and represented 'race' within the multicultural America. As a hyphenated Asian/American, Chin's 'Asian' side was dislocated or de-Asianized when the media positively frame her as a role model for other skaters. From the standpoint of white Americans, when the media focused on her difference, however, the reverse happened and her 'Asian' side was reaffirmed and highlighted through a certain process of de-Americanization. This multicultural management of race and its contradictory nature will be discussed further in relation to Kristi Yamaguchi in Chapter 4.

The Oriental Girl on Ice

Considering American orientalism as a crucial force of the white American imperial frame, I approach to the question of the US media's representation of yellow female skaters with what Stuart Hall (1992) calls the "discourse of the West and the Rest" and Edward Said (1977)'s "imaginative geography of the Occident and Orient" in mind. According to Hall (1992), the US is one with Western white Europe, not Eastern Europe because they share similar processes of historical development characterized as modernity, capitalist, industrialization, urbanization, and so on. Although Said (1977) mostly discusses the relationship between the British and the French as the Occident and the Middle East as the Orient, he also notes that the US "is much more likely to be associated very differently with the Far East (China and Japan, mainly)" than it is with Europe (p. 1). In this respect, I take away the media narratives of Chin as part of a larger formation of the ongoing historical process of the racialization of Asian/American women as the Rest/Orient/Other.

The gendered constructions between the colonizer as a male and the colonized as a female have a long history and the sexual language of imperialism has also long been apparent in the West-East relation. According to Said (1978), Orientalism was “an exclusively male province...with sexist blinders (p. 207),” in which the Orient was viewed with “the escapism of sexual fantasy” or “the freedom of licentious sex (p. 190).” Analyzing the writings of famous novelists and travelers such as Gustave Flaubert and ‘Dirty Dick’ Burton, Said (1978) argues:

Just as the various colonial possessions...were useful as places to send wayward sons, superfluous populations of delinquents, poor people, and other undesirables, so the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe...In time “Oriental sex” was as standard a commodity as any other available in the mass culture, with the result that readers and writers could have it if they wished without necessarily going to the Orient (p. 190).

In this way, the Orient was not only gendered as a feminized entity which correlated with the conquest of the Oriental women, but it was also sexualized as the land of fantasy that seduced the Occidental with sexual desire, pleasure, and violence.

Situating the multicultural America of the 1980s within the history of American orientalism, I want to draw attention to a certain conventional or formularized practice that is widely established in the US popular culture, which might be called the commodification of the oriental girl. My point is that the oriental image of the yellow female skater that Chin represented served as a kind of reservoir of exotic style and accessories fitted in with multiculturally imagined space of women’s figure skating. This is the argument that Jane Park (2010) makes in a discussion the “oriental style” of a newly emerged aesthetic product and Asian/American cultural formation in the Hollywood of the 1980s and early 1990s. She sees this as a kind of multicultural filmic language:

[certain] kinds of oriental imagery—the invisible abject and the hypervisible feted—are reduced to decorative flourishes within the films...“Oriental style” describes...the ways in which Hollywood films

crystallize and commodify multiple, heterogeneous Asiatic cultures, histories, and aesthetics into a small number of easily recognizable, often interchangeable tropes that help to share dominant cultural attitudes about Asia and people of Asian descent (p. ix).

In women's figure skating, similarly, I believe journalists, fans, and other audiences were unconcerned about the authenticity of the content and interiority of the imagery, but rather were attracted by the surface and certain visual economies of sexual consumption.

To better illustrate the oriental imagery that I have in mind, it might be useful here to introduce one passage frequently cited by various scholars in Asian American studies (Cho, 1997; Kwan, 1998; Woan, 2008). The article titled "Oriental Girls" in a 1990 *Gentleman's Quarterly* describes:

Her face-round like a child's,..., eyes almond-shaped for mystery, black for suffering, wide-spaced for innocence, high cheekbones swelling like bruises, cherry lips....When you get home from another hard day on the planet, she comes into existence, removes your clothes, bathes you and walks naked on your back to relax you.... She's fun you see, and so uncomplicated. She doesn't go to assertiveness training classes, insist on being treated like a person, fret about career moves, wield her orgasm as a non-negotiable demand....She's there when you need shore leave from those angry feminist seas. She's a handy victim of love or a symbol of the rape of third world nations, a real trouper (Cho, 1997, p. 191).

As the passage portrays, the Oriental Girl is supposedly small, submissive, exotic, and sexually active and eager to please and by the 1990s this iconic imagery was already a popular caricature of sexual commodity for western white male consumption.

Various fields of the US popular culture such as the Hollywood, TV stations, and Broadway have played a crucial role in spreading the imagery of the Oriental Girl. In Hollywood, as Gina Marchetti (1993) describes, Asian/American women are often portrayed as a sexual servant or complement that is "sexually available to the white hero (p. 2)." Peter Kwan (1998) categorizes such hyper-sexual/exotic characters of as "the Oriental Woman," and argues that the "ability and...willingness to serve as a sexual object is essential to her constitution (p. 112)." This image of the Oriental Girl/Woman is also commonly seen in prime-time television; Asian/American women are often framed

as rarely married and with active romantic lives with non-Asian male characters (Deo et al., 2008). On Broadway, Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* hit a worldwide success in 1904, and since then, numerous versions have been staged. Among them the 1989 musical *Miss Saigon* maybe the most famous one in which the tragic heroine was depicted as sexual, exotic, and submissive, traits that epitomize the Oriental Girl/Woman.

I argue that the media representations of Chin and her skating were a moment when the Oriental Girl/Woman was born into the multicultural site of women's figure skating. Like cinema, theatre, or musical, I understand the symbolic world of figure skating as an anthropological site in which the consumption of racial, sexual, and gendered difference is allowed and further identified within a politics of apolitical diversity.

My critical point here is twofold. On one hand, as mentioned in the previous chapter, I see the colonialist desire, fantasy, and gesture of the erotic Empire as inscribed in the production of the Oriental Girl/Women on ice. Within this neo colonial politics, Chin as the primitive subject and non-white, yellow female skater signifies an internally colonized object successfully assimilating herself into the controlled image of the Oriental Skater on Ice. And this looking practice or experience also further reaffirms the hegemonic status of white male sexual subjectivity. I will more specifically detail and interrogate the (neo) colonial functions embedded in consuming the Oriental Girl/Woman in particular relation to Michelle Kwan in Chapter 5.

My second point concerns the way in which the notion of yellow peril or threat is somehow automatically inscribed into the image of the Oriental Girl/Woman in an aesthetically perilous way. This idea is informed by what David Morley and Kevin Robins (1995) call "techno-orientalism," which refers to an anti-Japanese sentiment that appeared in the domain of technology in the 1980s and the 1990s, when Japan's bubble economy was at its peak. The technologically advanced products of Japanese computers, Walkmans, and video games were coined as a revival of the older yellow peril with

oriental technology conceived as a threat or fear of an Asiatic takeover of Western technological civilization (p. 147-173). While techno-orientalism emerged as a response to an American crisis discourse of economy and technology, I read a similar signs in women's figure skating, what might be called a sporting or sportized orientalism. That is to say, a prevalent form of anti-East Asian sentiment or racism was projected on Chin and other skaters of yellow color, whose bodies, aesthetics, and styles of skating were considered a threat to the white bodies, aesthetics and styles of US women's figure skating. I return to this point and discuss it more in relation to a group of Asian female skaters in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER IV

**READING KRISTI YAMAGUCHI: AN AMBIVALENT IDENTITY
OF YELLOW FEMALE SKATER BETWEEN NATION AND RACE
IN THE MULTICULTURAL ICE**

“What made America? What makes us?” With this slogan at the heart of the production, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) released *Faces of America with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.*, a series of documentary program that traced the diverse ancestries of famous persons in order to explore how their family histories paved the way for their lives as successful Americans. The fourth-generation daughter of Japanese American parents, Kristi Yamaguchi was selected as one of the twelve renowned Americans, whose accomplishments prove that with hard work and dedication American dreams can come true.¹³ Producer and host Gates (2010) later published a compilation book about the program and in commenting on the selection of Yamaguchi and explained why she was chosen as a *Face of America*:

The figure skater Kristi Yamaguchi captured America’s imagination in the late 1980s and early 1990s, winning victory after victory on the international stage, culminating in an Olympic gold medal in 1992. Since then, she has had a celebrated professional career and become an active philanthropist...Her stunning achievements stood in stark contrasts to the racial prejudice that had followed her family down through the generations. Both of her parents were imprisoned in Japanese internment camps as children. Three of her four grandparents spent time in the camps as well. It was, I thought, a remarkable American story (p. 216).

As *PBS* highlighted, a story of Yamaguchi and her family is “a remarkably American story.” She is a great American skater who achieved stunning landmarks that include an Olympic gold medal, two world championships, and five major championships. She

¹³ The other were Elizabeth Alexander (professor and poet), Mario Batali (chef), Stephen Colbert (comedian), Louise Erdrich (novelist), Malcolm Gladwell (journalist), Eva Longoria (actress), Yo-Yo Ma (musician), Mike Nichols (director), Mehmet Oz (television host/heart surgeon), and Meryl Streep (actress) (Gates 2010; <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/facesofamerica/profiles/kristi-yamaguchi/3/>).

completed all of these in just four years of her career from 1989 to 1992. On the basis of this outstanding achievement, Yamaguchi has been lauded as one of “the greatest figure skaters” by various media, institutions, and authorities and honored with numerous awards and accolades (Howard, 2012, April 30).

Her outstanding career also paved the way for success off the ice in her non-athletic life. Yamaguchi has been actively engaged in philanthropic work dedicated to helping children fulfill their dreams, through an organization of her own founding, Always Dream, named for her favorite motto. She has also been a champion of ABC's *Dancing with the Stars*, just as Dorothy Hamill has. The media has detailed her many victories and cast her as touching the hearts of Americans who have tracing her achievements carefully. Hamm, 2008, April 14). In addition, as an author, Yamaguchi wrote an autobiography and a picture book for the children, *Dream Big Little Pig*, the inclusion of which on the *New York Time* bestseller list prompted her publisher to produce a second edition.

Yamaguchi's family is also “a family of America” that has its own remarkably American story. Despite suffering from the strong anti-Japanese sentiment of the World War II era, her maternal grandfather George Doi demonstrated his loyalty to the US by serving as a sergeant in the army while his family languished in an internment camp in Granada, Colorado. Inspired by and growing up within this family culture, Yamaguchi's parents made successful lives as a dentist and medical secretary and both of them were committed to supporting her as she pursued her American dream.

In this chapter, which examines how the media represented Yamaguchi during her career as a skater, it should be apparent that that institution paved the way for her being chosen as “a face of America.” She made an impressive senior debut in 1989 nationals, placing second behind Jill Trenary and went on to earn second place again in the next two years, 1990 and 1991. With regard to the latter event, Yamaguchi had been unquestionably thought of as the favorite, yet the victory went to Tonya Harding who

gave a stunning performance. In the course of this, Harding became the first American woman and the second woman ever to land a triple Axel, the most difficult jump in skating. To that point the Japanese skater Ito was the only other woman who had succeeded with the triple Axel in the 1989 World Championships. One month after Harding's stunning upset, Yamaguchi eventually won her first major international title at the 1991 World Championships, a competition at which, notably, three Americans swept up the medals in Ladies' Singles: Yamaguchi first, Harding second, and Kerrigan third. This victory for American female skaters marked was the first time in seventy-three years that three athletes from one nation stood on the podium with the same three flags as the backdrop. In 1992, Yamaguchi opened her heydays, winning three titles at the US nationals, the World Championships, and the Olympics.

The media framed Yamaguchi positively in two ways. The first of these was as a national icon of American Olympic stardom. The media enthusiastically cheered her Olympics victory, hailing her as a new American ice queen for whom the nation had long been waiting (sixteen years since Fleming and Hamill). The central factor to this construction was the artistry and elegance of Yamaguchi's skating style, which the media contrasted starkly with the style of Japanese skater Midori Ito and American Tonya Harding on one hand, and equated with the style of American skater Nancy Kerrigan on the other hand. The media also framed Yamaguchi as a desirable type of citizen for multicultural America. They portrayed her and her family as classic All-American types while also expressing appreciation of her cultural diversity and her family's cultural heritage.

I read this media framing of Yamaguchi as an element in the dominant groups' multiculturalist project by which racial and ethnic minorities are rhetorically managed, controlled, and/or incorporated. In the early 1990s, when the multicultural atmosphere was especially charged, Yamaguchi's Olympic victory was the first for a non-white American female athlete in the sport, won on one of the most honorable stages of

international sporting competition. Through its representations of Yamaguchi in this specific context, the media re-imagined, re-narrated, and re-affirmed the idea of ‘America’ in two ways. One was as a sporting nation that is was naturally aesthetic and superior to the Japanese jumping machine that Ito represented. The other was as a great multicultural community in which a non-white little girl, inspired by and emulating her idol, Dorothy Hamill could achieve the American Dream while keeping her own or pre-given culture through her family.

I support this claim in two ways. First, I critically examine the way in which the media represented Yamaguchi as a national and multicultural icon. I argue that Yamaguchi’s image as an artistic skater was a flimsy and contingent construction that depended on broad-brush contrasts with so-called athletic skaters such as Midori Ito and Tonya Harding. Through the lens of the media’s over-exaggerated concern with Ito’s and Harding’s jumping, Yamaguchi’s aesthetic image could come into focus even though it was also downplayed through comparison with Nancy Kerrigan’s more favored style of white American artistry. My reading is not an attempt to place all skaters on the same stage and offer ‘real’ or ‘actual’ comparisons. Rather, I want to highlight only that differences are created and circulated to produce particular meanings.

Second, I examine how the media represented Yamaguchi as a multicultural icon. Drawing on Fortier (2005), I argue that the media mobilized her as a proud US citizen through a particular process of de-racialization in which her culturally marked otherness was peeled off and further re-encoded in a familiar image of All-American Girl & Family. But the media also put Yamaguchi at the forefront of advertising multicultural America by re-racializing her as a Japanese/American with a *good* pre-given cultural heritage and ethnic family history. What this double process results in is a certain reinvigoration of the assimilationist ideology of monoculturalism and white American supremacy.

Ultimately, I argue that such positive endorsement of Yamaguchi could dangerously obscure the fact that many other Asian/Americans still suffer epistemic

violence through stereotyping, caricaturing, and other mis-representations in their everyday lives. To support this claim, I offer some examples in which the media indirectly reveal signs or gestures that point to her being mis-identified as an Asian foreigner or foreign national. This kind of rhetorical debris or fragment is symptomatic of the way in which ‘America’ has been firmly rooted in a racialized sense of itself as a white nation. Set within this symbolic world of white American national ontology, I argue that the media presented Yamaguchi as belonging in the US only as an ambiguous entity admitted on the terms of model minority and who was always vulnerable to being ostracized as forever foreign.

Sport, (Multicultural) Nation and Women Athletes of Color

Sport has been a key site in which the idea of the nation has been imagined in particular ways. Many scholars have argued that in everyday life it has played a role in expressing, constructing and reproducing a sense of belonging among people who live in the imagined community of the nation (Bairner, 2001; Cronin, 2003; Dyreson, 2005). As Benedict Anderson (1983) notes, “every successful revolution has defined itself in national terms (p. 15).” In a similar vein, it can also be argued that athletic success is often seen in nationalistic terms as an achievement that directly reflects national prowess.

This long rhetorical tradition is still pervasive in the so-called multicultural era. In the context of the United Kingdom, for example, scholars have examined how the media constructs some successful athletes as proud subjects representing a newly imagined national identity appropriate for a multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-ethnic Britain (Burdsey, 2007, Carrington, 2010; Fortier, 2005). One notable case in the context of the US would be Tiger Woods. According to C. L. Cole & David Andrews (2002), Woods was portrayed, constructed, and advertised as a “son” of multicultural America with a particular emphasis being placed on his hybridized racial identity.

Such representations of the nation as a multicultural community mediated through its successful athletes have also been gendered, primarily by linking sporting

accomplishments to hegemonic masculinities and male athletes. As various scholars have argued, the media rarely frame women athletes as representatives of national identity, but rather situate them relative to dominant versions of normative femininity (Borcila, 2000; Chisholm, 1999; Walton, 2010).¹⁴ This point is even more important in the case of women athletes of color. The media has often neglected them and more problematic than this underrepresentation is the common representation of black female athletes in derogatory ways (Douglas, 2002; 2005; Douglas & Jamieson, 2006; Spencer, 2001; 2004; Vertinsky & Captain, 1998).

Arguably, Yamaguchi can be viewed as one of the few American women athletes of color, through whom the media has attempted to imagine America as a nation and as a multicultural society as well. I discuss the media narratives of Yamaguchi by means of two trajectories that shape the allegory of Yamaguchi and America. The first trajectory traces Yamaguchi's construction from individual skater, through dynamic jumper, and to a source of national pride as ice queen and quintessential representative of American Artistry. The second trajectory focuses on how Yamaguchi became a certain desirable type of role model symbolizing the great multicultural America. I first detail the former.

From Dynamic Jumper to a National Hope for American Artistry

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the print media frequently characterized female figure skaters as either athletes or artists (Adams, 2011; Feder, 1994; Kestnbaum, 2003). For instance, the media portrayed two-time Olympic gold medalist Katarina Witt as an artist whereas her contemporary, American skater Debi Tomas was characterized as an athlete. This formula was also applied to Nancy Kerrigan relative to Tonya Harding. In the build up to the 1992 Olympics, the media often discussed four skaters, Yamaguchi,

¹⁴ Despite this lack of national interest to women athletes, some cases have been discussed that women athletes are mediated as signifiers of the nation: for example, the US gymnastics women national team at the 1996 Olympics (Borcila, 2000; Chisholm, 1999) and a British long distance runner Paula Radcliffe at the 2003 London Marathon and 2005 Helsinki World Championship (Walton, 2010).

Ito, Harding, and Kerrigan in these dichotomous terms as can be seen in the following

Sports Illustrated summary:

This was a competition incorrectly billed as the athletes versus the artists. The designated athletes were Ito and Tonya Harding of Portland, Ore., the only two women who have landed a 3 1/2-revolution triple Axel in competition. The so-called artists were Yamaguchi and Kerrigan who, to put the matter in perspective, both had more difficult technical programs planned in Albertville than did American gold medal hopeful Debi Thomas--unquestionably an athlete--in the Calgary Games four years ago. Yamaguchi and Kerrigan were plenty athletic. They were just minus the one jump: the triple Axel. And as it turned out, they weren't alone in that (Swift, 1992, March 2).

As various scholars have already pointed out in discussing the significance of this period in women's figure skating (Fabos, 2001; Feder, 1994; Kestnbaum, 2003), the binary rhetoric of either artist or athlete became more clear-cut than ever during the 1992 Olympics.

For instance, the *New York Times* introduced Yamaguchi as a skater of "feathery elegance," describing her further as "almost dainty, with slim arms and long slender legs, she has mastered nuances of presentation (Janofsky, 1992, February 19)." Regarding Kerrigan, *Time* magazine saw in her "a Kate Hepburn-style beauty." She was "a throwback to Peggy Fleming [and] purists love her. She does graceful jumps, finishing them with an open, ample spread of her arms....She just skates as if annealed to the music (Duffy, Hillenbrand, and McGrath, 1992)." In contrast, the magazine wrote that Harding was "a bold, natural athlete who pays little attention to nuance, less to music," while Ito was "built like a fire plug...but can she fly (Duffy, Hillenbrand, and McGrath, 1992)." Japanese skater Ito, Yamaguchi's keen rival was even likened to the athlete with the highest jump and longest hang time in the world, she was "the Michael Jordan of figure skating (Levin, 1992)," according to one writer.

The media had not always seen Yamaguchi as an artist. In the 1989 nationals, when she made her debut and placed second, for instance, she was described as "a jumping machine" and "a dynamic jumper (Harvey, 1989, February 11)" while the

winner Trenary was depicted as “Katarina Witt’s heiress apparent (Swift, 1989, February 20).” Before the 1992 Olympics, as *Newsweek* observed, Yamaguchi “had always been labeled the athlete in comparison to the artistic Jill Trenary (Deford, 1992, February 10).” According to Abigail M. Feder (1994), Yamaguchi “grew into her artistry...out of her athleticism (p. 70).”

With respect to the media’s shifting representation of Yamaguchi from athlete to artist, however, I want to highlight two things: the presence of Harding as a major competitor of Yamaguchi and the fact of the American team’s sweep of the medals at the 1991 World Championships. Considering that contrasting is integral to the process of constructing identity, I see Yamaguchi’s aesthetic image as diminished by Harding’s much more powerful and dynamically athletic style. In the 1991 nationals, Harding had surprised the figure skating world with her matchless jumps, and this was the defining moment when she was stamped as an athlete and the most powerful American skater. Landing a triple Axel, the most difficult jump, Harding received a perfect 6.0 for technical merit from one judge and 5.9s from other eight judges (Janofsky, 1991, February 17). Characterizing Harding’s victory as a “stunning upset (Janofsky, 1991, February 17),” the media began to frame her as a powerful technician whose skating was dominantly athletic. With a the headline “Triple Threat,” *Sports Illustrated* described Harding as “a 20-year-old dynamo from Portland, Ore.,[who] is fiercely competitive [with] an arsenal of triple jumps at her disposal that is the envy of every woman skater in the world [except] the wondrously athletic Midori Ito of Japan (Swift, 1991, February 25).” In the case of Yamaguchi, by that time, the media was largely silent or commented in neutral terms on the smoothness and ease with which she skated. For instance, the *New York Times* described her style as “elegant and seamless” and her jumping as “effortless.”

In addition to the Harding effect, there was another crucial moment and factor in the media’s construction of Yamaguchi as an artist to which I have already referred. One

month after Harding's stunning upset, Yamaguchi won her first major international title at the 1991 World Championships, leading the unprecedented sweep of the medals by the American women. Officials in the US figure skating establishment and the media were thrilled at this historical landmark and their expectations for an Olympic gold the following year were higher than ever.

Surely, Yamaguchi's victory coinciding with the American dominance at the worlds was a decisive moment in which the media began to re-frame her as the hope of the art of American figure skating. Her 1991 win was welcomed as a victory for artistry because of the fierce competition that powerfully athletic skaters such as Harding and Ito offered. It was also pointed out that the judges had thought so highly of Yamaguchi's artistry that one had awarded her a score of 6.0 score on this aspect of her performance while seven others had given her 5.9 (Janofsky, 1991, March 17; Swift, 1991, March 25). The media also began to frame her as the most recent in a line of American ice skating princesses and queens and to project intense national desires on in regard to the upcoming Olympics. Under the headline "Ice Queens," *Sports Illustrated* noted, "Kristi Yamaguchi led a U.S. sweep at the world figure skating championships." Arguing that, "the future is one of the major reasons the [1991 World championships] sweep...was so important," the *New York Times* placed Yamaguchi at the center of the bright future for the Olympic competition that was just eleven months away.

By this time for the media, Yamaguchi was definitely an artistic skater and as such was sharply contrasted to Harding. For instance, in *Women's Sports and Fitness* columnist Susanna Levin describes the two skaters, anticipating successful performances from them at the 1992 Olympics:

The two could hardly be more different; Blonde-haired Harding has a farm girl's good looks; Yamaguchi is a delicate, dark-haired beauty of Japanese-American descent. The two are about the same height, but Harding appears much bigger... Yamaguchi seems to float around the rink, as if she were made of air. Hers is a natural grace, not at all exaggerated; her choreography and music accentuate her lightness and

delicacy...Harding, on the other hand, is described by Jenkins as “tomboyish” and “a daredevil” (Levin, 1992).

Levin (1992) wrote further in the same piece, “whereas Yamaguchi glides...Harding drives over the ice, like a basketball player bringing the ball down the court.”

Yamaguchi’s image had been unquestionably transformed into that of an artist whose skating style was graceful, elegant, and beautiful.

A Role Model for Multicultural America

Yamaguchi’s image as an artistic skater was further transformed when she was turned into a signifier symbolizing a role model for multicultural America because the media not only enthusiastically welcomed her as its new American ice queen, but also was highly conscious that she was the first Asian/American Olympic superstar. Her cultural traditions, family profile, and ethnic background were encapsulated into a story of the achievement of the American Dream. In this respect, the media seemed to mobilize Yamaguchi as a desirable kind of multicultural citizen who proved that America was a great multicultural society in which ethnic minority people could pursue their dreams while keeping their own culture. In the following section, I discuss three things: my understanding of the multicultural language of race, the media’s narrative of Yamaguchi as a multicultural icon, and some of the problems with this representation.

As I noted in chapter 3, I understand multiculturalism as a post/national discourse that inscribes certain multicultural values, ideas, meanings into the way in which the nation is imagined or narrated. This idea calls attention to the issue of who narrates the multicultural ‘we,’ to whom, and for what purposes. In this respect, as Neil Gotanda (1996) warns, it is important to consider whether multiculturalism can “function to maintain the centerpiece of the old racial order—White privilege (p. 239).” On this question, I speculate over the hidden political function that such positive constructions of Yamaguchi might serve. In brief, I have it in mind that multiculturalism as a new

national agenda is a rhetorical tool for incorporating or managing the concerns with minority people.

According to Barnor Hesse (2000), a helpful, critical approach to multiculturalism, is to acknowledge that its ambivalent nature has led to “the persistence of unresolved discrepancies (p. 16).” I believe that race is one such unresolved discrepancy in the symbolic world of multicultural America. As most multicultural discussions have exclusively focused on the issue of difference regarding minority communities as a question of culture, the idea of ‘race’ has somehow come to be an unfamiliar category, detached, deflected, and dislocated from the multicultural center (Sivanandan, 1990; Carrington, 2000). From this point I attempt to resurface Yamaguchi’s race from the way in which the media represented her within the multicultural language of diversity, plurality, and hybridity.

In order to disrupt the media’s multicultural management of Yamaguchi’s race, I pay attention to Fortier (2005)’s work, which examines how the British press constructed particular successful athletes as cultural, ethnic or racial ‘others’ but also as proud subjects who symbolized a multicultural Britain, for example Kelly Holmes. According to Fortier (2005), the media constructed Holmes as a role model for multicultural Britain through a “double process of de-racialization and re-racialization (p. 559).” On one side, they placed great emphasis on Holmes’ declaration¹⁵ of her pride in being British. Fortier argues that the media so over-emphasized her pride in her national identity that “[Holmes’] dark skin [was] gradually peeled off in the process of making [her] British (p. 569).” The media also re-racialized Holmes. Despite “her refusal of blackness,” they mobilized her as a heroine for the racial community, highlighting her skin color as being “at the forefront of the meaning of [her] Britishness (p. 569).” Discussing this

¹⁵ Kelly Holmes was a bronze medal list in the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Holmes’ statement in the Daily Mail read: “I’m proud of being British. I served in the Army for nine-and-a-half years as a Sergeant PT instructor and I never had any problems regarding race. If you’re born in Britain, and your parents are British and you live here, then you’re British it doesn’t matter what colour you are. I don’t understand what the issue is (Fortier, 2005, p. 568).”

ambivalent link between the nation and race, Fortier (2005) interrogates the “politics of pride,” by seeing in this “an ‘achievement’ that is endlessly deferred, as the non-white skin is never fully peeled off in the continuous process of de/re-racialization (p. 574).”

Fortier (2005)’s explanation of this double process can be also read in media constructions of Yamaguchi. Some of these suggest a certain de-racialized intimacy or sameness by encoding Yamaguchi and her family as a classic type of All-American Girl and Family. In this rhetorical deployment, the mark of Yamaguchi’s ‘race’ (‘Asian’ or ‘Japanese’) is silenced, or peeled off or dislocated from the *slash* or *solidus* of the terms Asian/American and Japanese/American. On the other hand, the media did not fully peel off the difference of Yamaguchi and her family. For example, some accounts invoked the internment past of her parents and grandparents, through which they re-narrated multicultural America, putting Yamaguchi’s difference at the forefront as a kind of advertisement for it. Yamaguchi’s identity was thus re-racialized.

In what follows, I detail and discuss how the media represented Yamaguchi as a multicultural icon. Adding the trope of the model minority to the double process, I highlight four themes: 1) Yamaguchi as a version of a Japanese/American success story 2) her de-racialization and representation as All-American 3) a process of sanitizing the shameful past as a historical re-racialization and 4) the Yamaguchi-Ito rivalry as a battle between two similar but different skaters.

The media framed Yamaguchi’s victory in the Olympic final as a climactic moment in her life story drawing on the ideology of the American Dream and the trope of the model minority. As mentioned in Chapter 2, two articles published in 1966 in the mainstream media fuelled the model-minority discourse. Here, I draw on the one published in the *New York Times Magazine*, headlined “Success Story, Japanese-American Style (Peterson, 1966, January 9).” In this it is written:

Like the Negroes, the Japanese have been the object of color prejudice.
Like the Jews, they have been feared and hated as hyperefficient

competitors. And, more than any other group, they have been seen as the agents of an overseas enemy...

Generally this kind of treatment...creates what might be termed "problem minorities."...The history of Japanese Americans, however, challenges every such generalization about ethnic minorities...

By any criterion of good citizenship that we choose, the Japanese Americans are better than any other group in our society, including native-born whites. They have established this remarkable record, moreover, by their own almost totally unaided effort. Every attempt to hamper their progress resulted only in enhancing their determination to succeed. Even in a country whose patron saint is the Horatio Alger hero, there is no parallel to this success story.

In this classic narrative of the model minority, Japanese/Americans are portrayed as successful achievers who have better assimilated than any group through their hard work, dedication, discipline, intelligence, quiet accommodation and emphasis on education and family (Shim, 1998; Suzuki, 1989; 2002; Zhang, 2010).

Soon after Yamaguchi's Olympic victory, *Sports Illustrated* displayed her as the cover model for the March issue (March 2, 1992), with the headline, "American Dream." On that cover, Yamaguchi appears in a close-up shot holding up her gold medal, with a triumphant smile, girlish ponytail, glittering costume, and long red nails. As Elena T. Creef (2004) interprets, the cover image highlights "her all-American iconography within the framework of sports nationalism," and draws connections "between the fulfillment of the American Dream and the model minority success story (p. 157)." In similar vein, *Time* magazine ran the headline "When Dreams Come True" under which a success story of Yamaguchi (Duffy, 1992, March 2) ran:

[Kristi said,] "It's something I've dreamed of ever since I put on skaters as a little girl."...She had nothing else to say. No thoughts about what she would do next year, or what she would do tomorrow. She had just made it through the arduous course of a fairy tale: pluck vs. luck.

For Yamaguchi, Olympic glory is the culmination of a single-minded 14-year quest. She is a fourth-generation American...[and] was born with clubfeet, but the condition was corrected, and by six she was on the ice for keeps.

Very much reminiscent of the classic article in the 1966 *New York Times*, this narrative might be called a new version of Japanese/American style of the sporting success story.

More particularly, there are two significant characteristics to the Yamaguchi version of Japanese-American success story. First, the media portrayed her as an ideal type of skater with a strong work ethic, the right kind of temperament, and good relationships with her coaches. They often directly quoted her coaches and skating officials to do this. *Time* magazine cited US team coach Don Laws' comment that "Kristi has the ideal temperament for a skater. She trusts her coach, her parents and her program (Duffy, 1992, March 2)." The *Los Angeles Times* interviewed Yamaguchi's pairs coach Jim Hulick interviewed who described her as a "superhuman" who managed a hectic schedule: "five days a week, she wakes up at 4 a.m., is on the ice an hour later, skates until 10 a.m., drives herself to school at Mission San Jose High School, where she is a senior, goes home at 2:30 pm. To study and is in bed by 7:30 p.m. (Harvey, 1989, February 11)." Yamaguchi's singles coach, Christy Ness, was quoted in *Sports Illustrated* as commenting that her pupil never "thinks about being tired...[and] trains extremely hard; she's very disciplined and she wants it very much (Swift, 1989, February 20)."

These positive aspects of Yamaguchi's cultural features were also packaged into a story of a little girl's dream. Not only *Time* magazine, but numbers of other publications commonly ran interviews with Yamaguchi, quoting her as saying such things as "I first dreamed of this as a little girl when I put on my first pair of skates (Brennan, 1992, February 22; Glauber, 1992, February 22)." In addition the realization of her dream was often presented as overlapping with Dorothy Hamill, her role model. In the 1992 Olympics, Yamaguchi's dream came true in front of an unexpected visitor, her idol Hamill. After the competition, it was reported that Yamaguchi appreciated Hamill's visit, saying that, "it meant a lot to me because she is part of the reason I'm in the sport

(Brennan, 1992, February 22; Glauber, 1992, February 22).” This drama of (Asian) American Dream involving an inspirational connection between Yamaguchi and Hamill was televised nationwide.

A second characteristic in the multicultural construction of Yamaguchi can be found in media portrayals of her and her family as recognizable types of All-Americans. Below the headline “A Native Treasure to Behold,” for instance, the *Los Angeles Times* depicted Yamaguchi in these terms:

Kristi was as American as a pumpkin. Or a Valley girl. She chewed gum, collected rock albums, ate pizza and was on the telephone a lot. On the ice she is the nearest thing to a living poem as an athlete gets. Off the ice, she goes to malls, checks fashions and worries about her hair. When she picks music for her routines, she doesn't turn to Madame Butterfly, she chooses the pop group, En Vogue, whoever they are. America is lucky to have her (Murray, 1992, December 17).

In the cheerful tone of this description, Yamaguchi's Asiatic aura is erased and replaced by western, white cultural signifiers such as pumpkin, pizza, shopping, rock music, fashion, and En Vogue. This culturally re-encoded intimacy with Yamaguchi makes America feel lucky because she is easily recognizable as one of ‘us.’

Calling Yamaguchi “your everyday, normal, All-American girl” in another article, the *Los Angeles Times* also described her family in classic terms:

Here is the portrait of an All-American family...Dad Jim is a dentist. Mom Carole is a medial secretary. Brother Brett plays varsity basketball. Sister Lori's a world champion baton twirler. And itsy-bitsy, ponytailed Kristi is a world champion figure skater, favored...to become Olympic champion as well (Downy, 1992).

This All-American family of Yamaguchi was contrasted with Ito's and Harding's. It was widely circulated that Ito's parents divorced when she was ten, and that she resided with her coach Machiko Yamada (Mizell, 1992, February 20). *Newsweek* also set Harding's family in contrast to Yamaguchi's:

Tonya Harding doesn't want to talk much about her past either. Her father was usually out of work, on the move. Her mother's been married six times and has had a number of children, one of whom, an older brother, sexually assaulted Tonya once. She's had asthma all her life (Deford, 1992, February 10).

Along with these profiled portrayals, certain declarative comments by Yamaguchi and her family were also published. For instance, the *Chicago Tribune* quoted Yamaguchi and her mother Carole making comments such as, "I'm fourth generation in the United States," and "I'm so assimilated, I've lost the language (Japanese) (Hersh, 1992, February 7)." In more detail, the *St. Petersburg Times* cited Carole's proud assertion:

We're an all-American family. There are two other children Lori (22) and Brett (17) and I honestly can't remember any of them dating anything but Caucasians. We're very proud of where we came from, but today, we are Americans first (Mizell, 1992, February 20).

In this way, Carole's declaratory comments on pride function as a personal testimony to her American-ness, while her ethnicity and race are erased through her forgetting Japanese. Consequently, she and her family can be easily taken up as exemplary representatives of the All-American family.

The third important narrative characteristic is the fact that the media paid special interest to the Yamaguchi family's past and wartime experiences. Almost universally, the media focused in on the internment experiences of her parents and grandparents during interviews (Deford, 1992, February 10; Downey, 1992, February 21; Hersh, 1991, February 15; Rosen, 1992, February 19; Swift, 1992, March 2). For instance, the *St. Petersburg Times* reported (Mizell, 1992, February 20):

Kristi's grandfather was yanked out of the University of Southern California. His family lost the flower-growing business they had built in Gardena, Calif., and was sent to an internment camp in Colorado.

Kristi's grandmother was pregnant, and it was amid the outrage and disgust of that American prison for Japanese-Americans that her mom, Carole, was born.

Jim Yamaguchi, father of Kristi, has a similar background but avoids talking about it. Now a Fremont dentist, his parents were stripped of their Gilroy, Calif., ranch in 1942 and likewise sent to a camp.

“My mom honestly can't remember much, having been a newborn in that camp,” Kristi said. “My dad never speaks much about it. They're enjoying life today and know looking back to then will bring mostly pain.”

Her mother nodded.

“I'd rather not talk of that,” said the soft-spoken, highly approachable Carole Doi Yamaguchi. “It is past, and we prefer not to hold grudges. Our view is toward the future.”

In this narrative of the internment history, the *different* past of Yamaguchi's family is managed and sanitized in a way that allows the shameful memory to be refused and denied and their anger and anguish are silenced.

Lastly, the Yamaguchi-Ito rivalry also played a crucial role in the media's construction of Yamaguchi as an American multicultural icon. Certainly, the media paid a lot of attention to the unique match between two Asian female bodies on the center stage of the ice, a first in the history of US women's figure skating. In terms of skating style, the rivalry was framed the familiar terms of an artist and an athlete, as in the *New York Times*' description of Ito as “the 22-year-old athlete and aspiring artist [and] Yamaguchi, the 20-year-old artist and aspiring athlete (Janofsky, 1992a).” However, the Yamaguchi-Ito rivalry offers more complex chains of meanings in relation to their different nationalities but shared Asian-ness. As the *Chicago Tribune* headlined, “Yamaguchi and Ito: They're Worlds Apart--except On The Ice (Hersh, 1992, February 7).” Focusing on this rivalry, the media portrayed Yamaguchi as a somehow ambivalent image between an American and an Asian as contrasted as well as equated with Ito.

I introduce here one description that is commonly cited in other scholars' works, that is, an article titled “The Jewel of the Winter Games” in the *Newsweek* (Creef, 1993; 2004; Fabos, 2001; Feder, 1994; Kestnbaum, 2003; King, 2011). I have rearranged the order of three following paragraphs (Deford, 1992, February 10):

Yamaguchi is almost five inches taller than the 4-foot-7 Ito and totally of Japanese descent, she perfectly represents the stylish Western ideal that the stout little Midori is so envious of... Yamaguchi is cut high, with a Betty Boop mouth and two beauty marks wonderfully positioned under the left eye and the lips. Ito... is simply short, her powerful legs bowed in an old-fashioned way, what the Japanese once called, unkindly of their women, daikon legs, after the archipelago's big, squat radishes.

In a sport where no woman but of white, Northern European birth or heritage has ever won the figs, the battle for the gold and all the lucre it earns sets up a duel between two young women named Yamaguchi and Ito, whose bloodlines both stretch back, pure and simple, to the same soft, cherry-blossom days on the one bold little island of Honshu... In matters of appearance, it doesn't seem that Yamaguchi and Ito grew up in different lands so much as if they came from different centuries.

The twist is, through, that if the powerful Ito is Midori, of Nagoya, the delicate Yamaguchi is Kristi, from the Bay Area, fourth-generation American. It's the chrysanthemum and the sword—on the ice together, worlds apart... Kristi Yamaguchi is still a Buddhist, and very much a hyphenated American; to wit: Middle-American, Californian-American, beauty-American.

I offer three thoughts on this account. As the first part indicates, Yamaguchi is portrayed as an attractive westernized woman in contrast to the unattractive and oriental Ito. What makes Yamaguchi so stylishly western is her body type, which is favorably over-feminized as opposed to Ito's athletic body, which is lacking in femininity. Yet Yamaguchi is like Ito in terms of race. They originate from the same place, Honshu Island, yet they represent two very different aspects of that place. Reminiscent of Ruth Benedict (1946)'s famous book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Yamaguchi symbolizes one part of the complex pattern of Japanese culture, aesthetic Japan, while Ito, symbolizes another and opposite one, militaristic Japan.¹⁶ Starting with “the stylish western ideal” and tracing back to the skater's Honshu origins, it seems that *Newsweek* eventually found the middle ground of Yamaguchi's image, that is, a hyphenated American.

¹⁶ Benedict (1946) claimed in her introduction, “Both the sword and the chrysanthemum are a part of the picture... the Japanese are both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways (p. 2).”

Disrupting the Multicultural Management of Race

I have several thoughts on and responses to these narratives of Yamaguchi as a multicultural icon. In the first, Yamaguchi's achievement overlapped with the struggles her family had in the past turns her story into a heroic pedagogy in which marginalized people feel compelled to believe in their capacity to learn and to change themselves. At this point, I want to address one particular point about the gendered and raced way in which the media framed Yamaguchi's ambition and success. As Feder (1994) argues, Yamaguchi "was allowed ambitions as long as they were couched in terms of little girl dreams," while, for the media, male athletes' can be "lionized for being a big game (p. 71)." In a similar vein, insights into Yamaguchi as a person seem to be tied only within the comfortable zone of the private sphere, culturally encoded through intimate metaphors such as of the home, friends, and family.

In this privatization of Yamaguchi's citizenship, I also read race through the construct of the model minority. As the media exclusively focused on Yamaguchi's pre-given characteristics regarding her cultural attributes, distinctiveness and heritage, the sources of Yamaguchi's achievements are individualized along with the value and inspiration of her family. So in larger terms she and her family offered the media and its audience a unique example of the multicultural spectacle, which could be enlisted in the racially mixed composition of salad bowl America. I discuss this multicultural management of Yamaguchi's race in relation to some thoughts on the double process.

I would argue that the media seemed to manage Yamaguchi's racial identity through a double process of de/re-racialization within the politics of pride/shame. That is to say, her achievement is collectively imagined as something about which the whole 'American nation' can be proud while the nation's shameful past in relation to her family and other Japanese people is retold in a somehow neutral way. More precisely, the media peeled off Yamaguchi's 'racial difference' and then re-encoded it an image of an intimately known 'Other' who is recognizably like 'us' and whose family had

demonstrated its loyalty and patriotism to ‘our’ America. This process can be seen at work in Yamaguchi’s and her mother’s refusal of their Japanese-ness on the one hand, and the media’s invoking of the wartime history of Yamaguchi’s family and its re-narration through the voices of Yamaguchi and her family on the other.

I want to discuss this process of historical re-racialization a little further. Writing history is not always a pleasurable thing but is also often painful and the internment of over 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II maybe one of the most painful moments in the writing of American history. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, authorizing the mass incarceration of a group of people two-thirds of who were American citizens and over half were children or infants. In 1988, then president Ronald Regan signed the Civil Liberties Act, which granted \$20,000 in restitution per each surviving Japanese American, and implemented this along with a presidential apology. Despite such governmental action, silence has largely dominated in the history of Japanese American interment history.

Coinciding as it did with the fifty-year anniversary of Japanese American internment, the media’s attention to the Yamaguchi’s family history at the moment of her Olympic victory seemed to signal one of the moments when that silence could be broken. Yet what is most at stake for me is the way in which this part of the past was re-vised, re-narrated, and re-historicized. According to Fortier (2005), “the politics of pride seek to eradicate shame via an erasure of certain histories (p. 562).” In the case of Yamaguchi, her repeated declarations of an assimilated person’s pride along with the refusal of Japanese-ness seemed to participate in an unacknowledged and hidden way in the sanitization of the shameful past that was inflicted on not only her family, but also other Japanese Americans as marginalized others. The shame that might be associated with the past treatment of the Yamaguchis is avoided being calling up and the parents keep silent regarding their painful memories, while the present pride of Yamaguchi is only highlighted. In this way the internment past is revised and even sanitized as a

testing site for Japanese American loyalty to America. This is the subtext I read as operating underneath the representation of Yamaguchi's success as a story of the American Dream and this is how it is significant to the idea of multicultural America.

This ambivalent aspect of the double process of racialization, I argue, was epitomized in the media narratives of the rivalry between Yamaguchi and Ito. Through Yamaguchi's sameness with Ito, her American identity is somehow faded and she is racially re-colored as an ambivalent entity of either an honorary white American or harmlessly non-threatening Japanese. In this she is seen positively as an aesthetically exotic and favorably feminine Japanese woman who is like the chrysanthemum as opposed to the militaristic jumping machine of Ito who is like the sword. In this respect, the imagery of and imagined relation between Yamaguchi and Ito perfectly reflects a white American national ontology, the paradoxical perception of Asian people as either model minority or yellow peril.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, both the notion of the model minority and the yellow peril arise from the same source, that is, foreignness. Both stereotypes can be interchangeable in that their relation is much like "the two sides of the same coin (Kang, 2010, p. 206)," "a seamless continuum (Okihiro, 1994, p. 141)," or "a mobius strip (Aoki, 1996, p. 35)." Echoing the wartime rhetoric between the US and Japan, the media's framing of the Yamaguchi-Ito battle invoked nationalistic sentiments that coincided with a newer anti-Japanese climate, the so-called Japan-bashing that was pervasive in the cultural space of the 1980s and 1990s. Just as the two stereotypes of model minority and yellow peril could be interchangeable, however, so Yamaguchi was also not free from the "Japan Problem (Karel, 1990)" that was prevalent by the early 1990s. In the following section, I deal with how such perceptions about foreignness and yellow peril boomeranged on Yamaguchi.

Neither 'Real' American nor 'Actual' Japanese

I have shown so far how the media represented Yamaguchi as a nationally and multiculturally proud subject and also discussed why such constructions were seemingly positive in terms of race. Along with this multicultural construction of Yamaguchi as an honorary white, the media also produced some provocative signs or gestures that not only re-racialized her but also de-nationalized as a foreign and Asian entity. Yamaguchi's identity and belonging were problematically unsettled and vulnerable to certain extent to the media's contradictory understanding of her race in relation to the nation. In the next part of this chapter I offer three instances of the rhetorical debris or fragments that the media could not fully manage in terms of Yamaguchi's racial identity within the boundary of the nation.

I want to first point out that although the media favored Yamaguchi's artistic skating, appearance, and body image in contrast to Ito's and Harding's, her aesthetic aura seemed no match for Kerrigan's whose style of feminine image was absolutely privileged by the most media. Kerrigan's appearance and visual appropriation of costumes were overwhelmingly praised as being like the classic Hollywood film stars, and thus her image became a symbol of American national feminine beauty (Feder, 1994; Kestnbaum, 2003). For example, *People* magazine chose Kerrigan as one of "the 50 Most Beautiful" and stated, "Kristi Yamaguchi may have won the Olympic gold last year, but bronze-medal winner Nancy Kerrigan got the gasps for her Grace Kelly gleam (Feder, 1994: 75)." For the media, Kerrigan was "the most lyrical skater (Janofsky, 1991)," an "Irish Katarina Witt (Feder, 1994: 75)," a "poster girl (Feder, 1994: 75)," and "a Kate Hepburn-style beauty (Duffy, Hillenbrand, and McGrath, 1992)." In short, Yamaguchi's position in the media seemed to be stuck in la imbo between Kerrigan and Ito; in other words, it might be said that Yamaguchi was in a state of being neither like the *real* Oriental Ito nor like the *real* Occidental Kerrigan.

Second, the image of Yamaguchi in the media was somehow inflected by the cultural climate of anti-Japanese sentiment or so-called Japan-Bashing. Some in the media suggested that Yamaguchi's lack of commercial endorsements even after her Olympic victory was closely associated with Japan-bashing. This was first broached by *Business Week* when the publication noted, "companies may be shying away from Yamaguchi because of her ethnic heritage: She was born in the U.S., as were her folks, but her surname and looks are Japanese...In the marketing Olympics, she's not [a] threat to Michael Jordan (Zinn, 1992, March 9)." *Newsweek* also likened Yamaguchi's fame to the Japanese ubiquitous presence, a cultural and economic invasion threatening the American homeland. One piece noted, "and now: what's a good ole boy to do if there's not only a Toyota in the driveway and a Sony in the bedroom and a Mitsubishi in the family room-but on the screen there, as the band plays the 'Star-Spangled Banner,' is the All-American girl of 1992, and her name is Yamaguchi? (Deford, 1992, February 10)" This tone of unsubtle racism and Japan-bashing climate in relation to Yamaguchi quickly spread out to other media including newspapers, National Public Radio and sports talk shows (Mulligan, 1992, March 17).

Third, some in the media seemed to perceive Yamaguchi as an undifferentiated 'Asian' skater, conflating her with the Japanese skater Ito. The *Sun Sentinel* was one of many media outlets that produced a cover story anticipating Yamaguchi's gold at the Olympics (Stephens, 1992, February 21). They started the article by retelling an anecdote about what had happened to Yamaguchi during the 1990 World Championships. At the airport, she encountered a radio reporter who had brought along a Japanese translator. They chatted for a while and then the reporter asked Yamaguchi how she spoke such good English. "I'm an American," Yamaguchi said, according to the *Sun Sentinel*, prompting the reporter to ask, "aren't you Midori Ito?" It seems that this experience for Yamaguchi was not uncommon. The *Los Angeles Times* also noted how, "whenever she skates at international events, often against her gifted rival Midori Ito of

Japan, the same thing happens every time. A journalist stops to chat with Kristi, listens a while and invariably says: ‘My, your English is very good.’ That one always makes her laugh (Downey, 1992, February 21).”

My point is that these all narratives indirectly reveal the dominant force of the white American national ontology. The racial frame of white America has symbolically denied, nullified, excluded Asian/Americans from the national boundary, repeatedly perceiving and representing them as foreign Asians or non-Americans. Critical race legal theorist Neil Gotanda (1992; 1996; 1999) has called this epistemological violence “Asiatic Racialization,” a process characterized by “[a] group of related yet distinct ideas—Asiatic unassimilability, the conflation of Asian/Americans with Asian citizens, and the perception of Asians as a threat to the American nation (Chuh & Shimakawa, 2001, p. 1).” Teaming this process with a focus on its de-nationalizing aspect, Bill Ong Hing (2001) also characterizes it as “de-Americanization” that includes “a process of ostracism” and “a twisted brand of xenophobia (p. 4).” Whatever it may be called, the main source of such exclusion comes from race, read most easily from the skin color of yellow.

In this respect, I argue that Yamaguchi’s identity and belonging are constructed as neither an authentic American nor an actual Asian via the media’s ambivalent framing of her race in the multicultural context. Her Olympics victory was managed as contingent on her being accepted as a model minority; however she was also excluded because she could be recognized as a foreign Asian. In this way, she was permanently stuck on this bifurcated issue of identity and belonging; either hyper-assimilated into “honorary whites” who are a culturally familiar “Other” or ostracized as “forever foreigners” who are racially “Other.” With this point, I end this chapter by laying out my concluding thought.

A Remarkably Asian/American Story

In the context of the US, the multicultural narration of the nation is not historically contingent on the specific era in which multicultural turn happened. It has a

long tradition that has been played out as a crucial part of the history of America as the land of the free and the home of the brave for all immigrants from throughout the world. Like white European immigrants, as Mia Tuan (1998) expresses it, “Asian America has its roots in voluntary [migration](p. 122).” In reality, however, racial and ethnic minorities’ experiences are still replete with cultural inequalities coined as representational problems saturated with racial discrimination, social marginalization, and political exclusion (Kymlicka, 1998; Hall, 2000; Fortier, 2005; Ang, 1996; 2013; Ang & Stratton, 1998).

I read Yamaguchi’s construction as ‘a face of America’ as a merely cosmetic image of an honorary white American. It seems to me that such positive portrayals of her covertly obscured and concealed the continued existence of cultural violence in the form of stereotypical representations and mis-representations such as the model minority and the forever foreigner, and through the racial trope of the Oriental other, and so on. What these discourses, stereotypes, and myths share in common is the idea of how to make sense of the difference between ‘we and us’ and ‘other and them.’ For the media, Yamaguchi might have been defined as ‘we’ or one of ‘us,’ as opposed to Ito who was defined as ‘other’ or one of ‘them.’ Yet, I believe, such discourses of the non-West or the Rest, which were projected on to Ito, inevitably had a certain boomerang effect, and through this the American politics of difference were re-inscribed in representations of Yamaguchi.

For instance, on March 26, 1996, Bill Handel, a radio morning-talk-show host for KFI-AM, Los Angeles, made the following derogatory remarks about Yamaguchi and Kwan during his nation-wide broadcast. Arguing that amnesty should be given to Tonya Harding who had been deposed, Handel stated:¹⁷

¹⁷ As his comment provoked the local Asian Pacific American community, he defended that he didn’t mean to make fun of Asians and it was his sense of humor like sarcasm (Lin, 1996, April 5).

You know, I'm tired of the Kristi Yamaguchis and the Michelle Kwans! I don't want these Oriental people winning all the time. They're not American, and Tonya's an American! When I look at a box of Wheaties [Yamaguchi's ad sponsor], I don't want to see eyes that are slanted and Oriental and almond shaped. I want to see American eyes looking at me. We have to limit the ethnicity of figure skating...This is not a Chinese sport! This is not a Japanese sport! This is American! That's what it is!

Without the presence of Ito and Harding, Yamaguchi along with Michelle Kwan was seen as no more than yellow peril.

At this point, I am thinking of one interesting question: what if Yamaguchi had competed against Kerrigan rather than Ito? To imagine 'If~' in history might not be the best way of being critical. However, one incident that happened to Kwan might indirectly give an answer to this hypothetical question. At the 1998 Olympics, Kwan won silver behind her American national teammate Tara Lipinski. Thus, two American female skaters, one a daughter of Polish immigrants (Lipinski), the other a daughter of Chinese immigrants (Kwan) stood on the podium. Soon after the ceremony, *MSNBC* reported the result under the headline "American beats out Kwan," somehow insinuating that Kwan was not an American.¹⁸ Again, at the 2002 Olympics, an almost identical headline appeared in the *Seattle Times*, and it was written: "[Sara] Hughes good as gold: American outshines Kwan (Yang, 2006, p. 299)." Here is what I imagine as an answer, to the hypothetical question I posed above: a headline reading 'American Kerrigan beats and outshines Yamaguchi.'

¹⁸ They apologized as the following: "MSNBC apologizes for an error that may have been interpreted to state that U.S. figure skater Michelle Kwan was not American. The error appeared briefly in a scrolling marquee during coverage of the Winter Olympics and was corrected quickly. However, the marquee was picked up by MSNBC's push technology, News Alert. So to some, it might have appeared the error was on the site for a longer period or was not corrected. MSNBC apologizes for the bulletins wording." See Edmundo Macedo (Executive Sports Editor), "MSNBC apologizes for error in Michelle Kwan news bulletin," Feb. 28, 1998. See at <http://www.msnbc.com/news/147046.asp>

CHAPTER V

**READING MICHELLE KWAN: CULTURAL MEANINGS OF
KWAN’S YOUTHFULNESS AND HER HYPER-SEXUAL/EXOTIC
TRANSFORMATION**

On November 9, 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced that she was appointing American figure skater Michelle Kwan as America's first ‘Public Diplomacy Envoy’¹⁹. Rice’s statement clearly demonstrates why Kwan was chosen for this role, as well as what she hoped Kwan would do for America:

Michelle embodies the American dream. The daughter of Chinese immigrants, she rose to the heights of artistic and athletic excellence through her discipline, her drive and her determination. Even before Michelle won her first World Championship at age 15, she had already captivated the imaginations of people everywhere with her personal story- a story that is deeply an American story. One of Michelle's greatest objectives will be to engage and spark dialogue with young people all around the world by helping to tell America's story through her own story (Fawcett, 2006, September 11).

Kwan’s personal story is “deeply an American story.” Sweeping all major events in the 1996 season, including the US nationals and World Championships (W.C.), fifteen-year-old Kwan became the youngest American female champion since Peggy Fleming in 1964 and the third youngest female world champion behind Sonja Henie in 1927 at age fourteen, and Oksana Bauil in 1993 at age fifteen. She then went on to earn forty-three championships, including nine US, five world, and two Olympic medals, silver in 1998 and bronze in 2002. The moment when Rice assigned Kwan the honorable mission of representing ‘America’ to “young people all around the world,” was the moment when

¹⁹ Responding to Anti-Americanism since the Sep. 11 attacks, American government began to place an emphasis on public diplomacy, which has rarely been effective in the international relation policy, in order to turn around widespread negative perception about Americans. As an American Public Diplomacy Envoy, Kwan has done this role in having visited China and Russia in 2007, Argentina in 2008, Ukraine in 2009, South Korea in 2010, and Singapore in 2011. Along with Kwan, Cal Ripken, Jr., and Ken Griffey, Jr. were also appointed as American Public Diplomacy Envoy (Neikirk, 2004, July 23; Fawcett, 2006, September 11; Hersh, 2011, June 30).

the daughter of Chinese immigrants transformed from a Chinese American into an ideal American citizen.

This chapter tells another story of Kwan, a story that is a deeply Asian/American story, for Kwan's early road to success was by no means smooth sailing. Despite Rice's statement, initially Kwan did not captivate the American people and media. Rather her youthfulness was racially vulnerable to contesting discourses about the age and maturity regarding young female skaters during what can be understood as the girls' era of US women's figure skating.

When Kwan made her senior debut at the age of twelve, she early earned the media spotlight as a kind of poster-child for girl skaters. It was two years later in the 1995 season that the issue of her maturity was crystallized when Kwan was fourteen. The media drew considerable attention to the skater's youthful appearance giving it as a reason for her disappointing second place at the US nationals and fourth place at the World Championships. In response to this, they argued that Kwan needed to take on a more mature look. Ten months later during the 1996 season and under the guidance of her coach Frank Carroll, she appeared on the ice with a much more sophisticated and mature image, performing the role of Salome, the biblical temptress, with a highly ornamented costume, theatrical make-up, and her hair up in an elegant bun. Again, the media focused intensively on her external change, describing it as a 'striking' or 'surprising' transformation and offering further and more mixed responses to it. Kwan's victories, along with the development of the presentational and performative aspects of her skating were appreciated for sure, but some in the media also expressed cynical comments that criticized Kwan's transformation as a rush to adulthood.

I frame the media's narratives of Kwan, especially those during her earlier career, as being closely related to two stereotypes of Asian/Americans. First, the media subjected the skater to an infantilizing gaze that reflected a classically racialized stereotype of Asian/Americans which is that they look much younger than their actual

chronological and physical age, even more so than other people of color who have also been subject to such infantilization. Second, the transformation that Kwan's coach Frank Carroll devised for her erased her singular individuality and submerged her subject formation as an Asian/American woman in the stereotypical straight jacket of a hypersexual, exotic creature, a stereotype that is pervasive in popular culture. By interrogating these two images and constructions from a post colonial and neo colonial perspective, I eventually argue that the symbolic world of women's figure skating can be understood as an anthropological site of white aesthetic imperialism in which neocolonial visions of the child and sexual fantasy are projected on Kwan, a girl skater of the primitive/colonized and yellow subject.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first I outline how the girls' era emerged and what its significance was for US women's figure skating. Then, I describe how the media represented Kwan's age and her youthfulness. With my focus on race, I lay out an interpretation in terms of why Kwan was judged as looking especially youthful in relation to the pervasiveness of the stereotype that Asian and Asian/Americans characteristically seem to be younger than their actual ages. Pinpointing the origins of this contrasting white-yellow typology in imperialism and colonialism, I then discuss why the stereotype is problematic and what larger meanings are inscribed in the media's infantilizing perception of Kwan. Secondly, I summarize the media's reception of Kwan's transformation with three themes: appraisals of her newly mature look, the role that coach Carroll played in deciding that this was the right thing to do, and the mixed responses it elicited. Then, I lay out my interpretation emphasizing that her transformation can be usefully read as a form of white subjects' sexual consumption or exploitation of deep-rooted colonial fantasies. As a concluding point of my reading, I set out my thoughts on why she was constrained to transform herself in this way.

The Era of 'Girl' Skaters

In the mid-1990s women's figure skating was entering a shifting period in which a further framing of 'girls and ladies' emerged, which was apparently a response to the successful entry of teenagers to senior skating competitions (Kestnbaum, 2003). This was an after-effect of the International Skating Union's decision to eliminate the compulsory figures, a discipline that was conventionally regarded as being best suited to more adult and technically experienced artistic skaters. Although three countries, the US, Canada, and Great Britain, had dissented, an initial resolution was passed in 1988 that reduced the number of compulsory figures performed from three to two over the next two years. The figures were then eventually eliminated completely beginning with the 1991 season. The rule change meant that more emphasis was placed upon the athletic aspects of skating such as high difficulty skills and jumps, the beneficiaries being young female skaters, whose thin bodies were thought to be better suited to quick rotations and jumping than the bigger, more rounded bodies of their more mature and older counterparts. The long hours necessary for being schooled in compulsory figures no longer held back young skaters from mastering their blades on ice and as a result, a group of young talented athletes aiming for ever more demanding and dynamic jumps at an ever earlier age began to move up to the senior level (Harvey, 1992, February 5).

The development registered clearly in the media. For instance, the *Star Tribune* framed the 1995 US nationals with headlines such as, "Children pull rank in women's world; Youth is solid in U.S. skating loop." This article begins: (Weiner, 1995, February 10):

Today, at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships, a 14-year-old [Michelle Kwan] will begin her quest to become the youngest "woman" champion ever. A 17-year-old [Nicole Bobek] will attempt to show she can still compete. A 12-year-old starlet [Tara Lipinski] will watch closely with visions of taking them both on next year.

“In figure skating today, you have to have it all at a young age,” coach Frank Carroll was quoted as saying. “If you start learning things at 16 or 17, it’s too late...The biggest death knell of a girl skater is to gain weight.”

In this way and at this time, American women’s figure skating entered a new era of girl skaters, just at the moment that Kristi Yamaguchi turned professional at the age of twenty-three and two other ‘older’ stars, the twenty-five-year-old Nancy Kerrigan and the twenty-four-year-old Tonya Harding left the sport.

As coach Carroll describes in the above quotations, the surge of girl skaters involved a new discourse revolving around maturity. The weight gain and the development of breasts and fuller thighs and hips that came with physiological maturation were understood as compromising most skaters’ ability to perform athletic skills. Kwan was not exempted from this discourse. From the moment of her debut and throughout her earlier career, the media continually speculated that the growth of her body would be a crucial factor that would determine her future success. For instance, *Newsday* expressed concern that “[Kwan’s] apparently bright future could be clouded by something as benign as normal maturation (Jeansonne, 1995, February 10).” And her father was often reported as saying, “we’re trying to protect her youth (Longman, 1995, February 10).” Like other girl skaters, Kwan did have to deal with the development of her body as she matured. However, the maturity dilemma that Kwan faced was more complicated because in addition it seemed that her youthful appearance belied her actual age.

An Early Start

In January 1993, the year after Yamaguchi won the Olympics gold medal, the twelve-year-old Kwan took and passed the test that qualified her for senior competition at the upcoming US nationals. In that event she placed sixth and became the youngest senior nationals competitor after Priscilla Hill in 1973. As the media commonly labeled girl skaters who excelled in their jumping skills as ‘athletic’ skaters (Kestnbaum, 2003),

it was not surprising that they introduced Kwan as a type of prodigy who was extraordinarily talented in this regard, describing her “a jumping marvel (Bondy, 1993, January 21)” and likening her to Tonya Harding as “focused, athletic and...determined (Alexander, 1994, July 3).”

However, it was her racial/ethnic identity and age/youthfulness that seemed most central in drawing the media’s attention to Kwan as a girl skater. First, the media highlighted her cultural background as the daughter of Chinese immigrants and they discussed her prodigious talent in relation to other Asian/American skaters, Tiffany Chin and Kristi Yamaguchi. Portraying Kwan as “the latest in a line of successful Asian-American skaters,” for instance, the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* wondered:

Why do Asian-Americans perform so well? Kwan wrinkled her nose and said, “I don't know.” She and Yamaguchi looked at each other and laughed. Said Yamaguchi, “Maybe it’s just coincidence.” Kwan's coach, Frank Carroll, suggests that the Asian-Americans benefit from small hips and being raised “in backgrounds of achievement.” Kwan's father, Daniel, emigrated from Canton, China, and is a manager at Pacific Bell. Her mother, Estella, came from Hong Kong and runs the family-owned Chinese restaurant. Michelle speaks Chinese at home (Rosen, 1993, July 26).”

The media anticipated a bright future for Kwan based on two points that had also been made in relation to Yamaguchi: her body type was well suited to jumping and her cultural background, growing up as the daughter of model minority Chinese immigrants, seemed to guarantee that she would succeed in her skating ambitions.

The media seemed to be very interested in these connections between Yamaughic and Kwan, frequently asking about and wondering why Asian/American skaters were so successful in the sport, what made them such good skaters, and where did their success come from? As these themes and issues are discussed in more detail in the next chapter, I want to focus here on Kwan’s age and her youthfulness, which were central and distinctively different features of media narratives of Kwan compared to those in the case of Yamaguchi, who had made her senior debut at the age of seventeen.

An important topic for discussion in the media was the fact that coach Carroll had opposed Kwan's early entry into senior competition. She and her father had decided she should take the qualifying test without first discussing this with her coach. For instance in a *New York Times* interview featuring all three, Carroll is quoted as saying, "I wasn't in favor of it...She would have been junior champion, and I thought that would be the best thing to do. But she wanted it this way." In the same interview, Kwan's father Daniel offered another perspective, commenting, "this was not my decision at all...She didn't want to tell me she was running from a pressure situation...[that] Frank was against it. But she apologized to Frank." Lastly, Kwan was quoted saying, "it's kind of fun skating with older people [and] it's fun looking at them, and smiling at them...They've been out there a couple of hundred years. I'm just starting (Bondy, 1993, January 21)."

The media expressed a good deal of interest in the fact that Kwan, a twelve-year old Asian/American girl had performed a curiously adult long program with six triple jumps to music from *Miss Saigon*. And most media highlighted her age and precocity, discussing her debut in terms that emphasized that she would almost certainly have won the junior championship but chose instead a more challenging competition against the senior skaters such as 23-year-old Kerrigan and 22-year-old Harding. For instance, an item in the *New York Times* ran:

Listed at 4 feet 11 inches and 77 pounds, Michelle Kwan is something of a curiosity here to competitors, as well as to fans. When Kramer escorted Kwan past older rivals near the dressing room of the America West Arena, Kwan drew stares. "How old is she?" Kerrigan asked Kramer. "Twelve," Kramer said. "She's 12?" Kerrigan said (Bondy, 1993, January 21).

In this way, Kwan's early start at the senior level was at issue in the media. And as Carroll's comments indicated it seemed that there was a mismatch between her age and her appearance, "she's as far ahead as anybody could be... she's a jumping marvel at this point. [However] she just needs a senior look, more mature (Bondy, 1993, January 21)."

She Just Needs a Senior Look

As a skating prodigy Kwan quickly lived up to expectations in the next season, 1994. She won the Junior World Championships and also placed the second behind Harding at the senior US nationals. With this, she became the youngest female national medalist at the age of fourteen and also earned a spot on the US team for the 1994 Olympic Games in Lillehammer, Norway. However, the Olympic spot was instead given to the 1993 national champion Nancy Kerrigan, who had withdrawn from the 1994 competition after an assault in which she was clubbed above the knee by an unknown attacker, who was later discovered to be connected to Harding's ex-husband (Alexander, 1994, July 3; Harvey, 1994, February 3). The thirteen-year-old Kwan was reported as "graciously stepp[ing] aside to make room for Kerrigan," the twenty-four-year-old who had been the favorite to win the nationals competition before the attack on her (Fernandez, 1995, February 10). Although Kwan eventually went to the Olympics as an alternate for Harding, she did not compete.

Starting the 1995 season, Kwan, a fourteen-year-old girl skater who was still only 5 feet 1 inches tall and weighed 98 pounds, was considered to be the top American skater in the absence of both Harding and Kerrigan. The *Providence Journal* headlined "Michelle Kwan's time has arrived at 14 years old (Thornton, 1995, February 5)." *USA Today* also predicted that Kwan would win the national title and become the youngest American female champion in the seventy-eight years history of the event, a distinction that Peggy Fleming who won the 1964 nationals at the age of fifteen had long held (Becker, 1995, February 9). However, Kwan placed second to Nichole Bobbek, a seventeen-year-old skater who was judged to have skated a very 'safe' program.

However, the media pointed mostly to Kwan's innocence and young age as a principal factor in the result. For instance, *Sports Illustrated* commented:

Kwan did nothing to dissuade anyone from the belief that she's a very good skater on a beeline toward greatness. But at times last week she looked every bit the ninth grader who went trick-or-treating with her older

sister last Halloween and who still walks around with a teddy-bear knapsack (Howard, 1995, February 20).

The *New York Times* highlighted her youthfulness even more, using the very same imagery:

After the competition...Michelle Kwan put away her skating costume and pulled out a Halloween costume. Back at home in Southern California, she went trick-or-treating as Fred Flintstone, and her sister, Karen, went as Pebbles...One night she is trick-or-treating in disguise, the next she is the prime-time attraction in her sport. (Longman, 1995, February 10)

As a *Boston Globe* headline stated, it seemed that “Kwan [hadn’t] quite come of age,” and so, would “have to wait for her official coronation as America’s Ice Princess (Shaughnessy, 1995, February 12).”

One month later, the general representation of Kwan as an athletic skating prodigy became more complicated during the 1995 World Championships where she earned the fourth place. This time the media was disappointed with the judges, not Kwan’s performance. The crowd had given her the only standing ovation and the media praised her choice of program, which with seven triple jumps, was much more difficult than that of the other competitors. The media could not figure why Kwan only placed fourth, and sought an explanation in three factors: her youthful looks that seemed to belie her age, the need for her to display a more mature artistry, and her junior status in terms of her early career-stage.²⁰

With the headline “Young Kwan Learns Older Is Better in World Championships,” for example, the *Los Angeles Times* noted, “Kwan is 14, which is about the only thing she did wrong.” The piece included coach Carroll’s comments:

If she skated like that and was 16 years old and had been to three Worlds or four Worlds, maybe the results would have been different... (The judges) are looking at her and they’re saying, ‘She’s 14. Now wait a minute. Is she ready to be the best free skater in the world?’ I think that had a lot to do with it--her age...So I don’t think there will be any

²⁰ I am indebted this idea to one of my committee members, Dr. Susan Birrell. It is of course one of many her advices and feedbacks.

controversy about them having her first. I think they certainly have adequate reasons why (Penner, 1995, March 12).

Pointing to Kwan's "little-girl dress" and mere "touch of lipstick and [the] pony tail," the *New York Times* also believed that the judges "swung over to side with the grizzled veterans (Brennan, 1996, March 24)," "telling [Kwan] with their restrained marks that they were waiting for a talented girl to become a young woman (Longman, 1997, February 3)." In short, as the *Washington Post* argued, "Kwan was deprived of a medal because she looked too young (Brennan, 1996, March 23)." In this sense, a certain consensus seemed to be established that it was not Kwan's turn; that her time had not yet come.

How Youthfulness Matters on Ice

The increasing success of young skaters has also caused some to voice concerns relating to the issue of ideals of femininity in women's figure skating. To a certain extent, smaller and thin skaters were understood as being favored in terms of athletic and technical advantage. However, according to Kestnbaum (2003), the skating community did not admire the small and thin body type as an ideal of beauty, but still preferred "to see older, more womanly-looking skaters as the sport's top exemplars (p. 169)." And she further notes coach Carlo Fassi's comment: "If we cancel [compulsory] figures, it will be like gymnastics, with young girls who can do all the jumps at age thirteen and quit at age fifteen. I don't like gymnastics any more. It's little muppets just tumbling around. Where is the beauty of that? (p. 169)" In short, if young skaters followed the path young gymnasts had taken, they would eventually turn figure their sport into acrobatics on ice.

How is this analogy between skating and gymnastics significant? Why was it feared that skating was turning into a kind of gymnastics? What were the sources of this anxiety? In Olympic gymnastics, by the late 1960s, mature women performed gentle ballet-type programs characterized by expressive and graceful skills and movements. This trend dramatically changed in the 1970s, when the so-called "the Comaneci-type" of

young and immature girl gymnasts began to execute acrobatic and risk-driven routines of technical combinations (Barker-Ruchti, 2009). Western audiences were fascinated by the small, slim, and innocent gymnastic girls from the Soviet bloc who were often described as “child stars,” “wonder children” or “gymnastics queens.” Based on such observations, it has been argued that “a new corporeal and aesthetic standard” or “new ideal of femininity” emerged in gymnastics in the 1970s (Weber & Barker-Ruchti, 2009; 2012, p. 22, 34).

However, there was also a clear concern about the girl gymnasts in the context of Cold War anxieties linked with patriarchal and paternalist views of young females (Barker-Ruchti, 2009; Kerr, 2006; Varney, 2002; 2004; Weber & Barker-Ruchti, 2012). The trend to more acrobatic gymnastics had been fostered by the political ambitions of the Soviet government and other countries in the Eastern Bloc countries. The totalitarian regimes of such communist authorities launched highly competitive sporting programs, and it was widely rumored that many young immature girls were collected, moulded, and manipulated through inhuman training systems to learn risky and extraordinary routines. Thus, the dominance of girl gymnasts provoked a gendered and sexualized anxiety regarding girl gymnasts’ ‘masculine’ bodies. As Julia Weber and Natalie Barker-Ruchti (2012) argue, a source of the concern revolved around “a specific gender disposition that situated the gymnasts in paradoxical relations between child-woman and man. The gymnasts’ athletic performance was described as a link between ‘feminine’ grace, childish expression, and ‘masculine’ body control and physical strength (p. 36).” In short, a certain paternal or patriarchal sense of heterosexual concern was projected on young gymnasts within the dominant ideologies of the nuclear family as a gender-appropriate sphere.

Why Kwan Looked Young

My point is that the media’s anxiety or concern about Kwan’s youthfulness is rather different than Kestnbaum’s (2003) argument about patriarchal or paternal fears

about gender and gymnastics. I also do not want to make too much of the idea this was solely a matter of individual concern for her. Rather, I want to emphasize that an important part of what made Kwan look 'too young' to the media, or the source of the media's infantilizing gaze on her, can clearly be related to her race and yellow skin color. In other words, I want to connect the case of Kwan with a certain set of racial beliefs or assumptions surrounding Asians and Asian/Americans and concerning the way they look; that is, that they look much younger than their actual age.

Although this idea has not been much discussed at the level of discourse or concept in the sport studies literature, I would say that it is a stereotype that has been long and frequently exercised as a violence of representation against many people of Asian descent. I strongly believe it is implicitly pervasive, not only because I have often felt that I have been infantilized by being asked my age by various people in various situations, but also because this experience of 'looking young' is a very common topic for and burden to many other people in Asian or Asian/American communities, including among my friends and families. Before explaining where it comes from and why it is problematic, I want to consider how it actually figures in the daily lives of Asians and Asian/Americans and in popular culture by laying out some formal and informal sources that deal with the stereotype.

A handful of few scholars have established, through in-depth interviews, that there is such a stereotype and that it commonly affects Asian/Americans in the work place and more broadly in their everyday lives. Here are some interviewees' comments and responses to questions about this:

Asians tend to look younger than their true age and some people tend to treat them accordingly...I was actually involved in a situation once before when I visited a client for the first time and they jokingly commented, 'Jesus I didn't know they were sending someone who's 16 over here. (Ki & Khang, 2008, p. 105)

We look younger than we are. In some situations, it might be a compliment. In an office setting, they tend to look at you like a child and discount what you say. And it's not just our look, but our height. So I

think Asian women have a lot to compensate. We need to dress more professionally, and do a lot of things to counter those perceptions. (Võ, 2004, p. 102)

Asian/American essayists and contributors to on-line spaces, blogs, and magazines attest to the prevalence of the stereotype, too. For instance, essayist Crystal Tai (2009) recalls her experience in the *Secrets of Asian Women*:

When I entered graduate school...I was already over 30. But I was often mistaken for an undergraduate student on campus, even for a freshman a couple of times...I've heard numerous Caucasians and African-Americans, men and women, marvel at the youthful looks of East Asians. One lady said she should always add 10 when guessing an East Asian woman's age for the number to be correct. (p. 8, 27)

Just surfing through on-line spaces one can easily notice that there are a number of similar episodes told in Asian/Americans' social networks and groups, blogs, and electronic media magazines.²¹

The stereotype also permeates popular and consumer culture. For example, it is a topic for comedians. In KT Tatar's stand-up routine show titled *Asians Look Young*, the performer tells the story of one of his experiences when, while he was boarding an airplane, a member of the cabin crew thought that he was a teenager, whereas he was actually twenty-six.²² One Asian/American character in the famous TV show, *Star Trek (Voyager)*, is also a good example. Throughout the seven seasons of the show, the young ensign Harry Kim never gets promoted to lieutenant. He is an eternally youthful ensign, trapped in a filial relationship with the matriarchal white captain, Kathryn Janeway. Advertisements for cosmetics and skin products furnish further good examples. The

²¹ I introduce one example in a blog: "I often hear people tell me that Asians always look so young...Do you realize how annoying it can be to always be thought of as a pre-teen? Just a couple of days ago I was running at a local high school track. After completing my workout, I was walking to my car and a nice man with his daughter approached me and said 'do you go to school here?' I was thinking in my mind, 'do I look like am still in high school?', but I kindly told him I did not and that I had graduated from high school over a decade ago." I referred to this website, <http://adventuresofanabc.wordpress.com/2009/09/09/being-asian-and-looking-young-can-be-a-misfortune/>

²² <http://www.goldsea.com/Video//video/1275/KT-Tatara--Asians-Look-Young>

copy often employs the stereotype and uses images of youthful-looking female models to speak to consumers' desires for looking young.²³

All else aside, what the above referenced works lead me to think about is at least two things. One is that the media's emphasizing of Kwan's youthfulness is an indirect expression that she looked much younger than her actual age and even younger than other girl skaters. The other is that Kwan might have experienced the feeling that she was being subject to an infantilizing gaze and that this might have been part of the reason for the dramatic way in which she transformed herself in the next season.

Any such infantilizing perception or gaze directed to Kwan cannot be either objective or apolitical. Rather I read it as a violence through stereotyping that perpetuates the political domination that was historically constructed during the colonized past of Asian/America and is structured by the white American imperial frame. As mentioned in Chapter 2, I understand this stereotype of youthfulness as a colonial remnant of the trope of the child, which was one of the most significant elements in the rhetoric of western empires. Working with this point in what follows I discuss the cultural meanings of Kwan's youthfulness, focusing on what the stereotype means and how it functions in white-yellow relationship. I start by detailing further the problematic nature of the trope.

Cultural Meaning of Kwan's Youthfulness

Historically the trope of the child functioned to justify colonial domination through its close association with the concept of the primitive (Ashcroft, 2001; Stella,

²³ For example, an on-line based beauty magazine MeaningfulWomen.com headlined "Discover How Asian Women Look Younger Longer" and displays one advertisement that says: "There is a common theory many believe that Asian women tend to look younger for a longer period of time than women from other races... The fact remains that Asian women possess a look that radiates youth and enables many Asian women to appear to be far younger than their actual age. What is the difference between women of the western part of the world compared to ladies that live in Asia? A big difference is the fact that women that live in the United States and other areas in the West seem to focus much of their energy on using lotions and potions." (<http://www.meaningfulwomen.com/discover-how-asian-women-look-younger-longer>).

2007; Wallace, 1994). According to Bill Ashcroft (2001), through a “cross-fertilization” between the two ideas, colonial authorities were able to represent the colonized as both children and savages, and thus reaffirmed a hierarchal gap between the civilized and the barbarous (p. 37). Both the child and the ‘primitive’ signify the ‘first’ or ‘earliest’ in a process of progression and ‘pre-literate’ or ‘pre-history’ in relation to the idea of literacy and culture. However, the link between the two addresses a certain ambivalence or contradictoriness in the nature of colonialist rule because the child belongs to the colonizer’s self, while the ‘primitive’ does not but is other to the colonizer.

The crucial point here is that the paternalistic trope of the child exerts an astonishing capacity to mask the contradictoriness inherent in imperialist and colonialist relations. According to Bill Ashcroft (2001) it “offered a unique tool for managing the profound ambivalence of imperialism, because it absorbed and suppressed the contradictions of imperial discourse itself.” He continues:

The child, at once both other and same, holds in balance the contradictory tendencies of imperial rhetoric: authority is held in balance with nurture; domination with enlightenment; debasement with idealization; negation with affirmation; exploitation with education; filiation with affiliation. This ability to absorb contradiction gives the binary parent/child an inordinately hegemonic potency (p. 36-7).

In this way, the trope of the child is useful because it disguises or absorbs the actual hard reality that perniciously portraying the colonized solely in negative styles of debasement, negation, abjection, defilement, and so on would reveal.

This cross-fertilization between the child and the primitive is still in effect today in a different style of rhetoric, that is, in developmental theory or discourse. According to Shohat & Stam (1994), the infantilizing perception of the ‘primitive’ signifies “an earlier state of individual human or broad cultural development (p. 139).” Thus, if the trope of the child allowed the colonial empire to disguise itself as the benevolent parent or savior of humanity, now we can see that the later idea of ‘development’ serves the same purpose of masking, absorbing, or suppressing

the contradictory nature of neo colonial domination and exploitation of the post/colonized people who live in so-called underdeveloped or developing countries. It is within this post colonial and neo colonial context that I situate the case of Kwan, reading in the media's treatment and infantilizing of her certain colonial remnants that work in collusion with the rhetoric of development.

My argument is that the media, as a neo colonial authority of contemporary western sporting imperialism projected a paternal frame of racial stereotyping on Kwan, who was thus turned into the 'primitive' subject of a non-white female skater. I imagine that for the media Kwan would have looked much younger in part due to the primitiveness that the imperialist frame attaches to her yellow skin color. In these terms, Kwan's youthful look is decoded within a kind of Lamarckian system of racial understanding, which leads to the conclusion that her aesthetic status has not reached at certain desirable stage of the environmental and historical process. In other words, before her transformation, Kwan's aesthetics were at the level of the child and needed to be developed; aesthetically she was a blank page to be inscribed with the higher-level aesthetics of the advanced and civilized cultures. Her youthfulness was not just about her age; it was also a sign of her primitiveness.

Using Ashcroft (2001)'s ideas, it could also be argued that Kwan's primitiveness circulated as both 'same' and 'other' in the anthropological site of a white aesthetic empire. For the media and coach Carroll, Kwan's youthfulness was a sign that 'our' young skater had potential, but it also signified her 'otherness' and indicated that she needed to be assimilated in a particular way. At this point, the media's and Carroll's shared perception of Kwan as a child merged into a moral conflict over colonial domination and the naturalization of the colonizer's contradictory impulses for education and nurture versus exploitation and oppression.

The exploitative nature underlying the training and nurturing of Kwan, I think, is embedded in the incident of her transformation into a hypersexual and exotic being. This can be understood as a form of sexualized exploitation in the sense that the transformation signified a decisive outcome that Carroll managed and by which he engineered her successful assimilation, civilization, or development to a higher level of aesthetics. Underneath the media's infantilizing perceptions and Carroll's management and coaching, I also read a certain sinister connotation of the neo-colonial gesture that aesthetically colonizes, subordinates, or dominates Kwan's subjectivity. Below, I give my interpretation of Kwan's transformation and an analysis of how the media narrated and responded to it.

Comeback and Mixed Responses

It was not far into the season that followed her disappointing performance that Kwan came into her own. Starting with the 1996 Skate America, when she was fifteen, she swept six major titles including the US nationals and the World Championships. In most competitions, Kwan's program was much more technically demanding than others' and often included seven triple jumps. But what was most striking were her scores for artistic impression (polished footwork, refined extension of the arms, elegant hand movements, and so on). Kwan earned seven marks of 5.9 for artistry at the US nationals, and two perfect 6s and seven 5.9s for artistry at the World Championships. Looking very much an all-round skater excelling in both her athleticism and artistry, Kwan made a major mark in the history of US women's figure skating when she became the youngest female champion since Peggy Fleming (1964) and the third youngest female world champion behind Sonja Henie and Oksana Baiul. But it was not Kwan's versatility that the media highlighted; rather, the spotlight was on the changes Kwan had made to her external self and persona.

At the 1996 Skate America, the first event in the season, Kwan appeared with heavily theatrical make-up including rhinestones pasted at the corners of her eyes and her

ponytail replaced with an elegant bun. Dressed in a richly ornamented costume, she performed the role of Salome, the biblical temptress in Richard Strauss's opera, to the music 'The Dance of the Seven Veils.' The newly made-over Kwan projected sophistication and maturity but also a highly sexualized theatricality. The media's response to Kwan's transformation can be characterized in three ways.

First, the media reported Kwan's victory as a moment that she was reborn as an artistic skater with her transformed and newly mature look. Many headlines reflect this point, for example: "Kwan Breaks Through (Longman, 1995, October 30)," "Maturity Invites Success (Longman, 1996, March 23)," and "From Acrobat to Artist: Kwan Grows into a Star (Litsky, 1996, November 2)." More significantly, according to *Boston Globe* writer John Powers, the transformation was "her defining moment...when she came of age (Washington Speakers Bureau, 2012, May 30)." Pointing to the skater's mature image and artistry at the 1996 US nationals, the *New York Times* appreciated Kwan's attempt "to evoke the persona of a young woman instead of a promising innocent... [her skating] has also become demonstrably more mature...with an impeccable, elegant performance (Longman, 1996, January 20)." In a similar vein, they also appreciated Kwan's maturity at the 1996 world championships: "Kwan has grown into the part, not only with cosmetic changes, but with her ripened skating style (Longman, 1996, March 24)." As Kestnbaum (2003) also claims in her book *Culture on Ice*, "Kwan [certainly had] revealed her solution (p. 49)."

Second, the media framed Kwan's transformation as a story of coach Carroll's decisive intervention, employing the following plot line: the misfortune of the fourth-place at the 1995 World Championships; coach Carroll's 'bold' decision; his persuasion of Kwan and her parents; their consent; Kwan's adaptation to her new mature look. For instance, the *New York Times* described the decision thus:

Kwan's coronation has come in a season in which she has changed her look to appear more adult...A fourth-place finish at the 1995 world championships, her coach Frank Carroll believes, was a signal from judges

that Kwan appeared too much like a girl, not enough like a young woman (Longman, 1996, January 21).

Carroll...took the bold, risky move of portraying the 15-year-old as the biblical temptress Salome. At first, it appeared to be a wrongheaded decision; with heavy makeup, Kwan seemed to be yet another teen-ager rushed unnecessarily toward adulthood. But she matured into the role, and by the end of last season, Kwan's *Salome* had ascended into the artistic ranks of Katarina Witt's *Carmen* and Oksana Baiul's *Black Swan* (Longman, 1997, February 3).

Carroll, when interviewed about his decision and asked why he made it, why it was an appropriate thing to do, and how he persuaded Kwan to go along with it answered:

If I had my choice, that's what I'd like Michelle to be [the greatest American skater like Janet Lynn]. I don't want her to be Midori Ito or Tonya Harding. I don't want people to say, 'There's Michelle Kwan, the girl who does triple axel.' I want her to do a triple axel, but I want her to be known as someone who is a real artist (Longman, 1996, March 24).

Someone 12 or 13 doesn't look the same at 15...Her face and body have changed. We've added things with makeup and costumes. It's appropriate for her age. I don't think it's a Pygmalion change. I think it's going with the flow (Longman, 1996, January 21).

Her Chinese background is, you don't wear makeup at that age...I had to say: 'If you're appearing in the ballet, you have to look the part. There's nothing extraordinary about wearing makeup. It's part of the shtick. We're not taking school exams, we're performing in front of thousands of people (Longman, 1996, March 24).

Kwan and her father also talked to the media:

I don't want to overdo it...But she's growing, her body is growing, becoming more lady-like, so you have to go with the flow. You have to respect the sport. It's like a show (Longman, 1996, March 24).

I learned from the Olympic champions. I looked in the mirror and examined how they did their makeup. I learned from the best (Longman, 1996, January 21).

I've made a lot of changes this year...I'm very comfortable with them. I've always had an image in my mind. It has to come from inside. You have to feel the music, the emotion, from inside, not just the outside look. (Longman, 1996, January 20)

In this way, the media framed Kwan's victory as the consequence not only of the more mature look that the transformation brought about, but also emphasized that the change was because of coach Carroll's bold and successful decision.

Third, some media were somehow ambivalent about what Kwan's new physical appearance meant, given her chronological age. Under the headline "Kwan, in a Rush to Adulthood, Is Given a Makeover at Age 15," the *New York Times* also expressed some cynicism at the transformation:

Kwan is not a woman yet. She is only 15, not yet old enough to drive a car or steer her own career. She is still shy of 5 feet 2 inches. She weighs but 96 pounds and is still adjusting on ice to her latest growth spurt...No amount of makeup gives Kwan what she lacks at this stage... she is pictured in publicly photos paddling a canoe and dressed as a Disney Pocahontas. Before the Skate American competition opened [at the 1995 W.C.], she was spotted in the hotel wearing a teddy bear knapsack (Longman, 1995, October 27).

In addition, reporting on Kwan's victory over the 24-year-old second place winner Tonia Kwiatkowski at the 1996 US nationals, *The Washington Post* argued that, "in women's figure skating, it's better to look old than to be old. A case in point: The skater who looks 25 defeated the skater who almost is 25 Kwan (Brennan, 1996, January 20)." Before the 1996 world championships the newspaper was even more cynical about Kwan, speculating, "she might win the gold because she is 15 going on 30 (Brennan, 1996, March 23)." Certainly, even for a media that understood that Kwan's physical appearance was crucial to her success her age was a major issue.

Same Age but a Different Kind of Youthfulness

As I explained before, women's figure skating entered a new phase with the advent of younger skaters in the mid-1990s. The discourse of artistry as an expression of ideal femininity became more complicated and ambivalent with the rise of girl skaters framed as 'prodigies' (extraordinarily talented but also innocent) on the one hand and as a 'threat' (as in the fear of being 'too gymnastic') on the other hand. While praising their talent and skill in regard to jumping, the media were also generally concerned that young

skaters should not be rushed into maturity. In this context, the media's response to Kwan's youthfulness was mixed, ambivalent, and unsettled; the welcome maturity was seen as being compromised by her over-sexualization. Ironically, her youthfulness re-emerged as a trope that highlighted a moral ethos concerned with the threat to innocence that a rush to adulthood might pose. It seemed that, all other considerations aside, Kwan simply looked too young to carry off such a sexually mature image.

The media's infantilizing gaze at Kwan contrasted sharply with somehow more fixed constructions of two other dominant girl skaters in the 1990s, Okasana Baiul and Tara Lipinski. Unlike Kwan whose pre-transformation immature look was an issue, the media took little account of Lipinski's physical appearance, but they rather portrayed her as a 'precocious' skater for her age. For instance, *The New York Times* described the twelve year-old Lipinski, 4 feet 6, 69 pounds, as "a rising star", observing that "her self-assuredness, poise and maturity translate to grace and power on the ice unmatched by any American female skater her age, and few of any age (Longman, 1995, February 8)." Representing Lipinski as a strong-minded person, they also further noted that "at 12, she is already more comfortable during news conferences than Kristi Yamaguchi, the 1992 Olympic champion, was at 20, much more relaxed in public than Nancy Kerrigan, the 1994 silver medalist, is at 25 (Longman, 1995, February 8)."

Unlike Kwan, whose youthful artistry seemed to look somehow awkward, the media also appreciated Baiul's artistic image more than it did those of other adult artistic skaters such as Katarina Witt and Nancy Kerrigan. For example, the *New York Times* wrote that, "the beauty of Baiul's skating, her whispery glides and sparkling expressiveness... puts Katarina Witt to shame, the way she mugs for the judges. She's just the girl they were looking for (Longman, 1995, February 6)." In another article, they also pointed out that Baiul's "ebullience and improvisation of youth prevailed over the aloofness of Kerrigan's twenty-something free-skate routine (Longman, 1995, October 27)." In addition to Baiul's youthful look, her mentality was also described as mature for

her age, relating to the fact that she became an orphan at the age of thirteen, after her mother died of ovarian cancer. Commenting on this unhappy story, the *New York Times* emphasized Baiul's precocity describing her as a "teen-ager mature beyond her years (Longman, 1995, February 6)."

The Oriental Girl/Woman Skater on Ice

Kwan's hyper-sexual/exotic transformation into the Oriental Woman was the answer that her camp came up with to ultimately tackle the looking-young dilemma. Responding to a public gaze of infantilization, Kwan not only had to demonstrate her maturity, but also had to construct her persona in very specific ways. As Kestnbaum (2003) explains, the matter of "maturity or good presentation" for female figure skaters has been "often conflated with the demonstration of one's sexuality or feminine charms along with the emphasis on physical beauty (p. 152)." In the case of Kwan this resulted in a decisive transformation that she carried through into a series of performances featuring her in racially sexualized roles: *Salome*, and *Pocahontas* in the 1996 season and *Taji Mahal* in the 1997 season. The 'racially sexualized' phrase denotes a type of popular representation of Asian/American women that is prevalent in much of the media and popular culture and to which I have alluded earlier: hyper-sexually fetishized and exotic images such as *Madam Butterfly*, *Dragon Lady*, *China Doll*, *Geisha Girl*, *Lotus Blossom*, and so on. As I also explained in Chapter 2, these images, images that Kwan took on after her transformation, can be understood as a particular racialized and sexualized construct, the so-called Oriental Girl/Woman (Said, 1989; Lowe, 1991).

I would situate the media narratives of Kwan's transformation in the historical reproduction and circulation of the Oriental Girl/Woman in visual and popular culture. I understand the ice rink in the world of figure skating as an anthropological site in which a neo colonialist system of representation addressed Kwan as a primitive athlete of color who looked young but when properly managed, was able to transform, assimilate, or self-colonize herself. Within this neo colonial context, Kwan's transformation can be seen as

a floating signifier symbolizing the primitive subject as a yellow female skater who is internally self-colonized through successfully assimilating herself into the controlling image of the Oriental Woman. Taking this idea further, I critically interrogate the post/colonial significance of this image creation and invention and further discuss the cultural meanings of Kwan's transformation, focusing on power relations between white men and yellow women.

Cultural Meaning of Kwan's Transformation

I read Kwan's transformation as an outcome of the way in which she was constructed as the internally colonized subject and Carroll and the media reaffirmed their neo colonial authority and power of representation. In this relationship, I think power operates in two dimensions: the political and the psycho-social. I take this idea from what Herald Prins (2002) has called the "primitive perplex." Arguing that colonial fantasy is crucial to the visual media's commodification of Native American Indian identities, Prins (2002) explains the term as a process by which "North American Indians became subjects of internal colonialism in a double sense--both politically and psychologically (p. 60)." From this perspective, I would also claim that Kwan has become an internally colonized subject who was not only politically oppressed but also psycho-socially exploited through the visual economy of a neo colonialist system of representation, imagination, and consumption.

With regard to the political, I argue that the Oriental Woman construct operates as a form of symbolic violence to or oppression of Kwan. Power is not merely exercised in a hard form such as the military force, but it also takes the soft form of culture, aesthetics, and representations, and so on (Ashcroft, 2001; Nye, 1990; Shohat & Stam, 1994). As a historically marginalized group, Asian/American women are liable to be rendered powerless to control their own representation. Rather, they have been and continue to be exposed to such an oppressive burden of representation that it amounts to what Stephen Legg (2007) calls "epistemic and historiographical violence and domination (p. 265)."

The stereotype of the hyper-sexual/exotic image is one of such powerful vestiges of the colonialist rule that still remains and helps to perpetuate the commodification and exploitation of Asian/American women.

For the dominant group of the White male, the Oriental Girl/Woman can be understood as and likened to a kind of “controlling image” with which to direct the racial and sexual formation of Asian/American women in America. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) and other Black feminists have discussed such controlling images and shown how they are used to degrade or denigrate women of color as well as justify their subordination to the dominant groups. In the view of some yellow feminists, such an image also controls Asian/American women by locking their diverse and multiple identities into a permanently fixated icon. While Black women are often cast “as not feminine enough,” Asian/American women are “vulnerable to mistreatment from men who view them as easy targets...[or] too feminine (Pyke & Johnson, 2003, p. 36).” This hyper-sexuality for Asian/American women, as Shimizu (2007) highlights, has been firmly and historically rooted and operates pervasively as a part of the “network of social forces that ground their legibility in [America] culture (p. 17).” Specific ways of representing the Oriental Girl/Woman may be different from one screen, stage, or ice rink to another, but I believe they are all the same in terms of being ideologically charged representations whose source and presumptions crucially come from the same past of imperial and colonial imagination, fantasy, or nostalgia.

The construction of the Oriental Girl/Woman also contributes psycho-socially to the hegemonic constitution of the white male subject, whose participation in this racialized sexual economy hinges upon two notions: the colonial gaze and the colonial fantasy. Looking relations are never innocent but also bound up with power and knowledge. As Corinn Columpar (2000) notes, “to see [is] to know and to know to have institutional control of the gaze (p. 34).” Laura Mulvey (1993) also early pointed out the gendered dimension of the looking relation coining it in the phrase “woman as the image

and man as bearer of look (p. 19).” According to Judith Butler (1993), this is also racial, because those involved do not engage in “simple seeing, an act of direct perception, but [in] the racial production of the visible, the workings of racial constraints on what it means to ‘see’” and this is “a repeated and ritualistic production of blackness (p. 16).” Caught or objectified in this looking relation, it can be argued, in a re-phrasing of Mulvey (1993), “[Asian/American] women as the image [of the Oriental Girl/Woman] always signify white male fantasies and desires (p. 19).”

With regard to Kwan’s transformation, I read clear ramifications of the colonial legacy and its lingering effect that still persists in the way in which the racial distinctions of ‘yellow and ‘Asian’ are naturalized through the visual economy of gendered and sexualized terms rendered by the nostalgic rhetoric of Empire. Kwan’s subjectivity was symbolically oppressed by being erased or locked into a permanently fixed iconography of the hyper-sexual/exotic Oriental Woman. For white male lookers, to watch Kwan’s performance is to engage in a process of entering into a world of the imagination in which white men are allowed to enjoy the dialogue of pleasure on their terms and in their language. In this regard, I want to rather highlight the neo colonial subtext that operates underneath the rhetoric of Kwan’s aesthetic development at the direction of Carroll and his bold decision-making. That is to say, her racial identity was sexually exploited by being assimilated into a historically naturalized image of the Oriental Woman, and within this the imperialist desire of white sexual fantasy was also embedded in her hyper-sexual/exotic transformation.

Why Would Kwan Transform Herself?

From the social constructionist perspective, representation is not merely a reflection of the world, but more crucially engages in a process of constituting the subjectivity of people, things, and historical events (Hall, 1997). In this sense, athletes and their sporting bodes are not simply to be seen as “signifier[s] of meaning, but as... subject actor[s] in a larger drama of culture and power (Alter, 1992, p. 24).” As subjects,

it can be argued that Asian/American women are born into and live in a world in which a system of hyper-sexual/exotic representation operates and influences general consciousness and social interaction.

In the context of Asian/America as an internal colony, Asian/American women are not free from interpellation as such images so I imagine that they have or might be able to use the stereotype in self-enabling ways, consciously or unconsciously. As Jean Kilbourne (1995) explains of young women's self-transformations:

A woman is conditioned to view her face as a mask and her body as an object, as things separate from and more important than her real self, constantly in need of alteration, improvement, and disguise... Objectified constantly by others, she learns to objectify herself (p. 122).

Following this thought, it might be said that Asian/American women are constantly objectified by others' racially gendered gaze and thus they learn to objectify themselves through their relations with those who project stereotypical images on them. Thus, they often or almost always engage the stereotype as a force for understanding the self and their relations in their social lives.

In fact, it has been argued and empirically demonstrated that Asian/American women strategically play into hypersexual and exotic images as a way of gaining the approval of white men (Lee & Vaught 2003). While they recognize that "they cannot achieve the White beauty aesthetic," Lee and Vaught (2003) argue, they also believe that "they can attract White men by submitting themselves to the fantasies of White men (p. 463-4)." In everyday life, adapting to such fantasies brings either "emotional stability (Lee & Vaught, 2003, p. 463) or "the double burden of racial and gender stereotyping (Chan, 1988, p. 38)." At a societal level, the hyper-sexual/exotic stereotype has already become "a network of social forces that ground [Asian/American women's] legibility in culture (Shimizu, 2007, p. 17)." Therefore, such stereotypical self-construction even becomes a necessary part of their success especially in racialized institutions like Hollywood, where characters of racial minorities based on stereotypes are persistently

manufactured (Yuen, 2004). What is crucial here is that Asian/American actresses translate the stereotypical roles into their “opportunities for crossover roles and alternative representations of people of color (Yuen, 2004, p. 266).” By acknowledging such racial barriers, they establish racial and ethnic performance as a creative way of self-recognition and self-invention.

It is in a similar regard that I also imagine one answer to the question of Kwan transformed herself in the way that she did. That is to say, she self-orientalized herself by presenting a hypersexual and exotic image, one that corresponded to what other people had come to expect of her as an Asian/American woman. I read this as a definite but maybe desperate attempt to get a foot in the racially gendered institution of women’s figure skating.

CHAPTER VI

READING ASIAN DESCENT SKATERS: THE REPRODUCTION OF YELLOW FEMALE SKATER ON WHITE ICE

On February 12th, 2006, before the 20th Winter Olympics in Turin Italy opened, Michelle Kwan held a press conference to announce that she was withdrawing from the Olympics because of an injury to her groin in. Following the 1998 Olympics Kwan had continued to skate and demonstrate her prowess on the ice. This dominance included eight consecutive wins at the US National Championships from 1998 to 2005; she also earned a bronze medal at the 2002 Olympics and four titles at the World Championships in 1998, 2000, 2001 and 2004. Thus, her career accounted for forty-three championships, including nine US, five world, and two Olympic medals, silver in 1998 and bronze in 2002. As the *New York Times* stated, Kwan was “the face of United States figure skating for more than a decade (Zinser, 2006).” The American face of figure skating was not able to skate at the 2006 Olympics, and that marked the end of her career. It was at this moment that the so-called “post-Michelle Kwan era” opened up (Hersh, 2012, October 30).

The post-Kwan era in American women’s figure skating seemed to be full of promise. At the 2006 Olympics, Kwan’s former teammate Sasha Cohen won the silver medal, barely missing the gold. One month later another American skater Kimmie Meissner earned the title at the world championships. Most of all, administrators at the US figure skating association seemed excited by the future prospects of America’s junior skaters such as Rachael Flatt, Ashley Wagner, Mirai Nagasu and Caroline Zhang (Hersh, 2007, January 25). However, not all of them went on to realize demonstrate their potential: Nagasu’s fourth place at the 2010 Olympics and Wagner’s fourth at the 2011 world championships were the best that those skaters achieved. Since Meissner’s victory

in the 2006 World Championship there has been no American female skater on the podium at the two biggest international events.

The vacuum left by the decline of American dominance in women's figure skating began to be filled by a new crop of very successful Asian skaters. To begin with, gold medals in two recent Olympics went to Asian skaters. Japanese Shizuka Arakawa won the gold over Cohen at the 2006 games and this was the first time that an Asian person had become the Olympic champion in the history of women's figure skating. At the latest but one Olympic games in 2010, two Asian skaters stood on the podium during the medal ceremony: Korean gold medalist Yu-Na Kim and Japanese silver medalist Asada Mao. In addition, Asian success on ice has extended to the World Championships. In the 2007 event, three Asian skaters swept the medals; two Japanese skaters Ando Miki and Asada Mao won gold and silver respectively, and Korean skater Yu-Na Kim placed third. Since then, all of the major international titles, except one at the 2012 world championships have gone to Asian skaters: Asada Mao for the 2008 and 2010 Worlds, Yu-Na Kim in 2009 and 2013, and Ando in 2011.

This chapter is focused on the media representations of Asian and Asian/American female figure skaters in the period from the mid-2000s to the present. The so-called post-Kwan era for US women's figure skating has been characterized appropriately as a period of the rise of Asian success and fall of American prowess and as Asian skaters have become more visible and demonstrated their dominance, the US media have struggled in discussing this shift of power. More specifically, the media has grappled with: 1) how to define the success of Asian skaters, 2) what it means to the US women's figure skating, and 3) how to come to terms with the decline of American prowess.

My argument is also threefold. First, I contend that the media analyzed and theorized the Asian success through a largely essentialist racial lens. The media seemed to argue that skaters of Asian descent are naturally gifted in terms of both the biological

and the cultural: they have a natural talent for jumping because of their body type and they share cultural attributes, values, and a morality that has paved the way for their international success. I frame these narratives within the trope of the model minority and further discuss its political implications in terms of how skaters of yellow color are racially triangularized between the dominant white race of white and other racial and ethnic minorities.

Behind what was somehow a seemingly complimentary and benign endorsement of Asian figure skaters, I also argue that a certain paranoid style of demonization operated that perceived skaters of Asian descent as fearful beings who threatened women's figure skating as a White space. I situate this atmosphere of crisis of race within the history of the ways in which the yellow peril has been recurrent element in gendered discourses of race. My critical reading is informed by the notion of bio-power, a regularizing force that has been exercised to systematically control populations of Asian and Asian/American women who are apprehended as a racial and sexual threat in terms both of pathology as well as aesthetics.

Lastly, I argue also that the US media constructed women's figure skating as a White space. The hegemonic structure of this whiteness was reaffirmed in three common media themes: white female skaters were conceived of as a group of victims; nostalgic memories of white princess skaters were regularly invoked and re-narrated; a quest for white American Golden Girl was promoted as a way of insinuating white pride. In this way, the media's analysis of Asian success as an incident or a text was absorbed into the occlusion of the racialized history of women's figure skating. In what follows, I first lay out how the media understood, defined, and took meanings from the success of Asian and Asian/American female skaters.

The "Why?" of Yellow Success

From the mid-2000s, women's figure skating in the US has become a site in which one can see more Asian descent females than in any other sport. At the 2010 US

Nationals, there were twenty-three skaters in the senior women's division, and among them were eight skaters of Asian descent. Reporting on this salient presence, the *New York Times* ran the headline "Figure Skaters of Asian Descent Have Risen to Prominence," and further analyzed why Asian athletes were dominant on ice in the following manner (Longman, 2010, January 23):

Skaters of Asian descent, primarily women but also men, have risen to prominence in large numbers both nationally and internationally. The reasons are varied, skaters and coaches say. They have to do with rules changes, body type, hard work and discipline, diet and the emergence over the past two decades of role models like Kristi Yamaguchi and Michelle Kwan of the United States and Midori Ito of Japan.

This abstract analysis revolved around a group of related yet distinct ideas, beliefs, or observations about skaters of Asian descent that has been circulated as a certain standardized answer accounting for the success of yellow female skaters on ice.

I first detail what this explanatory frame is more specifically about in terms of how the ideas and concepts explaining the Asian success divide along two dimensions, the biological and the cultural. Then, I briefly lay out my critique; that is, how images of yellow female skaters have come to be seen, controlled, and reproduced in a particular system of representation.

First, the US media seemed to argue that skaters of Asian descent are generally better jumpers than white skaters due to their biology, their genetics. This argument takes the form of assertions that Asian females are more likely to have the right body type, one that is the small, thin, and childish with a "the lower centre of gravity" that made it easier for them to jump (Clarke, 2008, January 20; Ong, 2008, January 20). For example, the *Chicago Tribune* suggested that "the traditional morphology of Japanese children" helped their success, stating that "skaters with smaller, lighter bodies--especially girls and women--have a size/strength ratio advantageous to jumping and spinning (Hersh, 2010, December 7)." This supposed biological advantage was also explained as being maintained through Asian skaters' adherence to "a diet of rice and vegetables and fish

[and their avoidance of] large quantities of beef and fat.” This made them less vulnerable than their Caucasian counterparts to the weight gain that was deemed fatal to skating ability (Longman, 2010, January 23). Originating from coaches and disseminated by the media, the presumed biological advantage projected on yellow female bodies has become an element of a broadly popularized theory that is accepted as accounting for the Asian success.

Second, the US media asserted that the prowess of skaters of Asian descent could be attributed to particular aspects of their culture and heritage, such as a hard work discipline, parental dedication and support of their children’s ambitions, and the existence of kindred role models. By mentioning that “discipline at home often transfers to discipline at the rink,” for example, the *New York Times* emphasized hard work as “the premise of why they [skaters of Asian descent] succeed,” exemplifying this through the case of Yamaguchi, who was so self-motivated that she “often woke her mother at 4 in the morning so she could train (Longman, 2010, January 23).” The media also saw this discipline as inspiring a younger generation of Asian/American kid skaters. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, a 7 year-old girl skater Akari Nakahara who had “fallen in love with figure skating and dreamed of becoming the next Michelle Kwan or Kristi Yamaguchi” (Ni, 2010, February 21):

wakes up at 4:30 a.m. six days a week. While most people are asleep, she races through breakfast before rushing off with her mother to an ice skating rink...“She loves to skate,” said Akari's mother, Kaori Nakahara, a piano teacher from Japan who recently began driving her daughter...“I never have to wake her up in the mornings. She's the one who tells me ‘Mommy, it's time!’”

Just as Yamaguchi and Akari are overlapped in terms of a hard work, the dedicated role of Akari’s mother, although she is reluctant to openly acknowledge it, is implicitly described as paralleling that of Nagasu’s mother. The *Los Angeles Times* offered further the comments that Nagasu’s choreographer made about the skater’s mother: “It's pretty amazing, the dedication from her parents...Her mother would close the sushi restaurant at

11 p.m. and be on the ice every morning at 5:30 or 6 a.m. (Ni, 2010, February 21).”

Reinforcing this sacrificing and devoted attitude, the *New York Times* also highlighted the way in which parents cultivated the strict discipline that was attributed to the Nagasu family, by relating an anecdote about the mother, who “sits at practice and gives hand signals to her daughter [but] had sometimes used corporal punishment, slapping [Nagasu] when she was younger (Longman, 2010, January 23).” In this way, the media seemed confident that the Asian success was an aggregated outcome of Asian (American) cultural features such as a discipline, hard work, parents’ dedications, and having role models.

My critique of the media’s analyses of the sources of yellow success is also twofold: the biological and the cultural. First, I argue that biological differences as established by skin color were seen as playing a crucial and determining role. This perception is easily open to critique simply on the basis of the numerous research studies demonstrating that there is no scientific basis to ‘race’ as a biological category or explanation for athletic achievement (Miller, 1998; Hoberman, 1997). In addition, it can be argued that the racial alignment between yellow bodies and skillful and dynamic jumping is a kind of immediate knowledge based upon pseudo-scientific observations. I sense that a similar version to the scientific racism that is exercised against black athletes is at work here. As various scholars have argued in anatomizing the public imagination about black racial genetic superiority, theories of racial difference continue to be invoked within sport to explain the perceived dominance of black athletes in certain professional sports such as track & field, basketball, football, and so on (Hoberman, 1997; Miller, 1998; Walton & Butryn, 2006). Women’s figure skating also became one such sporting specialization within the public imagination through the use of a pseudo-scientific discourse that purported to distinguish between yellow skaters and white skaters using racialized understandings of biological and/or genetic differences.

The second point of the critique is that what has been termed cultural racism is also at work here. The media’s analyses of yellow success that especially focuses on

culture, I believe, closely resonates with what Etienne Balibar (2007) calls “culturalist” or “differentialist” racism, “a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences (p. 84).” Balibar’s point is that “culture can also function like a nature (p. 85),” which means that it operates “as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin (p. 85).” In a similar vein, I also see that skaters of Asian descent are understood as being determined by their belonging to Asian (American) historical culture, which is trans-nationally and trans-historically universal, monolithic and permanent for all yellow female skaters. More particularly, in culturalist terms the Asian style of diet as a cultural lifestyle naturally protects the skaters’ bodily asset; the discipline exercised at home transfers to discipline at the rink; the unwavering support of parents is naturalized as “spirits of community (p. 86)” that is transferable to each and every family; and finally, Asian (American) culture is historicized through “a spiritual inheritance (p. 86)” that is handed over through the medium of role models.

Crucially in this process, Asian (American) cultural difference has come to be presumed to be a separate, static, and independent entity that is naturally differentiated from other cultures. This construction, in Balibar’s terms, brings to the fore a conception of the world based on cultural difference, that is, a world-view that believes “historical cultures” can be divided into two groups: “the one assumed to be universalistic and progressive, [and] the other supposed irremediably particularistic and primitive (p. 86).” While Balibar highlights the primitive as a crucial concept that naturalizes Black in relation to White, I would like to add here the term foreignness as another yet central element that naturalizes Yellow as particularistic in relation to White. In other words, the media narratives of the yellow success can be framed as a form of racialization in which Asian foreignness is both biological and cultural and racial difference is identified, characterized, and exaggerated by means of certain ways of representations.

Foreignness is an epistemological idea or concept that has been and still is being applied as a common way of understanding Asian (American). As mentioned in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 as well, mainstream management of foreignness includes manipulating it dialectically: one pole is the positive or assimilationist perception of the model minority and the other is the negative or unassimilationist perception that is often named as the Yellow Peril. What is important here is that both are interchangeable as they co-signify the same coin of Asian (or yellow) foreignness. For instance, the model minority includes the images of ‘hardworking,’ ‘industrious,’ ‘family-oriented,’ and ‘mysterious’ or ‘exotic.’ In the sense of the yellow peril, however, “Hardworking and industrious become unfairly competitive; family-oriented becomes clannish; [and] mysterious becomes dangerously inscrutable (Saito, 1997, p. 72).”

This point is also at work in the relationship between yellow and white in women’s figure skating. To a certain extent, the media responded to Asian success in a somehow positive way. However, beyond the positive appraisal what the style of representation that was used connotes is rather more than just a theme of the model minority on white ice, for it also further conceals certain negative overtones that are the other side of the coin or strip. In what follows, I examine and discuss how representing Asian descent skaters as a model minority also involves mobilizing a certain threatening identity, which is very reminiscent of the yellow peril.

The Asian Invasion

In the 2010 Olympics, there were two Asian skaters who stood on the podium at the medal ceremony of the Ladies Singles: Korean Yu-Na Kim who won a gold and Japanese Asada Mao who took the silver. Reporting on this, along with the news that five medals from the total of twelve in figure skating went to athletes from Asia, *Time* magazine used headlines such as this: “Call it the Asian Invasion. Or the Beast from the East...It’s the highest haul so far in the sport at the Olympics for those from the Pacific Rim, and it signals the beginning of what many anticipate will be a shift of the podium

from West to East (Park, 2010, February 26).” I believe that the invasion metaphor reflects a noteworthy escalation in the alarmist discourse on Asian skaters’ dominance of the ice. Calling up an act of war, it seems to signify a sense of crisis caused by Asian skaters’ attack on the sovereign territory of US figure skating. What does the Asian invasion exactly mean? Where does the metaphor come from? How have yellow female skaters come to be encapsulated in the metaphor? What is the US sovereignty that it seems to threaten?

The implication of the Asian invasion for US women’s figure skating is that it carries an anxiety that Asian young skaters armed with their formidable jumping weapons will eventually undermine an aesthetic norm of women’s figure skating by displacing America’s sophisticated artists. What is pointed to as the crucial factor for this understanding is a series of the rule changes and new judging systems that have shifted the emphasis from artistry to jump technique. Thus, it is explained that Asian skaters have been able to take more advantage of these changes because of their natural asset, a body type that is small, thin, and childlike. This makes it possible for them to execute dynamic jumps whereas American skaters have lost the opportunity for using the cultural asset of the artistry through which they have historically demonstrated their superior prowess.

The central core of the perception of yellow female skater as a perilous being of the Asian invasion lies in the idea of jumping as a threat. As detailed in the Chapter 4, it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s that this began to be regarded as a symbol of an athleticism (one that often connoted masculinity) that was in unfavorable contrast with artistry. At that time, the print media often employed the metaphor of threat in representing a group of athletic skaters such as Ito, Harding, and Bonaly, describing them as, for example, “more muscular and broad-shouldered than girlishly slim or womanishly curvaceous (Kestnbaum, 2003, p. 151).” Athletic skaters and their dynamic performance of jumps, most notably the triple Axel, were read as certain signs of a threat to the

feminine ideal of the sport. “In the beautiful, sequin-and-lace world of women’s figure skating,” a *Washington Post* article noted, it meant that “a single jump [the triple Axel] has turned order to chaos (Brennan, 1992, February 19).” What the chaos brought to the fore was a series of hard questions: is the best skater the jumper or the artist? Who deserves more reward, the athlete or the artist? In which direction should women’s figure skating proceed, toward the balletic or the gymnastic (Feder, 1994; Kestnbaum, 2003; Jeansonne, 1992, February 20)?

Although there had been such debates over skating styles before, especially in the 1992 Olympics, there had not been the same collective sense of a threatening overtone over athletic skaters then. The media had not expressed interest in what the biological or cultural source of the fearful jumps might be, nor had it discussed it in terms that suggested chaos at the level of the generality. Rather, the media seemed to believe that the phenomenon of the influx of athletics skaters was a matter of taking each skater at the level of individuality. Thus, in representing Ito, Harding, and Bonaly, the media focused on telling each skater’s individual story and describing their particular prowess in jumping. Most of all, the crisis caused by that individual athleticism seemed to be manageable, as when an American artist (Yamaguchi) surmounted the Japanese threat from Ito, securing “a victory for artistry over the fast-approaching gymnastic-like athleticism in skating (Jeansonne, 1992, February 20).”

The anti-athleticism projected on the jumping style entered upon a new phase in the mid 1990s when another framing of the ‘girls versus ladies’ emerged, apparently a response to the entry of teenagers to skating. As young teenage skaters began to dominate the highest level of the competitions, the media decided that this was an after-effect of the elimination of the compulsory figures, an event regarded as being best suited to artistic skaters. While the thinner bodies of the teenagers were thought to be better suited to quick rotations and jumping than the bigger, more rounded bodies of the adults, the polished technique that the figures demanded came with the latter’s greater maturity.

In this atmosphere, concerns about rewarding female skaters with immature bodies and the fear that bounding little girls were taking over ladies' figure skating gained currency, as an item in *Newsweek* illustrates (Deford, 1992):

If jumps become the sine qua non of the competition, then younger and younger skaters, concentrating on a few energetic moves, could turn figure skating into another (offstage: screams, groans, shrieks, noisy wrist slittings) gymnastics. That specter, of teeny-weensy little prepubescent bubbles popping about, haunts the figure-skating beadle. "Look," wails one panicky official when the dreaded comparison with gymnastics is uttered, "ninety percent of our girls are attractive, and they all have breasts."

By the 2000s, the concern seemed to have become a reality. "During the past two decades," *USA Today* noted, "figure skating has become gymnastics on ice, where the ability to jump trumps all else. Artistry has taken a back seat to physics" – and puberty, it seemed had become a girl skater's most feared enemy now (Brennan, 2009, January 22). In all, it seemed that the media saw the young skater as a problem.

This generalized anxiety over an aesthetic threat on ice was targeted at a group of Asian female bodies. And most of all, I believe the role of Kwan should be noted as a crucial nexus, a point at which two important ideas about young skaters and Asian skaters meet. As detailed in the Chapter 5, Kwan was very much embroiled in the issues of maturity and yoked by the narratives of infantilization. Intertwined with this discourse of young skaters, the threatening perception of Asian skaters was also forming in the media, which conflated Asian athletes such as Ito (Japanese) and Chen (Chinese), and linked the American Kwan with them. For example, the *Washington Post* previewed the 1996 World Championships (Brennan, 1996, March 19):

There is a distinct possibility that Ito, Kwan and Chen will be the skaters who sweep the medals and climb onto the podium Saturday night. If that occurs, it would be the first time three Asian or Asian-American women took the top three spots at an Olympics or worlds. Five of the past seven world champions have been either Asian or Asian-American. Various coaches and skaters, some of them Asian-American, have said that body type, diet, family structure and discipline all contribute to Asian success in women's skating.

The Canadian media also subscribed to this bio-cultural reasoning for the Asian success. An article in the *Calgary Herald*, headlined “Asian Women Ideally Suited to Dominated in Skating” quoted Kwan’s coach Carroll: (Ireland, 1996, March 22): “Asian people are very disciplined, very goal-oriented, and I think their families want them to achieve, they want them to do well at what they’re doing.” Kwan was reported to have agreed that it was hard work commenting that the great skaters worked at their craft, but Carroll went further, insisting that it was not only a skater’s work ethic, that body type was also a factor. “Asian women have very little chests, very little boobs, and usually small bodies and tight hips. That’s ideal for figure skating because the weight distribution and the balance in the air, the axis, is very easy with that kind of body.”

By this time, the discourse of a jump as a threat had seemed to change; the threat came not from young skaters, but from Asian skaters. In a sense, Asian skaters seemed to be more of a threat than young skaters because their body type was ‘natural’ and fixed by their ‘race.’ Any threat that a young skater might represent to the artistry of the sport, on the other hand, was temporary and would be countered by maturation; and so concerns about young skaters jumping tended to be about protecting them. In this developing discourse, the ‘young’ skater had been absorbed into discourses of the ‘Asian’ skater and the media used both terms interchangeably. For example, the *New York Times* analyzed why skaters of Asian descent “have risen to prominence” in the following way (Longman, 2010, January 23):

The influx of Asian skaters can be traced in part to the elimination of compulsory school figures... Without compulsory figures, skating became more like gymnastics. Jumping assumed a new urgency. Younger skaters could excel... Asian skaters are often small and willowy, which can be an *asset* when jumping. “They have bodies that are quick and light; they’re able to do things very fast,” said Frank Carroll, who coached Kwan and now coaches Nagasu. “It’s like Chinese divers. If you look at those bodies, there’s nothing there. They’re just like nymphs.”

Asian skaters along with Asian/Americans Kwan and Nagasu are all conflated into small, willowy, and young nymphs or Chinese divers.

Bio-politics on Plagued Ice

Certainly, there were noticeable changes in the way in which the jump as a threat was understood in the world of women figure skating. More precisely, a subject who brings fear shifted from some lady skaters, who have the individual strength to execute difficult jumps, spins, and techniques because of their masculine features; through girl skaters, who, with their pre-pubescent bodies can jump like gymnasts; to Asian (American) skaters, who have the ideal type of body as well as the desirable yet dangerously inscrutable pattern of the culture to draw on.

What mattered in the past seemed to be the jump itself as a threat, and athletic skaters were simply viewed as an individual capable of performing a fearfully powerful jump, rather than as an agent who evokes a collective sense of fear along with her. However, what one can see now is a certain shift in which the source of the threat the jump posed is questioned as well as extended from individuals to a mass or population. In other words I would argue, what is inscribed here is a racially essentialist idea that the threat of ‘jumping genes’ in yellow female bodies might be biologically reproduced and culturally reinforced at the level of population, both of which possibilities are signaled by a skin color of yellow. Thus, the political significance of this discursive process is an effect of the exclusion that separates out of a group of yellow female skaters from the universal population of women’s figure skating.

I believe Michelle Foucault’s analytics of biopower is useful in understanding this point. I understand the concept to refer to a form of power that is exercised to normalize the state or society by systematically controlling individuals who are dangerous or abnormal (Foucault, 2003a; 2003b). One effective way of doing it is not merely to eliminate the danger itself, but rather to find its source and either destroy or purify it, so that the welfare of the society may be preserved. Based upon this pathological sense of the relationship between an individual and the population that it belongs to, biopower is

generally used in the domain of the public hygiene, birth control, medicine practices, and so on.

In this working of biopower, race is often marked as the key to targeting a population as the source of a threat. Eventually, according to Foucault (2003b), two racist functions are thus produced. The first one is the creation of a hierarchy by which certain races are described as superior and others as inferior. And the second function is bring into being a rhetoric and logic of war for as Foucault has it: “The more inferior species die out...the stronger...I will be able to proliferate (p. 255).” This war rhetoric does not necessarily mean military confrontation, but it is rather similar to the practice of the quarantine inspection in the plague town (Foucault, 2003a, p. 44).

This brings me to imagine the world of women’s figure skating as a similar space to the plague town. The influx of yellow female skaters, who are understood as a threat, undermines the aesthetic norm of white artistry in the sport. Then, what can be seen on the plague ice is an enforcement of a racial quarantine inspection or partitioning based on a constant observation, assessment, and accumulation of knowledge. What matters now is not who is performing threatening jumps, but rather where the aesthetic danger comes from. Thus, biopower targets not individual skaters themselves, but a racial population that is identified as the source of danger – what Foucault calls a “social body,” “background-body,” “body behind the abnormal body,” or “body of heredity” or whatever similar names it may be given, which the authorities wish to control or regularize (Foucault, 2003a, p. 313). Foucault’s emphasis on the war rhetoric is also seen here: the more aesthetic danger that the jump represents is eliminated, the more the world of women’s figure skating as a white specie, race, or population will be purified. Under this implicit banner, the repudiation of or discontent over Asian female skaters might be justified as a symbolic killing in the name of protecting the general welfare of women’s figure skating within the aesthetic economy of biopower.

As Foucault traces this new racism to the end of the nineteenth century, I also situate the perilous perception of Asian skaters as an aesthetic threat within a historical trajectory of the biopower by which the US has controlled populations of Asian female immigrants. As Viet Thanh Nguyen (2000) notes, “the history of American legislation concerning Asian immigration has been explicitly a biopolitics of bodily regulation, shaping the Asian American community through acts targeting gender, sexuality, race, and class (p. 133).” This bio-political construction of Asian immigrants and Asian/Americans has been associated closely with the way in which the yellow peril idea has been (re)employed, (re)produced, and (re)circulated throughout the history of the US.

What is at stake for me is the certain gendered manner in which the yellow peril has been projected onto Asian and Asian/American women. The central element in such gendered discourses is the pathological perception of Asian women’s bodies as a polluting element to the nation’s public hygiene, racial purity, and sexual morality. For instance, Chinese female immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were perceived and labeled as prostitutes who were bodily contagious as well as morally debased (Peffer, 1986). Such anti-Chinese sentiment eventually led to a series of exclusion laws that excluded Chinese women because they were assumed to be disease-carrying prostitutes. According to Sucheng Chan (1991), law and policy makers commonly believed that “allowing the alleged Chinese prostitutes to enter would be akin to allowing persons with contagious diseases to enter (p. 101).” This immigration exclusion saturated with gendered prejudice persisted in different forms throughout the early and mid 20th century until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abolished the immigration restriction based on the national origins quota system (Lowe, 1996).

But the perception of Asian and Asian/American women as sexually available and lascivious has been permeated within American popular culture and is still broadly current today. The popular media has represented them both in the submissive style of

'Lotus Blossoms' and the fearsome style of 'Dragon Ladies' (Marchetti, 1993). No matter which, it portrays them as a sexualized danger or threat that might undermine American white heterosexual morality. As Kang (2010) argues, "a key link in the gendered construction of the yellow peril is the sexualization of Asian women as erotic and taboo objects of desire (p. 208)." It has been also popularly reproduced in the so-called "Butterfly Genre (Kim, 2010, p. 78)," similar stories in films, plays, or novels in which Asian (American) woman in romance with a white man eventually leave him or commit suicide, being displaced by American white woman. The tragedy of the 'Butterfly' reflects a fear and desire of racial miscegenation, symbolizing a solution of "the problem of race that so disturbed Americans, who were at that moment cutting off Asian immigration (Kim, 2010, p. 80)." Not surprisingly, this style of the Asian women's perilous image has survived like a specter and has been regularly reproduced in various characters in American popular culture.

I argue that the long-standing perception of Asian women as fearful beings who are gendered and sexualized threat has been also resuscitated on the ice in an aesthetic form of the yellow peril. The peril is invoked symbolically in the fear of Asian jumpers but it also entails its inseparable pair, the model minority. The yellow presence on ice is emphasized through the insistence that they jump better and more spectacularly than other skaters and so while the media welcome and praise them under the banner of model minority, the threat that they pose is invoked too. Thus when the yellow presence is seen as dominating over or outdoing white skaters, however, for the media model minority skaters become a yellow peril on ice, a threat to an otherwise aesthetically civilized sporting world. Skaters of yellow color, armed with the biological jumping gene and cultural genes like dedication and a hardworking ethic are easily made into a source of danger to the aesthetic norm of white artistry, one that might eventually destroy the welfare of (white) aesthetic of the sport.

What this revival of yellow peril eventually means for women's figure skating is the construction of whiteness. The articulation of racial and sexual demons effectively justifies the production of a backlash discourse as a way of accomplishing what David Sibley (1995) calls "spatial purification." According to Sibley (1995),

[T]he built environment assumes symbolic importance, reinforcing a desire for order and conformity if the environment itself is ordered and purified; in this way, space is implicated in the construction of deviancy. Pure spaces expose difference and facilitate the policing of boundaries (p. 87).

The US media also seemed to define women's figure skating as a space that has been infringed upon by such a deviancy of race. Indeed, a certain atmosphere of victimhood, rejection, and backlash involving spatial purification of the ice is also pervasive in the media narratives. I offer more detail on this point in the next part.

Backlash and Defense of White Artistry

I believe that the bio-political construction of the yellow female skater is accompanied by a process in which American skaters are naturalized as sophisticated artists and US women's figure skating is universalized as a space of whiteness. Adding to and supporting this, I discuss two ways in which a white racial project has been exercised in the sport. I first detail how white artistry is an established and invisible norm, and then I explore how the aesthetic norm of white artistry is defended through a backlash culture that is expressed in various modes in contemporary women's figure skating.

The media characterized and constructed American skaters as white artists in various modes and in invisible, implicit, and unmarked ways. It has been persuasively argued that white ways of knowing, thoughts, and seeing are ontologically naturalized in many sports (Douglas, 2005; King, 2005; McDonald, 2005; Walton, & Butryn, 2006).

John Gabriel (1998) explains this point with three key words:

exnomination, that is the power not to be named; *naturalization*, through which whiteness establishes itself as the norm by defining 'others' and not

itself; and *universalization*, where whiteness alone can make sense of a problem and its understanding becomes *the* understanding (p. 13).

Within women's figure skating, in the same way, the perception of American skaters as white artists is confirmed through the construct of the otherness of yellow skaters. For instance, the *Washington Post* explains why Asian skaters are dominant with an intimation of their biological difference from Americans (Clarke, 2008, January 20):

Still, it's difficult to project the competitive arc of female skaters, whose careers are shorter than those of male skaters. The sport has trended recently in favor of smaller-framed females. And Asian skaters, as opposed to American, dominated the major international competitions in 2007. In many respects, the ideal female skater must fulfill contradictory ideals, expected to have the body of a child, the emotional range of a young woman and the competitive resolve of an adult.

In this binary rhetoric, the perception of the American as white artist is intimated (the context of the sport's rule changes and the connection with the rise to prominence of Asian skaters as a consequence is implicit) and naturalized by way of reference to Asian skaters' smaller-framed and child-like body type. As a result, the idea of American white artist as the ideal female skater is exnominated, but universalized through its unmarking of itself.

Second, white artistry as *the* aesthetic norm is defended, preserved, and reproduced by a range of backlash-related responses to the yellow success. Many scholars have demonstrated how the White male backlash has been implicitly circulated in relation to masculinity within the sporting sphere (Gabriel, 1998; Walton & Butryn, 2006; Kusz, 2007). With a similar idea, I argue that a culture of backlash is also played out in relation to aesthetic femininity in the world of women's figure skating. In this I refer to three inter-related responses to the 'crisis' of America's white skating artists: victimization, nostalgia, and pride.

In terms of the first of these, the US media represented American white female skaters as the victims in a historical era marked by major rule changes that allowed a small minority group of yellow female skaters to threaten the aesthetic norm of

femininity that was understood as the very essence of women's figure skating. For instance, the *Washington Post* considered why American white artists "face[d] a steep decline" (Shipley, 2009, January 26):

Some figure skating insiders say the new judging system, which was adopted just before the decline, might be contributing. Because the system emphasizes technique over pure artistry, they say, the United States has lost one of its historically greatest assets in the sport... "In the United States, we have emphasized crowd appeal, the artistic side of it, everybody being unique and having a real sense of showmanship," Hamilton said. "That doesn't seem to be as valued as in the past."

This victimhood is also associated with a sense of nostalgia for a past era in which American skaters were dominant in the sport. Emphasizing the lack of a US medal contender as a big problem, for example, the *Wall Street Journal* recalled, "if there was a golden era for U.S. figure skating, it was the period after the tawdry drama of Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan (McKay & Catton, 2014, February 4)." Especially, the nostalgia for Kerrigan or even Harding seemed to reach its peak in January of 2014, when their scandal turned twenty years old. A number of media outlets, not only newspapers but also broadcast television and others, rushed to produce coverage of the so-called 'Harding & Kerrigan 20 years later.' Most notably, *ESPN* produced a documentary *The Price of Gold* with the subtitle, "The Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan saga captured the attention of the world 20 years ago. How much did Harding know (Friedman, 2014, January 15)?" The *Washington Post* also harked back nostalgically to earlier eras of US skating, stating that the sport needed a white star or queen skater such as "Peggy Fleming, Dorothy Hamill, Kristi Yamaguchi, Nancy Kerrigan and Tara Lipinski (Shipley, 2009, January 26)." This comment, similar to what Larry Bird said of his sport, "professional basketball needs a white superstar," resonates not only with both senses of victimization and nostalgia, but also carried a tone of pride (King, 2005, p. 397).

With regard to white pride, the media pursued the quest for a white American Golden Girl on ice just as in the early 1900s it had called for a Great White Hope to put

an end to Jack Johnson's dominance in boxing. The focus and hopes were pinned on a handful of skaters who had shown some potential as likely challengers to the Asian dominance: Gracie Gold, Ashley Wagner, and Polina Edmunds, all of who were expected to compete in the 2014 Olympics. For instance, the *USA Today* describes Gold thus (Whiteside, 2014, February 5):

With blonde hair pulled into a bun, a dress straight out of a fairy tale and a free skate to Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty*, all that's seemingly missing is a tiara and a kiss from a prince. U.S. figure skating has been looking for its next ice princess... "I think she's incredibly elegant," coach Frank Carroll said. "She has a beautiful face, a beautiful body and she's long and she jumps high and she floats through the air... Kind of a complete package."

In addition, the *Wall Street Journal*, portrayed Wagner in the following way (Yang, 2014, January 14):

[Her] flowing blond hair, bellflower-blue eyes and sculpted features mark her as a sporting archetype: She's the embodiment of the "golden girl" the media has extolled when they've waxed poetic about idealized ice queens of the past, from Norway's Sonja Henie to East Germany's Katarina Witt, a marketer's dream who's already signed up tent-pole sponsors like Nike, Pandora Jewelry and CoverGirl, which assessed her Teutonic beauty as being worthy of serving as one of their global "faces."

If Gold and Wagner could be viewed as a type of golden girl and ice queen or princess, Edmunds was represented as the "future" of American women's skating. According to the *New York Times*, she was "2014's version of Tara Lipinski," who has "the most technically demanding routine among contenders [such as Gold and Wagner] (Longman, 2014, January 11)." The *New York Daily News* also highlighted her athletic prowess: "Edmunds is exactly what American skating needs right now... She is a cocky upstart with an infinite upside, arguably the only American woman with the leaping skills to compete with the Asians and Russians for gold (Bondy, 2014, January 10)."

I argue that what these narratives symbolize is a racial marking of women's figure skating as a white space. The strategic purposes for deploying 'normative whiteness' and 'white pride' might vary slightly, but their effects converge on building an allegiance to

whiteness. In this sense, US women's figure skating has been whitewashed, exposing a symptom of what Barnor Hesse (1997) calls 'white amnesia.' In the crisis of whiteness, "the racialized [and gendered] other absorbs all attention," according to Hesse (1997), the "hegemonic structure of whiteness forgets its contested antecedents, it forgets what 'others' remember; in effect this 'white amnesia' represses the historical context of racism (p. 86)." In the case of US women's ice skating the role of the media has been to reaffirm the historicized origin and development of the sport's whiteness and in the recent past it has done this by invoking the highly charged constructs of victimhood, nostalgia, and white pride.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined how the media represent Asian and Asian/American female figure skaters such as Tiffany Chin, Kristi Yamaguchi, Michele Kwan, and a group of Asian skaters. Reading such skaters as texts, I have concerned with three interrelated key words: representation, discourse, and power. Representation is a certain process producing meaning through medium of language and exchanging it between members of culture. And its sources rest on discourses, and various modes of observation, information and knowledge. Power matters at this time when representation and discourse are associated to produce the meaning of the difference between peoples, cultures, societies, and worlds. With this frame, I conclude this dissertation by laying out some summarized points and thoughts.

Throughout this dissertation, my concern has been to critically think over who represents the skaters for whom and further explore what role of sport (figure skating) and the media have played in our current understandings of sport and race. More precisely, I ask myself how the representations come out coherently, where the sources come from, how they are connected as taken for granted, and why such representations have been reproduced. In short, I argue that the media's diverse, coherent, and ambivalent representations are all revolved around and eventually converge on the fact that the skaters' skin color is *yellow*.

With this consciousness of race, the goal of this dissertation has been to demonstrate two things. One is about how the media discursively constructed them as a particular style of the racialized and gendered iconography, what I have called the *yellow female skater*. The other is about why this construction of the imagery is an American invention or creation produced by American dominant style of White ways of seeing, knowing, and understanding the sporting world.

I argue that the imagery of yellow female skater is conceptualized as a mixed image of the racialized and gendered iconography that has certain timeless attributes of the biological and the cultural. To be more specific, the media produced biological and cultural meanings of the skaters with focus on their individual style of skating, personal characteristics or attributes, working attitudes and relationships to coaches, ethnic profiles regarding family background and history, and so on. Thus, what the *yellow female skater* signifies is a numerous set of ambivalent meanings such as: nationally American but racially Asian; a desirable type of citizen who is docile and hardworking but also dehumanized sense of training machinelike; naturally youthful and innocent but somehow childish and aesthetically underdeveloped, exotically feminine but hyper-sexualized; biologically benefited body type but aesthetically perilous.

As sources for these descriptions, portrays, and representations, I have articulated five key tropes or discourses. They are: the trope of yellow jumping machine as aesthetic peril, the trope of model minority as an inclusive language of Americanization or assimilation, the perception of forever foreign Asian as an exclusionary language of the Asiatic racialization, the trope of the child regarding skaters' youthfulness as a form of (neo) primitivism, and the projection of the hyper-sexual/exotic image as a form of (neo) colonial fantasy. Produced by the systematic network of the multiple combinations of these discourses, the media's construction of the *yellow female skater* encapsulates the capillaries of social/cultural/political power lines intersected among race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and nationality, which embedded within the ice as well as our larger social and global world.

By this inductive reasoning, I conceptually imagine the system of representation/discourse nexus as a metaphorical rim of what I call the *Sporting Yellow Pacific*, an American style of the transnational and neo-colonial frame of the symbolic reservoir, in which the *yellow female skater* has been arbitrarily invented, discretely connected, discursively circulated, and irrationally reproduced. I further define this

space-time configuration an ontological and epistemological outcome of American white supremacy strongly sustained by two forms of power: a national force of the white American national ontology and a historical force of the white American imperial frame. It is under these two powers that Asian and Asian/American female skaters have been struggled from the media's representational violence coined with cultural, social, and political marginalization and exclusion.

What does this construction of *yellow female skater* eventually mean to women's figure skating? I believe 'race' is one of the important epistemological categories that matters White power. The significance of race in power relation comes from its capacity to divide, differentiate, or distinguish between white and non-white, self and other, or us and them. What I hope to give a message through this dissertation is not only about how Asian and Asian/American female skaters are objectified as a racially and gendered marked other. The construction of yellow female skater also contributes to the way in which the media self-constructs or reaffirms women's figure skating as a space of whiteness.

Here I want to briefly draw future lines of scholarly inquiry that this dissertation further invites. At first, it might need to be further studied how Asian and Asian/American females skaters or people who participate in the sport actually understand figure skating in relation to their indentify formation of subjectivities. In other questions, why they engage in the sport, what does it mean to them, and how they translate the sport in their lives?

Indeed, it seems that figure skating has come to as one of the most appropriate sports for Asian and Asian/American females. The US media well recognize this cultural phenomenon. Headlined "Young Asian American skaters dream they can soar," the *Los Angeles Times* produced an ethnographic article highlighting the popularity of the sport in Asian/American community. They illustrated:

In recent years, Asian figure skaters from around the world have increasingly come to dominate the sport...Such success has inspired new generations of athletes and enthusiasts...“There has been sort of this boom in the last decade,” said Richard Wise, operations manager at [a] rink and a coach...“On any given day, the majority of the skaters here are Asian.”

Peter Martell, of the Plano, Texas-based Ice Skating Institute, said the trend is not limited to Southern California. He said ice rinks across the nation are seeing greater numbers of Asian skaters. “The Asian population in America has increased dramatically, and consequently there's more Asian skaters,” Martell said (Ni, 2010, February 21).

This sporting boom in the community is not only confined to Asian descent females, but also males. They further wrote:

Not all skaters here are female. Ethan Duong, 11, a Vietnamese American skater from Arcadia, started skating at age 7. He said getting up early to practice was not always easy. “It takes a lot of endurance to not shut down the alarm clock,” he said. But it was his mother, Tammy Thach, who almost gave up. “I kept telling him, why don't you stop, I'm cold,” said Thach, who sat bundled in a cold ringside seat while her son glided gracefully across the ice in a thin jump suit. “Skating is fun. You get to experience something people don't experience every day,” Ethan said. “You get to do different things on the ice and amaze people” (Ni, 2010, February 21).

What makes them fun insomuch they can get up early and practice hard in the sport? How do they actually take away figure skating?

Among many approaches attempting to capture their own meanings of the sport, ethnographic studies can be suggested as a useful based on observations, interviews, and participations in such sporting sites in the reality. To illuminate such marginalized voices and experiences is absolutely meaningful in terms of re-visioning or re-constructing the struggled past or reality for the oppressed people. Adding to these methodological and axiological suggestions, however, I want to highlight one point that relates to ‘representation,’ which might need to be also critically considered in the process of making-visible. That is ‘self-orientalization’ or ‘self-colonization’ in terms of representation, which indicates that people in the East/Orient/Asia (the colonized) also represent themselves as the same way in which the West (the colonizer) imagined them.

It should not be overlooked that orientalism as a colonialist representation has been also inversely adapted by people in the East/Orient/Asia as the colonized. Rethinking orientalism as “a product of the circulation of Euro-American and Asian intellectuals,” Arif Dirlik (1996) argued for “self-orientalism” or “the Orientalism of the Oriental” as a discourse of self-representation which refers to the tendency that Asian people, especially intellectuals represent Asia as the oriental other in the western orientalist terms (p. 96). In this dissertation, I have also sensed and observed some instances that Asian/American female skaters and their families self-represent themselves as the oriental subject in much the same way the media did.

The comment of Marjorie Chin, Tiffany Chin’s mother can be a good example. Delighted by Chin’s successful debut at the 1981 US Nationals, she interviewed to the *Los Angeles Times*: “If she [(her daughter Chin)] makes it to the top, that would represent a lift to all Orientals...I think we have the support of Orientals in this country (Cobbs, 1981, February, 3). Marjorie, not an American, but a Taiwanese immigrant, self-defines not only herself but also Tiffany and other Asian Americans as an ‘authentic racial community’ as much the same way that Paul Gilroy and Ben Carrington has observed in the commodification of black popular athletes and celebrities.

It can be also seen in regard to the skaters, for example, the comments of Mirai Nagasu, a second generation of Japanese/American, who placed the fourth at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. Nagasu interviewed about her “being the only child of Japanese-American parents who emphasize the traditional values of their Asian upbringing” to the Chicago Tribune:

Because I have been raised by Asian parents in an American culture, I struggle a little bit with balancing the two...Sometimes my parents want to push me harder and want me to work harder. They will say something is not good enough, and it gets into my mind that it is not good enough, and

it does bother me. But my emotions also make me the passionate skater I am (Hersh, 2012, April 6).

For the audience, it would have been heard that she was saying about how her parents as Asians are different from her as an American. In this way, Nagasu's comment is no other than her self-Asianizing or self-orientalizing expression in terms of the model minority.

Nagasu's interviewing about herself is more interesting. She seemed to be a candid interviewee unafraid to say whatever comes into her mind and also often self-critical to her fault. Headlined "Teenager Would Like to Shock You with More than Just What She Can Sometimes Say," the *Chicago Tribune* illustrated:

Nagasu filled some of the entertainment gap with the mix of witticisms, wisdom, wacky observations about herself and her experiences...

The candor can get her in deep...with her explanation for why she was so looking forward to the swag that would be hers for having made the Olympic team by finishing second at the U.S. Championships. "I guess I can be stereotypical and say that Asians are very cheap," said Nagasu, a Japanese-American.

When the subject came up again Saturday in a question about what she had received, Nagasu noted an Asian-American friend who is "very Americanized" had scolded her about the comment. "But I've already said what's been said," Nagasu continued, then explained how she regretted having arrived only Thursday because a lot of her sizes no longer were available in the clothing provided by the U.S. Olympic team. And so it went...she has made...with a perfectly timed, "Just kidding" (Hersh, 2010, February 13).

Whether it was humor or not, what can be read here is a certain way in which she self-asserts herself as an Asian or Asian/American identity.

According to Dirlik (1996)'s point, a form of self-orientalistic representation has been fundamental to Asian countries' self-assertion for their cultural or national identities. The impulse of self-othering in the western or the colonizer's terms was somehow irresistible for the colonizer to strive to gain a visible position in the western global culture. Thus, Dirlik (1996) highlights that a discourse of self-orientalism is not "an expression...of powerlessness," but rather

“a new found sense of power (p. 113).” Thus, it has played a crucial role in the ways in which Asian cultural traditions, heritages, or legacies have been re-invented, revived, or rehabilitated in the post/colonial context of cultural nationalism, such as the revival of Chinese Confucianism and the so-called Bengal Renaissance, the rediscovery of Hindu traditions.

In this respect, my dissertation rather leads me to think back the original question of who represent the skaters as the *yellow female skater* for whom. As I also discussed the point of ‘why Michelle Kwan transformed’ in Chapter 5, it seems that the construction of yellow skater is not only attributed to the media’s objectifying representation, but also to certain extent associated with the skaters’ self-othering or self-orientalizing representation. It is at this point that I sense certain *problematic* nature which might have been also embedded in the skaters’ self-orientalistic expressions. What I see as problematic is the way in which Asians and Asian/Americans as the colonized subject might often uncritically self-represent themselves as the oriental other in a certain essentialist way. In other words, they might also believe that they have certain timeless or inherent attributes of the biological and the cultural.

My point is that a certain essentialist idea or naturalizing belief is too much common not only in the US context, but also in Asia and Asian/America. While writing this dissertation with this point now, I have also often felt myself that I am unconsciously thinking and talking to my family and America friends such that way. One of the common topics with my wife about our American lives is to talk about how much Koreans and Americans are different and we often suggest our each hypothetical theory about why they are different. Reflecting my school live, I can also sense to talk much about such difference with my American friends and my adviser from the UK. Explaining or sometimes persuading my difference to them, I have often belatedly recognized that I had talked in a too

much essentialist way. To ask your blood-type is such a good example for me. Like many other Korean people, I have often taken for granted or believed that individual personalities or characters are closely associated with the blood type. In my first year of the school, I had often asked this essentialist question to my friends and sometimes received awkward responses from them.

Like the idea of the blood-type, I came to the University of Iowa with my essentialist philosophy of sport. That is, sport itself is naturally good because it has a good component or gene within it. This naïve sense of the evangelical belief became immediately chaotic as I read dark sides of the American sporting culture in the development of its bright side. Reading articles about Billy Jean King, the Williams sisters, and other numerous people who had been invisible, I began to sense that sport could be not good for some people in some context.

However, my resistance to the sporting essentialism was arisen throughout my diasporic life. Raising two daughters with my wife, I have often observed so-called Korean ‘parachute kids’ whose fathers work in Korea. Having empathy while meeting and talking with them, I often wondered what my daughters’ American life would be, if I go back to Korea and leave them here as parachute girls. Then, it came up to me seriously the fact that my first daughter likes to play soccer. What if King and the Williams sisters were Asian or Asian/American women? What kind of cultural and historical significance would have been resided in the way in which cultural meanings of them are produced, circulated, and communicated? And why one cannot see many Asian or Asian/American female athletes in the media?

This personal empathy driven from diasporic experience has made me to work on this dissertation. As many scholars argue, I believe that ‘the personal is political.’ But I also believe that all of the political cannot be the personal. At this point, I rather seriously think over the idea of empathy. I am neither Asian female nor Asian/American female. However, if there is one thing as the most precious one that I have come to realize from

working this dissertation, it would be that I have felt and thought about such empathy. With flying back to home, finishing my academic journey, I will think of such empathy again with which to contribute to the global sports studies and history.

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