

Respect, Cho Chang, and Asian Representation: A Critical Analysis of the White Gaze in Harry  
Potter

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By  
Kaitlin Pham

Dr. Richard Besel  
Senior Project Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Dr. Bernard Duffy  
Department Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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### **Respect & Representation: How Asian Labels Are Perpetuated Negatively Through 'Cho Chang'**

I was first drawn to *The Harry Potter series* during middle school after hearing the hype around J.K Rowling's incredibly imaginative tale about the magical forces between good and evil. I had always been enthralled about stories regarding fantastical worlds, and Rowling's stories are so remarkably thought-out, that the Latin-based Incantations to even minor character's name contain a deeper subliminal meaning. That is, until we look at Harry's first love interest, Cho Chang. It appears that many readers are absolutely perplexed about Cho Chang's ethnicity. Her name indicates an Asian ethnic origin, but this distinction stops there. There are partial interpretations of her name within Japanese and Chinese languages, however, the full name does not make complete sense in either language. Foreign readers have translated Cho's first name to "butterfly" in Japanese; however, the character's surname, Chang, has no equivalence. It is in actuality most likely a version of the family name Zhang. Cho, unfortunately, is not a name in Chinese at all, in either Mandarin or Cantonese, but is closely related to Chou, which has negative connotations and is rarely ever used as a girl's name (Spencer). It appears that the girl's name has been completely made up without a second thought. As a result, many readers are outraged over Rowling's apparent slip-up, one saying, "I've pretty much lost respect towards JK Rowling as a person. I believe she shouldn't of written just one Oriental character and write her poorly as she did. To what I think, Miss Rowling reflects Cho Chang...as giggly, aggravating, egotistical, intellectual, and manipulative" (Chaos). On the other hand, Rowling's primary female heroine, Hermione Granger, maintains a sturdy, respectable background for her character. Her name encompasses many literary references, including roots within Greek mythology and Shakespearean tales; not to mention that Hermione is an actual girl's first name, in contrast to Cho's seemingly fake name. Granger's important feminist role in the novel clearly juxtaposes Chang's characteristics, thus creating a set of standards that the ideal female character is

expected to provide. As a result, an emphasis on immense intellect, reckless courage, and underrated beauty, all attributes that Granger and other successful females in the series showcase, are shown as being more valued and important. Regardless of Chang's athletic, social, or intellectual prowess, she is consistently cast aside in favor of dominant characters, shoving Chang into the classic model minority role that many Asians fall into with regards to media. Rowling does a fantastic job including members of all backgrounds into her stories; however, it is disappointing to see how the dominant culture is reflected within her brilliantly mapped-out story. Rowling put little effort in naming the sole Asian character of the Harry Potter series, which points to a darker side of the inner workings of our culture as we examine how Chang's existence in the series has gloomier connotations that can be traced throughout media.

Rowling's decision to feature a minority character as Harry's first love interest is an interesting and important one. Instead of an empowering narrative from a minority perspective, readers and audiences are left with a flat character that is surrounded by better thought-out individuals with far more interesting backgrounds and stories. Readers are then left grasping for details about Chang's background in hopes of learning more about her character. Many characters in the series inherited names that give clues about themselves. Hermione Granger's first name is derived from "Hermes", the messenger of the Greek gods, as well as the god of wit, eloquence, and quick thinking. Her name also alludes to *The Winter Tale*, a Shakespearean play where the character who bears her name is erroneously mistaken as being unfaithful to her husband, which foreshadows Ron's suspicions against Harry and Hermione in *The Deathly Hallows*. Rowling even made sure fans understood her character's pronunciation, creating a scene between Granger and her Bulgarian Pro-Quidditch Star date, Victor Krum in *The Goblet of Fire*.

On the other hand, if we delve further into the cultural contexts behind Cho Chang's name, we can borrow from the Japanese translation of her label. A butterfly can normally symbolize femininity and romance and the flowers that the butterfly interacts with symbolize the boys with whom Cho becomes romantically linked, which exclusively feature Cedric Diggory, Harry Potter, and Michael Corner. Cho's romantic exploits become her foremost character motivation, and it is uncomfortable to analyze how Rowling's portrayal of the only Asian character could be written so one-dimensionally. It appears that females who are in charge of their sexuality seem egotistical and provoking and are seen as manipulative to their male counterparts, and the readers. That being said, the values that Hermione Granger possess that push her above Cho Chang's become ultra-defined, preaching to the audiences how Rowling believes the ultimate female should behave and think, and how Chang has no possibility of attaining these qualities. In this paper, I will analyze and discuss J.K. Rowling's role in perpetuating the White Gaze with her depiction of Cho Chang in her series, and how Chang's interpretation in the films further reinforce our dominant cultural predispositions. By juxtaposing Chang's intelligence, courageous capacity, athleticism, and romantic relationships in comparison to Hermione Granger, I can shed light on Rowling's typically ideal woman and the unfortunately subpar ideology that Chang falls into.

Drawing from Stuart Hall's essay on "Racist Ideologies and the Media," it is important to first understand from a sociological standpoint that hegemonic ideology in media emerges from the way power relations have been historically constructed before seeing how alternative media responds to hegemony. Media's "imagery and themes are polarized around fixed relations of subordination and domination," which has stemmed from historical relations such as colonization, and in turn, legitimizes white superiority and non-white inferiority in popular culture" (Hall, 274). Within this historical and cultural framework, the dominance of white

superiority in mainstream media has and continues to subjugate and stereotype Asians and Asian Americans. In order to understand how alternative media responds to and challenges hegemonic ideology, we have to first establish what is being said in mainstream media. The rare images of Asians integrated within Western culture muddles and complicate an already absent source of identity for Asian Americans. Portrayals of Asians women as submissive sexual beings have infiltrated dominant media in television and literature. The image of Asian women as exotic young girls is commonly known as the Geisha girl, who is submissive and subservient. She is ready and willing to fulfill male desires. The other major role of the Asian American woman in the media is that of the evil temptress or what is called the Dragon Lady. The Dragon Lady was made popular by Fu Manchu type movies, but continues today in films. The Dragon Lady is ruthless, cold-hearted, and wears too much makeup. She is manipulative and enjoys torturing her victims. This role also subordinates Asian women, portraying them as untrustworthy and malicious (Lay 48). Additionally, the media undermines Asian females' dignity and self-respect by portraying them as docile and erotic. Hollywood loves depicting Asian females as seductive China dolls or exotic playthings attentively serving Anglo males, which can be evident in the subtlest outlets, including children's series.

Rather than portraying super heroes who save the world singlehandedly, Asian individuals are often reduced to being shy and humble sidekicks who are inherently incapable of speaking unaccented English, charming the opposite sex while also aiding them in the process. Although these can be termed "positive" stereotypes, the model minority myth pressures Asian Americans to conform to Hollywood's false representations. These stereotypes portray Asian Americans as lacking in leadership, innovation and motivation. Consequently, many Asian Americans encounter a white ceiling that prevents them from being promoted to top executive and administrative positions (Lay, 1999; Kawai, 2005; Zhang, 2010). By stressing that Asian

Americans were “succeeding through making efforts on their own despite their racial background, the model minority stereotype produces a “colorblind talk,” the most influential racial ideology in the post-Civil Rights Movement era” (Kawai 113). And while Asian-American adults feel hindered by these seemingly positive stereotypes, many Asian-American youths adopt a depressing mindset that leads to self-doubt. They feel defined by society's expectations of their talents. Research revealed that “the academic excellence of Asian Americans has tremendous psychological and social costs, such as studying harder and longer, forgoing social life, enduring loneliness and alienation, and experiencing extreme depression and stress etc.” (Zhang, 24). Unfortunately, because of the model minority stereotype, these problems go largely unrecognized, and Asian American students receive little institutional support to cope with the problems. They mask feelings of helplessness, frustration and desperation as they try to please society. They feel limited by society's expectations, and this prevents them from venturing out into the unknown. Thus, Asian-American youths are forced to choose between being accepted according to Hollywood standards or being rejected through the development of their own identities.

### **Consumption and Creation of Media under the “White Gaze”**

In 1975, Laura Mulvey penned, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” where she coined the term the “male gaze”. In it, she uses examples in cinematography to explain how the male gaze affects how the audience views the people being presented. The male gaze can be thought of how men look at women, how women look at themselves, and how women look at other women. Mulvey believes that film audiences view characters from the perspective of a heterosexual male. For example, the male gaze occurs through lingering camera shots framed on the curves of a woman’s body, or with editing techniques cut specifically to cater a specific

viewpoint. Techniques that utilize slow motion, deliberate movement, and cutaways are different methods of conveying this “male gaze.” As Mulvey explains, “In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to striptease...she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire” (Mulvey 10). The theory suggests that the male gaze denies women human identity, relegating them as objects of admiration, strictly for physical appearance. Most importantly, the events that occur to a woman onscreen are presented largely in context of the man’s reaction to the events; therefore, the female perspective is strictly limited. This theory suggests that a woman can more often than not only watch a film from a secondary perspective, and most interestingly, only view herself from a man’s perspective. Often the female character has no real importance to herself, and it is how she often makes the protagonist male feel or act that is highlighted. Essentially, the female only exists in relation to the male. The male gaze dominates how viewers receive the story, and most importantly, how they will receive each individual character. However, when some characters are highlighted more than others, audiences get a biased interpretation of a potentially three-dimensional character.

Drawing from the male gaze theory, I will introduce the “White gaze” which takes on the same premise of the male gaze, the main tenet being how the viewer automatically assumes the perspective of the hegemonic force, in this case, the ‘White’ perspective. In the White gaze, minorities are reduced to objects used to boost a White agenda, and any injustices done against the protagonist will assumingly be justified. The audience already accepts that their perspective assumes a White body, and will receive all perks and legitimacies that Whites possess unless otherwise indicated. The White gaze affects how we consume and create media within one

specific hegemonic viewpoint, and how we are shielded from other standpoints. In 1993, Frankenburg considered whiteness to be of three interrelated occurrences: First, whiteness is “a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, ‘whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (Frankenburg 1). John T. Warren explains that, “when talking about race and power, academics tend to fall into the trap of niceness, reducing racism and white supremacy to talk of ‘systems’ and ‘discourses’. Such work...sidesteps the immediacy of racism’s felt effects, leaving individuals relatively untouched by their own racist acts” (280). When the dominant point of view falls within the White Gaze, all individuals learn to adapt and consume media with this particular hegemonic viewpoint. Thus, members who do not fall into the dominant White group adapt this dominant perspective, consuming media that only keeps one demographic prominent. As a result, those who are not represented within media are not properly characterized, and their lack of representation perpetuates within our dominant culture as we continue to produce works that exclude minority characters and emphasize the majority.

### **The Yellow Peril and the Repercussions it Faces with the White Gaze**

The “yellow peril,” “model minority,” and gendered divisions such as “dragon lady” and “lotus blossom/Madame Butterfly” have dominated the media portrayals of Asian women in the past. Many of these stereotypical portrayals came to existence during the mass exodus of Asian immigrants starting in the mid-19th century labeled as deviants and pollutants, and during the turn of the 20th century, known as the yellow peril (Kuwai). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the West feared the yellow race as a menace that would “threaten the domination of the White race, which stemmed from the large population size of East Asia, China’s potential

military and economic power, and Japan's rise as an imperial power after Japan defeated China in the Sino-Japanese war in 1885 and Russia in the Russo- Japanese war in 1905" (112). In addition, sexual stereotypes of Asian females are common in many forms of media, especially movies and television. Asian women "though given limited visual representation in media, when depicted are shown as exotic innocents, there for the conquest of men. Or, they are pictured as evil temptresses, with cruelty as their best feature. The message sent is that Asian women are only here either to serve or to destroy" (Lay 48). While these are all important in the field of studying Asian and Asian American representations, I will draw attention to female gender stereotypes and the "model minority" typecasts as the major identification codes in the tremendously popular series *Harry Potter*.

Stereotypes are widely accepted as culturally shared beliefs describing personal traits and characteristics of groups or individuals. In regards to the Cultivation Theory, media discourses help to define, share, and maintain racial stereotypes across societies over time, especially when inter-racial contact is limited (Shanahan). Stereotypes are descriptive in nature and have either positive or negative valence. While negative stereotypes of racial and ethnic out-groups are used to justify White superiority, positive stereotypes can also be detrimental. Apart from the obvious drawbacks of defining a group uni-dimensionally, "seemingly positive racial stereotypes can reinforce racial hierarchies while undermining support for race-targeted policies such as affirmative action" (Ramasubramanian). In J.K. Rowling's internationally acclaimed children's series, she features Cho Chang as a young Asian girl and Harry Potter's first love interest. Chang's presence in the novel is riddled with a basic storyline consisting mostly of weepy conversations with Harry concerning her deceased boyfriend and her conflicting affections towards Harry. There is an obvious lack of character background other than her stereotypical name, and her foremost purpose in the book is to aid Harry in his romantic trials. While her

character is neutral for the most part, she is overall defined as a negative and dramatic phase in Harry's life. What is important is that the difference in portraying a negative character and a dark character is this: a negative character has no redeeming features and tends to embrace the stereotype without explanation. It is a character with no motivation. A dark character would be one who is complex, whose motivation is visible to the audience, and one who you understand, even if you do not like that character. A dark character would be a tapestry of wants and needs that give the actor an entire world to embrace. The main antagonist in the story, Voldemort, had a prominent and rich background revealed in the book, while Chang's presence was subsidized by artificial emotions that barely scratched the surface of her character. It is clear to see how expendable her character is, and it seemed that her ethnicity was a gimmick. Cho's character could have easily been any other ethnicity, and her only true distinguishing feature is her role as Harry's exotic love interest. Her name gives clue to her background in addition to some clue of what Rowling was attempting to create with Chang's character, but in the end we are left with a puree of first and last names that originate from more than one dialect. One can hypothesize that even though Rowling spent time creating an off-center minority character love interest, Cho Chang was never truly necessary. Instead, her role in the series was simply to help Harry grow and become the man necessary to defeat evil. Her unique attributes were never addressed, and she was never given opportunities to prove herself. As a result, Harry learns what he dislikes in a partner, and Cho becomes personified singularly by her sexuality. Her talents and personal attributes are overlooked while her entire persona seemingly circulates around the boys in her life and her role in aiding their personal growth.

While Chang's presence seems limiting for Asian girls, Rowling's series does feature a strong female character that possesses traits and wits that are enviable amongst the most resourceful wizards. Hermione Granger has become the epitome of girl power in the series after

winning the title of “the most intelligent witch of her age” whilst fundamentally providing her best friends Ron Weasley and Harry Potter the solutions in completing tasks in and outside the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Hermione Granger is able to punch boys in the face and defeat the most skilled wizards of the century all while maintaining order in a world dominated by reckless men. While there were boys who popped up throughout her life, Granger’s sights were set on mainly helping Harry and passing her own exams. Meticulous, responsible, and a perfectionist, Hermione is insistent on order and steadfastly obedient to the rules, at the expense of her popularity. She spent little time worrying about her love life, and spent most of her efforts on improving her own skills. However, in spite of her straight-laced disposition, Hermione was not above using threats and coercion to get what she needed, or stand up for her friends when she thought it was in their best interests. Fervently obedient and loyal to her friends, the juxtaposition between Granger and Chang is painfully obvious, and is only exemplified when Granger personally approves Harry’s decision to break up with Chang due to her high emotionality and instability throughout the series.

I am not implying that J.K. Rowling is prejudiced. Instead, I believe that she unconsciously is part of the grand trap the dominant media has set up for us. Her inclusion of an Asian female as Harry’s love interest is admirable—it is stimulating to see that a character that had qualities I could relate to represent a possibly pivotal role in the series. Instead, I was disappointed to see how the character I related to the most could be simplified into a boy-crazy emotional muddle. Cho Chang’s depiction in the series is the most recent example of how Asian stereotypes can infiltrate our dominant media outlets, and reaches us in the earliest ages. In 1995, Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek explained that, “‘White(ness)’ is a relatively uncharted territory that has remained invisible as it continues to influence the identity of those both within and without its domain...It wields power yet endures as a largely unarticulated

position” (291). They explain that Whiteness rhetoric has always already assumed to be “a member of the center” which in turn creates a function invisibility: “If whiteness is everything and nothing, if whiteness as a racial category does not exist except in conflict of others, how can we understand racial politics in a social structure that centers whites, yet has no center?” (297). Their studies suggest that our structured society gives White individuals the advantage of being a member of the center, without being apparent about their dominance. However, due to this hegemonic arrangement, our societal structure is set up to boost and accommodate the White condition, without ever needing to mention it. This arrangement has repercussions on both sides: the members in the core of the configuration who benefit from it do not realize they are diminishing the freedoms of the members belonging outside the center, while the pleas from the minority groups go unheard. Nakayama and Krizek’s conversation about Whiteness Studies is an important one: the discussion of how the dominant culture is able to fade into the background, yet become the norm is crucial to how our governing culture functions. If we ignore how easily the center can remove itself from our culture’s lens, and explore how the periphery zones are being affected by being framed by a group that is seemingly untouchable, it is simple to fall into the cycle of repeating stories from a one-sided point of view.

Similarly, Henry Louis Gates talks about double consciousness, and how being part of a minority group would give certain individuals a cultural moment where he or she would be able to look at him or herself through the eyes of the dominant majority, but still understand the workings of society from a peripheral perspective. Even a thoroughly well thought-out story like J.K. Rowling’s enchanted masterpiece can fail to fully grasp the potential of having the double perception a minority character holds. John T. Warren suggests that, “whiteness [is] a performativity constituted identity, and he reminds us that one does not individually own the ways whiteness has been constituted; rather, whiteness is produced in ways that individual

subjects may not even be aware of' (281). Those who participate within our dominant media have a say and influence in regard to how "whiteness" is formed in our thoughts. Although they may not mean to hinder the minority agenda, white performativity will manifest and affect both groups in large ways that can go undetected.

### **Cho Chang: Athlete, Scholar, Courageous Friend, and/or Temptress?**

J.K. Rowling began writing her award-winning series as a single mother on her lunch hour. Inspired by fantastical creative pieces of work, Rowling created a magical world inspired by real people in her life. She has exclusively stated that many prominent characters in her books are built from childhood friends and memories. She has even written characters with whom she identifies with personally, particularly Hermione Granger. Her work became an international hit and Rowling finished seven complete books for the series, which sold into the hundreds of millions and adapted into a blockbuster film franchise. The children's series blasted Rowling's literary career through to super-stardom, and she continues to write for both adult and children readers.

Rowling became an international literary sensation in 1999, when the first three installments of her series took over the top three slots of the *New York Times* best-seller list after achieving similar success in the UK. The phenomenal response to her books culminated in July 2000, when the fourth volume in the series, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, became the fastest selling book in history (Joanne Rowling). Rowling has become Britain's 13<sup>th</sup> wealthiest woman, a pioneer of children's literature. Her work in the series is remarkable since she allows her novels to mature with her readers. She realizes that her franchise has a living soul, and consequently has adapted her words to adjust to each of our individual lives. As Rowling writes Harry to grow in each novel, her readers have too.

Rowling features Cho Chang in the fourth installment of the series, although she does get mentioned in the third novel. When Harry decides to attempt to have a relationship with Cho, we experience Harry's first crush firsthand as he attempts to get her attention, helps her grieve over ex-boyfriends, and eventually pushes her aside as she deems worthless to him in the sixth novel. Cho's spastic attention towards Harry grows over the series, and even though she moves from boy to boy after their break up, Rowling makes it seem that Cho never truly gets over Harry. It appears that many readers have felt Cho's sudden absence in Harry's life as irrelevant, explaining how Rowling makes it seem that, "people of other ethnicities are okay to date, to prove our liberal credentials; but no self-respecting hero-type ever ends up with them. Or treats them as anything more than a blow-up sex doll" (Chaos). As readers move on throughout the series, Cho's character becomes less and less mentioned, and booklovers are left with a character with no explanation for herself, her actions, or emotions. It poses the question: If JK Rowling had been a black writer, created only one white character, and portrayed the white character as badly as she did Cho, could she have escaped scrutiny as easily as she did? Was Cho truly even necessary as a character, or would any other female been acceptable in her position? In this next section, I will do a close analysis of Cho Chang's presence in the series, and analyze how her existence in Harry's life and the novels perpetuates Rowling's subtle prejudices.

#### **Athlete**

*"She's a fourth year, and she's pretty good...."*

*(Prisoner, 272)*

When first introduced in the series, Cho Chang is described as being extremely beautiful, with a flair for flying. A Quidditch match between her house Ravenclaw and Gryffindor sparks her first appearance and first encounter with Harry Potter. Rowling mentions Cho's beauty first and foremost, but quickly conceals it behind Cho's talents as the only female player on her team:

Their Seeker, Cho Chang, was the only girl on their team. She was shorter than Harry by about a head, and Harry couldn't help noticing, nervous as he was, that she was extremely pretty. She smiled at Harry as the teams faced each other behind their captains, and he felt a slight lurch in the region of his stomach that he didn't think had anything to do with nerves. (*Prisoner 277*)

Her position as the Seeker provides the reader an image of a smaller, speedy individual, with great attention to detail. Rowling's decision to debut Chang during an important athletic match is commendable. Chang and Harry have a semblance of similar likes and interests, especially since they play the same position on their respective teams. Chang appears repeatedly throughout the series, usually touting a sporting team's badge or attending sporting tournaments. The fact that Chang is able to go head-to-head against Harry gives the readers a look at her competence on the Quidditch field, but also puts her on even footing with Harry. However, although Chang is said to be apt on the field, she shadows Harry throughout the game as he "[notices] that Cho Chang was tailing him closely. She was undoubtedly a very good flier — she kept cutting across him, forcing him to change direction" (*Prisoner 278*). As a result, instead of utilizing her own senses to win the match, she decides to set a mark on Harry and follow his moves. Although her talents on the field are well respected, she is never shown being able to actually win a match using her own flair for flight. The only Quidditch match where she is featured ends up as a disaster when soul-eating Dementors interrupt the game. In the film adaption of this scene, viewers only see Harry's point of view of the match, and there is no mention or sight of Chang whatsoever.

It is tremendous to see a minor character get introduced with an extra dimension to her roles right away. In this case, readers first meet Cho as a "very pretty girl who played Seeker on the Ravenclaw team" (*Goblet of Fire*, 114). Within the first sentence, readers gather clues about

Cho's ethnicity, personality, and appearance. However, the clues end there. Cho's perspective is incredibly limited throughout the novels and the films. She is completely absent in the third film, and introduced in the fourth. Katie Leung, a Scottish actress who plays Cho Chang in the films, has extremely limited screen time and even fewer lines. The films skip over her Quidditch abilities and hang strictly on her good looks to rationalize Harry's attraction to her. That being said, Chang becomes more and more personified by her beauty, and less for the talents she actually possesses. Her actions in shadowing Harry promote a model minority image by choosing to promote her sidekick instincts instead of endorsing her keen leadership intuition.

### **Scholar**

***"Wit beyond measure is man's greatest treasure."***  
*(Deathly Hallows, 588)*

In addition to her athleticism, Chang is presumed to be very clever. Her decision to shadow Harry's movements in the Quidditch match is the first example of her intelligence. Chang was sorted into the Ravenclaw House, which prizes learning, wisdom, wit, and intellect in its members. Many Ravenclaw students tend to be academically motivated and talented scholars. In fact, Hermione Granger was strongly considered for Ravenclaw before being sorted into Gryffindor. Chang possesses numerous strengths academically, exclusively within the subject of Charms, as she was able to produce advanced pieces of magic, including conjuring a corporeal Patronus in her sixth year. She has also deemed proficient in Defense Against the Dark Arts, defensive spells that proved beneficial when she fought and survived the Second Wizarding War. Her expertise and advice was also vital to Harry during the War, giving Potter crucial information in helping him find the final object necessary to defeat Lord Voldemort. The object, a diadem that belonged to Rowena Ravenclaw, had been hidden for centuries and thought to be lost forever. Chang was able to help Harry plan his first move in the castle, giving him the idea to visit the Ravenclaw Common Room to have a look at the diadem undetected. However,

before she was able to show her discovery, Harry's primary love interest, Ginny, interjects and insists that Luna Lovegood show Harry the Common Room. Luna Lovegood is also a Ravenclaw, whose grey eyes often appeared to be dreamily distracted. Her extremely quirky personality and eccentric beliefs lead her to become constantly ostracized by her classmates. Rowling has stated that Luna is one of her favorite characters to write for, and is, "slightly out of step in many ways but she's the anti-Hermione. Hermione's so logical and inflexible in so many ways and Luna is likely to believe ten impossible things before breakfast" (J.K. Rowling at the Royal). In the film, Luna aids Harry with the last Horcrux, giving him information about the diadem. In contrast to the book, Cho contends against Luna and puts down her suggestion. Instead of aiding Harry in his process, she is seen as negative and halting.

Rowling's decision to push aside Chang and give credit to Luna was a deliberate one. Masked behind teenage jealousy, Rowling set up a classic scenario that we have all witnessed in modern media: Although minority characters can aid their major counterparts, they will never be able to complete the task they helped solve. Using Luna as a character foil for Hermione, Rowling does a fantastic job showing how the two female polar opposite character archetypes are acceptable in our culture. However, she silently dismisses all those that fall in between the two extremes, subtly hinting that those who lie outside the majority will be rejected. Although Cho, a minor character, can aid immensely to advancing the White condition, she will never be able to get the recognition or treatment she deserves. Instead, the acknowledgment will be allocated to the majority, and the perspective shown to the audience presumes the White body, securing the core viewpoint while staying undetected.

### **Courageous Friend**

*“I never dreamed Marietta would tell... She's a lovely person, really. She just made a mistake...”*  
(*Order*, 637)

Cho had other opportunities to showcase her character, and she appears in many scenes with Harry that dictates her allegiance to morality. She is fiercely loyal to her friends, sports teams, and House. She, along with dozens of other loyal students, helped Harry defeat Lord Voldemort and his supporters. In her sixth year, she joined Dumbledore's Army, a secret organization initiated by Harry and his friends to teach their fellow Hogwarts students proper Defense Against the Dark Arts. Although her parents did not approve, Cho attended meetings and worked to perfect her skills in the event that she would need to protect herself and others. Cho's determination to fight against Lord Voldemort was motivated by her previous boyfriend's death, who was killed by the Dark Lord the year before. She also brought fellow Ravenclaw friend Marietta Edgecombe along to the meetings, despite the girl's reluctance. Later in the year, Marietta betrayed the D.A. to the school administration, and was hexed with a blistered face, exposing her of the disloyalty. Cho becomes the only person from the association to stay friends with Marietta, and considered what they did as a “horrible trick” (*Order of the Phoenix*, 637). When Harry scorned Marietta for the betrayal and Cho defended her, their relationship quickly fell apart and the two did not interact until she graduated from Hogwarts. In the film, Marietta Edgecombe is completely left out of the story. Instead, Chang is left carrying the shame of ousting the D.A. under the influence of a truth serum, and completely disfiguring her relationship with Harry. However, she never gets the opportunity to tell this to Harry in her own words, and the audience is told about her illegal interrogation through the dialogue of other major characters. The director David Yates decided not to include any scenes featuring Cho explaining herself to Harry, and uses the absence of communication as the end of their relationship.

Although Cho may be terrible at picking friends, she stayed determinedly loyal to what she believes in. Her decision to join an organization that would put her academic life in danger accentuates her desire to be part of something important. She acknowledges that there is an issue to be solved, and is happy to team up with others in an effort to resolve it. However, the moment it appeared that Chang was not loyal to the (White) cause, all her supposed friends turned their backs on her. In the books, her allegiance to Marietta causes a rift in her relationship with Harry, and in turn the rest of the D.A. In the films, her supposed disloyalty goes unanswered. When Cho approaches Harry to speak to him about what had occurred, he pushes past her and refuses to speak to her. We only learn later that she was drugged by the school administration, and even then there is no form of closure for Cho. Her once pure relationship with Harry becomes muddled and dropped quite quickly. It appears that her action, or rather inaction, made her disadvantage to Harry's agenda. On the other hand, she becomes an object used to boost the school administration's agenda, and becomes so easily disposed of that not even Harry notices her absence. Effectively, Cho Chang is not even given a chance to explain her misfortunes, and furthermore, is used as a disposable pawn that becomes so easily removable that the audience does not seem to care about her fate. She becomes Harry's toxin, poisoning his life with her presence, and the moment she disappears, he will be able to get back on track.

### **Temptress**

**Ron:** *"You're well out of it, mate. I mean, she's quite good-looking and all that, but you want someone a bit more cheerful."*

**Harry:** *"She's probably cheerful enough with someone else."*  
(Order, 866).

Harry's crush on Cho began during his third year and her fourth. He attempted to pursue her during his fourth year; however, at that time, she was dating Cedric Diggory. Extremely popular and friendly, Cho had a large group of friends and a crowd of male admirers. Her

loyalty and kindness made her a well-liked student at Hogwarts, and her athletic and intellectual proficiency made her very appealing to be around. However, after Cedric's death, Cho became conflicted with her feelings about Harry. Throughout her sixth year, Cho's relationship with Harry increased intimately as she confided to him her clashed feelings about Cedric's death after D.A. meetings. Harry's presence left Cho wanting answers from him regarding Cedric's passing, whilst simultaneously battling romantic feelings towards him. As Harry discussed Cedric's death with both Ron and Hermione, while refusing to do the same with Cho, Cho began to increasingly dislike Harry's two best friends. She did not trust Harry's friends, and believed that Harry had more than platonic feelings for Hermione. Within the novel, this was one of the major reasons that Cho and Harry fell apart:

Harry: "Look, let's not talk about Cedric right now... let's talk about something else."

Cho: "I thought, I thought you'd u-u-understand! I need to talk about it! Surely you n-need to talk about it too! I mean, you saw it happen, d-didn't you?"

Harry: "Well — I have talked about it, to Ron and Hermione, but —"

Cho: "Oh, you'll talk to Hermione Granger! But you won't talk to me! P-perhaps it would be best if we just... just p-paid and you went and met up with Hermione G-Granger, like you obviously want to!" (*Order of the Phoenix*, 562)

Ironically, Hermione was attempting to give advice to Harry on building a successful relationship with Cho. When Harry approached his best friends about what to do about her, Hermione responds with an empathetic response:

Obviously, she is feeling very sad, because of Cedric dying. Then I expect she's feeling confused because she liked Cedric and now she likes Harry, and she can't work out who she likes best. Then she'll be feeling guilty, thinking it's an insult to Cedric's memory to be kissing Harry at all... And she probably can't work out what her feelings

are towards Harry anyway, because he was the one who was with Cedric when Cedric died, so that's all very mixed up and painful. (*Order of the Phoenix*, 459)

It is wonderful that Rowling fashioned dialogue that gives insight into how Cho was feeling throughout her trials with Harry. However, we still never hear it come from Cho's own mouth. In the film and series, most scenes that Cho appears in present her in tears, and justifiably so; nevertheless, Harry does not understand how to handle her emotions. He dismisses her attempts to communicate with him, and he pushes her away the more she tries to speak about Cedric. Harry and others perceive Cho to be excessively melodramatic and filled with angst, with very little control over her emotions. Though her distress is expected after the murder of her boyfriend, Cho spends the rest of her year at Hogwarts in sadness, losing her large group of friends, and using others in hopes of gaining more details on Cedric's death. She is so consumed by sadness that only Hermione understands the trials that she is going through but is too weak to express on her own. Her entire existence becomes absorbed in the boys she dates as she withdraws from her close friends and becomes obsessed with procuring male companions. Her emotional mood swings indicate how Cho cannot handle the stresses in her life. In comparison to Hermione, who is able to simultaneously master her classes while helping Harry run a banned underground organization, Cho is constantly crying and unable to get her life back together. Her high emotionality and constant need for a male companion further divides her from Hermione, who retains her independence until the final book. Cho becomes unable to serve Harry in the way that he preferred, and once he realized her incapability to aid him in romantic matters, he quickly grows indifferent to her. Once again, Cho becomes a pawn used in Harry's master chess game.

### **Conclusion**

*"I wouldn't want to be in a film because I'm Asian. I want to get respect as an actress."*

*Katie Leung, Scot actress who plays Cho Chang (IMDb)*

Cho Chang is introduced as Harry's first crush, kiss, and girlfriend. She supported him during the Triwizard Tournament, even though her boyfriend was one of his rivals. Her introduction into the series was a positive one, but her departure was anything but. Although Cho possesses desirable traits, her trivial role hinders her from being able to get the full acknowledgement she deserves. While she has all the top qualities on paper, Cho's relationships never truly work out. Rowling has acknowledged that Chang marries a non-magical person after her departure from Hogwarts, after spurts of other less serious boyfriends (Larson). The actress who portrays Cho Chang in the films, Katie Leung, has stated that she would like to get respect as an actress, and not to appear in the film as a gimmick. Unfortunately, Cho Chang could have easily been played by any Asian girl, Leung just happened to fit the role best. Rowling created a best-selling caricature off Chang's character, who appears in Harry's life with the sole purpose of showing him the melodramatic trials of teenage love. Her character is so plainly one dimensional and half-baked that stereotypical Asian typecasts have subtly seeped into the subplots without much dialogue—her presence is simply enough. Chang becomes a girl self-possessed by her emotions, provoked by the boys she surrounds herself with. Her lack of any specific background leaves her character flat and uninteresting, and as a result, the audience becomes more attached to Harry and his storyline. We see everything occur from his point of view, even if the events occurring directly affect Cho. We never acknowledge Cho prove herself in her own organic way, and instead we must depend on major characters to deliver us tidbits on her happenings. Her lack of agency is disappointing, especially when she possesses all qualities necessary to be a much larger character. Instead of appearing strong and bold like Hermione who is able to run after the injustices done to her and her friends, Chang crumbles to the pressure

and ceases to benefit any agenda. Thus, she gets tossed aside and mislabeled as a submissive, overemotional female, whose sole happiness stems from the boys she has relationships with.

The White Gaze subtly manipulates the minority group to boost the personal agendas of the White condition. Further, we assume the perspective of a White body when consuming media, completely disfiguring any hope of upholding the minority standpoint. Within our dominant culture, we consume material that reduces all forms of Asian agency. Asian characters rarely get to see their work out to the end, and if they do, their perspective is rarely ever shown. Our culture devours media that boosts one group's schema while effectively overlooking another. As a result, the sheer sparseness of any realistic, balanced, or self-defined portrayals of Asians in popular culture makes any new portrayal stand out conspicuously—a nail to be scrutinized and hammered down. It appears that whenever Chang was emotionally and mentally stable, she was desired by all her peers. However, the instant she was not able to handle her stresses, she moved from being a positive to negative character, and is pushed aside by someone else the audience can relate to better.

The most important idea regarding The White Gaze in regards to Asian representation is the lack of Asian agency. Tierney (2006) explains, “whiteness themes in films...rationalize and validate the cultural appropriations in the films and secure the center for the White protagonist” (608). If our culture continues to view and produce themes of Whiteness in films, we run risk of furthering already subtle, yet disparaging, effects to other social groups. Because our current perspective partakes in a dominantly White perspective, we will only receive one perception. Hundreds of Asian girls are reading the novels, or watching the films, wondering how the only person in the series they can identify with could be so damaging. When consuming it within the dominant White Gaze, it is quite easy to fall into the trap we have set for ourselves. Proper representation of our society, and racial mindfulness are important. The way we read books,

watch television, and listen to the radio are being shaped by our current discourse. Unless we adjust the way we portray and represent individuals in a balanced manner, there will be dozens more Cho Changs lost in the pages forever.

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