

[연구논문]

# The Color of Brainwashing: *The Manchurian Candidate* and the Cultural Logic of Cold War Paranoia

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[T]he shock of the discovery of the plight of the prisoners placed Chinese conduct in a new, infinitely more disturbing light. Mao Tse Tung's China acquired a new, far more frightening and disturbing aspect. From this, arguably, its image in the West never recovered. Long after the Korean War receded into memory, the fear of "the Manchurian candidate" remained.

Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (1987, 304)

The concept of a rumor does not deny the presence of existential threats facing the United States during the course of the Cold War. In fact, the predominant image of the enemy was, at times, quite realistic. Nevertheless, veracity had little to do with the rumor's reception. The rumor spread because it provided a culturally compelling explanation for an uncertain predicament; fact and accuracy played a supporting role only. The sinister face of the enemy emerged primarily from a common "universe of discourse" and a pool of "shared assumptions" permeating American society at mid-century.

Ron Robin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy* (2001, 4)

The Korean War brought one of the great sea changes in postwar American history, yet the most mysterious and terrifying outcome for the American public was a psychological one: “[o]ne of the most interesting aftermaths of the Korean conflict in 1950–1953 has been the preoccupation of many Americans with ‘brainwashing.’”<sup>1)</sup> As the ultimate product of Cold War paranoia, brainwashing was considered the latest weapon that would complement an ideological warfare. The term “brainwashing” was coined by an anti-communist journalist Edward Hunter, who had worked in Japan and China as a propaganda specialist during World War II. In his book, *Brainwashing in Red China: The Calculated Destruction of Men’s Minds* (1951), Hunter explained that “brainwashing” was a direct translation of the Chinese term *xi-nao* (洗腦), characters meaning respectively ‘wash’ and ‘brain.’ While Hunter spelled out the term as if it were a secretive form of Oriental witchcraft, “‘brainwashing’ actually referred to the Chinese principle of *thought reform* (思想改造), which had evolved from the philosophies of Marx and Mao.”<sup>2)</sup> Also known as ‘ideological remolding’ or ‘ideological reform,’ *thought reform* was the name for a Chinese communist program that guided one through a proper ideological path to become a “Good communist.” The program not only drew on classical Chinese philosophy but made use of many traditional Chinese educational approaches such as constant repetition and rigid forms.<sup>3)</sup> By integrating Marxist doctrines in the

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1) Edgar H. Schein, “Brainwashing and Totalitarianization in Modern Society.” Rev. of *Brave New World Revisited* by Aldous Huxley and *The Rape of the Mind: The Psychology of Thought Control—Menticide and Brainwashing* by Joost A. M. Meerloo. *World Politics* 11, 3 (1959): 430.

2) Timothy Kendall, “‘Torture – and Loving Care – in China’: Captivity and the Fiction of Oriental Despotism.” Eds. Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy, and Steven G. Yao. *Sinographies: Writing China*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 202.

Confucian tradition, *thought reform* sought to effectively convert the Chinese people to communist values and practices. In principle, the program differed little from other consciousness-raising activities in many cultures including Western psychotherapy.

Hunter's fictional neologism did not gather wide public attention until the controversy rose regarding the American prisoners of war (POWs). It was reported that 23 American POWs voluntarily renounced their US citizenship to remain in communist China<sup>4</sup>) and the Army issued an extensive report on the treatment of American prisoners called "POW: The Fight Continues After the Battle" in 1955, two years after the armistice ending the Korean War. The report instigated a popular obsession with brainwashing by confirming that thousands of the surviving prisoners of war underwent intensive indoctrination by Chinese communists through a hypnotic method. In 1959, journalist Eugene Kinkead claimed in his book, *In Every War But One* (or *Why They Collaborated* in UK), that one-third of all POWs collaborated with the enemy. When communist sympathies were regarded pathological and the descriptions of communism relied heavily on the rhetoric of disease, any successful appeal of communism was unthinkable. Besides, even if ideological reasons were put behind, it struck as particularly odd why any one would culturally prefer "an extremely backward, dreadfully impoverished country, supposedly out of preference for its

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3) Robert J. Lifton, "Thought Reform of Chinese Intellectuals: A Psychiatric Evaluation," *The Journal of Social Issues*, Eds. Raymond A. Bauer and Edgar H. Schein, 13:3, (1957), 17.

4) The number of POWs decreased to 21 after further investigation, but the rationale behind the number continued to attract public interest as suggested in the title of Virginia Pasley's book, *21 Stayed: The Story of American GIs Who Chose communist China -Who They Were And Why They Stayed*, published in 1955.

way of life” over “the highest standard of living that the earth had ever seen.”<sup>5)</sup> The public interest and concern regarding the American POWs was so intense that the returned POWs were “for a time, one of the most extensively studied groups in United States history.”<sup>6)</sup> There was a national anxiety for the potential harm that might be done to the American society if the most “contagious” of the infected POWs were unleashed into the public. Books and articles apparently persuaded the public that brainwashing, or psychological conditioning using a combination of Pavlovian science and Oriental artifice, was a real possibility.<sup>7)</sup> The concept of brainwashing was enormously effective in accounting for what appeared to be inexplicable to the American public. It was threatening to know that Americans were infiltrated by an unforeseen irresistible force against their will but at the same time reassuring to believe that Americans were ideologically loyal to begin with if it were not for the evil mind control weapons developed in the East. Contrary to the populist notion that brainwashing originated from the sinister Asian communists, the concept of brainwashing was a peculiarly American one and was propagated by the U.S. military and intelligent agencies.

Of all the Cold War narratives about brainwashing, arguably John Frankenheimer’s *The Manchurian Candidate* most vividly depicts the

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5) Hunter, 11.

6) Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

7) A body of texts about brainwashing began to emerge by journalists and behavior scientists including Hunter, Lifton, Kinkead, Schein, Bauer, Segal, and Miller. Articles on American POWs from the Korean War frequented mainstream publications: “Stories about the experiences of American prisoners appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, *Times Magazine*, and *The New Yorker*” (Louis Menand, “Brainwashed,” *The New Yorker*, 78, Sept. 15, (2003):88).

Cold War paranoia about mind control: "Indeed, *The Manchurian Candidate* became an explanation for brainwashing –so much so that a 1979 ABC documentary on CIA 'mind control' used clips from the movie to illustrate its thesis"<sup>8)</sup>(J. Hoberman 19). As a cinematic adaptation of Richard Condon's best-selling 1959 novel of the same title, Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* chronicles the story of American POWs brainwashed during the Korean War. Worshipped as the 'hero' at his return to U.S., Raymond Shaw (Lawrence Harvey) turns out to be the "Manchurian candidate" programmed by the Soviets and the Red Chinese to take assassination orders to infiltrate the U.S. government. Captain Bennett Marco (Frank Sinatra), who has led Raymond's patrol in Korea, succeeds in breaking himself out of brainwashing to uncover the communist plot. Towards the end, the film reveals that the chief communist operator was none other but Raymond's own mother, Mrs. Iselin (Angela Lansbury), who has been puppeteering McCarthy-like Mr. Iselin and her own son. The film, as the prototypical mind control narrative, proved how brainwashing was a larger-than-life threat for Americans during the Cold War era.

The film suffered from relative obscurity for over a quarter of a century since its original release in 1962. First being dumped by its studio United Artists for failing to live up to its expectations, the film was withheld by Frank Sinatra, who played the movie's main role, for reasons best known to himself.<sup>9)</sup> Meanwhile, the film developed a substantial underground reputation. To use screenwriter George Axelrod's

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8) J. Hoberman, "When Dr. No Met Dr. Strangelove," *Sight and Sound*, 3:12, (1993): 19.

9) Many have speculated the movie was withdrawn because of the assassination of President Kennedy yet the assassination did not take place after a year from the original theatrical release of the film.

words at the film's theatrical re-release in 1988, "[t]he movie went from failure to classic without passing through success."<sup>10</sup>) When the film finally gained its opportunity for reassessment, most of the critical attention on the film focused on the apparent political crisis of the era —of McCarthyism, Cold War, the dangers of international communism, assassination, and the political intrigue. It was almost as if the critical reviews in various film magazines and scholarly history journals were reviving the dichotomous conflict of the Cold War era.<sup>11</sup>) After the initial round of critical debate about the ideological standpoint of the film, the scholarly attention underwent a decided shift to address gender issues. Tony Jackson, for instance, offered a characteristically Freudian reading of the film to demonstrate how the Cold War paranoia of gender roles were represented in the film: "the real danger, the real fear, involve[d] the feminization of the American male and the coming to power of the American female" (39). Scholarly analyses that followed in this strain expanded upon Schreber's version of "paranoia" to uncover the queer context of the film.<sup>12</sup>) Both Kevin Ohi and Matt Bell paralleled the Cold War paranoia to the homosexual panic: "That closed system —of which *The Manchurian Candidate* is a prophetic allegory —also shares with Cold War paranoia an excluded center of queerness"<sup>13</sup>);

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10) Aljean Harmetz, "'Manchurian Candidate,' Old Failure, Is Now a Hit." *The New York Times*, Feb 24 (1988).

11) For critical reviews in film magazines, see Doherty (*Cineaste*), Berry (*Cinemaya*), and Hoberman (*Sight and Sound*). For scholarly history journals, see Kirshner, Carruthers, and Young.

12) In his analysis of Schreber's paranoia, Freud ascribes the cause of paranoid delusion to homosexual impulses unresolved in infancy or early childhood. See Sigmund Freud, "Psychoanalytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (*Dementia Paranoides*)," *Three Case Histories*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier, 1963).

13) Ohi, Kevin. "Of Red Queens and Garden Clubs: *The Manchurian Candidate*,

"*The Manchurian Candidate* figures the repressed homosexual wish-fantasy in the neurotic, 'negative' form of paranoid delusion"<sup>14</sup>) (Bell 90). In the most recent critical reviews of the film, scholars have continued to prove how the film courts yet another paranoia of the period, namely the integrity of the human mind. For instance, Timothy Melley has argued that "*The Manchurian Candidate*'s deepest worry is neither communism nor anticommunism but embattled human autonomy" (157) and Catherine Canino has claimed that the film fulfilled the prophecies of "the imagined loss of cherished American autonomy and free will" (134).

What strikes as quite extraordinary is that while it took over a half a century for the critical analyses to cover all the major paranoid fantasies of the period and the critical attention on the film has changed through the years to reflect the evolving scholarly foci, the contemporaries of the film were already aware of entire the oeuvre, possibly even before the film's 1962 release. In his 1959 review essay titled "Brainwashing and Totalitarianization in Modern Society," Edgar H. Schein writes regarding the American preoccupation with brainwashing:

There are probably many reasons for this preoccupation. First because our struggle with the communist world is partially an ideological one, we need new terms for ideological weapons —e.g., "brainwashing." Second, because the Chinese communists were successful in stalemating the Korean conflict and in eliciting germ-warfare confessions and other collaborative behavior from their American prisoners of war (POWs), we have had to find someone or something to blame. The conclusion that the collaborator and confessor

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Cold War Paranoia, and the Historicity of the Homosexual." *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*, 58 (2005): 176.

- 14) Matt Bell, "'Your Worst Fears Made Flesh': *The Manchurian Candidate*'s Paranoid Delusion and Gay Liberation." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12:1, (2006): 90.

were “brainwashed” is one convenient way of assigning such blame. Third, our own society has become increasingly concerned about the ethics and implications of techniques of overt and covert persuasion [...]. Fourth, our changing international position has led us to an attitude of tense doubt about our supremacy and our capacity to cope with international problems. Given these and doubtless many other factors, it is no wonder that we have begun to question where the limits of the integrity of the human mind lie, and increasingly to entertain concepts like “brainwashing” which express graphically our loss of confidence in our capacity as individuals to master our world. When things go wrong, it is far less ego-deflating to say that we have been “brainwashed” than to recognize our own inadequacy in coping with our problems.<sup>15)</sup> (430–431)

In the introductory paragraph to his essay, Schein demonstrates how brainwashing served to alleviate a myriad of cultural fears including ideology, psychological influence, and cultural fears of losing free will. His list is eerily prophetic in summing up the film’s critical oeuvre that was to follow in the next 50 years. Part of the reason why Schein sounds like a clairvoyant is in *The Manchurian Candidate*’s success at courting all the paranoid fantasies of the time. The film has garnered its canonical status in regards to Cold War culture as much as to have a book-length study on the film published in recent years to provide an “analysis of the ways in which [*The Manchurian Candidate*] opens out onto larger questions and themes of American politics and culture in the Cold War years” (Jacobson and Gonzalez x). By bringing together the period’s most invasive hostilities of Red Menace, McCarthyism, Momism<sup>16)</sup>, and mind control under the theme

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15) Schein, 430–431.

16) A term coined by Philip Wylie in his 1942 book, *A Generation of Vipers*. Momism was a critique against excessive maternal influence on boys that



of brainwashing,<sup>17)</sup> *The Manchurian Candidate* succeeded in becoming “what is perhaps the Cold War’s most paranoid film.”<sup>18)</sup> In other words, the film was exemplary to the extent of capturing the gist of the period as analyzed by Schein and his contemporaries.

According to Ron Robin, Edgar Schein was one of the leading social psychologists at the time to head the Johns Hopkins–administered Operations Research Office (ORO), one of the major army–funded research programs responsible for producing scientific reports on brainwashing of American POWs. In an attempt to prove American national character as impervious to communist methods of indoctrination, the study reported that “the methods of coercion employed by Chinese captors did not represent anything out of the ordinary” and “the enemy had not employed unusual ‘Pavlovian’ techniques to break the will of the prisoners.”<sup>19)</sup><sup>20)</sup> Claiming

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led to the demasculinization of American men. The concept gained wide appeal leading to a broader concern about the malleability of the American self along with the growing fear of rise of male homosexuality. See Kyle A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

- 17) Edelstein offers a smart rundown of the major themes of the film: “The Frankenheimer–Axelrod adaptation of Richard Condon’s bracingly unsentimental novel is indelibly early ‘60s: when fear of the Red Menace collided head-on with revulsion for the Red-baiting legacy of Sen. Joseph McCarthy; when the themes of brainwashing and the bomb and ‘50s ultrasensitive momma’s boys and Freudian monster-mamas all coalesced into the freakiest paranoid melodrama the country had ever seen.”
- 18) Jared Gardner, “Bringing the Cold War Home: Reprogramming American Culture in *The Manchurian Candidate*,” *Proceedings of the Conference on Film and American Culture*. (Williamsburg: Roy R. Charles Center, College of William and Mary, 1994), 27.
- 19) Ron Robin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military–Intellectual Complex* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 171.
- 20) Leading behavioral scientists including Raymond Bauer, Edgar Schein, Robert Lifton, and Julius Segal contributed to the 1957 special issue of *The Journal*

that there was no successful evidence of brainwashing, the ORO study reported that only a small proportion of POWs collaborated and even those collaborative activities had little to do with ideological persuasions. However these government-ordained reports and studies were no less controversial and politically informed than the narratives produced by critics of POW conduct. Where these major reports were particularly unconvincing were on the issue of race and ethnicity. Despite the extensive nature of these empirical studies and their meticulous attention to numbers, race was thoroughly dismissed in all reports. To describe the first racially integrated war in American history, the reports resorted to uncharacteristically vague phrases such as “a great percentage [of POWs] were Negroes; a very large number were Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-Americans.”<sup>21)</sup> Without statistical evidence, the reports attempted to deny race as a significant social category arguing that race, as opposed to factors like class and education, did not matter when it came to ideological persuasions. While initial debriefing files of repatriated POWs suggested reports of racial tensions and racist gangs within the camps, such material disappeared in the scientific reports as if ethnic subcultures or discriminations were nonexistent.

Needless to say the reason why these reports ignored race had to do with the political need to produce an alternative definition of the American body politic. The army-funded reports had to assume that the experience of the minority POWs were analogous to that of the other POWs to follow the theoretical paradigms of the researchers. The researchers who led the army-funded studies including Schein,

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*of Social Issues* to debunk the myth of brainwashing.

21) Albert D. Biderman, *March to Calumny* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1963), 25; quoted in Robin, 173.

Biderman, and Segal were influenced by the disciplinary paradigms of the time as well as their own ethnic background as Jews.<sup>22)</sup> According to David Hollinger, Jews were prominent in the budding behavioral sciences, which reflected their willingness to participate in the American intellectual life that heretofore “barred Jews and other non-Christians from full participation.”<sup>23)</sup> Therefore many behavioral scientists were skeptical about the cultural authority of Protestant heritage that held up patriotism and anticommunist ideologies and attempted to challenge the standard bearers of culture through their antiauthoritarian “science.” The disciplinary paradigms these researchers worked within emphasized socioeconomic factors of class and education to account for social phenomena and did not consider race or ethnicity as a viable social category.<sup>24)</sup> It can be conjectured that ignoring race made it more feasible for the Jewish academics to enter the mainstream American culture defined by traditional Protestant values. In other words, the ethnically-informed academic agenda of the Jewish intellectuals paradoxically rendered racial or ethnic difference inconsequential. It is in this context that one must understand why the major POW studies studiously avoided the issues of race and ethnicity despite the substantial minority presence in the POWs. The studies argued that even if there were African American POWs who collaborated with the communists, it was not because of their race, but because of their lower-class status and lack of education in America.

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22) Robin, 174–179.

23) David Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth-Century American Intellectual History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), x.

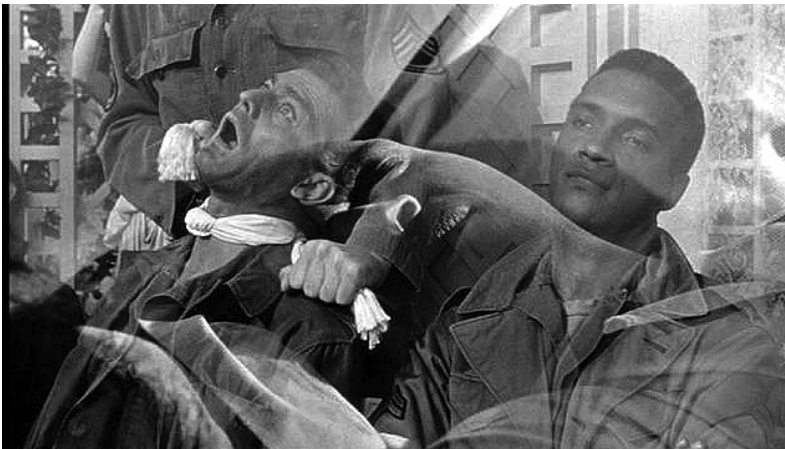
24) According to Robin, most notably “Chicago School of Sociology,” of which Schein and his colleagues were members, “denied the existence of a uniquely African American subculture” and claimed that “the assignment of African cultural attributes was essentialist and scientifically false” (Robin 175).

It is therefore all the more telling that the critical oeuvre of *The Manchurian Candidate*, despite its comprehensive analyses on different aspects of the Cold War paranoia, mirrors the silence of the mid-century POW reports on the issues of race and ethnicity. It is almost as if the critical reviews have chosen to expand on the perspective of Schein and his contemporaries and thereby conceded to adopt their stance on issues of race and ethnicity. In fact, the film itself adheres to what the mid-century behavioral scientists may have envisioned of at the time. The film's most celebrated scene of the brainwashing sequences, for instance, is offered in two different versions –one by Corporal Melvin, the patrol's only African American, and another by Marco.<sup>25)</sup> Remembered for its technical inventiveness, the scene has been used in numerous documentaries to illustrate the virtual process of brainwashing. The scene features the American soldiers as members of what at first appears to be a parodically perfect ladies' garden party in New Jersey. The camera makes a 360° turn around a rotating circular set to reveal what may be the unlikeliest setting for the American POWs –a summery, flowery surroundings, with all grandmotherly, well-dressed women drinking tea and taking notes as Mrs. Whittaker speaks on hydrangeas and cold air drainage. Once the camera has made a complete circuit of the scene, it abruptly becomes an auditorium in which a Chinese communist stands before the captured American soldiers making a presentation to high-ranking officials from various communist nations. Both Corporal Melvin and Marco abruptly wake up sweating and terrified from their nightmares reciting the identical words: "Raymond Shaw is the kindest, bravest, warmest, most wonderful human being I've ever known in my life." The only difference between their dream sequences

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25) See <Figure 1>.

is that Mrs. Whittaker and all the ladies in the garden club are African Americans in Corporal Melvin's dream.<sup>26)</sup> While coupling the two dream sequences may have allowed some viewers to grasp what is going on in a rather confusing scene and confirm that brainwashing was taking place in reality, the two dream sequences are for the most part alike and repetitive. There seems to be no significant difference between the two versions except for the race of the participants,



〈Figure 1〉 Corporal Melvin during the brainwashing sequence

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26) See 〈Figure 2〉.



〈Figure 2〉 Different brainwashing versions of Corporal Melvin and Marco

While almost every critical review of the film devoted to comment on these brainwashing sequences, none have yet compared the two versions in terms of race. Indeed, it may have been difficult to tease out any significance from the two versions; however the effect is jarringly reminiscent of what the mid-century behavioral scientists have argued in the army-funded reports—that the minority POWs were essentially not different from the rest of the POWs. In fact, by choosing to corroborate the brainwashing scare through the patrol's only African American is in many ways revealing. Melvin's presence visually confirms the presence of minorities in the army, nonetheless

proves the point that race did not matter. The scene makes it evident in the most direct fashion that African American POWs were no more or no less vulnerable to communist indoctrinations by illustrating that their experiences in Korea were identical in essence. Even the small details like changing the African American bell boy to a Caucasian one in Melvin's dream sequence suggest that race is entirely interchangeable without any signifying effects. There is another African American in the film, who plays none other but a psychiatrist as if to counterpoint the Sino-Soviet psychiatrists and imply the ethnic difference of the leading behavioral scientists. Casting the psychiatrist as an African American may not have been entirely coincidental for Frankenheimer has noted the role's significance as "one of the first instances where a black actor was cast in a part that specifically didn't say the character was black." Again, the director's passing comment seems germane to the prevailing idea of racial presence without significance accounted in the army-funded reports. The film's reference to Hispanic POWs is more subtle. In one scene, a Puerto Rican officer speaks in Spanish on the phone as Marco leaves the police station. According to George Axelrod's script, the scene is inserted to contradict Raymond's earlier remark on the country all speaking the same language yet the recognition of Hispanic soldiers remains marginal in the background.

If the film represented African Americans or Hispanics to downplay the race factor, the film's representation of Asians or Asian Americans did not quite align with this perspective. According to the military reports, there were a substantial number of Asian Americans who served during the Korean War, yet not even an approximate number was determined.<sup>27)</sup> America was still in an uneasy position with Asia after

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27) "New Asian American," *The New Jersey Korean War Veterans Memorial*

combating Japan during the World War II, which led the U.S. Department of Army to drop the designation of “Asian-American” at the time. As the first major conflict that materialized the ideological tensions, the Korean War quite dramatically established American hegemony in international order and determined the standards for East and West relations in the following decades. The Korean conflict legitimated the postwar expansion of U.S. power around the world under the name of protecting Asia against the spread of communism. By highlighting the ideological adversary and the crisis in Asia, America was able to construct a national identity as a nonimperial world power while expanding its political, military, and economic power in Asia to an unprecedented degree. Because of the distinctly Asian contours of the war, America came to recognize Asia in ways that it had not before and the newly developed understandings shaped subsequent American entanglements in Asia.<sup>28)</sup> If Asia had been primarily imagined in terms of cultural difference through Orientalism, the war complicated American conceptions of Asia by introducing its own ideological binary. Asia was no longer a mutually exclusive entity in the U.S. global imaginary and its status as a threat or ally was yet to be determined. Hence America was still more cautious about imagining its racial diversity with Asians than with African Americans or Hispanics.

From this perspective, the portrayal of Asians in the film’s brainwashing sequence is unambiguous and is dominated by the Orientalist paradigm. The presentation of Asians in the scene makes clear of precisely what was so fearful about the red, or yellow in this case, menace. In a review issued at the film’s original release, Yen Lo (Khigh Dhiigh),

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website. <http://www.state.nj.us/military//korea/factsheets/asian.html>

28) Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 5.



the chief brainwasher, is described as a “Chinese [with] a whimsical, literate mind from outer Manchuria, if not space.”<sup>29)</sup> The allusion to the science fiction genre is quite pertinent given that “the era’s sci-fi films customarily disguised communists as aliens.”<sup>30)</sup> The scene produces a version of an essentialized and Orientalized Other, where Asians are literally alienized while feeding into the stereotype “of communist cunning (and in this case ‘Oriental’ artfulness)”.<sup>31)</sup> Yen Lo’s Asian face becomes synonymous with Oriental witchcraft as Marco figures out the process of brainwashing by remembering his face: “I remember. I remember. I can see that Chinese cat standin’ there smilin’ like Fu Manchu.” The reference to Fu Manchu, the hero-villain and sinister Chinese criminal genius that visualized the Yellow Peril incarnate, is not without context considering the contemporary observations: “[n]othing less than a combination of the theories of Dr. I.P. Pavlov and the wiles of Fu Manchu could produce [communist collaboration]”. Therefore, the translation of Red Scare to Yellow Peril was not only feasible but inescapable.

The fear of mental invasion by Oriental forces develops into a new threat as the infiltration takes place within the native soil. Chunjin (Henry Silva)<sup>32)</sup>, the Korean translator who menaced the American soldiers

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29) Anby, “*The Manchurian Candidate*,” Rev. of *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Variety*, (October 17, 1962), 6.

30) Thomas Doherty, “A Second Look,” *Cineaste: America’s Leading Magazine on the Art and Politics of the Cinema*, 16:4, (1988): 30.

31) Carruthers, Susan L, “*The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and the Cold War Brainwashing Scare,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 18:1, (1998): 81.

32) Like the character of Yen Lo, Chunjin’s character was played by a mixed race actor. Yen Lo was played by Khigh Dhiegh, or Kenneth Dickerson, a New Jersey born actor of mixed North African ancestry. He was well-known for his portrayals of Asian villains namely as the Red Chinese agent in

in Manchuria by betraying them over to the Chinese communists now follows the Korean vet home. In the scene where Marco confronts Chunjin at Raymond's place, the Asian face is again read like a cryptic code or password, invoking the paranoid fear of being swamped by the other.<sup>33)</sup> As soon as Chunjin opens the door for Marco, he gets an immediate strike from him. The punch is so instantaneous and abrupt that it is as if Marco instinctively recognizes a self-evident evil in Chunjin's Asian face. To fight Chunjin, Marco simulates a classic karate stance as if he intuitively recognizes the stance to be proper—in order to physically overcome the Oriental, he must first demonstrate his knowledge of the Oriental form.<sup>34)</sup> Marco screams out his questions repetitively with each punch: "How did the old ladies turn into Russians?! What was Raymond doing with his hands?! What were you doing there?!" His questions are never really answered. Nor does he seem to seek one. He seems to be more intent on silencing the other by force than pleading for an answer. In fact, Chunjin remains silent throughout the fight except for his animalistic howls. Violent blows are followed one after another until Chunjin's body is prostrate on the floor getting Marco's endless kicks. While the kicks are evidently brutal, the effect does not strike as painful. The body of Chunjin lies like an inanimate carcass responding

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the TV series *Hawaii Five-O*, and as the camp commandant in the Korean POW film, *Time Limit* (1957). Chunjin was played by Henry Silva, a Brooklyn born actor of Sicilian and Spanish descent. He played a succession of villains in numerous Hollywood films. It is interesting that the film chose to remain for the most part Asian-free by employing actors from African or Hispanic backgrounds to play the main Asian characters.

33) See <Figure 3>.

34) Kevin Ohi discusses numerous instances in which each character "inexplicably knows," "instantly remembers," and "immediately shows" in the film. Such instances of intuition or "unnerving knowingness" seem to extend the paranoid plot to the film itself (169).

mechanically to the blows, Frankenheimer noted that the scene was what Sinatra was most obsessed with ever since he first read the script. And in his commentaries, Frankenheimer even boasted of the scene being the "first big karate fight in Hollywood" (director's commentaries DVD). The scene was also selected to be included in the original theatrical trailer to attract potential audiences: "United Artists took pains to publicise the forthcoming attraction of cinema's first authentic karate fight (between Sinatra and the treacherous Korean manservant/subversive, played by Henry Silva), stressing that the stars had been trained specially to chop tables in half with a deft flick of the wrist."<sup>35</sup>) Despite the efforts to highlight the scene from the side of the production, the scene remains to be the most unexplained and hardly discussed among viewers.

The scene offers an instance in which Cold War paranoia has contributed to an enduring cultural stereotype of Asians as perpetual foreigners and as cunning, inscrutable spies. The paranoia against brainwashing, or the fear against mental enslavement created its own enslavement: "the imagined crisis of imminent enemy infiltration, made themselves all the more vulnerable to 'domestic' infiltration."<sup>36</sup>) The threat posed by the racial other is not isolated to the foreignness of Manchuria as a location far away but continues at home. In the scene, the mere appearance of the Asian phenotype represents the danger, the

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35) Carruthers, 89.

36) Catherine Grace Canino, "'Ben, it's a terrible thing to hate your mother': Mind Control in *Hamlet* and *The Manchurian Candidate*," *Shakespeare Survey* 61 (2008): 137.



〈Figure 3〉 Marco and Chunjin in a fight

evil, and the foreign that cannot and must not belong in U.S. Chunjin's Asian face is enough evidence to warrant the physical violence. While Raymond is the true arch-enemy, it is Chunjin who deserves the blows. Chunjin is always deferential to his white superiors —false-accented “*sank you*” and “*yes, sir*” being his catchphrases. However the characteristic subservience reminded many Americans of the dreadful effects of passivity: “Brainwashed, these Americans become like Asians, like communists: passive, conformist, and obedient to authority”<sup>37)38)</sup>; “It was widely

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37) Klein, 37.

38) Klein expands on this perspective to discuss Orientalism in the film: “According to *The Manchurian Candidate*, contact with Asians, either at home or abroad, could only weaken the nation. While American participation in the Korean War halted the spread of communism in northeast Asia, it also opened up a hole in the nation's defenses, allowing the Asian menace to invade and corrupt America. Asian-ness, it suggested, was something to

believed that the communists held power in China because the Chinese people were incapable of change: they were passive, torpid, and accustomed to living under tyranny of totalitarian regime.”<sup>39)</sup> While Chunjin’s servile yet treacherous character appears to be tamed into a smiling and faithful one in his service under the Caucasian master, Chunjin’s very presence reminds Marco of the potential threat that lurks behind the inscrutable smile. Just as Fu Manchu’s smile was so sinister for not knowing what he was up to, the inability to make out one’s emotions and feelings was considered a genuine threat. As the “cold” in the Cold War implied a bloodless war, being bloodless amounted to lacking emotions or feelings. Therefore the mind control by the cold-blooded communists was menacing precisely because its potential to strip one of emotions –as Yen Lo prides on his skill of brainwashing, “[a brainwashed agent] cannot possibly feel guilt, nor will he, of course, have any reason to fear being caught.” The choreography of the fight further serves the Orientalist construction in envisioning karate as the ultimate form of martial arts to fight an Asian. Despite the absurdity in this assumption, it is undoubtful that the American producers aimed for a cathartic effect from the potential viewers by having the quintessential Hollywood hero dehumanize an Asian.

While these scenes suggest that the Cold War paranoia was largely dependent upon Orientalist constructions of Asians, the film also deconstructs the notion by redefining Asianness. Although Asian space is evoked as the heart of communism, the film reveals that the real problem may lay closer to home in America. The film’s most shocking revelation is that Mrs. Iselin, the only mother and wife in the film, is the “American Operator” for the communists who programmed Raymond to become an assassin.

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be kept out of the United States at all costs” (37).  
39) Kendall, 198.

It turns out that even the brainwashing was not an Oriental tactic first picked up by the communists but a method Mrs. Iselin has long-practiced on her son.<sup>40)</sup> In several instances, Raymond puts his hands over his ears to shut down his mother's voice. Nevertheless, he always succumbs to his mother's words, as he confesses to Marco in his drunkenness, "She won, of course. She always does, I could never beat her, I still can't." In the scene where she reveals to her son that she is his communist controller, she makes Raymond repeat herself word by word as if to imprint each of her word into his brain. It is consequently the domineering mother, clad in *cheongsam*, who replaces the chief Chinese brainwasher Yen Lo. Toward the end of the film, Marco also takes the place of Yen Lo with the new deck of the cards. Yet the most striking instance in which Asianness is reconceptualized is in the absurd exchange between Marco and Rosie.<sup>41)</sup>



〈Figure 4〉 Marco and Rosie

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40) According to Philip Wylie's theory, Mrs. Iselin is a prototypical viper, or the "serpent in the suburban garden of Cold War domesticity" (Menand 88).

41) See 〈Figure 4〉.

Arguably the most inexplicable scene in the film, the conversation between the two is full of “non sequiturs, verbal gymnastics, and flying buttresses” that would “not be out of place in a Beckett play or in a Marx Brothers film.”<sup>42)</sup> It is perplexing to understand why Rosie declares “Maryland’s a beautiful state” when they are in Delaware and why Marco asks Rosie out of the blue if she is Arabic. It is even more puzzling when Rosie comments “I was one of the original Chinese workmen who laid this track on this stretch.” It seems almost impossible to make sense of their inscrutable exchange<sup>43)</sup>, but the reference to Maryland in Delaware may imply imagination of distant spaces and both “Arabic” and “Chinese” are ethnicities from the Orient. When Rosie positions herself as a Chinese workman, she not only acknowledges that Asians have been part of American history, but also invokes the idea that Asianness is no longer pertained to the racial other.<sup>44)</sup> The film also suggests that the Asians themselves are no better at keeping up with the Orientalist constructions: Yen Lo is aware of capitalism’s lures and runs off to Macy’s to buy goods from his wife’s shopping list while Chunjin gets a night off on Christmas eve. Finally, Asianness is ultimately redefined through the “Manchurian” candidate. While Raymond is described as the only patrol member who does not sexually mingle with the Korean hookers in the opening scene, his apparent moral superiority against the other patrol members proves a sham as it turns out he is the champion communist conspirator. Rather than making Raymond distasteful, the irony in his

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42) Bruce Krajewski, “Rhetorical Conditioning: *The Manchurian Candidate*.” Blakesley, David, *The Terministic Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives on Film*, Carbondale, (IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 226.

43) Indeed, inscrutability does not only pertain to Asians in this case.

44) Szalay analyzes the same exchange from Richard Condon’s novel in a similar vein: “Rosie claims China less for its communism than for its ability to reorient the project of American nativism” (387).

character proves deconstructive and even liberating: just as its etymology proposes a Greek term to designate an Asian geography,<sup>45)</sup> the Manchurian brings the East and West together by pulling down its rigid borders. The film, in this context, reinvents Asianness as a new fluid signifier exceeding its spatial, cultural, or ideological limits to encompass what America has been and what it is to become.

By analyzing what has been curiously dismissed in the critical oeuvre of the film, I have tried to uncover the intersections between ideology and race and how it highlights the complex cultural logic of Cold War paranoia. While the Cold War paranoia has manifested itself most notably through brainwashing —allegedly the new mind control weapon developed by the enemy, the idea was able to gain currency because of the fears at home. Tapping into the fear of brainwashing, *The Manchurian Candidate* emerged as the archetypal Cold War narrative by visually fulfilling the paranoid fantasies of the time. The film's portrayal of minority POWs for the most part aligned with the theoretical paradigms of the mid-century behavioral scientists to disregard racial significance. On the other hand, the film did reflect the stereotypical imaginations about Asians and Asian Americans that have largely developed during the Cold War period through the brainwashing scare. Yet at the same time, the film reimagined Asianness to call for a far more flexible model of Cold War paranoia than the consistent discourse of oppositions would allow. *The Manchurian Candidate*, in this context, is not only brainwashed in black and white but encompasses the Red scare and Yellow Peril as well as all the shades of colors signified.

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45) The term "Manchurian" comes from the "Greek *manteuesthai*, 'to prophesy'" (Krajewski 222).



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**Abstract**

**The Color of Brainwashing:  
*The Manchurian Candidate* and the Cultural  
Logic of Cold War Paranoia**

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In this paper, I trace paranoia's emergence in American culture during the postwar experience, including nuclear anxiety, the Red Scare, and the Cold War, by looking at *The Manchurian Candidate*. Often considered a concealed satire of political hysteria, the film has often been reviewed in the context of the political crisis of the era —of McCarthyism, Cold War, communism, Momism, assassination, and the political intrigue. The scholarly absorption in these ideological and cultural fears led critics to overlook the critical context of race despite the clear intersections between ideology and race in the film's translation of the Red scare to "Yellow peril" and its redefinition of Asianness. Set in Communist Manchuria, the film's sinister "Orientals" disguise themselves as spies and infiltrate the minds of American POWs through brainwashing. The film continues to dismantle ideological and racial dynamics as an Asian ex-spy converts to a faithful servant so as to be allowed to step onto American soil. I argue that the investigation of race in this film complicates the ideological binary and questions the grounds for assuming mutually exclusive sides of paranoid relationships. By considering how race highlights the complex cultural logic of Cold War paranoia, this paper attempts to break through what may seem like a consistent discourse of oppositions and calls for a far more flexible model of Cold War paranoia than an ideological binary would allow.

**Key Words**

Brainwashing, *The Manchurian Candidate*, Cold War, Paranoia, Race