Fu Manchu and the characterization of the Chinese as yellow peril in Spain

Fu Manchu e a caracterização dos chineses como perigo amarelo na Espanha

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ABSTRACT
This article traces the Chinese characters presented as the anti-Western threat in Spanish culture, namely the Yellow Peril discourse, which has not received adequate attention from the academia. Since the 19th-century, Chinese characterization in Spain has taken place as an especial cultural phenomenon, in which the connotation of "peril" first emerged from a press representation from France and England. After a period of inner circulation of stereotypes, it is revived by the irruption of Anglo-American popular culture, in the form of a well-defined Fu Manchu in the first half of the 20th century. The authors examine two films directed by Jesús Franco: *The Blood of Fu Manchu* and *The Castle of Fu Manchu*, co-produced by European production companies and shot partly in Spain. In the whole process, the "peril" associated with Chinese characterization maintains both its "vicarious" and "referential" representation. Thus, Jess Franco's cinematographic version of Fu Manchu anticipates the postmodern pastiche and turns Fu Manchu into an entire "empty" cultural entity. The article aims theoretically to differentiate "media culture", which is a fertile terrain of both stereotypes and its extreme form, pastiche, from other types of high culture and popular culture. In the case of Chinese characterization in Spanish culture, media and a culture shaped by media can be considered as the *producers* of the Chinese peril phenomena.

Keywords: chinese imaginary in spain, Fu Manchu, media culture, stereotype, vicarious character, referential function, pastiche.

RESUMO
Este artigo traça os caracteres chineses apresentados como ameaça antiocidental na cultura espanhola, nomeadamente o discurso da Ameaça Amarela, que não recebeu a devida atenção da academia. Desde o século XIX, a caracterização chinesa na Espanha

tem ocorrido como um fenômeno cultural especial, no qual a conotação de "perigo" surgiu inicialmente a partir de uma representação na imprensa da França e Inglaterra. Após um período de circulação interna de estereótipos, é revivido pela irrupção da cultura popular anglo-americana, na forma de um Fu Manchu bem definido na primeira metade do século XX. Os autores examinam dois filmes dirigidos por Jesús Franco: "O Sangue de Fu Manchu" e "O Castelo de Fu Manchu", co-produzidos por empresas europeias e filmados parcialmente na Espanha. Em todo o processo, o "perigo" associado à caracterização chinesa mantém tanto sua representação "vicária" quanto "referencial". Assim, a versão cinematográfica de Fu Manchu por Jess Franco antecipa o pastiche pós-moderno e transforma Fu Manchu em uma entidade cultural completamente "vazia". O artigo tem como objetivo teoricamente diferenciar a "cultura midiática", que é um terreno fértil para estereótipos e sua forma extrema, o pastiche, de outros tipos de alta cultura e cultura popular. No caso da caracterização chinesa na cultura espanhola, a mídia e uma cultura moldada pela mídia podem ser consideradas como os produtores dos fenômenos de perigo chinês.

Palavras-chave: imaginário chinês na espanha, Fu Manchu, cultura midiática, estereótipo, personagem vicário, função referencial, pastiche.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article presents a historical overview of the process of Chinese characterization as danger and menace and analyze its evolution, from an accidental product of political crisis in the last part of the 19th Century, using imagery stereotypes from other imperialist countries in the period to the 1960', when it has been fully inscribed in the media culture in Spain and was finally defined and normalized and maintained as a referent. According to official records and academic research, there was not a relevant presence of the Chinese population in Spain until the 21st century (Beltrán 2009; Nieto, 2003). Nor did Spain have a strong economic or political relationship with the East as it is with other European countries, such as France or Great Britain, which show strong colonial interests in China. Therefore, it is of important significance to investigate the origin of the representations of the Chinese associated with the Yellow Peril and how it became popular in the Spanish media culture, referring to significant references of cultural production in other European countries (Plana, 2015; Frayling, 2014; Mayer, 2014; Richards, 2017).

We compare characters and locations that appeared in two films: *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (1968) and *The Castle of Fu Manchu* (1969), analyzing them in the context of the reproduction of an archetype based on both the collective fantasy and the standards of B movies, as well as a reinvested exoticism. This quirky combination has been repeated as a production formula from the library to the cinematographic production, reaffirming

the ability of stereotyping to cross epochs and boundaries. The study highlights the referentiality of the Chinese racial stereotype in Spain and recalls it as a transnational media culture's spectrum in the sense that it appears in media texts, such as literature or cinema, in a long production of sequels, serial films, or remakes, to the extent of becoming pastiches.

2 EUROPEAN GENRE FILM: FROM POPULAR CULTURE TO MEDIA CULTURE

We argue that the two films that Jesús Franco dedicates to the figure of Fu Manchu, *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (1968) and *The Castle of Fu Manchu* (1969) are examples of both the genre film[1] and the exploitative cinema of European co-production, which are characteristic products of an incipient cultural globalization in both content and language.

We discuss the following two aspects of the films. The first is the very place they occupy, being part of the transition from popular culture to media culture in the second half of the 20th century (Kellner, 2011: 23; Anyó, 2014: 57-74). The second is their essential referential nature, using racism and stereotypes which had been derived from other popular texts, not only from the same period but also from the modern media.

On the one hand, we consider media culture as the contemporary hegemonic type of culture, according to Cultural Studies theorist D. Kellner (2011: 23). It is the dominant culture, which at the same time replaces high culture in terms of its centrality and social impact. Media culture is the dominant force of socialization, with its images, celebrities, and its stereotypes. As Bourdieu argued (Bourdieu 1984: 152-154) early forms of media culture (by the time, he defined it as "popular culture" can replace the traditional institutions like family, school, or church to dominate the judgment of taste, value, and thought, and produces new modes of identification, style, fashion, and behavior.

This does not imply considering media culture as "inter-classist", since the social and economic classes characteristic of capitalism, an economic system based on inequality in the possession of both economic and cultural capital, continue to exist in late capitalism[2]. Media culture responds to a large extent to the interests of the class that owns

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[1] A film that was produced with the intent of fitting into a specific genre (such as science fiction, romantic comedy, horror, or film noir) with an existing audience. (https://www.wordsense.eu/genre_films/)

[2] In his work, *Postmodernism…* (1991), Jameson calls on the origin of the term "late capitalism" in the Frankfurt School and defines it as "the form of capitalism that came to the fore in the modernist period and now dominates our own postmodern culture".

and controls the large media conglomerates. However, there is for sure an inter-classist pretension, insofar as these interests treat culture above all in mercantilist terms, that is, of production for profit. These interests lead any art producers/creators to seek to produce popular artifacts that attract mass audiences. Thus, at times these artifacts may contain social criticism or articulate ideas proper to progressive social movements if they are profitable in commercial terms.

In the same way, Raymond Williams warns us about the need to differentiate media culture from working-class culture, since the former is outside the latter. Working-class culture is instituted, financed, and managed by the economic and cultural elites, and is a capitalist culture in its methods of production and distribution. The working class constitutes, perhaps, only the majority of consumers (Williams, quoted in Storey: 2002: 85).

Thus, as we have argued elsewhere (Anyó 2014), we can distinguish a sort of popular culture, which is made by and for the "popular classes", basically referring to those are non-hegemonic ones in terms of control of the means of production (and the media), an inclusive, egalitarian, local and utilitarian culture, as opposite to the media culture, which, instead, appears in the second half of the twentieth century, is a culture of standardized and homogeneous contents and is presented either through the traditional mass media or in the new media but not limited to these two channels. Media culture forces us to rethink cultivated culture and is often confused with popular culture, partly because it also conveys social differences. Media culture originates from the massification of art, and the commercialization of all cultures. It means the mainstream and can be kitsch. It is a culture that deliberately seeks to please everyone, which can be defined as omnivorous, as it admits everything if it is profitable (Anyó 2017: 120).

In the framework of culture theories, the crisis of the model of high and low culture during the second half of the 20th century has made necessary broader classification systems, mainly incorporating the category of media culture, to account for that mass culture arising from mass media, such as cinema and television, and before that from literature, which seemed to erase the differences between high and low culture (Anyó 2017: 119).

This media culture, as we will see in the case of Fu Manchu, cannot be considered cultivated because its main value is not originality, singularity, or uniqueness but referential and commercial. Nor is it the canon, which is the exclusive culture from a formal, hierarchical, universal, and aestheticism point of view, which also provides

critical judgment and the ability to discriminate between quality criteria and a sense of excellence, elements typical of the cultivated culture. Neither can we consider it as popular culture, insofar as it is not egalitarian, locally originated, nor democratic in its genesis, although it is often confused by the standardized and homogeneous contents, quite typical of media culture which allows massive dissemination, a necessary condition for its mercantile nature (Anyó: 2017: 122).

The figure of Fu Manchu in Spanish culture is a paradigmatic case of these distinctions. For us, Fu Manchu by Jesús Franco only can be placed within this space of media culture. Importantly, the two films cannot be understood except in relation to previous depictions, especially cinematographic and literary, of the figure of Fu Manchu in Western cultural production. These two films of Fu Manchu belong to a type of cinema that prefigures fundamental elements of what can be considered "cinematographic postmodernity", primarily they are both parodic and referential. This is the current domain of the "screen-sphere" or "global screen", according to the terms of G. Lipovetsky and J. Serroy (2009: 25), which is the representation of all existence that leads to extreme intertextuality or self-referentiality. The authors call it image-distance, which is the massive production of sequels, serial films, or remakes, which the authors consider to be true interpretations, clones, or quotations, to the point of becoming floating signifiers, quotations from non-existent films and ironic, parody, or pastiche references.

Although they define the phenomenon in different terms, this is, for Frederic Jameson, a fundamental characteristic of postmodernity: a very high self-referential and reflexive capacity, but derived in pastiche, that is, in the absence of any critical possibility. This is the fundamental distinction that Jameson draws between parody and pastiche. While both are the imitation of a peculiar and earlier style, parody is loaded with ulterior motives, with a satirical impulse, while "pastiche is an empty parody, a blind statue" (Jameson, 1996: 38).

The distinction between parody and pastiche (Jameson, 1996: 38) is important as in Jesús Franco's films about Fu Manchu. We find that extreme referentiality leads to pastiche and eclipses the parody since in the two films there is no reference to historical, social, or cultural reality. As Jameson defines, although parody and pastiche both are repetition or imitation or representation of something else prior, parody ultimately refers to the real reference, and therefore contains a certain amount of criticism in its commentary while pastiche is only imitation.

In the same sense, in the two films there exists a process of "acculturation" or an "explosion" (Jameson, 1995: 66) of culture in society and economy. Culture loses its referential function of reality since it should be a part, outside the society that produces it. Culture, fully integrated into the economic life of late capitalism, finds itself collapsed by it. If in modernity culture could exercise its critical and even utopian function, the reason was that it was separated from society and the economy. In postmodernity, as culture loses its autonomy and becomes confused or integrated into the rest of the fields, unable to differentiate itself from the referent, it also loses its critical capacity and is subordinated to the power of capital, converted into one more object of consumption (Jameson, 2012: 23).

3 THE PERCEPTION OF CHINA IN SPAIN BEFORE FU MANCHU

In the European tradition, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, the Chinese empire was a source of "inspiration for all of Europe" (Rodao 1995). The disclosure of the praiseworthy memory of Marco Polo was followed by the many Treatises, Memories, Travels, Stories that Portuguese and Spanish navigators wrote in testimony of their stay in China or studies about the country. Some of the main pioneers include Gaspar da Cruz (1570), Fray Martín de Rada (1571), Fray González de Mendoza (1858-1600), Fernández de Navarrete (1676), in addition to the numerous works left by the French Jesuits driven by the special interest of their emperor Louis XIV for China. Furthermore, Montesquieu and Diderot, Rousseau, Voltaire in France or England, John Locke and Matthew Tindal, and Goldsmith in England pay tribute to Chinese society and culture and cultivated the Sinophilia that appears in the following centuries (Vid. Zhang 2003, Moncó 2012 & Vega: 2009).

With this background in mind, Sinophobia developed as a psychological consequence of colonialism in the 1860s. The "yellow peril", representing the peak of Sinophobia, is an extremist hypothesis that was based on the memorial aftermath of a Eurocentric world history, originating from a political and economic conjuncture that is used as a pretext to justify certain political and military (colonialist) interventions and attitudes, as well as racism and /or the acts of ethnocentric individuals. In the historical context of the confrontation between European and non-European peoples, the emergence of increasingly daring Eastern rivals is observed: the Huns (4th-5th centuries), the Turks (11th-12th centuries), and the Mughals (13th centuries). This gave rise to the creation of an imaginary of generalized Eastern otherness that is blurred in time and space. It was not

until well into the 19th century, in the middle of the colonial period, that the antagonistic political discourse of a hypothetical general attack by the East against the West was consolidated. Additionally, it was not surprising that the three main branches of this political discourse sprouted and prospered in England, France, and Germany near the end of the 19th century, since they were the three axes of power of the new regime that emerged because of the First Industrial Revolution.

Although the political, economic, and religious interests involved in the emergence and propagation of such discourse are undeniable, it is not this early Yellow Peril, nor the pamphlet or catechetical aspect of the phenomenon that the examination of this article is incumbent upon. Instead, this article focuses on how the discourse of charged politicized intention passes through the filter of the press and the printing press, and filters into public opinion, spreading in various social contexts. Because it is in this context that the Yellow Peril takes its expression in a liberal cultural form and is used as a theme, motive, and inspiration for any form of artistic manifestation. As Amossy (1991) highlights, it is the same sphere where, by general rules, common places, topics, and stereotypes move.

For instance, in the Anglo-Saxon world, in the last decade of the 19th century, especially after the anonymous publication of MP Shiel published in 1898, literary projections on "the yellow danger" appears as a modern form of fiction that is inspired by gothic horror and sadism (Darryl 2019: 189. n. 41).

In Spain, on the contrary, from the 1930s to the 1990s, the picturesque depictions of China reflected only superficial Chinese typical characters based on known historical legends and prototypes. Most of the productions are tales of the fantasy genre or a humorous tone. For example, some notable authors include Juan Valera and Pardo Bazán, followed by a score of journalists and writers fascinated by the Chinese world. Among them, Chinese archetypes like the hypocritical woman, the suspicious teacher, and the exuberant Mandarin stand out. While there is another group of Chinese characters that followed the eloquent Chinese philosopher in the writings of Goldsmith or *Los Gramaticos* (1782) by Juan Pablo Forner (Vid. Relinque 2008), who borrow the Chinese character for satirical purposes, either for social criticism or for personal reasons. One excellent example of using Chinese characters this way is the Chinese traveler from the *Travels of the Chinese Dagar-Li Kao through the barbarian countries of Europe, Spain, France, England, and others* (1880) by Francisco Garrido (Vid. Prado-Fonts 2015). The only literary work that includes a detailed characterization of a Chinese character, a

Chinese scientist, in this case, is the proto-science fiction novel, *A voyage to Jupiter* (1899), written by Enrique Bendito, a military man from Alicante, who admires and professedly imitates works by Jules Verne (Vid. Ning 2020: 333-347). In contrast, Spanish realism did not deal with China even in the hands of Galdós. The popular example of late Chinoiserie, *Fortunata and Jacinta* (1887), only portrayed a couple of merchant characters with Chinese names. The exotic objects mentioned show a Chinese world that is as far away as the distant illusion of the childhood of the Barbarita character. In all these 19th-century works, the question of race wasn't something consciously considered but was only an obvious physical/external reality. However, the danger presented by the Chinese character, if it exists in such a case, is not a reality that concerns the world or Westerners - they are only characters on a fan or print, and in any case, a resurrected illustrated farce or a type character borrowed from Verne.

An important fact is that the Spanish perception of the image of China since the 19th century has become increasingly dependent on primary sources that come from abroad, such as France and England. Sinibaldo de Mas, the only Spanish agent in an intervention in China, based his vision of "awakening a giant" on French sources. Another example is offered by the illustrated press of the 19th century, an effective medium for bringing representations of the outside world to a larger audience. The Spanish illustrated press was mostly dependent on materials imported from France and England for the Far East issue. Consequently, the provision of Chinese materials that feeds into the common imaginary shared by many second-rate writers and journalists, curious about Chinese issues, is increasingly influential in the mass media (Ning 2020: 350-361).

On the other hand, for scholars like Rodao (1995: 95-96), "The adaptations of images taken from outside have had a life of their own. Thus, in Spain, the image of the Yellow Peril also had its repercussions, but it was adapted to the country's own situation, being intimately related to the delicate defensive situation of the Philippines." and that "[…] after the Spanish 1898 Disaster, that image of the Yellow Peril completely disappeared from Spanish society. Somehow, for that 'Dying' Spain that Lord Salisbury was referring to, the Yellow Peril was true; what made it different from non-yellow danger (read, the desires of other western countries) were the chances of success."

In his part, Ortells (2017) states: "Even before the loss of the colony in the Philippines, Spain's participation in the production of orientalist knowledge was extremely limited […] Together with the association of the Chinese imaginary with consumer objects from Manila, the resulting ignorance (which remains refractory to the

reception and translation of works of European sinology) generates an approach to China based on the reiteration of Eastern alterity, generating thus an imaginary with fanciful and exotic tints. Pre-photographic media, such as cosmoramas and the magic lantern, already linked to a certain magical value, will privilege this suggestive and fantastic imaginary" (2017: 436).

4 LOCAL VS. GLOBAL FU MANCHU IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Fu Manchu bears the name of his time, that of the last Qing dynasty or Manchu dynasty, the one that faced European imperialism in the 19th century. Naming the protagonist Fu is a phonetic joke ("Fu" for "fool") that is easy to catch. For us, the creation of Fu Manchu in itself builds a postcolonial discursive artifact, it is an "orientalism" very close to the meaning that Edward Said (1978) gives, writing about the East created at the whim of the West. But Sax Rohmer came up with the magic formula that combines fear with fascination, attributing a nonexistent danger to a Chinese individual that, as a result, survives postcolonial orientalism. It marks a pivotal moment in racist discourse, veering towards a popular fantasy that seeks exoticism through gothic and sadistic elements. However, Fu Manchu was not the sole character of this nature; although he proved to be the only one to transcend criticism, borders, and the passage of time. The most outstanding aspect was the universality observed in the incarnation, as its creator consciously outlined, "the yellow peril embodied in one man." However, it was also thanks to more "popular" media that Fu Manchu persisted in the likes of later readers.

In Spain, after 1898, the politician Emilio Castellar wrote his essays about "the Chinese problem" loaded with racism, which were published in Revista de España. The shock of such speech produced no more literary effect than some motley comments by Spanish intellectuals and writers. It was some anonymous journalists of the magazine *Ilustración Española y Americana* who wrote down their fictitious reaction by transferring from the French press "El Desquite de China" (in Spanish, "China's Revenge") a uchronia originally written by the French playwright Henri Noussanes, in which the attack on the West by the allied Chinese and Japanese troops was proposed. Ten years later, this hypothesis would gain strength in the similar, but much better known, short story *The Unparalleled Invasion* (1910) written by Jack London.

The first truly perverse Chinese character depicted in Spanish literature was a Chinese magician depicted in a decadent tale by Hoyos and Vinent from 1915. The Chinese hypnotist observes a certain kinship with Sax Romer's Fu Manchu created in

1913, as he hypnotizes viewers and stirs the audience to defend against an incredulous viewer (Vid. Ning 2017).

While in Spain the influence of the Chinese was still limited to the fictitious framework of artistic representations, the transatlantic world already perceived the threat of imported Chinese labor concentrated in a Cuban plantation (Vid. Ginés 2021). In the form of a short story, Hernández Catá represented "a changing social structure and that representation of the alteration of the social order is achieved through the use of horror-grotesque" (Casanova-Vizcaíno 2013: 60). In Spain, on the other hand, Chinese immigrants did not arrive until the second half of the 20th century (Vid. Beltrán 2009). This immigration only produced fictitious products such as a "Chinatown" in Barcelona with no actual Chinese community, but only sporadic street vendors of the same origin from the 30s (Vid. Ealham & Ansón 2007), further contributing to the persistence of their own archetypes and stereotypes.

Of the Spanish writers who traveled to China in the 20th Century, Luis Valera did so in the hostile moment of the Boxers Rebellion in 1900. 23 years later, Vicente Blasco Ibáñez arrived in China with total disquiet. Between one date and the other, the writers of the Silver Age of Spanish literature, Pío Baroja, Valle-Inclán, Federico García Lorca, and Agustín de Foxá, did not have direct contact with the Chinese world, but developed novels, stories, poetry, and theater in an imagined China (Vid. Bayo 1993). The Chinese theater is another important aesthetic and thematic point in modernist Spain, but it was nothing more than the appropriation of a London tradition. Perhaps the most momentous of these pieces was Wu-Li Chang (1928), Federico Reparaz's adaptation of the work of Harry M. Vernon and Harold Owen (1913), who depicted a Chinese Mandarin man who murders his daughter to prevent her from marrying a Westerner, sacrificing her instead as an offering to the gods (Vid. Chang 2015).

The circulation of cultural and popular materials about the Chinese world was about to take the shape of a new folklore that reproduced and combined stereotypes with limited coincidences and the reality and experiences in the eastern country. However, after the two world wars, the eruption of a pulp culture in the United States led to changes in the parameters of mass communication. In Spain, these intermediaries were the old local publishing houses such as Hymsa, Bruguera, Molino, Maucci, Lux, Plaza, and Clipper, which, following transatlantic fashions, produced and reproduced pulp novels.

In the 30s, *The Gangsters of Manchuria* (Murder in Manchuria) by GH Teed (1934), *The Chinese Victim* (The Chink's Victim) by J. G. Bradon (1935) or *The Tiger of*

Canton Sixth Blake did not even include the translator's name. Augusto Barrado produced the Spanish version of *El demonio amarillo* (The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu) (1935) originally written by Sax Rohmer. Similarly, to Barrado, authors like J. G. López Hipkiss used pseudonyms to sign their Spanish translations or adaptations of the English and American novels that were published about the same criminal and violent Chinese archetype. Often, the translations were written by popular writers such as J. Mallorquí Figuerola, a phenomenon that was observed until the 1940s. Two pulp novels that were first created in Spanish are *Chou Fu Shan, el misterioso* (1941), and *El dragon de fuego* (1944), both by Fidel Prado. The second has no less than 16 series exclusively published by the above-mentioned famous publishing house Bruguera. Another example is Yuan Kang's daughter, the series "Capitán Pantera" (1946) by P. V. Debrigode. In the 1940s, Fu Manchu's films were dubbed into Spanish and screened in movie theaters, forming a new loop of materials that constantly circulates between the popular Spanish and the American pulp that persists until the 1960s.

5 JESS FRANCO'S FU MANCHU

The two films that Jesús Franco directed about the figure of Fu Manchu are embedded in this long-lasting and divergent tradition. Firstly, they are European co-productions located in more than one country - a characteristic phenomenon of genre cinema and the European low budget of the sixties and seventies (Vid. Navarro: 2009). Secondly, they are enrolled in a series of five productions produced by Harry Alan Towers, starring Christopher Lee in the role of Fu Manchu and Tsai Chin in the role of Lin Tang. These productions include *The Face of Fu Manchu* (Don Sharp, 1965), *The Brides of Fu Manchu* (Don Sharp, 1966), *The Vengeance of Fu Manchu* (Jeremy Summers, 1967), in addition to *The Blood of Fu Manchu* and *The Castle of Fu Manchu* by Jesús Franco. Although the last two are directed by a Spanish director, co-produced by Spanish production companies (Ada Films and Balcázar Cinematographic Productions respectively), and shot partly in Spain, they were not set in a local Spanish context from social and cultural points of view. Additionally, these films are inscribed in a specific narrative context predominated by media culture. The characterization based on the racial stereotypes, and the locations with an uncritical pastiche, derives at the beginning from the series of five films in which these two are found. Afterward, in the tradition, detailed previously, of the figure of Fu Manchu.

The characterization of the main Chinese characters, Fu Manchu, and Lin Tang, fully responds to an acceptable and understandable racial stereotype for Western audiences: sadistic, cunning, perfidious, with icy courtesy and evil laughter, evil persuasion, hypnotization, and dominance over the will of others. Although Tsai Chin is a Chinese actress, a certain member of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, and Christopher Lee, as is known, is a British actor, related to the European aristocracy, without any relation to China. His racial characterization is pure stereotyping. The same happens with the locations, as in *The Castle of Fu Manchu*, where the Park Güell in Barcelona, the famous work of Antoni Gaudí, was set as the castle of Fu Manchu.

The similarities are more noticeable than the differences among the five films with respect to those directed by Franco. They are, then, characteristic European exploitive film co-productions that use global cultural stereotypes in an uncritical way, as a vehicle for a lighthearted narrative, situated between pulp and pop, and more delusional even than the films directed by Franco. In today's technological language, they share "structural similarities" in images with such films, allowing for prediction in forms/segments even without going in-depth examination of their content, for example, with the Latent Spaces technique, as it has been applied to user preference prediction with MovieLens (Manoel, Mirapalheta, & Chela, 2021).

In the following paragraphs, we will first analyze the characterization of Fu Manchu and his eternal rival Nayland Smith, and then that of Fu Manchu's lair scenarios, the subways, and dungeons where he plans and operates his plans for domination. The keys to both are established in the first of the five films, *The Face of Fu Manchu*. Here, the evil Fu Manchu and Lin Tang reestablish the stereotype of racialized characterization that will be repeated in the four subsequent films. This is also the film where the character of Fu Manchu's opponent, Nayland Smith, is first established.

Both Fu Manchu and Nayland Smith are indebted to characters established in earlier films, notably *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (Charles Brabin, 1932), with Boris Karloff in the role of Fu Manchu. Both in *The Mask of Fu Manchu* and *The Face of Fu Manchu*, Fu Manchu is characterized by a very long and thin mustache, the slanted eyes, long nails, a Mandarin dress, an imposing body presence - shared by both actors Boris Karloff and Christopher Lee – and a highly racialized interpretation of cunning and perfidy. His opponent, the Englishman Nayland Smith, played by Lewis Stone in the first of the films and by Nigel Green in the second, appears as the perfect example of European, more specifically British, elegance, seriousness, confidence, and rationality. Although in both

Franco's films the actor who plays Nayland Smith is Richard Greene, his characterization is like what we have seen - an elegant, calm, well-off, self-confident, sensible, and daring middle-aged British male.

Indeed, the main characters of the two films by Jesús Franco take as a direct reference the first of the saga, of which they are sequels, in an operation very characteristic of exploitation cinema, which in turn takes as a reference the classic cinema of adventures of the thirties, in a very postmodern referential way. All these factors build an ahistorical, yet still ideological, pastiche. As we can see, these characters are characterized according to the "yellow danger"– which Nayland Smith explicitly cites with these same words – in a vicarious racism that cannot be linked either socially or culturally to the Spanish reality. Instead, this racism emerges from the recycling, without aesthetic prejudices, of the adventure cinema tradition, the stereotypes of which are easily recognizable and accepted by the public, thus perpetuating an idea detached from reality but solidly installed in the collective imagination. We are therefore in front of a pastiche without parody, based on a referentiality that does not end, and a pure syntagmatic relationship of signs without real content.

Regarding the locations, the analysis leads to the same conclusion. *The Face of Fu Manchu* is shot almost entirely in a studio, with the sets inspired by the 1932 film with secret passages, torture chambers, sinister thrones where Fu Manchu concocts his plans and is treated like a god or emperor. The basements and dungeons of *The Blood of Fu Manchu*, Franco's first, are also decorated very similarly to the previous ones. Here the novelty is the setting in the Mexican jungle, in a delusional plot that mixes yellow danger with a kind of revolutionary or guerrilla lifestyle a la Pancho Villa, Sancho López. With respect to *The Castle of Fu Manchu,* it is credited that it was shot in "Istanbul and surroundings", where Park Güell in Barcelona, Spain, should undoubtedly be located in those "surroundings". Antoni Gaudí's modernist architecture refers to the eastern stereotype –be it the Middle East or the Far East– in the same way as Fu Manchú's mustaches, for pastiche.

6 CONCLUSION

As we have seen in the case of the "yellow peril" in general in Spain and the case of Fu Manchu in particular, we cannot explain the form taken by the representation of the Chinese without recourse to the concept of media culture. It is always a vicarious or referential character culturally derived from the representations of other European

countries, such as Great Britain, France, or Germany, which do have direct geopolitical interests, of a colonial nature, in China. Spain, on the other hand, with no relevant economic or political relationship with China or the Orient in general, constructs its representation of the Orient on the basis of European cultural productions, as we have seen in sections 3 and 4, a brief historical overview of the perception of China in Spain before and after Fu Manchu. We are dealing, therefore, with referential representations.

At the beginning of this article, we wondered about the origin of the representations of the yellow peril in Spain, and, about the stereotype so well represented in the character of Fu Manchu. Given the scarce presence of the Chinese population in Spanish society until the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and the absence of economic or political relations between Spain and China during the 19th and 20th centuries, unlike other European countries that do have colonial interests, the answer to the initial question must be given within the framework of media culture and the concept of referential representation.

In this context, the films about Fu Manchu directed by Jess Franco and partly shot in Spain, responded to this same trend. They cannot be explained based on a local Spanish context, nor based on a relationship between the two countries, but only according to the referential flows, typical of media culture, which will largely shape postmodernity as a cultural period. In this sense, we consider the Yellow Peril in Spain and the Fu Manchu stereotype a sample of referential culture within the media culture. They do not arise from any Spanish social context, but from global forms of representation and in relation to media products that impose stereotypes without strong social roots.

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