

"Japanese, Japanese, Japanese ...": Representations of East Asians in contemporary Swedish visual culture

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Visual culture and the European colonial legacy

During the classical colonial period (1492 – 1945/1968), visual representations of native populations and ethnic minorities played a crucial role as a technique of governance and as a part of the general knowledge production of the Others in the European colonial empires. Through various mass communication channels, this colonial imagery and racial gallery normalised and popularised what was considered to be “common knowledge” about the colonies and their inhabitants, and what is still today very much perceived to be so regarding non-white immigrants in the West (Ewen & Ewen 2006; Jahoda 1999). In the contemporary postcolonial era when the former colonial masters are forced to live side by side with their former colonial subjects in their own homelands, visual culture still continues to produce and reproduce ethnic and racial fantasies of non-white people in a post-modern Western culture obsessed by and saturated with visual images of all sorts, whether in canonical or popular culture, and whether in analogue or digital form. This scopic regime of colonial images is on the other hand today challenged and criticised by the different migrants and minorities that are portrayed and depicted in the stereotypical representations. The recent European controversy and conflict surrounding the Danish and Swedish Mohammed caricatures, and the activism of different North American media watch groups monitoring newspaper and outdoor ads, and television and internet commercials that represent people of colour in a demeaning way are good examples of this postcolonial semiotic war that is being waged today regarding how to accommodate the visual legacy of the global European empires.

This is a study of representations of East Asians in contemporary Swedish visual culture, framed within the context of an existing and on-going postcolonial antagonism between the white majority population and the non-white minorities, and in this case articulated as a semiotic conflict over who is imagining and representing who. The title “Japanese, Japanese, Japanese...” refers to the famous citation by the legendary Swedish radio journalist Sven Jerring, and derives from his comments when he covered the soccer game between Sweden and Japan at the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin which to the shock of the former ended in the latter’s victory. The citation is still widely used in everyday life and in the media by today’s Swedes, and connotes that Japanese people and East Asians in general are just too numerous, and that they all look alike besides being blistering and irritating, but also disciplined and organised. The aim of the study is to analyze representations of East Asia and of individuals and groups with an East Asian appearance and of an East Asian origin in contemporary Swedish culture. East Asia is here defined geographically as Asia east of Burma and Tibet, namely Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, and East Asians are defined as those who can be broadly identified and categorised as “yellow” Asians. The research questions of the study are: Which kinds of representations of East Asians exist within contemporary Swedish culture? How do these representations relate to historical representations of East Asians as well as of other non-Christian and non-Western ethnic groups such as Jews, Arabs, Africans and American Indians? And how do these representations relate to contemporary representations of East Asians and other non-white groups in other Western countries? The study begins with a background to the issue and its Swedish context illustrated through previous research and Sweden’s historical and current relations to East Asia and East Asians, and is then followed by a presentation of the major themes that have been identified, and at the end the results are summed up and discussed.

Sweden’s images of the non-Western world and relations to East Asia

Sweden’s encounter with the world outside Europe is fully embedded within the colonial enterprises and imperial projects of the more powerful European powers, which were initiated from the 15th century and reached its peak during the first half of the 20th century. Consequently, Swedish people also harbour the general Western fantasies and images of the non-Western world and its various populations, a fact which has been expressed as follows by Åke Holmberg (1988, 1994, 1999), the Swedish expert on Swedish images of the non-Western world as reflected in travelogues, newspapers, literature and science texts deriving

from the 1700s until the end of decolonisation in the 1960s: “The images have served the hegemony of the colonial powers, seldom Swedish power positions. In essence, Swedes have mostly been epigones in this field, by in one way or another taking in images created by others. Has this fact made the Swedish images of the outside world different...even more objective, less prejudiced...? The answer to these questions is a consistent no. In their analogical relations to the exotic world, Swedish writers have identified themselves with Europe, the West, Christianity, and the white race.” (Holmberg 1994:23).

Several recent studies on Swedish images of the Others in the media, in cinema and in material and visual culture have also confirmed Holmberg’s conclusion that Swedish representations of ethnic and racial minorities do not differ substantially from those in for example England and France, Germany and Italy, and Russia and the USA, in spite of the still lingering self-image of being practically the only Western country that stood outside the colonial project as well as having accomplished a non-racist society (Andersson 2000; Brune 2004; Camauër & Nohrstedt 2006; Catomeris 2004; Fornäs 2004; Grinell 2004; Gustafsson 2007; Habel 2008; Hultén 2006; Kulick 1992; Magnusson 2005; Nationalmuseum 1996; Wright 1998). Among them, Lars M. Andersson (2000) has analyzed visual representations of Jews in Swedish magazines from the first half of the 20th century, and his argument is that such images which today might appear typically or even outrageously Anti-Semitic and racist, in those decades were more or less normalised and most probably not perceived as problematic by the wider audience. Christian Catomeris (2004) has written about representations of non-Swedes in Swedish children’s books, Klas Grinell (2004) has done research on images of non-Swedes in Swedish travel magazines, and Leif Magnusson (2005) has studied material representations of Africans in the form of plaster-cast figurines. Rochelle Wright (1998) and Tommy Gustafsson (2007) have looked at non-Swedish and non-white roles and characters in Swedish pre-war cinema, and they both conclude that although there are specific Swedish themes and groups turning up such as vagrancy and the Saami, the representations are more or less in common with general Western images and discourses.

It is here important to differentiate between research on Swedish historical images of a certain country, region or continent and its respective population, and of studies looking at contemporary Swedish images of non-Swedes living permanently in today’s Sweden as minorities and diasporas. There are for example several studies of Swedish historical images of for example India, Iran, Arabia, Turkey, China and Japan and the different ethnic and

national groups living there, but there is little research on contemporary Swedish images of people coming from those countries and who are living in Sweden (Burgman 1996, 1998; Edström 1997; Edström & Svanberg 2001; Fazlhashemi 1999; Hägerdal 1996; Johansson 2008; Nyberg 2001; Petersson 1988; Ådahl, Unge Sörling & Wessel 2002). Research on Swedish images of other countries, regions and continents are therefore in general far more common within Swedish academia than research on Swedish images of non-Swedes living in Sweden of today. Among ethnic studies based on interviews with informants belonging to different minority groups, there are on the other hand references here and there to how visual representations of the group, produced and disseminated by the majority population, tend to diminish the informants' identifications with the Swedish nation state and create feelings of frustration, alienation or even aggression (Farahani 2007; Kalonaityté, Kawesa & Tedros 2007; Lundström 2007; Sawyer 2000; Schmauch 2006).

Previous research on Swedish images of the Others has also been heavily limited to historical and textual material, and consequently there are only a few studies focusing on contemporary representations, for example on stage, in film, on television, in cartoons, and in ads and commercials (Berg 1998; Berglund & Ljuslinder 1999; Eilard 2008; Feiler & Sauter 2006; Högfeldt, Sander & Larsson 2008; Lundstedt 2005; Pripp & Öhlander 2008; Roosvall 2005; Strömberg 2001; Tigervall 2005). Among them, Staffan Berglund and Karin Ljuslinder (1999) have examined ethnic jokes in Swedish television shows of the 1980s and 1990s, Anna Lundstedt (2005) has analyzed representations of non-Swedes in Swedish fashion catalogues, Fredrik Strömberg (2001) has looked at how Africans are portrayed in cartoons and comics, and Carina Tigervall (2005) has done research on how migrants are represented and imagined in contemporary Swedish cinema. Tigervall argues that contemporary Swedish representations of the Others tend to be exoticizing and "positive" in the sense that the non-Swedes are depicted as essentially different and thereby alluring and desirable according to a shallow ideology of multiculturalism, and they are sometimes even being used to project and imagine utopian visions of another Swedishness.

There are also a couple of reports and theses looking at ethnic and racial diversity in Swedish newspaper and magazine ads and television commercials, and which are concluding that representations of non-white people tend to be prejudiced and stereotypical as well as underrepresented in Swedish visual and audiovisual material, and the majority seems to consist of representations of infantilised men of colour (Andén-Papadopoulos 1996;

Björkstedt & Malmström 2007; Guillén Åkerlind 2007; Hirdman 1996; Petersson 2008). Several studies are also analysing representations of specific ethnic and racial groups such as Jews and West Asians, and Africans and African Americans, but except for one M.A. thesis by Makiko Kanematsu (1999) focusing on ads and commercials portraying Japan and Japanese people, and resulting in the finding that the vast majority of them, if not all, are exoticizing besides tending to indiscriminately mix Japanese motives with Chinese and other Asian ones, there is no previous study at all on representations of East Asians in contemporary Sweden. So to sum up, Swedish research on Swedish images and representations of the Others tends to focus either on historical material, and preferably from the classical colonial period, or on text material, and mainly on newspapers and books, as well as on the more frequently researched ethnic and racial groups such as Jews, Arabs and Africans.

Swedish relations with East Asia has up until today never been as pronounced as those with for example West Asia, the Americas or even Africa, and compared to many other Western countries there are few East Asians living permanently in Sweden (Departementsserien 1998). Sweden's historical relations with East Asia are in a comparative international perspective both relatively modern and meagre, as Sweden did not have any colonies in East Asia and did not have any significant contacts with East Asians except through the tradesmen of the Swedish East India Company, and missionaries and diplomats visiting the region during the classical colonial period (Arne 1952). This makes Sweden different from for example Britain, France, the United States, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Germany, Italy and even Austria and Belgium which all established colonial settlements, trade concessions and military bases in the region, and which all experienced substantial numbers of East Asian migrants from the first half of the 20th century. After World War II and during the Cold War, Sweden also remained officially neutral when anti-colonial and anti-Communist wars ravaged the region and created massive external migration waves to the Western countries that were directly involved in these conflicts, and especially to the US, the UK, Australia, Canada, France and the Netherlands which all hosted substantial East Asian minorities already from the 1950s. It is therefore logical that the majority of academic studies analysing various Western ways of imagining and representing East Asia and East Asians through the matrices of colonialism and Orientalism, seldom if ever take up Swedish examples and the Swedish case.

Furthermore, Sweden is one of a few Western countries without a Chinatown, a Little Tokyo, a Koreatown, a Thai Town or a Little Saigon in any of its cities. Except for odd numbers of students, travellers, entertainers and workers who stayed in Sweden for longer or shorter periods in the pre-war period, East Asian migration to Sweden started in earnest in the 1960s, and today it is estimated that 65,000 individuals of East Asian decent are living in Sweden including the first and second generations. Out of this total population, 30,000 children or almost half have been adopted by Swedes, and 20,000 women or about one third have married Swedish men, while a substantial number are children of both these groups and consequently of mixed decent, and those of Chinese, Thai and Korean origin constitute the dominant nationalities (Hübinette 2003; Kjellgren 2001). This historical background and the insignificant demographic presence of East Asians representing less than 5 percent of the total population of foreign decent in Sweden, and dwarfing the huge populations of for example West Asian and Latin American origin living in the country, is important to bear in mind together with the proportionate predominance of adoptees and spouses within the group, to be able to fully understand and grasp the context of the contemporary Swedish images of East Asians.

Representations of East Asians in Swedish visual culture

This is a preliminary attempt at mapping out the contemporary Swedish representations of East Asians. This is being done within the context of Sweden's past and present relations with the region, including the fact that Sweden lacks colonial experiences in East Asia and harbours few East Asian immigrants within its borders. The theoretical and methodological approach to the study is to be found within critical race theory and postcolonial feminist studies, and the multidisciplinary fields of cultural and visual studies, and the study is grounded in the conviction that representations of the Others are both reflecting existing power asymmetries as well as upholding the very same hierarchies, and in this case between white Swedes and "yellow" Asians (Hall 1997a; Said 1978; Sturken & Cartwright 2001). The study builds mainly on previous Anglo-American critical media studies on Western images and representations of the Others in contemporary visual culture; for example how Asians are portrayed and denigrated in television commercials and film posters, how Africans are depicted and fetishized in advertising and broadcasting, and how non-white people in general are displayed and exploited in outdoor ads, screened on the cinema, staged in shows, or digitalized on the internet and in computer games (Beuregard 1999; Coltrane & Messineo

2000; Cortese 1999; Hall 1997b; Lee 1999; Lorbeer & Wild 1993; Murji 2006; Nakamura 2002; Nayak 1997; O'Barr 1994; Rossi 2009; Shohat & Stam 1994).

Within this critical research tradition represented by scholars such as Richard Dyer (1993), Kobena Mercer, (1994), bell hooks (1992), Stuart Hall (1997b), Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994), visual images of all kinds are viewed and treated as texts reflecting and documenting global and local histories and social relationships and inequalities, as well as actively producing and upholding cultural meanings and norms. For example, the British cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy (2005) analyzes the present resurgence of colonial images in Western visual and material culture as a reflection of a postcolonial melancholia, whereby white Westerners are mourning the passing of the white empires as well as trying to resurrect their spirit through the neo-imperialist politics of the Western war on terror, while at the same time trying to grapple with the new multiculturalist condition of having to share space together with their former colonial subjects.

According to the American cultural anthropologist William O'Barr (1994), who has studied how otherness is represented in American advertising, besides defining the border between an Us and a Them, representations of foreigners and outsiders in visual culture also demarcates the boundaries of its audience, namely who is invited to watch and consume the images and gain amusement, pleasure and satisfaction out of them. This particularly concerns commercial images, whose producers take care not to offend its audience by meticulously considering issues of social acceptance and cultural appropriateness. Although people of colour are of course sometimes interpellated and included as potential consumers, and also within the Swedish context there is nowadays a continuous discussion among companies, marketers and advertisers how to direct ads and commercials specifically towards migrants and minorities in an ethical and "correct" way without hurting and humiliating them, according to O'Barr there is a strong tradition in Western visual culture to appropriate and exploit non-white people merely as commodities and objects and make use of them in images that have nothing do with their own situations and experiences. In other words, when for example a Latin American person is used in an ad directed towards the white majority population and framed within the perspective of the white gaze to communicate themes of relaxation or even laziness, it has nothing to do with real, physical Latin Americans, and they are then obviously not included as possible consumers, while on the other hand such an image may well reproduce the so-called tropicalisation of Latin America as a backward continent among white Westerners. In

accordance with this perspective, the English film studies scholar Richard Dyer (1993) writes that his research interest in images and representations of the Others stems from the conviction that “how social groups are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in life...poverty, harassment, self-hate and discrimination” (Dyer 1993: 3).

The empirical material to this study comes from a private archive of images, photos, illustrations and ads printed in newspapers and magazines, ads displayed outdoors in public space, commercial and informational brochures, catalogues, posters and flyers, audiovisual and digital cinema, and television and internet commercials, which are all representing East Asian peoples or individuals in some way or another, and which has been continuously collected by one of the researchers during the course of the last decade. The material also contains photos and audiovisual reproductions of contemporary material artefacts depicting East Asians such as dolls and statuettes, shop signs and company logos, as well as stage productions and performances with East Asian characters and roles in theatre plays, musicals, shows and stand-up comedies. The archive makes up at least 500 different items, of which about 100 images have been scanned and digitalized. An exploration of the historical blueprints and visual provenances of the images does not fall within the scope of this limited study, but it can be assumed that most of the themes and motives if not all are pan-Western in some way or another, and that most of the depictions and details if not all probably derive from non-Swedish sources and origins, and some of them may well go back to the first visual depictions of East Asians going back to 16th and 17th centuries’ Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands, while a substantial part most certainly originate in French, Russian, German and British drawings and paintings from the 19th and 20th century which were used to illustrate everything from postcards and posters to commodities and logos (Linhart 2005). Many of the Swedish themes of course also derive from contemporary American cinema and popular culture.

Deeming from this collection, which does not claim to be complete and exhaustive, the following broad tendencies are discernable. When it comes to region, Northeast Asia, principally China and Japan, dominates over Southeast Asia, which mainly seems to mean Thailand and Vietnam. Regarding country, China and Japan dominate when a country is identifiable at all, although most representations usually mix different Asian countries together, and when it comes to gender, women dominate over men, while in terms of

generation, children dominate over adults. When it comes to time, a perceived past, preferably an Orient of some sorts, or a projected future, oftentimes a science fiction-like Orient, dominates over present East Asia when East Asia is portrayed as a region, and finally with place, Swedish and Western settings and contexts dominate over East Asian ones when East Asian people are represented. That Northeast Asia is more prevalent is not a surprise, nor is the dominance of China and Japan, two Northeast Asian countries which throughout history has more or less competed with each other in signifying East Asia itself, and sometimes even merging together into one enormous “yellow Orient” in the Western imagination. The tendencies that women dominate over men, and that children dominate over adults, can be attributed to the statistical-demographic fact that it is international marriage and international adoption which has created the major part of the East Asian diaspora in Sweden contrary to most other Western countries where East Asian endogamic migrant families constitute the main diaspora. The tendency that today’s East Asia is less depicted than a past traditional Orient or a future technological Orient goes well in hand with the classical colonial Orientalism in Western canonical literature and the contemporary techno-Orientalism of Western popular culture, while it is perhaps a bit more surprising that East Asians are more often placed in the West than in East Asia when human beings are involved, a fact which might be explained by pure economic and practical reasons, namely that it is simply just too expensive and inconvenient to visit East Asia itself for the producers and photographers of the images.

Out of the same collection, the major themes can be broadly defined according to the following categories. It must here be noted that the identified themes are never sharply divided among each other, and that there is no ideal type of any of them, as the images are always ambiguous in some way or another, and it is always possible to categorize them differently as well as belonging to several categories simultaneously, so the borders between the themes are therefore always blurred and unclear. A prominent theme is an orientalized East Asia inhabited by Japanese samurais, geishas and ninjas, Chinese emperors, sages and mandarins, and South East Asian Buddhist monks, rice farmers and temple dancers, which has been a part of the Western phantasm of the Far East for centuries, and which is reproduced and naturalised over and over again in among others travel guides, feature films, and television commercials. The constant turning up of this fairy-tale Orient is a good example of what the American postcolonial feminist Anne McClintock (1995) calls commodity fetishism or commodity racism, and which was so common during the classical

colonial period as a way of spreading the ideology and gospel of imperialism among the white European masses. Related to this is a mystified Orient filled with inexplicable and incomprehensible signs and characters, and secrets and mysteries, and connected to spirituality and harmony, and health, medicine and the world of new age with all its sexualized fantasies, which fascinated Rudolf Steiner and Madame Blavatsky, the founders of anthroposophy and theosophy, as well as intellectuals like the American poet Ezra Pound and the French literary theorist Roland Barthes (Hübinette 2007).

Another prominent theme is East Asia as signifying the future not just for East Asians, but in the end for the whole humankind. In 1995, the British media and communication studies scholars David Morley and Kevin Robins (1995) coined the term techno-Orientalism, to be able to understand how East Asia, which in the 1980s and 1990s mainly meant Japan, but also Hong Kong, and to a lesser extent Taiwan and South Korea, and which today means China, is imagined as a variously hypermodern and postmodern future which is sometimes utopian and sometimes dystopian, and which is associated with manga and anime, computer and video games, cyberpunk and science fiction, and cyborgs and robots. In this future fantasy world of a techno-Orient, the old *fin-de-siècle* discourse of the yellow peril which haunted the Western imperial powers one hundred years ago, has morphed itself into the fear of the recent East Asian economic miracle, with East Asians almost being synonymous with intelligence, higher education and research, entrepreneurship and business, but also with the frightening “yellow masses” marching towards the future and a coming race war with the West.

When it comes to East Asian individuals, the most frequently represented person is an East Asian child, something which probably reflects the high demographic density of East Asian adopted children and adult adoptees in Sweden: in total 30,000 individuals out of an East Asian population of 65,000 and a foreign-born adoptee population of 50,000. Accordingly, most images of East Asian children are of adopted children, and the East Asian child is most probably the most commonly seen non-white child in general in Swedish visual culture, being portrayed as completely integrated and assimilated, and as a preferred friend and hugging buddy of white children, while their visages are oftentimes blown-up and enlarged out of proportions to underscore their Otherness and desirability. When it comes to East Asian adults, women strongly dominate over men, again perhaps reflecting another demographic factor which pertains to the East Asian diaspora of Sweden, namely the presence of 20,000 women of East Asian decent being married to Swedish men, apart from the mundane and

naturalized fact that young women dominate in general in visual culture. Again, as with the East Asian child, the East Asian woman is usually an integrated and assimilated citizen and probably the most frequently appearing non-white woman in the Swedish public, as well as again a preferred and hugging friend for white women and a desired partner and spouse for white heterosexual men. As with the East Asian child, the image of the East Asian woman is also often enlarged in an objectifying and fetishistic way.

Another theme, which on the surface might sound paradoxical given the “positive” and almost cheerful representations of the East Asian child and the East Asian woman, is the East Asian body with all its spectacular and deviant curiosities: the epicanthic fold of the eyes, exalted Mongoloid-like face expressions and bizarre circus-like body positions, androgynous and sexless bodies floating in the air or standing upside down, and the ever present Siamese twin theme of “they all look alike”. The monstrosity of the East Asian body and the nausea that it seems to cause for the white gaze, probably derives from American and allied World War II propaganda posters where Japanese people and Japanese soldiers were portrayed as monkey-like sub-humans, and from the whole discourse on monsters which has haunted the Western psyche ever since the colonial project was initiated with all its tales and stories of monstrous races in distant countries (Linhart 2006; Shildrick 2002). A specific techno-Orientalist sub-theme is the East Asian body as a robot or carrying a camera as a prolonged body limb or even as a prosthesis, an image which is closely associated with the stereotype of the Asian tourist who is both ridiculed and feared at the same time, symbolising global mobility, money spending and a reversed power balance with the coming of the “yellow hordes” (Beauregard 1999). William O’Barr (1994: 158-173) has argued that the American obsession with and fear of Japan in the 1980s was expressed by belittling Japanese men as tourists or businessmen carrying cameras, and this motive has obviously come to stay in Swedish visual culture as well.

Arguably one of the most disturbing and stereotypical themes is the image of the East Asian man, who either is weak and sensitive, unmanly and homoeroticized, or he is ugly, nerdish and goofy, and in any case utterly despicable and ridiculous. If East Asians in general are machine-like, the East Asian man is almost turned into a robot himself according to the logics of Asian hypermodernity, crony capitalism and overdevelopment. The image of the East Asian man also uncannily resembles the Jewish man of the mid-war period, who was also heavily feminised and seen as a tragicomic figure unworthy of any trace of hegemonic white

heterosexist masculinity, and at the same time intimately associated with business and money (Andersson 2000).

However, the most problematic theme which is closely related to the East Asian man, is according to us the East Asian caricature and its twin partner the East Asian character, which together make up a substantial part of the contemporary visual images of East Asians, and probably constitute the most popular subject of them all, considering how these themes are so closely connected to everyday humour and a certain Swedish liberated irony. The East Asian caricature almost solely concerns the East Asian man, with his buck teeth, sneaky eyes, greasy hair, thin body, big head and short arms and legs, wearing the conical “coolie hat”, smiling smugly and shrewdly, looking like a fool and a jerk, and often labelled “Chinaman”, “chink”, “gook” or simply “ching chong”. The Finnish gender studies scholar Leena-Maija Rossi (2009) talks about a colonial complicity when she tries to understand how certain demeaning visual representations of Africans and Asians are still very popular on chocolate products in Finland in spite of the fact that Finland did not have any African or Asian colonies, and this colonial complicity evidently also concerns Swedish visual culture.

The figure of the East Asian caricature which is frequently depicted in photos, illustrations and films, is most probably the one bearing the closest resemblance to Anti-Semitic caricatures of Jewish men which were also considered to be humorous and comic, and where the audience identified the Jew by the help of certain specific physiognomic features such as the nose and the hair, and certain body postures and facial expressions, as well as creating a subject position for the viewer who identified with being inferior and yet superior to the cunning and disgusting “Semite”, and which provoked entertainment and scopophilic pleasure but also fear and anxiety among the “Aryan” majority population of Europe (Andersson 2000).

The subsequent theme, the East Asian character, is the East Asian caricature materialised and embodied, and performed and staged by white “stand-in” actors who take on a “yellow face” role including certain smiles, postures and even screams and cries deriving from an imagined martial arts world. If the East Asian caricature creates giggle and laughter, the East Asian character even provokes desire and excitement when being performed at theatres and stages, in ads and commercials, and on television and on the internet, deriving from its huge popularity, intermittent appearance and comic and humorous framing. The East Asian

character is as normalised and naturalised as the East Asian caricature, and manifests itself in everyday life of Sweden in the form of children's games, party songs, ethnic jokes and comedy numbers, and there is no debate whatsoever in the public sphere regarding these two themes and their systematic Othering effects among the general population of Sweden, among whom it is almost never considered demeaning and derogatory to make fun of East Asians or even perform the East Asian character at public or private events dominated by white Swedes.

East Asians as a visual Orientalist spectacle

So how do we contextualise and analyze the contemporary Swedish images of East Asians, as they are expressed through the identified themes? Do they differ from images in other Western countries, and do they differ from representations of other non-white groups? Firstly, most of the themes, if not all of them, seem to be well in line with the general Western images of East Asians, perhaps with the exceptions of the predominance of East Asian children and women being represented, which might reflect the strong demographic presence of East Asian adoptees and spouses in Sweden. In other words, Sweden shares the whole Western referent system of Orientalist images in spite of having no colonial past in East Asia and a small East Asian minority, and therefore consistency and continuity dominate over change and transformation when it comes to imagining East Asians even in Sweden. When it comes to Swedish relations to East Asia and East Asians, Sweden can almost be seen as a case study of a colonialism without colonies and an Orientalism without Orientals, considering that a full-fledged Orientalist imagery related to East Asia is able to exist in the public culture of Sweden, albeit in an epigonic and decontextualized version. One can therefore assume that because of this historical and demographic background, the general public in Sweden is most probably not as aware of East Asian histories, traditions, conditions and developments as the general public in for example Britain, France, the US and the Netherlands, where there exists a continuous relationship with East Asia and East Asians having deep historical roots. Thus, the specific Swedish context wherein these images are produced, distributed and consumed is above all characterised by a dehistoricized and depoliticized one, given that Sweden is also a peripheral Western country with its own peculiar provincialism and exceptionalist self-image. In other words, instead of identifying and recognizing these images within a colonial discourse and a racial archive, especially the themes of the East Asian caricature and the East Asian character are instead categorized as falling within the on the surface harmless and pleasurable genre of humour and comedy.

Another trait which contemporary Sweden's visual culture shares with most other Western countries, is the near absence of stereotypical representations of Jews, while the ones that exist of Africans are contested and debated, and the ones of Arabs and Asian Indians are considered taboo in the post-9/11 climate of terrorist fear and civilization wars. Thus, like in any other Western country, Swedish visual culture also tries to grapple with the discrepancy between the colonial imaginary and the postcolonial condition, whereby ethnic minorities interact with the majority population within the same national context. Stereotypical "old school" representations of indigenous populations such as American Indians and Inuits are certainly still present within Swedish visual culture, but these ethnic groups are today rather perceived as fairytale and fantasy figures than connected to a certain minority or diaspora. So in general, openly racist representations of Jews have been absent since 1945 or at least since 1968, and similar representations of Africans are today challenged and criticized, while the ones regarding East Asians are generally not questioned and debated. On the contrary, stereotypical representations of East Asians even seem to be increasing both in frequency and in intensity from the first decade of the 21st century deeming from the collection which this study is based upon, a tendency which we interpret as a reflection of the growing Western fear of East Asia as the coming challenger and competitor for global dominance.

Coming back to the most disturbing themes, namely the East Asian caricature and the East Asian character, they also both show strong archaic features which in most other Western countries today would be considered outright racist, and be officially condemned and opposed either by government and the establishment or by East Asian immigrant communities and antiracist activists. However, in contemporary Sweden these themes are instead seen as an expression of a liberated popular style humour challenging the political correctness of the cultural elite, and sometimes even turning up in leftist and antiracist contexts by interpellating the audience into a position of being inferior and subordinated, and thus rebellious and radical. Through these themes, East Asians are turned into a splendid, visual Orientalist spectacle and treated in a way which reminds of classical school bullying when a We has to be defined and demarcated towards a Them, and which in this case transcends Swedishness and the Swedish nation and in the end becomes a matter of the perceived planetary conflict between the white West and "yellow" Asia. By turning East Asians into symbolic figures of an absolute Otherness, the parallel to pan-European Anti-Semitic visual representations of the first half of the 20th century, which were also hegemonic and naturalised in the sense that they were a part of everyday life and not seen as racist and discriminating, becomes evident given

how prevalent and widespread, and above all how popular and beloved such stereotypical representations of East Asians actually are among white Swedes in today's Sweden.

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