



Shang-Chi: The Model Minority's Neoliberal Update

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Abstract. *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, heralded as the watershed moment in Asian American popular representation and antiracism in the US, not only falls short in authenticity but constitutes the model minority's neoliberal update—a newfangled normative identity for the neoliberal subject in place of the nonethnic white. The paper discusses three theoretical anchors: neoliberal colorblindness, formulated by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva as a hollow language that undercuts the substance in discussions of racism; the “protestant ethnic,” coined by Rey Chow to denote the investment of transgression and the imperatives of protest and confession in the “ethnic” subject; racial triangulation, first conceived by Claire Jean Kim to describe how Asian Americans are simultaneously valorized to Black/Latino Americans' disadvantages and ostracized as perpetual foreigners by white supremacist societies. These three modes coalesce into a binary of ethnic and nonethnic—the updated Black/white distinction—and counterintuitively valorizes the Asian American outsider position due to the reassurance of neoliberal globalization. This paper points to *Shang-Chi's* ironic scenes of racist stereotypes, humor, microaggression, translation, and the fictional common in-human enemy, historicizing them in their sociopolitical contexts, to explicate the specific workings of this updated model minority, crystallizing in the form of an Asian American superhero.

Keywords: *Shang-Chi*, model minority, neoliberal colorblindness, protestant ethnic, racial triangulation.

1 Introduction

Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings (hereafter *Shang-Chi*) is a 2021 American superhero film featuring Marvel Studios' first “Asian” superhero, a predominantly “Asian” cast, and a story set to renew Asian American media representation [1]. It follows a Chinese American superhero protagonist, Shang-Chi, who must confront his assassin warlord father and reclaim his Chinese heritage, while the father is manipulated by evil forces that threaten the world to look for his deceased wife [2]. The US blockbuster boasts a box office of \$432.2 million—and an overwhelmingly positive reaction from critics as a first “appropriately diverse” Marvel movie [1]. *Huff-Post*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and other media outlets have echoed this antiracist outlook [3]. The film's antiracist mission through visibility and “authentic representation” is central to this reception, with screenwriter Dave Callaham declaring that the crew

had a “physical list” of “stereotypes to explode” regarding Asian American masculinity [4]. To this end, the titular character Shang-Chi (pseudonymized as Shaun) and his oldest friend and sidekick Katy Chen Ruiwen originally work as unambitious parking valets remiss in his duties, a seeming opposite to the prudent and overachieving “model minority” stereotype. The film’s star Simu Liu himself has been an ardent activist, boasting that the film is “a watershed moment for Asian representation in Hollywood,” a story “told through an Asian lens,” and “a celebration of Asianness, of our culture, of our language, and so much” [1]. *Shang-Chi* is thus widely understood as an antiracist, Asian American activist film.

However, the film’s progressivism did not enjoy flawless reviews. Chris Reads points out that the film reduces its Asian cast to tokens: “Marvel just made a kung fu movie with an ABC protagonist and some MCU characters thrown in” [5]. Grace Elizabeth Rogers criticized that the film “prioritizes stereotyped portrayals of Asian media representation” by conforming to the Westernized comic relief Asian characters, and this overreliance “inhibits its ability to contribute nuanced and complex perspectives on Asian identity” [6]. Walter Chaw from *The Washington Post*, especially, offers a wide range of failed cultural references and authentic representation contrary to the film’s political ambition [7]. He characterizes the film as an “Orientalist fantasia,” criticizing the exoticized portrayal of Asia (especially concerning Ta Lo), misappropriation of Chinese culture (especially regarding mythical creatures in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* and the philosophical concept of *qi*), and the reinforcement of stereotypes while pretending to subvert them [7]. For example, Shang-Chi and Katy, though presented as underachievers set to subvert the model minority myth, are later revealed to be highly educated or multilingual [7]. Moreover, Shang-Chi’s alter ego, Shaun, is precisely the martial arts master stereotype Katy initially tries to dispel [7]. These failures perpetuate what Frank Wu terms the “perpetual foreigner syndrome,” the “twin” of the model minority myth in direct lineage of the yellow peril stereotype [8]. Chaw thus asks his reader to compare the moment when Katy asks Shaun, “Who *are* you?” after seeing him fight with the primary construction of the perpetual foreigner: “Where are you *really* from?”

While critics interpret *Shang-Chi*’s racial stereotypes as failures of an incomplete antiracist project, this paper describes them as necessities of a predominant ideology, coherent expressions of the film’s inner antiracist logic. Predominantly, these criticisms yearn for a *truly* accurate and authentic representation of Asian Americans where racist prejudice would cease, which would translate to favorable views and affirmation of Asian Americans, the same mission set out by the film’s cast and crew. These stereotypes are not oversights but expressions of neoliberal colorblind antiracism in superheroic rebellion, which alleviates the guilt of “authentic” and homogenizing Asian and Asian American representation by “ethnicization” and casting it as socially progressive. Such universal ethnicization and valorization of foreignness are the newly “updated” model minority: as whiteness may denote the universal human, Asianness may denote the normative way of being a neoliberal ethnic subject.

2 Neoliberal Colorblindness

According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *neoliberal colorblindness* refers to a post-civil rights “race-neutral” racism under neoliberal market economy to justify and reproduce racial inequality without ever *naming* race [9]. Central to this “new ideology” is “abstract liberalism,” a *vocabulary* (a web of insubstantial signifiers) that explains away racial matters—what Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant called “NewLiberalSpeak” [9,10]. This vocabulary includes approving terms such as *freedom*, *openness*, *growth*, and *diversity*, contrasted with disapproving terms associated with the state, such as *stasis*, *rigidity*, and *autocracy*; any “concrete” terms related to structural matters, such as power, hierarchy, or supremacy may be replaced by personal or group characteristics and preferences such as *bias*, *inclusivity*, and *merit*. Along with them are bourgeois values of “individualism, universalism, egalitarianism, . . . meliorism,” “meritocracy, . . . and neutrality,” intimately transforming the neoliberal subject into the entrepreneurial self with phrases like *know yourself*, *find yourself*, *love who you are*, and so on [9,11,12]. This mechanism helps privatize racism: negative outcomes of systematic racism are recast as individual moral failings, either on the part of the nonwhite’s lack of initiative or on the racist person’s bigotry or illiberal tendencies such as anger and resignation explicitly or implicitly upholding the hypostatized idea of already existing “equal opportunity.” Likewise, in NewLiberalSpeak, the term that replaced *race* is *ethnicity*, or “racial difference in the form of different food, dress, and [other] cultural customs” [13]. The antiracist neoliberal media, then, is to be responsible with the privileged power of representation they possess—a matter of choice *not to be racist*. This process to establish nonracial and non-structural traits as a group identity over and against race, elsewhere termed “ethniciz[ation],” is reflected in *Shang-Chi* [14].

Neoliberalism permeates *Shang-Chi*: hero’s-journey Hollywood formula of the superhero narrative, the self-entrepreneurial moral of the story, and the Orientalist contrast between a stagnant Asian culture and the modernized Western world. Regarding its ethical/ethnic messaging, the character introduction of Katy and Shaun begins with a jubilant recounting of anti-Asian microaggression (“I’m not Korean, idiot!”), followed by Soo’s relentless urging the Chinese American duo to “liv[e] up to their potential,” pointing out that Katy “graduated with an honours degree from Berkeley, and Shaun can speak . . . four languages” [2]. Later, *Shang-Chi* and Katy’s indolence is simultaneously problematized and affirmed. “If you aim at nothing, you hit nothing,” says the villager in Ta Lo to Katy, alluding to Katy’s aimless and directionless life [2]. This entrepreneurial moral is eventually contrasted with the drunken karaoke session with Wong by the end of the film, a celebration of Katy’s anti-microaggression trick: inexplicably belting out rock song “Hotel California,” which then serves as the film’s end-credit music [2]. On the other hand, a key moment in the film before *Shang-Chi*’s mother’s death, she imparts *Shang-Chi* the weighty mantra: “[I]ook into your heart, the light and the dark; to know yourself, you must face them both,” a find-yourself narrative thinly veiled in quasi-Daoist Orientalist imageries [2]. Confusingly, the film would not explicitly elaborate on the “dark” side of *Shang-Chi*’s “heart,” as *Shang-Chi* faces “no tough decisions” and “is adamantly opposed to his father the entire time, and ends up winning a fight” [5]. The film’s monomythical structure, adhered to by Hollywood,

already favors self-discovery, which is further flattened out in *Shang-Chi* as a discovery of Shang-Chi's superhero identity *from others's perspective*. *Shang-Chi* thus seems to strive for two contradictory emancipatory Asian American identities: the self-starting entrepreneur that grants Asian Americans a positive image and the nonconforming life-enjoyer that dispels the racist, model-minority stereotype.

Shang-Chi's antiracism, as Chaw argued, indeed falls short of this Asian-Americanist liberating mission. Yet, it fails not in degree but in kind—by selectively nullifying all its semantics with NewLiberalSpeak, it renders concerns for racism absurd. To name but three examples: firstly, following the logic of colorblindness, this perceived representational history is racially ambiguous and can be applied to all minoritized races equally: “that their experiences of racism are nothing unique,” yet this quite apparently racist idea is overridden by the premise that every culture—and everyone—is unique, as the film goes heavy-handed on “authentic” cultural representation [15]. Secondly, to symbolically subvert the history of “harmful stereotypes,” stereotypes are either “subsumed within their superheroic identities” or obscured by “racialized humor” [15], seen in, for example, Shang-Chi's kung-fu skills and exotic and unassimilable origin, Katy and Shaun's shaggy-dog story about microaggressions, and Katy's quippy personality, exemplified by the line “[d]oes he look like he can fight?” [2]. Lastly, the film depicts little to no systemic racial injustice (which in itself is hardly suited for the film's genre) other than school-age microaggressions in which the protagonists emerged triumphant; instead, an otherwise harsh and overdisciplined childhood commonly sustained by Asian Americans (and other nonwhites) is “outsourced” to Xu Wenwu and his evil forces in the Oriental Far East. Collectively, these are ironic devices whose racism ought not to be taken seriously that paradigmatically “rework” the very concept of racism, foremost through ethnicization, limiting Asian American experience as exclusively intra-ethnic: telling *an Asian (American) story*. As we will see in the next section, any potential allegations of (anti-Asian) racism launched at the film would be preemptively dissolved with irony through the mechanism of ethnic story-telling: *speaking as an Asian American*.

3 The Protestant Ethnic

The superhero genre's emphasis on transformation and defiance aligns with neoliberal antiracism, and the interrelation between them is explored next. Seen from a NewLiberalSpeak perspective, the superhero identity is the neoliberal “openness” par excellence. According to Ellen Kirkpatrick's analysis, the superhero identity “disrupt[s] thresholds of space \Rightarrow time, real \Rightarrow imaginary, possible \Rightarrow impossible, then \Rightarrow now \Rightarrow future and, in doing so, ‘open up more possibility than they foreclose’” [16]. This “promised” identity is characterized by transformative potential (“everyone can change”), defiance of dominant narratives (“be different or you are unique”), and civic participation (“everyone can make a difference”). In effect, the neoliberal “openness” is synonymous with an imagined contrarianism—the anti-stasis neoliberal value—which neatly summarizes neoliberal antiracism typified by *Shang-Chi* [16]. Shang-Chi transgresses the boundaries of space and time as his BMW penetrates the bamboo maze

to reach the “pristine, untouched” Ta Lo civilization “where tradition has not yet been corrupted by modernity” [17]; he subverts the distinctions of reality and imagination as he is simultaneously a mythical superhero and an awkward, relatable no-name. Most notably, in a scene criticized by Chaw, Katy’s intention to disrupt the “kung-fu-master” stereotype by saying “[d]oes he look like he can fight?” immediately backfires as the stereotype comes true [2]. Katy’s “interpellation” of Shaun as an Asian American that subverts the absurd stereotype that “every Asian knows kung-fu” is itself disavowed by Shang-Chi’s masterful kung-fu skills. In other words, this ironic rebellion that appeals to the common prejudice instead recognizes—reifies—the absurdity of that prejudice as the dominant narrative (among *Shang-Chi*’s audience)—“everyone knows racism is absurd.” This “openness” has been observed in neoliberal capitalism as Mark Fisher observed that “[s]o long as we believe (in our hearts) that capitalism is bad, we are free to continue to participate in capitalist exchange” [18]. Angela McRobbie likewise identified that neoliberal postfeminist culture operates on a “vehemently denunciatory stance” that feminism’s goals have been achieved, rendering feminism obsolete [19]. (This postfeminism can be found in *Shang-Chi*’s post-credits scene where Shang-Chi’s sister Xu Xialing, herself a feminist figure who is self-taught in kung-fu despite Xu Wenwu’s patriarchal, misogynistic discrimination in the organization, is seen overseeing a new secret army consisting of equal numbers of male and female soldiers [2].) Similarly, once one accepts that Asian stereotypes like “the kung-fu master” are already-overcome racism, which can be assumed for *Shang-Chi*’s target audience, a racist stereotype is no longer racism but camp: antiracist openness and transgression. This ironic protestation is fulfilled by a crucial part of *Shang-Chi*’s antiracism: ethnicity, and East Asian ethnicity in particular.

In her book *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Rey Chow, drawing on Max Weber’s analysis of Protestant-capitalist values, identifies a parallel structure in what she calls the “protestant ethnic”—marginalized “ethnic” individuals who are interpellated to perform—a form of spiritual or cultural labor—their ethnicity through protest, confession, and self-representation [20]. This capitalistic imperative for the ethnic minority to perform protestation manifests itself in *Shang-Chi* as being against both the would-be national ideal and racial emasculation, resulting in the paradoxical and simultaneous affirmation and disavowal of the “kung-fu master” stereotype and the entrepreneurial superhero, exemplified by the phrase “[d]oes he look like he can fight?” To summarize, Shang-Chi must protest, yet his protest originates from his self-affirming will, not necessity nor racial injustice; what he protests, namely racism defined as racial prejudice and animus, is, paradoxically, both yet to be overcome by a superhero’s subjective volition and already overcome in the teleological course of history. This is neatly compounded with the element of *confession* in Chow’s work, a form of self-mimicry where ethnic subjects repeatedly perform and authenticate their ethnicity [20]. This is the idea of ethnic individuals liberating themselves by speaking about their experiences as an *ethnic individual*, a “most intimate fashion—from within their hearts and souls” by which they submit to racist subordination, echoing Brown’s judgement of neoliberalism’s personal intimacy [20,11]. *Shang-Chi*’s advertised predominantly “Asian” cast, along with co-writers Destin Daniel Cretton and David Callaham’s both being half-Asian, serves as the basis for this protestant ethnic: an ethnic *authenticity*.

The use of Mandarin Chinese and its translations in the film is notable, as they make ethnicity possible for the “ethnic” individual, even if it sacrifices the experience of the nonethnic but still nonwhite viewers like those in Mainland China. On the common language as a primary means for “ethnicization,” Etienne Balibar argues: “it is always possible to appropriate several languages” to approximate an “open” self in conformity with the intimate process of neoliberal subject formation, which renders multilingualism desirable [14]. This logocentric ethnicization, as ethnicity contrasts with race, leads to a “racelessness” that is “one of the marks and privileges of membership in whiteness” [13]. In particular, the colonial models of language(s) *in general* are atomized objects freely accessed and possessed with self-entrepreneurship by the ethnicized individual or group, which “turn[s] languages into ‘portable things’” [21]. On the one hand, viewers praised the use of Mandarin throughout the film and the authentic tensions between that and American English [5]. On the other hand, localization of Mandarin for the film’s US audience is maladroit, and, at times, the Mandarin lines themselves are “localized” for (Asian) Americans. the Qingming Festival mentioned by *Waipo* (Grandma) Chen is laughably translated into English as the “Day of the Dead”; various Mandarin accents clash, with “the immortal Mandarin Tony Leung speaks as though he’s a Hong Kong real estate magnate”; Classical Chinese was never used despite its potential thematic authenticity [2,5]. This apparent inauthenticity is compensated by sprinkled-in set phrases and idioms (*a blood debt has to be paid by blood, I’ve eaten more salt than you have eaten rice*, and so on), some of the most famous idioms in Chinese languages that, it is to be assumed, Asian Americans are more likely to be aware of [2]. Even the entrepreneurial adage that “[i]f you aim at nothing, you hit nothing” is drawn out and awkwardly phrased in Mandarin: literally translated, “if there is no target in your heart, that is shooting an arrow without a target” [2]. The use of Mandarin and its English translation as subtitles, then, might *impede* cultural exchange and the potential of a peer-to-peer grassroots translation and subtitling by or for a Chinese audience, further divorcing the Asian American exemplar’s cultural sensibility from Asian culture. Seen from perspectives of an Asian American in neoliberal US, however, the film’s Mandarin is adequate: it serves to supplant the subject’s lack of ethnicity by constructing a Chineseness that is *attainable*, however accurate or inaccurate to Asian cultures—the Chinese language. Ethnicity becomes bilingualism. In sum, the film’s implicit equation between Chineseness (ethnicity) and dexterous bilingualism capitalizes on the ethnic individual’s unshakable dilemma between assimilation and “ethnicization”—Shang-Chi: “I thought that I could change my name, start a new life . . . But . . .” [2]—to market ethnicity as attainable, the promise of the non-traumatic yet counter-hegemonic ethnic individual commodified in filmic form. The exoticized and commodified Mandarin language and “Asian culture” at large, as we will see in the next section, is in fact a valorized foreignness that marks privilege more than oppression.

4 Racial Triangulation

For one to be accurately describe a sociopolitical reality reflected in *Shang-Chi* as racism while still acknowledging the malleability of its fabric, Claire Jean Kim’s 1999

concept of racial triangulation proves useful [23]. Racial triangulation positions Asian Americans “vis-à-vis [w]hites and Blacks” along two axes: the vertical *superior/inferior* axis representing racial valorization and the horizontal *insider/foreigner* axis representing civic inclusion [23]. In this framework, white Americans occupy the top-right position (superior and insider), Black Americans are positioned *inferior* but close to—if not the same as—whites on the *insider* axis, and Asian Americans form a triangle between Blacks and whites by being positioned between *superior* and *inferior*—if not simply *superior*—but marked as *foreigners* [23]. This means that a white supremacist society does not devalue all nonwhite races equally; it valorizes Asian Americans relative to Blacks as a means to, in the neoliberal context, deny the latter “equal opportunity policies and programs,” cited as “evidence that racial discrimination does not exist or impede the educational and occupational progress of racial/ethnic minorities”: “If [Asian Americans] have made it, how come blacks have not?” [22,9]. This triangulating process, while having persisted since the mid-1800s, shed its overt racial language post-civil rights era, coinciding the rise of neoliberalism [23].

While the racial triangulation theory is “widely taught and cited as the premier explanation of Asian Americans’ racial position in the United States,” *Shang-Chi*’s updated model minority myth adds intricacy to it [24]. Traditionally, the racial triangulation theory served to “disrupt[] notions of Asian Americans’ full-fledged complicity with Whiteness by arguing that at the same time that Asian Americans accrued advantages vis-à-vis Black people, they also experienced racial disadvantages” in the form of “‘civic ostracism’ or lack of political power due to the ‘perpetual foreigner’ stereotype” [24]. *Shang-Chi*’s updated outlook for Asian Americans’ triangulation disputes this by complicating the *insider/foreigner* axis with the very valorization of *foreigner* itself, through the protestant ethnic. White characters are identified as a “Romanian” with no discernible reasoning (compare “‘What’s up, Gangnam Style?’”), portrayed as comic-relief animal communicator (traditionally Asian or Native American stereotypes), or hidden behind a mask [2]. In contrast, *Shang-Chi* and Katy’s character developments follow the trajectory of assimilation into the *Chinese* space as a part of the neoliberal world, as Katy, originally of no command of Mandarin, is advised by Xu Wenwu to embrace her Chinese name and instructed by the elders in Ta Lo in Mandarin only. Herein lies the curious reformation of the classic racial triangulation: it is not only the Asian but also the white subjects who may be foreigners, the Asian-American foreignness is included in globalizing capitalism as a mastered and domestic space, and foreignness itself, unable to escape the capture of globalization, becomes a fetishized object possessed by the dominant subject. The strive toward foreignness as the neoliberal value of “openness” awards ethnicization against the close-minded provincialism of lower-class whites termed *racism* [25]. Meanwhile, the “ABC” (“America-Born Chinese”) Asian American is not alienated from *American* but *Asian* and must be assimilated to it. As each individual may assume “only one . . . ethnic identity,” *Shang-Chi*’s updated model minority favors an outside Chineseness to veil the otherwise obvious racial hierarchies of the American “melting-pot of a new race” [14].

The final worrying phenomenon is that the Asian American protestant-ethnic model minority is *en route* to become the proper way of engaging with racial self-identity even for whites. This development can be seen in Terrence MacMullan’s proposal for whites

to reconfigure their whiteness via ethnic habits of remembrance: “If we go back far enough or look carefully enough, we can find a culture and a history that is predicated on *particular memories and particular experiences*, not on the exclusion of others” [26]. Such ethnicization and (apparent) minoritization of the white *race*—“side-step[ing] race in favor of ethnicity”—are the exact strategy offered—and sometimes imposed upon—the “ethicized” and “culturalized” groups—Asian Americans via *Shang-Chi* [25]. Moreover, this strategy is often detached from both history and the subject’s lived experience, for whites or nonwhites alike. As Shannon Sullivan explains as a white middle-class Texan woman, this strategy puts premium on a “pedigreed” state or an established genealogical ancestry, a “cultural capital unavailable to lower classes of white people,” which cannot be said about, say, many mixed-raced people and those who are many generations removed from their immigrant ancestors, let alone groups whose ties to their even pseudohistorical origins are severed due to colonialism, assimilation, or both, unlike *Shang-Chi*’s Asian Americans who could confidently claim a certain outside ethnicity, “Chinese” [25]. Moreover, this approach effectively “Asian-Americanizes” the white bourgeoisie through a metastasis of the “perpetual foreigner syndrome” [8]. Eventually, the ethnic subject would “be accused of not going back far enough or looking carefully enough,” echoing the original colonial construction of the moving goalposts of whiteness [25]; in this scheme of foreignness *as* white is seen as favorable for even whites. Synthesizing the protestant ethnic and neoliberal values, as the model minority becomes the normative imperative for all subjects—“cultural values and hard work as the keys to success”—, *Shang-Chi*’s superheroic ethnicization as the updated model minority becomes, too [27]. As Balibar argues, through neoliberal “ethnicization,” “every individual” is “forced today to find [their] own means of going beyond exclusivism” [14]; the updated model minority is, then, majoritarian, occupying a space traditionally reserved for whiteness.

If the ethnicization project of *Shang-Chi*, as this paper has argued, indeed constitute a new form of white racism, the missing piece is a racialized Other, an imminent, non-human threat against the civilization of whiteness, and *Shang-Chi* finds this threat not in any human agent but eldritch creatures from another dimension—a longstanding trope in fantasy and scientific fiction genres that is susceptible to racism [28,29]. Despite being inspired by a warless utopia (*The Peach Blossom Spring*), Ta Lo is in a constant state of war as the most explicit “every-Chinese-knows-kung-fu” stereotype and a quasi-fascist society, fending off the Cthulhu-esque, nonracial “Dwellers-in-Darkness” to protect the rest of the world [2]. Xu Wenwu himself, far from a “more complex villain,” is under psychic manipulation which undercuts all his otherwise evil motives: being called upon by his late wife Ying Li, herself an exotic Oriental female trope who has lost all her agency when the main story began (due to being in death), he in turn loses his agency to Ying Li’s phantom orchestrated by the Dwellers-in-Darkness. Xu Wenwu brief interactions with *Shang-Chi* are about no more than a trite sentiment about redemption and fear, while the true evil is the autopoietic, uncanny, and soul-sucking monstrosities without reason [2]. The incessant inhuman threat in *Shang-Chi* posits Asian Americans in Ta Lo as the “normative [w]hiteness in Fantasy works,” while the monsters are, quintessentially, a deferred enemy of the fantastical racial purity [29]. As Asian Americans attain citizenship and as neoliberalism

globalizes, the “yellow peril” is deferred to fantasy monsters while Asian Americans, occupying the “model minority,” heroically battle the deferred yellow peril through the protestant ethnic to attain whiteness.

5 Conclusion

Racial colorblindness, foremost a vocabulary and secondarily an ethical paradigm that promotes openness and protest and reconfigures *racism* as individual moral failures, on the part of both the ethnic and the nonethnic (or not-yet-ethnic) subject, *survives* via the protestant ethnic and racial triangulation. Via the former, the racial subject is (re)interpellated as nonracial yet *ethnic*—the process *ethnicization*. Culture, language, geographical origin, and so on, are heralded into the symbolic realm through the ethnic subject’s confession and protest on the basis of their performative ethnicity. The latter, racial triangulation, operates in two ways: the Black/white binary where the ethnicized subject could be invested inherent subversiveness, while its opposite, the constative nonethnic subject, is encouraged to mimic the former’s transgression. This means non- or not-yet-ethnic subjects are encouraged to seek out an origin and a home outside of the white supremacist center in a globalized world that has already incorporated all its parts as distinct spatial patches of ethnicity. It is under these processes that foreignness is valorized for not only Asian American but all American subjects, the updated model minority of *Shang-Chi*.

The implication of this “no-outside” neoliberalism is profound. If the bourgeois race discourse, represented by *Shang-Chi*, encourages white Americans to emulate Asian Americans not only in academic, economic, or professional arenas but also in ethnicity and foreignness, Asian Americans’ already-expected foreignness (as per the perpetual foreigner syndrome) is insidiously affirmed with white valorization. Like *Shang-Chi*, such commercialization of racial hysteria for the ones with the most “purchasing power” is expected to intensify in areas such as (second-)language acquisition and tourism; the updated model minority would widen the divide between the advantaged and the disadvantaged in the intersection of race and class. Through the updated model minority, while the privileged could wear visibility, transgression, or ethnicity on their sleeves, the rest—the racial(ized)—is thoroughly denied of constative or “normal” existence. At the core of the updated model minority, the protesting, confessing, and authentic ethnic that is promised as accessible to all, is the autonomous, mobile, penetrative, and Western-centered subject, historically condemned as white supremacy.

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