AAR   REVIEW ESSAY

Oriental Monk as Popular Icon: On the Power of U.S. Orientalism

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Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture. By Jane Naomi Iwamura. Oxford University Press, 2011. 214 pages. $24.95.

What images has U.S. popular culture deployed in representing Asian societies and religious life? How might U.S. popular culture call for new critical engagements of Edward Said's theories, as in his *Orientalism*? In what manner do popular impressions of the Asian sage, such as the "icon of the Oriental Monk," as Iwamura terms it, catalyze such old stereotypes as "the inscrutable Oriental, the evil Fu Manchus, Yellow Peril, heathen Chinese and Dragon Ladies?" More particularly, how was the Oriental Monk icon and his "spirituality" variously reconstituted by media treatments in the 25-year period marked, first, by D.T. Suzuki's impact in the U.S. (1950–58), then by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1966–69), and the television series, *Kung Fu* (1972–75)? How might the Oriental Monk icon still be at work today in the kid-friendly

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orientalist dimensions of *Star Wars*, *Karate Kid*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Xiaolin Showdown*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, and *Kung Fu Panda*? Moreover, what happens if we view all this within a matrix of sexual and racial politics, and against the backdrop of a U.S. search for global sovereignty from the end of World War II to the present?

Jane Naomi Iwamura's stellar new book, *Virtual Orientalism*, brings meticulous analysis and cogent argument to questions as disparate and intriguing as these. The volume is amply enhanced with photographs, analyzed by Iwamura's illuminating and judicious commentary. In this review essay, because of the tightly reasoned and conceptual significance of her book, I devote much of my attention to tracing her key theoretical moves. A second section then identifies key research vistas toward which scholars are invited by her work.

VIRTUAL ORIENTALISM AS THEORY

As the very title suggests, the book deepens and extends Edward Said's theories, presenting his key concept, "orientalism," here, as a "created body of theory and practice," a "detailed logic" that forms a set of representations revealing much about the Occidental subjectivity that constructs, desires, and seeks to control "the Orient" (7). Orientalism, wrote Said in his near-classic 1978 book, "is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.'"[1] Iwamura's book dramatizes the continuing power of that distinction in post-World War II and contemporary periods.

Iwamura, however, moves beyond Said's theory in two ways: first, she gives vigorous attention to the U.S.-American cultural terrain, whereas Said had focused mainly on British and French Orientalism (with some treatment of U.S. scholars toward the end of his book) and, secondly, her theorization focuses largely on the mass media (popular) culture in the United States, rather than on more academic orientalisms. Although she may move beyond Said here, she sees the U.S. media as a key site of what Said took orientalism to be: "a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections" (Ibid.). It is with this latter move to popular culture that the notion of a *virtual* orientalism emerges.

By "virtual," Iwamura means not only the culture of online and internet communication technology—as in "virtual reality," and the "hyperreal" it creates through a heightening of the visual and by a

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[1]Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 2.

compression of time and space. She also highlights the way the visual media can conjure a kind of synaesthesia, working as "a sensory trigger" drawing together multiple human senses around privileged images. These images, or icons, do particular work in the mass media and in the social and political worlds that are their backdrop. You can see them—see through them, iconically—to glimpse what is revered, privileged, entitled, in the tumultuous world of U.S. politics and media.

Here is where Iwamura's key argument can be stated. A particularly powerful icon, a recurring stereotype in U.S.-American media, is the "Oriental Monk," a male Asian figure depicted variously as embodying transformative wisdom. Iwamura argues that in mass media depictions, the Oriental monk "reveals not only Americans' perceptions of the East, but also their religious self-definition, a self-definition that in the second half of the 20th century was informed by larger geopolitical power relations between the United States and Asia" (22).

The Oriental Monk icon is not just a salient image of a singular figure. It is that; but there is also a narrative bound up with it. This narrative has key actors, the male Asian sage figure, an American pupil, and the reified "Asian masses" who have not really understood their own sages. Nevertheless, certain fascinating males emerge from those masses once in awhile, whom the U.S. media find acceptable and whose teaching can be taken in by the American audience/apprentice(s). The *denouement* of the process is usually some affirmation of American viewers' self-image, which is also consonant with enhancing American cultural and political dominance over Asian societies and religiosity. That is the basic narrative of the Oriental monk icon.

In the quarter-century period treated by Iwamura, Suzuki enters first, to be described by *Harper's Bazaar* in 1956, as having "the inscrutable smile of a Buddha...eye slits like exotic butterflies in flight..." (33), and ends up inspiring a Zen boomlet in America. His American pupils are cultural thinkers within or at the edge of the Beat movement, Jack Kerouac, and also the writer, Alan Watts, both going on to popularize blends of Zen and American culture.

Then, the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi shows up in the 1960s media culture of U.S. hippies and transcendental meditation, and is proclaimed "Chief Guru of the Western World" (*The New York Times Magazine,* 1968). He apprentices hip musicians, actors, and a hungry white youth generation burned out on their parents' 1950s, post-World War II establishment. The extensive media treatment of Mahesh dramatizes another point made by Said about orientalism, that is to say it often admits of a "good Orient" in long-ago Asian religious tradition, but the present-day Asia, whether "Far East" or "Middle East (West

Asia), is the unruly, corrupted Asia, needing European and later U.S. control. Mahesh was made by the media to symbolize both the good and the bad Asia (96). He could convey to his American pupils the good wisdom of "long-gone India," but media pundits also put him under suspicion precisely for his success. Was there not something wrong with his influencing so many impressionable minds? How could he have developed so impressive a communications network? Thus, once the long-gone Asian heritage is passed to questing Americans in the present, those youths and their largely white leaders can protect that good of the Asian past, without the suspect Asian man being needed. This serves to reinforce a U.S. control, at least ideologically, over Asian culture, religion and, often, political life.

By the early 1970s, virtual orientalism develops further and "goes to Hollywood" with the film and TV series, *Kung-Fu*, starring actor, David Carradine, who was white (although for the series he was presented as bi-racial, "half-Asian" by the media-this, in classic "Yellow Face" tradition[2]). Now the American fascination with Suzuki and Mahesh really comes "to bear fruit" within this next historical period. The previously developed "search for spiritual renewal in the East," Iwamura writes, "found popular expression" in the *Kung Fu* media phenomenon (112).

In the *Kung Fu*, 90-minute debut film and subsequent TV series, this Oriental Monk—Carradine playing wise martial arts warrior, Kwai Chang Caine—has as apprentices different figures within the various episodes of the series. This popular culture form had a special power, as an entire TV-viewing audience over a three-year period becomes apprenticed to the "Asian" sage. The series functioned as the Oriental Monk icon usually did: enabling Americans to appropriate a wisdom that is reconfigured for U.S. geopolitical and cultural control.

In her analysis of the *Kung Fu* series, Iwamura particularly unveils the ways "anti-establishment white males" (148) are audience/apprentices in the *Kung Fu* iconic narrative. They are the key viewers in a spectatorship made up of a "post-1960s liberal audience" (Ibid.). Readers unfamiliar or uncomfortable with designating subject-positions as "white" and "male" may have some catching up to do regarding critical race studies and whiteness studies. Iwamura judiciously works aspects of this research,[3] showing readers how a certain audience subject-

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[2]Krystyn R. Moon, *Yellowface: Creating the Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance, 1850s–1920s* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

[3]Iwamura's sources on race come primarily from the most recent and tested research on race in mass media (just one of many examples being, Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). This is judiciously

position—again, "anti-establishment white males"—experiences the media event of the Oriental Monk. In the process, she brilliantly analyzes how "race and gender form an inseparable matrix from which the ego ideal gains its potency and the male spectator, in turn, gains his sense of control" (145).

How does this actually work in the case of *Kung Fu*? Crucial to understanding this is Iwamura's proposal that post-1960s liberal audiences, particularly anti-establishment white males, were negotiating a position of cultural discomfort that was psychically and socio-politically loaded. In examining this cultural discomfort, it is important to remember Iwamura's point about "the virtual," i.e. that the meanings negotiated through it are never merely psycho-individual processes, but also collective with social, political, and economic import. The antithesis between individual and social forces, especially in the virtual world, loses much of its sharpness, as indeed a careful reading of Freud would also emphasize.[4] Accordingly, the acute turmoil of the post-1960s generation of white liberal spectators in the virtual world of *Kung Fu,* blended individual and personal *with* social and geopolitical dynamics, in a distinctive way.

To see this, we need to become still more specific. White liberal discomfort in this generation was marked by an acute tension, between certain expectations of theirs now being disappointed, and others struggling to maintain themselves in the wake of that disappointment. The expectations being dashed—"promises lost" as Iwamura calls them—are those that once celebrated (often *only* in aspiration) U.S. political progressives' alliance with subaltern groups (147). Consider the tentative white liberal investments with African Americans in the civil rights struggle, their participation in certain parts of the labor movement in the United States, and perhaps most notably, U.S. white liberals' opposition to their parents' war in Vietnam and the portrait they held of themselves, thereby, as advocates and partisans of South East Asia's anti-colonial struggle against France, and then against the U.S. Iwamura

supplemented, as her extensive bibliography shows, with numerous broader studies of whiteness and racism, such as works by Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1996); David Eng's work on whiteness in Asian male communities, in David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986; and Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[4]Sigmund Freud, "Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the 'I'," (German, 1921), in *Mass Psychology and Other Writings,* trans. J. A. Underwood with an Introduction by Jacqueline Rose (New York: Penguin, 2004), 15.

also notes anti-establishment white males' tenuous ties to "women's liberation and ethnic consciousness movements" (146). The "promises lost" are those that had held out hope for continuing the alliances with these subaltern groups.

The trauma for this generation, for this audience that apprenticed itself to *Kung Fu*'s version of the Oriental Monk, was that the very liberal audience who claimed to yearn for alliance with subaltern peoples was, at the same time, unable to maintain its break with the previous generation's privileges—with the older system of domination, "their fathers ideals," as Iwamura puts it. Particularly, as energies of youth culture rebellion become routinized, or as its members took on demands of new employment and family responsibilities—with these developments, ambivalence and guilt built up, strong feelings attended their break with the past tradition, in a kind of oedipal drama (142).

Imagine, then, this abrasion of promises lost with a persistent desire to maintain privilege, and thus the desperate, tormented mind of "the anti-establishment white male." I might summarize it in the colloquial self-questioning of a white mind in such a situation: "How can I maintain my self-image as advocate of the subaltern poor at home and abroad? Particularly, how do I maintain that connection if it entails a break over a long period of time, a cavernous alienation opening up between me and my family, especially fathers (also mothers)? What is there for *me* to do, as an agent and actor in the world? And what will be my resources for agency if I lose the entitlements of family position and wealth that the old system of dominance still holds out to me? How can I maintain my place in privileged white worlds, and be a key, maybe even heroic, actor in the world of subaltern struggle and advocacy?"

Such an audience of spectators, with queries like these, is the desperate, collective "apprentice" that finds its way to a virtual "temple of shelter," we might say, in the *Kung Fu* series. Here, Kwai Chang Caine, as sagacious Oriental Monk, can be found attending to their trauma, in the television series of 1972–75.[5] Carradine's announced, though fictive, "bi-raciality," in so far as it is white, allows white spectators to identify with him as primary character of the show, reconfiguring themselves as agents in the dramatic narratives. Here, they are not the disappointed white folk of the political *real*, but rather the *hyperreal* heroic, risk-taking, martial arts experts and sagacious defenders of the poor

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[5]It is further evidence, perhaps, of the strength of the icon in the *Kung Fu* phenomenon that both the TV series and its originating 90-minute pilot are preserved in a three-box DVD set. See *Kung-Fu: The Complete Collection, 1972.* (New York: Warner Home Video, 2007).

subaltern. But in so far as Caine's bi-raciality is "Asian," the white spectator identifying with Caine can also play with another alternative identity and thus strengthen his illusion that he has "become other," broken away from his white family, political entitlements and his betrayals of the subaltern. In Iwamura's words, in the white liberal, predominantly male, spectator's encounter with the *Kung Fu* series, "the new dominant group staves off its disappointment" (147). Caine is thus "this unusual representation that seems to serve as both ego ideal and fetish. . ." (Ibid.). It is, she notes,

> Also reflective of a transitional moment in American hegemony, in which the new dominant group ambivalently eschews its subaltern affiliations. The character of Caine, at once, serves as a declarative statement of the group's emerging dominant status, as well as a symbolic substitute for alliances hoped for, but never achieved (Ibid).

It is this "transitional moment in American hegemony" that Iwamura discerns not only in *Kung Fu,* but also, in more preliminary fashion, in the earlier Suzuki and Mahesh media events. Moreover, Iwamura shows—in ways that cannot be summarized here—how this icon is even more blatantly at work in white spectators' representation and fascination with figures like Deepak Chopra (108–10) and the Dalai Lama (162–5). Iwamura's *Virtual Orientalism* is so rich with other examples and theoretical dynamics, beyond the ones I have summarized here, that scholars in American Studies, History, Cultural Studies, as well as Religious Studies will find additional perspective and theorization to be instructive.

RESEARCH VISTAS

In this second part of the essay, I identify three areas of research that might come into significant interaction with Iwamura's groundbreaking work. These can be seen as research vistas that the book opens up for future reflection.

Consider, first, the possibilities of bringing *Virtual Orientalism*'s analyses into conversation with contemporary studies of media representation in the Vietnam War, the last three tumultuous years of which, 1972–75, corresponded with the years of the *Kung Fu* TV series. Iwamura herself signals such a possibility in the opening pages of her book, when she mention's Malcolm Browne's "gut-wrenching image of Vietnamese monk Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation circulated widely in the Associated Press" (4). That image was one striking

depiction among many different salient images, which elicited diverse forms of U.S. spectator involvement in Asian image-making. The Buddhist monk aflame in a column of fire, young Vietnamese running and burning with napalm, these and many more media images, both anaesthetized viewers and enraged them. The theoretical deliberations persist beyond the Vietnam War era—as in Susan Sontag's and Judith Butler's reflections on photography of war crimes—asking how important both image *and* narrative exposition are for interpreting these events.[6] The Vietnam War belongs intimately to the set of "major transformations" at work in Iwamura's complex site of analysis, "a dramatically changing Asia" that included the "push towards decolonization and industrialization . . . the Non-aligned Movement and the Bandung Conference in Indonesia; and the rise of Communist China" (20). Iwamura lists these as geopolitical contexts for the white audiences engaging the Oriental Monk icon amid their ambivalences about mourned losses and unrelenting wishes for privilege. The U.S. war in Vietnam, and white audiences' wrestling with its meanings and violence at that time, offers a fascinating backdrop for further engagement with Iwamura's important work.

For example, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk ("bonze" or teacher) may have been an especially troubling image for U.S. spectators. As journalist Frances Fitzgerald reports, Buddhist monks played a key organizing role in early Vietnam protest movements, harnessing their culture's memories of lives lost to violence, and skillfully linking those memories to movement actions scheduled for ritualized days of the dead. Vietnamese monks were media savvy, too, knowing how U.S.-backed Vietnamese regimes "depended upon the electronic reactions of world opinion" to maintain repression.[7] For U.S. journalists, these Buddhist monks, with their shaved heads, bare-feet and overall mien, often occasioned, noted Fitzgerald, the old racial epithets of "the yellow masses" and "inscrutable orient." One British journalist described Buddhist teacher, Thich Tri Quang, as "Yul Brynner playing Dracula."[8]

All three of Iwamura's "Oriental Monk" figures surface during the time of U.S. indirect or direct involvement in Vietnam. Imagine, then, the fruitful research agenda that could situate Iwamura's insightful

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[6]Butler, "Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag," in Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009), 63–100. On Vietnam photos, see especially, 68–72.

[7]Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the American in Vietnam* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1972), 133.

[8]Ibid. 285.

analysis of the Oriental Monk icon in tandem with these Vietnamese Buddhist bonzes who understood electronic media and who even invited *New York Times* reporter, Malcolm Browne, to witness the first self-immolation of a protesting monk.[9] How might we interpret the relationship between the agency of a Buddhist monk making himself both martyr and icon in the international media, and white U.S. spectators apprenticing themselves to contrived Oriental Monk imagery in the media back home? How is the *real* self-immolation by Buddhist teachers related to the *hyperreal* immolation and co-optation of Asian males in the Oriental Monk icon? Is there a war of icons here, a contestation of myths in media representation? Might one explore fruitfully the hypothesis that the Oriental Monk iconography in the United States was part of an elaborate popular mythology functioning, desperately, to counter the power of the iconic Buddhist martyr figure of protest? To test such a hypothesis would require analysis of a whole play of different kinds of media depictions of the Vietnam War period, of the multiple images flashing about U.S. citizens in their media, and then a re-examination of Iwamura's Oriental Monk icon in that setting.

One very important source here might be William V. Spanos' research on the way film and literature have been used in the United States since the Vietnam War, to achieve a kind of forgetting, even repression, of the United States will-to-genocidal violence in that war.[10] Spanos' work situates the kinds of dynamics explored so well by Iwamura within the context of ambivalence, guilt, and denial at work during U.S. genocidal violence. The United States has pursued a veritable politics of the bomb in its Asian wars—deployed from the Philippines, to Hiroshima/Nagasaki, to the devastation of Korea, to Vietnam, and to today's Iraq (West Asia) and Afghanistan in Central Asia.[11] The Oriental Monk icon may be one of the ways that the U.S. media and citizenry show themselves as grappling with what Spanos calls "America's shadow," those shadowy places where the geopolitics of U.S. empire dumps bodies, disparages them, and stereotypes them as

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[9]Malcolm W. Browne, "He Was Sitting in the Center of a Column of Flame: Suicide in Saigon 1963," in *Reporting Vietnam: American Journalism 1959–1975* (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 29–35.

[10]William V. Spanos, *America's Shadow: An Anatomy of Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), and especially, William V. Spanos, *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization: The Specter of Vietnam* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), 57–186.

[11]On the Philippines, recall Harvard's William James' lament and analysis in "The Philippine Question," in *William James: Writings, 1902–1910* (New York: The Library of America, 1987), 1134–35. On genocide by the United States in its occupation and war in Korea, see the new book by Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2010), 161, 172.

inhuman and disposable. Spanos also suggests that from those places there is also an unrelenting, haunting, and unsettling spectrality, a threat and promise of something truly other to the juggernaut of genocidally maintained imperial force. Whether the powerful images of American media, such as the Oriental Monk icon, can continue to mask and thus support this geopolitics of violent empire is yet to be seen. Iwamura's exposé of a powerful icon of media image-making may also help unmask the geopolitics of violence.

A second research vista might also ask how the iconic narrative about the Oriental Monk, regarding Asians and Asian-Americans, intersects with a variety of popular images that reinforce U.S. geopolitical dominance over other racialized subalterns. Within what Joe Feagin terms the "white racial frame,"[12] or what might be called, following Jacques Rancière, a white racialized "aesthetic regime of politics,"[13] certain people and traits are often "fractioned" off from various subaltern groups to support an always reconfiguring "white ethnicity." Especially as today's financial powers of global markets reinforce a white collective body, to which fractions of many "diverse" others are attached–especially then, there occur many other processes of iconicity, whereby white spectators and power-holders construct and manipulate variously portrayed "good Blacks," "good Latinos/as," "good Muslims or Arabs," and so on.[14] How does the Oriental monk icon relate to the iconicity of other groups which are made subaltern to the U.S. global project?

We might explore the Oriental Monk icon, for example, in relation to the way whites historically rendered indigenous people of North America in iconic ways. Aspects of the Oriental Monk icon are reminiscent of the nineteenth century white audiences at theatrical plays, such as *Metamora,* so helpfully analyzed by historian, Jill Lapore. Here again, a white actor plays a man of color, in "Redface," we might say. The white spectators identified with this "Indian" character, King Phillip, a Wampanoag warrior (known as Metacom to his own people), even to the point of cheering him from their seats when he uttered each night at play's end a dying curse against "the white man" and his children forever. Identifying with this curse, even cheering it, became

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[12]Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

[13]Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible.* Trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2004), 14, and "Translator's Note," 4–5.

[14]On this practice of "fractioning," see Susan Koshy, "Morphing Race into Ethnicity: Asian Americans and Critical Transformations of Whiteness," *Boundary* 2 28, no. 1 (February 2001): 153–94.

constitutive of white U.S. identity, celebrating its nostalgic bond with an "imagined Indian past." Yet, as Lapore also notes, this celebration required an absence of actual Indians who might challenge white hegemony. Thus, nineteenth century indigenous slaughter and displacement could go unchallenged by these same white spectators.[15] What I suggest is that Iwamura's Oriental Monk icon might be seen as part of a larger assemblage of images in a regime of representations that is always at work to control a differentiated, racialized subaltern world of "others."

Third and finally, I want to highlight, perhaps especially as theologian and ethicist, the fruitfulness of another dimension of Iwamura's provocative text. I will term it a "moral dimension." By this, I have in mind the kind of claim she makes toward the end of the book's Introduction. There, she indicates that her recounting of the genealogy of the Oriental Monk icon should be taken not only as "exposé" of a mass media phenomenon, but "[m]ore specifically, . . . to reveal the ideological interests and processes at play in our popular encounters with him—*so that we may no longer comfortably revel in our own fascination and reverence*" (22, emphasis added). By the pronouns, "our" and "we" here, I suspect she means primarily those of us—especially those of us who style ourselves as "anti-establishment" in our politics— who also find ourselves reconfiguring our whiteness and our maleness in ever-new controlling guises. It is this "we" who especially need to cease the comfortable revelry in the Oriental Monk icons. Elsewhere, she indicates that her worry that Virtual Orientalism not only "declares an independence from the real, but it also co-opts or colonizes the real" (112). She even labels this colonizing co-optation "especially insidious" in her chapter on *Kung Fu* (130), because the TV series' formulaic narrative reduces minoritized group struggle to the psychospiritual realm. In short, there is pervading Iwamura's text a moral sense with political and civic implications, which identifies processes that are "insidious" (cunning, with harmful effects) and thus in need of exposure and resistance.

This is *not* to say that Iwamura's cogent analyses are simply subservient to fixations on moral judgment, surely not those moral senses built on easy binaries of good politics and bad, of approved and prohibited behaviors. The more valuable moral sense at work here, which

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[15]"*Metamora; or, the Last of the Wampanoags* was performed until at least 1887 and was one of the most widely produced plays in the history of nineteenth-century theater." See Jill Lapore, *The Name of War: King Phillip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 191 and 191–226.

enhances her analytic theory, is a complex one, unfolding how the media's aestheticized images reinforce abuses of power that are inscribed in our everyday perception and, hence, in political life generally. With Rancière, again, we might say that this mix of image and politics constitutes an "ethical regime of images," which distributes the sensible, our everyday perception. Thus we meet here not simply a moral sense, but also a politics, one revolving "around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibility of time."[16] Iwamura resituates moral discernment, then, in this more complex space of the political. A key part of resisting the co-opting and colonizing ways of the past and present U.S. imperial is to cease to "comfortably revel" in the media images served up to its citizenry and residents. Here is a moral dimension with a new and demanding complexity, and theorists in ethics and religious studies are beckoned to a discerning moral discourse and in relation to urgent political challenges of our time.

So, you may still wish to go check out *Kung Fu Panda*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, or, more recently at this writing, the movie *Eat, Pray, Love*—even the DVD box set of *Kung Fu*, still available today. If we are tempted to do so, however, we white spectators, especially, may need to deploy a kind of moral asceticism, one that refuses to "comfortably revel" in the Oriental Monk icons and their ever new virtual orientalisms. Decolonization, de-imperialization—resistance to the racialized regimes of U.S. power—all these require that we revel elsewhere. Just where that place of liberating revelry for decolonizing forms of popular art might be is a question for later inquiry. For the present, we are all in debt to Iwamura whose exposé of the Oriental Monk icon shows us another important site where resistance, as well as new knowledge production, comes alive.[17]

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[16]Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 12–3.
[17]Naimo Ramos-Chapman, "Eat, Pray, Love and Leave," *ColorLines: News for Action,* August 16, 2010, http://colorlines.com/archives/2010/08/eat_pray_love_and_leave.html (accessed February 25, 2011).