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SELF-ORIENTALISM REPACKAGED: WONG WING FRIED RICE

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Abstract

Globalization has prompted a multicultural retheorization of both consumer and market (Fu et al., 2014; Riefler et al., 2012; Kipnis et al., 2019). In short, the Canadian multicultural market consists of international goods which are authentic, domestic goods purporting authenticity (e.g., orientalizing), and multinational, fusion innovations that are authentic-ish (e.g., self-orientalizing; Hui, 2019; Li, 2020; Stephens, 2021). What results is a fetishistic commercialization of multiculturalism, where brands are packaging ethnicity and race to vie for consumer attention. This paper addresses the latter variety — self-orientalist packaging designed for products born out of (formerly) Chinese Canadian enterprises, namely Wong Wing Fried Rice. Developing an analytical and theoretical approach that can support the identification of racialization, racist typologies are situated in graphic design. Themes derived from the analysis include racism, orientalism, self-orientalism, exoticism, cultural appropriation, among others. Findings reveal how self-orientalist packaging and label design is discursively negotiated as both internalized racism and anti-racist resistance, necessitating a more nuanced approach that reflects the sociopolitical context in which products are branded. The adoption of transversalist tenets, an

anti-racist modality outlined by the methodological component of this study, presents one possibility.

Keywords

Graphic Design, Self-Orientalism, Anti-Racism, Transversalism

1. Introduction

Globalization has prompted a multicultural retheorization of both consumer and market (Fu et al., 2014; Riefler et al., 2012; Kipnis et al., 2019). Beyond ethnocentric purchasing behaviours, white, North American consumers are increasingly exhibiting cosmopolitan, and even xenocentric reorientations (Ariska & Risman, 2020; Beusaert, 2012; Cho et al., 2019; Diamantopoulos et al., 2019; Dissanayake, 2020; Kipnis et al., 2019; Li, 2020; Riefler et al., 2012; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999). Recognizing the viability (and competition) of imported goods, Canadian companies have diversified their portfolios to market internationally inspired products (e.g., Pride of Arabia Coffee, Golden Temple Atta). This demand has not escaped diasporic enclaves either, in other words, entrepreneurial networks that have been purveying transnational goods tailored to local palettes since the 19th century (Jacobs, 2009; Jung, 2010; Hoe, 1990; Lee, 1992; Li, 2020; Liu, 2009; Uneke, 1996). Chinese Canadians, for instance, have long commercialized *self-orientalism* — a strategic response to white Canadian consumers' orientalist dispositions — bolstering economic self-sufficiency, thereby circumventing disenfranchisement (Dissanayake, 2020; Hoe, 1990; Hui, 2019; Jacobs, 2009; Jung, 2010, 223; Li, 2020; Liu, 2017; Said, 1979; Uneke, 1996; Weiyu, n.d.). In short, the multicultural market consists of international goods which are authentic, domestic goods purporting authenticity (e.g., orientalizing), and multinational, fusion innovations that are authentic-*ish* (e.g., self-orientalizing; Hui, 2019; Li, 2020; Stephens, 2021). What can result is a fetishistic commercialization of multiculturalism, where brands package ethnicity and race to vie for consumer attention. This paper addresses the latter variety — self-orientalist packaging designed for products born out of (formerly) Chinese Canadian enterprises, namely Wong Wing Fried Rice (see Figure 1).

The study begins with a brief overview of the product's proprietary history, followed by an iterative comparison of the package pre-and post-acquisition by McCain Foods Ltd. The package is then subject to a comprehensive visual analysis informed by ethnic and racial studies. I will consider the following questions: (1) How is graphic design used to reproduce self-orientalist

typologies in consumer packages and labels? (2) and How is self-orientalist packaging discursively negotiated? Developing an analytical and theoretical approach that can support the identification of racialization, racist typologies are situated in graphic design. Themes derived from the analysis include racism, orientalism, self-orientalism, exoticism, and cultural appropriation, among others. Findings reveal how self-orientalist packaging and label design is discursively negotiated as both internalized racism and anti-racist resistance, necessitating a more nuanced approach that reflects the sociopolitical context in which products are branded.



Figure 1: *MLW Foods Inc. 's Wong Wing Fried Rice Package*

(Source: *Wong Wing Fried Rice, by Walmart Canada, n.d.* (<https://www.walmart.ca/en/ip/wong-wing-fried-rice/6000197758909>). Copyright © 2022 Walmart.)

2. Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical framework underlying my analysis is transversalism (transversal cosmopolitanism), a policy which not opposed but an alternative to identity politics, that acknowledges intersectionalities and proposes interlocutors transcend their ideological differences to support a common cause, in this case — anti-racism (Brown, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991; Gills & Hosseini, 2021; Grünberg, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2012). A form of coalition politics that celebrates “universality in diversity,” transversalism does not require collocutors to self-decenter to center others (which can result in an “uncritical solidarity”); instead, encouraging them to pivot the centre (Barkley-Brown, 1989; Gills & Hosseini, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2012). This process requires

participants exercise a “critical openness” and make “systematic attempts to co-create common(ing) platforms for transformative perspectives, plans, and praxes” (Gills & Hosseini, 2021). Thus, transversalism mandates: “(1) recognition of diversity and difference, (2) dialogue (deliberation across differences), (3) systemic self-reflection, (4) intentional openness (intention to explore the reality of the Other), (5) critical awareness of the intersectional nature of power relations that affects interconnections,” and (6) a “strong commitment to creating alterity through hybridization and creolization of ideas and actions” (Gills & Hosseini, 2021).

The motivation behind this study is a general interest in the materiality of racism within the context of graphic design. As a novice researcher, I approached this topic with a limited understanding of critical race theory (CRT) but also a “critical openness,” which ultimately ensured the adoption of a holistic, decolonial framework that considers a variety of data (Gills & Hosseini). In accordance with transversalist principles, I attempt to distill and reconcile otherwise antithetical perspectives on self-orientalist packaging, in part so that I can exercise greater reflexivity and critical consciousness in my own work of cross-cultural perception and representation as a graphic designer, resulting in a more thoughtful and creative praxis (Allen et al., 2000; Freire, 2017).

3. Methodology

This study relies on a qualitative, mixed-methods approach. Drawing on key marketing concepts, namely (un)ethical market segmentation, autoethnography is coupled with purposive sampling for data collection of racialized consumer packages, in which the packages and labels graphic design is foci. The package for this case study — hereby identified by brand name — is Wong Wing Fried Rice. The sample was observed and photographed at the Canadian food retail chain Real Canadian Superstore (more commonly known as Superstore) located at 1755 Brimley Rd, Scarborough, Toronto, Canada (see Figure 2). The sample was also visually inspected at neighbouring chain stores to maximize the study’s generalizability and capture the racial nuances of each package in greater detail (e.g., the effects of in-store merchandising). Secondary field sites include Walmart Supercentre, located at 1900 Eglinton Ave E; No Frills, located at 3401 Lawrence Ave E; and FreshCo, located at 2650 Lawrence Ave E.



Figure 2: *Real Canadian Superstore Located at 1755 Brimley Rd, Scarborough, Toronto,*
(Source: Real Canadian Superstore Brimley Road, by C. Shaowei, 2020, Google
(<https://goo.gl/maps/BeeZsY4b8Yx8gBYx5>). Copyright © 2020 Chen Shaowei.)

4. Wong Wing Foods Inc.

Beginning operations in 1948, Wong Wing Foods Inc was developed by Chinese, French Canadian siblings Marcel and Lucille Wong (“Our Story,” n.d.; Won, 1989). Named after the founders and financial backer Mr. Wing, the family firm soon grew to become Canada’s largest purveyor of Chinese, North American cuisine — effectively placing Montréal on the gastronomical map (McGovern, 1994; Van Praet, 2002; Won, 1989; “Wong Wing Foods,” n.d.). Such was the enterprise’s reputation, that it was the sole supplier of Chinese style cuisine at Expo 67 and 86 in Montréal and Vancouver respectively (McGovern, 1994). In 2002, after several advances, the Wong family relinquished ownership to McCain Foods Ltd (Van Praet, 2002). The acquisition ushered in several new developments, including package redesigns — an effort to reposition the brand and increase profit margins (see Figure 3; “Good Fortunes,” 2005). In 2021, McCain sold its majority stake to investor group MLW Foods Inc, led by Champlain Financial Corp (Champlain Financial Corporation, 2021; The Globe and Mail, 2002).

Figure 3: Iterations of Wong Wing Fried Rice Pre-and Post-Acquisition (Left to Right)



(Source: Left image from *Wong Wing Foods Have More Chinese Character*, by Wong Wing Foods Inc, 1988, *Toronto Star* (<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1357306318>). Copyright © 1988 Wong Wing Foods Inc, *Toronto Star*. Right image from *Wong Wing Fried Rice*, by Walmart Canada, n.d. (<https://www.walmart.ca/en/ip/wong-wing-fried-rice/6000197758909>). Copyright © 2022 Walmart.)

5. Wong Wing Fried Rice

Wong Wing Fried Rice is packaged in an oyster-pail shaped paperboard container. The FOP features the trademark in both English (“Wong Wing”) and traditional Chinese characters (“黃榮”) atop a red gradated, horizontal banner, with yellow lineation and scroll detailing (Lai & Chan, 2015). Sitting directly underneath, a green gradated, vertical banner with yellow outline, reading the product name in English (“Fried Rice) and French (“Riz frit”). Accompanying these extrinsic cues, a vivid photograph of the Americanized product when prepared (Jung, 2010; Li, 2020; Semple, 2021). Above, wrapping around the box, a decorative T-shaped meander border with lóng [Chinese dragon 龍] and xiángyún [auspicious clouds 祥雲] imagery atop an orange gradient imitating a sunrise (Beer, 1999; “Good Fortunes,” 2005; Welch, 2012). The other sides of the packet comprise intrinsic cues, such as ingredients and instructions; extrinsic cues, such as product message and place of origin; and transactional cues, such as barcode and production lot code.

6. A Blast from the Past: Self-Orientalism Reimagined

Former Director of Marketing Julien Roel's reference to the redesigned package as a "new image" is an inexact description, considering the replication of visual elements from past communications ("Good Fortunes," 2005). Wong Wing Fried Rice recycles trademarks, motifs, and symbols from advertisements, packages, and labels produced under the original proprietorship (see Figure 4). While older variations employed léi wén (thunder pattern 雷紋) borders (red circle, lower-left), the reworked package incorporates an alternative pattern, the T-shaped thunder-scroll or wave fret (red circle, centre; Beer, 1999; Fo Guang Shan Nan Tian Institute (NTI), n.d.; Welch, 2012). The sinicized typeface used in the original trademarks (blue circles, lower-left and lower centre-left) is retained (Pater, 2016; Quito, 2021). The lóng [Chinese dragon 龍] symbol, while previously playing a peripheral role (i.e. only appearing in advertisements), is repurposed as an embellishment (yellow circles, upper center-left and upper-right; Welch, 2012). Hence, the redeveloped package simply regurgitates self-orientalist components — it is a pastiche. Above all, McCain Foods Ltd commissioned Montréal-based brand agency, Origami (now Origami Branding) for the redesign (Origami, 2009; Origami Branding, n.d.; Volckmann, n.d.). The President and Creative Principal of the establishment, Michael Wou, is a designer of East-Asian ethnicity (Origami, 2009; "Origami Communication Design," 2004). Wou speaks to the branding strategy as "both authentically Asian and exotic" ("Origami Communication Design," 2004). It could be argued, then, Wong Wing Fried Rice is a self-orientalist reinterpretation of a self-orientalist interpretation.



Figure 4: *Wong Wing Foods Inc. Advertisement Featured in the Toronto Star on February 10th, 1988 (Left) And Wong Wing Fried Rice Package (Right) With Colour-Coded Magnifications* (Source: Left image from *Wong Wing Foods Have More Chinese Character*, by Wong Wing Foods Inc, 1988, *Toronto Star* (<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1357306318>). Copyright © 1988 Wong Wing Foods Inc, *Toronto Star*. Right image from *Wong Wing Fried Rice*, by Walmart Canada, n.d. (<https://www.walmart.ca/en/ip/wong-wing-fried-rice/6000197758909>). Copyright © 2022 Walmart.)

7. (Stereo) Typography

The current trademark's typeface mimics the calligraphic nature of Chinese characters. Historically referred to as "Wonton," "Chop Suey," "Chopstick," and "Chinatown," this font was developed to evoke "Asianness" to the Western masses (Pater, 2016). Although the exact origin is unclear, research suggests it is derivative of an earlier permutation by the Cleveland Type Foundry, eponymously named "Chinese" and later "Mandarin" (see Figure 5; Cleveland Type Foundry, 1893; Quito, 2021). Quito (2021) suggests the font family's release in 1883 — a year after the American Chinese Exclusion Act and two years prior to the Canadian Chinese Immigration Act — was not coincidental, but concomitant (Anderson, 2007; Kil, 2012). "Chinese" is merely one of the innumerable manifestations of Anti-Asian sentiment which "coursed feverishly through the West" (Quito, 2021). The font was often juxtaposed with caricatures evoking the racial colour metaphor "Yellow Peril," which refers to East-Asian people as a societal threat (see Figure 6; Kil, 2012; Lee, 2007). In other respects, the typeface is assimilatory. The sinicization of English type is also a Western attempt to de-sinicize East-Asian diaspora, whereby they are coerced into a proclivity for English and orientalist interpretations of Chinese and Chinese typography (Meletis, 2021). This longstanding relationship with prejudice, bigotry, and intolerance has come to characterize the typeface — "Wonton" cannot escape its racist dimensions (Seals & Ellsworth, 2022). The self-orientalist reproduction of *stereotypography* in Wong Wing Fried Rice only rubber-stamps its colonial usage (Pater, 2016).

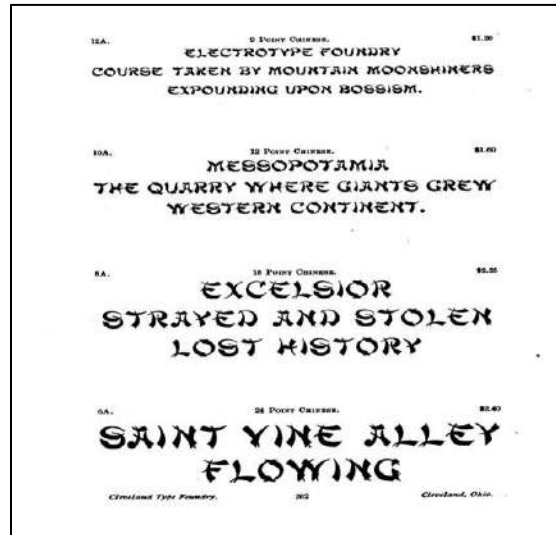


Figure 5: “Chinese” Typeface Advertised in The Cleveland Type Foundry’s “Catalogue and Price List of Type and Material”

(Source: Catalogue and Price List of Type and Material (p. 202), by Cleveland Type Foundry, 1893, *The Foundry* (<https://archive.org/details/ATF1893ClevelandSpecimen/page/n209/mode/2up?q=chinese>). Public Domain.)



Figure 6: Anti-Japanese Propaganda Poster Sponsored by Texaco, Inc Which Circulated During World War II

(Source: *Go Ahead, Please - Take Day Off!* by Texaco Inc and Office for Emergency Management. Office of War Information. Domestic Operations Branch. Bureau of Special Services, 1941–1945, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/516234>). Public Domain.)

8. (Mis) Shape

The tapered package conforms to the Western misconception and fetishistic obsession with orientalized innovations as *authentically* Asian. Contrary to popular belief, the oyster pail is an American post-World War II response — not a traditional Chinese utensil (Greenbaum & Rubinstein, 2012). World War II ushered in the rise of fast food, and paper pails were a functional answer (Greenbaum & Rubinstein, 2012). However, in the 1970s, a graphic designer for the now Fold-Pak company, designed an oyster pail with a pagoda motif and the phrase “thank you” in the stereotypical “Chinese” typeface (Greenbaum & Rubinstein, 2012). The superimposition of orientalist type and Buddhist imagery on a coincidentally origami-like container was enough to beguile the North American public. This distinction seems to have escaped the creatives in charge of the Wong Wing redesign also, describing the new package as resembling a “Chinese Take-Out Box” (see Figure 7). Thus, Wong Wing Fried Rice not only perpetuates a Western myth about Chinese foodways but celebrates cultural insensitivity. Ever since the oyster-pail has been falsely iconized as a symbol of Chineseness, it has simultaneously been used as a tool to exoticize and marginalize those of East-Asian descent (Chieh, 2020). In 2020, for example, former art director of British Columbia-Based Lululemon Athletica Inc, Trevor Fleming, Instagrammed a racist, xenophobic t-shirt proselytizing a now debunked belief that COVID-19 is a result of bat consumption in Wuhan, China (see Figure 8; Chieh, 2020; King, 2020). The garment, named “Bat Fried Rice,” features an oyster-pail with bat wings and the phrase “No Thank You” in the aforementioned stereo(type). Fleming’s post transpired during a critical time in the global pandemic, where scientific data revealed healthcare disparities minoritizing people of colour (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.; Gupta & Aitken, 2022). The t-shirt was condemned for instigating COVID related anti-Asian sentiment, which is since on the rise (Balintec, 2022; Chieh, 2020; Gover et al., 2020; Guo & Guo, 2021; He et al., 2021; King, 2020). For many in the Chinese community, the oyster pail has come to represent racially charged mockery (“Full Text of Michelle Wu’s Statement,” 2019; Leung, 2019).

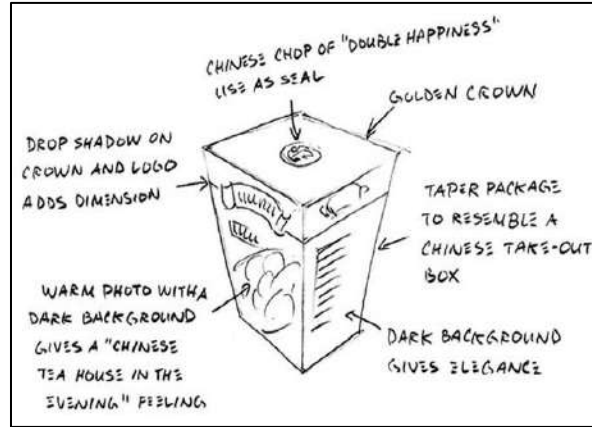


Figure 7: Detail from Preliminary Sketches of Wong Wing Redesign by Origami
(Source: Wong Wing, by R. W. Volckmann III, (n.d.), Romantic (<https://romantic.li/portfolio/wongwing/>). Copyright © Origami Branding.)



Figure 8: Recreation of California Artist Jess Sluder’s “Bat Fried Rice” T-Shirt
(Source: Lululemon Apologises After Staffer Promotes ‘Bat Fried Rice’ T-Shirt, by Y. H. Chieh, 2020, Airasia Play (<https://www.airasia.com/play/assets/blt9a5540d034653ad8/lululemon-apologises-after-staffer-promotes-bat-fried-rice-t-shirt>). Copyright © 2020 AirAsia Group Berhad.)

9. Chinoiserie

Wong Wing’s Fried Rice package decontextualizes Chinese motifs and symbols. The hanging scroll, for example, which is historically preserved for calligraphic and painted works meant for temporary display, is repurposed here as a static, commercial ornament (Sze, 1963). The use of saturated tones also contrasts with traditional conventions, where more harmonious balances of neutral and vibrant colours are considered (Sze, 1963). Moreover, hanging scrolls are typically

hung vertically, with only the hand scroll having a horizontal format (Sze, 1963). Additionally, the dragon imagery which wraps around Wong Wing's Fried Rice banner vilifies the national symbol's origins. In Chinese culture, the *lóng* [Chinese dragon 龍] is a sacred, legendary creature which has come to represent auspiciousness, virtue, wisdom, and community. Providing spiritual sustenance and physical safety, the *lóng* is deified for summoning wind and rain (Maguth & Wu, 2020; Zhou, 2015). Such is the creature's popularity, that birthrates are known to spike in the Year of the Dragon, and those with the zodiac are touted as "charismatic, innovative, free-spirited, and flamboyant" (Maguth & Wu, 2020). *Lóng* varieties that exhale fire are a rarity, regarded as punishments for moral transgressions (Hua, 2016). Under the original proprietorship, *lóng* imagery is accompanied with textual aids that contextualize the creature true to cultural tradition (see Figure 4). Yet the juxtaposition of the *lóng* with fiery tones in the Wong Wing Fried Rice redesign fuels the Western perception of the Chinese dragon as *only* a fire-breathing monster. The malevolent Western beast popularized by the likes of J. R. R. Tolkien and J. K. Rowling is projected onto the benevolent Eastern avatar (Maguth & Wu, 2020). Zhu (2015), classifies such false impressions as contagions, adding "if one mistakes the virtuous Chinese Dragon as those evil western dragons, then misunderstanding the whole nation is possible." His argument — although controversial — is not without basis. The perpetual misinterpretation of East-Asian cultural components as evil mythologizes Chinese peoples as having aggressive manners of expression.

10. Self-Othering: A Means to an End?

The retail industry "both publicly declares and perpetuates the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgement and enjoyment of racial difference" (hooks, 2014). The commodification of Otherness offers consumers "more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling" (hooks, 2014). Racialized packages have quite literally become the spice, adding piquancy to the mundanities of everyday, Western life (hooks, 2014; Lee, 1992; Li, 2020; Liu, 2009; Uneke, 1996). To this day, Canadian supermarket aisles shelve varying degrees of performative Chineseness. But Wong Wing Fried Rice is unique in that it embodies a multigenerational self-orientalism. The package reproduces self-orientalist components including typographical appropriation, or *bad characters*, which attempt to reduce the entire demographic to a letterform; the oyster pail, an American innovation that has although helped Chinese restaurateurs gain economic leverage, is used ad nauseum to perpetuate anti-Asian sentiment; and

chinoiserie, a Western exploitation of Chinese visual language that decentres cultural tradition for colonial interpretations (Giampietro, 2004; Lyakhovich, 2020; Pater, 2016; Seals & Ellsworth, 2022; Wachendorff, 2018). Ironically, Wou is an East-Asian imitating East-Asians imitating white people imitating East-Asianness. Even though he has not manufactured these stereotypes, his redesign helps cement them into Western consciousness (Wang, 2012). And unlike other orientalist brands which *package* race as a positioning strategy, Wong Wing sells race itself — having even once “launched an initiative called ‘Discover Your Asian Side’” (“The Industry Rings in Chinese New Year,” 2011). This campaign promotes the harmful notion that Asianness can not only be sold but consumed *and* purged at the customer’s convenience. Wong Wing Fried Rice is essentially a “contemporary revival of interest in the ‘primitive,’ with a distinctly postmodern slant” (hooks, 2014). Packages that reinforce the colonial gaze simultaneously ease wayfinding for orientalist consumers, further privileging whiteness. The phenomenon of racialized packages — although mediagenic — can do a great disservice to people of colour.

Yet this self-Othering is hardly ill-intentioned. The historical application/enactment of racial stereotypes by members of the culture in question is not always a form of internalized racism; rather, a necessitated strategy for survival (Hunter and Nettles, 1999; Kern-Foxworth, 1994). People of colour are cognizant of the symbology which represents them, possessing a definitive perception of themselves, their racialization, and how others perceive them (Kern-Foxworth, 1994). This cultural hyperawareness is best deconstructed in W.E.B. Du Bois’s Theory of Double Consciousness. He states:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois, 2018).

By tapping into this hyperconsciousness, non-white racialized peoples can access social structures and services that they would otherwise not be privy (Kern-Foxworth, 1994). Since the

19th century, Chinese Canadians have overcome socioeconomic barriers by way of self-caricature and standardization, expanding the limited scope of employment opportunities available to East-Asian people at the time (Hoe, 1990; Hui, 2019; Jacobs, 2009; Jung, 2010, 223; Lee, 1992; Li, 2020; Liu, 2009; Seals & Ellsworth, 2022; Uneke, 1996; Wang, 2012). Thus, the utilization of orientalist tropes in original Wong Wing media can be interpreted as a calculated effort to shatter the glass ceiling; a negotiated acculturation between Chinese diaspora and the mainstream Canadian community (see Figure 9; Lee, 1992; Li, 2020; Liu, 2009; Zine, 2012). Reflecting on his family's Chinese restaurant that adapted to the local, white clientele, Darren Lee states, "when deciding what business path to pursue years earlier, my grandfather, who had already lived through lean times in China and America, decided that at the very least he and his future family would never go hungry in the restaurant business" (Jung, 2010). Monetizing self-orientalism can also benefit racialized communities at large. The Wong family was characterized by their philanthropic and humanitarian efforts. Former president Richard Wong, generously donated to Chinese orphanages, held numerous volunteer titles pertaining to East-Asian causes, and continually advocated for the Chinese Canadian demographic (Parkes, 2000). Wou's self-orientalist motives behind the redesigned package are equally nuanced. As ethnicity is more and more commodified, racialized cultural workers livelihoods hinge on self-Othering (hooks, 2014; Yeh, 2021). Although he describes the redesign as "both authentically Asian and exotic," he goes on to say the combination is "sure to appeal to Canadian consumers" ("Origami Communication Design," 2004). His predictions materialized, of course, with Roel admitting the new image sells "like crazy" ("Good Fortunes," 2005). Clearly, Wou is cognizant of orientalist interpretations and the saleability of Orientalia. He strategically presents Chinese culture through the Western colonial gaze to ensure profit margins. In all its iterations, Wong Wing Fried Rice presents the depressing polarities of self-Othering which designers of hyphenated, racial, and multiracial identities must endure.



Figure 9: *Wong Wing Advertisement by Richard K. Wong*

(Source: *Wong Wing Foods, by Montréal Signs Project, n.d.*

(<https://www.montrealsignsproject.ca/sign/wong-wing-foods>). Copyright © 2020 Wong Wing Foods, Montréal Signs Project.)

Of course, such self-Othering representations — despite their pragmatisms — are highly contested (hooks, 2014; Yeh, 2021). However, polemics against self-orientalizing are also problematized (hooks, 2014; Yeh, 2021). Chatelain (2021), reminds us to exercise compassion towards “individuals navigating few choices,” rather directing our criticisms to the very institutions and systems which took those choices away (Yeh, 2021). For many, the act of self-stereotyping is “easier psychologically than maintaining or developing an oppositional standpoint in the face of white hegemony” (Hunter and Nettles, 1999; Yeh, 2021; Zine, 2012). But beyond these conventional interpretations lie positionalities unconsidered: self-orientalism as counter-orientalism. Chinese-Canadian artist JJ Lee, who explores cultural hybridity through the lens of Chinese foodways, reminds us that self-orientalism can also be a form of “equal opportunity” appropriation; reclamation of cultural elements formerly co-opted and mis-appropriated by the dominant culture (Lee, 2018). The cathartic ritualization of destroying *or* preserving and reproducing what is generally considered racist memorabilia (Orientalia in this case) as a form of racial liberation is not a new practice (Colvard, 2019; Motley et al., 2003; Patterson, 2011; Pilgrim, 2015; “SRD 2022: Catharsis, Complaining and Destruction with Boxcheckerz,” n.d.; Obenson, 2019).

11. Conclusion

The preceding analysis, which considers the positionalities of experts, practitioners, laypersons, and consumers, explores the phenomenon and nuances of racialized packaging, or more specifically, self-orientalist packaging. The study confirms the non-neutrality of self-orientalist packages, revealing how self-orientalist packaging and label design is discursively negotiated as both internalized racism and anti-racist resistance. In the case of Wong Wing Fried Rice, while the original package speaks to the notion of Chinese authenticity, actively positivizing negativized cultural components, the redesigned package centers on a creative alliance that accommodates a European *representation* of Chineseness, making a “spectacle of the Other” (Kobayashi et al., 2019). Whereas the original package reconstructed orientalist notions as counter-orientalist, the redesigned package reconstructs counter-orientalist packaging as self-orientalist. Thus, the redesign necessitates a renewed design approach, one which reflects the sociopolitical context in which products are branded (Lupton et al., 2021; Pater, 2016).

11.1. Limitations

Going forward, the addition of in-depth interviews with consumers could supplement the observational fieldwork, capturing buyers’ perception of racialized and in this case, self-orientalist packages. Additionally, conducting interviews and co-designs with graphic designers, marketers, advertisers, and stakeholders could aid in discerning the specific steps needed to redress self-orientalism in graphic design.

11.2. Scope of Future Research

The *decolonization* of colonial packages is dependent on the *inclusion* of anti-racist pedagogy within graphic design praxis. Thus, future research could explore various anti-racist modalities within the context of graphic design, identifying, testing, and introducing specific procedures that can be implemented into the (re)design process. The adoption of transversalist tenets, as outlined by the methodological component of this study, is one possibility.

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