Orientalism and Western Images of China
Before we define Orientalism, it is important to understand the idea of IMPERIALISM:

Imperialism is the forceful extension of a country's power and authority by territorial conquest or by establishing economic and political domination of other nations that are not its colonies.

You may be familiar with Imperialism through the term EMPIRE: The term *empire* derives from the Latin *imperium* (power, authority). Politically, an empire is a geographically extensive group of states and peoples (ethnic groups) united and ruled either by a monarch (emperor, empress) or an oligarchy, a ruling group.
ASIA IN 1900
Imperialism and empire include two key ideas:

1. **An IMPERIAL CENTRE** where economic and military dominance is located along with an attitude of superiority over conquered peoples. This attitude of superiority requires an inferior “Other” that allows the imperial centre to feel it is better, higher, greater or grander.

2. **A COLONIAL CENTRE** where the dominance of the powerful, imperial centre is exercised or played out.

**ORIENTALISM** is a set of CULTURAL ideas that contribute to the sense of superiority found in the imperial centre.
Orientalism

A collection of thoughts and writings regarding “the Orient” that emphasizes the superiority of the West, thus enabling Western dominance and moral authority over the Orient.
“The Orient” was first seen in the works of Western geographers, historians, and linguists in the 18th century as an area distinct from Europe. It was based on the idea that effective conquest and control required knowledge of the conquered peoples. Historically, the French and the British were seen as having the longest tradition of Orientalism.
However, in 1978 Edward Said wrote his highly influential book “Orientalism”. It examines and critiques issues of colonialism, power and Western (European-North American) thinking with regard to non-European peoples.
Where is the Orient?

Orientalism blurs the distinctions between non-European countries. The Orient then, may be seen as a vast region that crosses many cultures and countries. It includes most of Asia and parts of northern Africa. It may even be said to include ALL non-European areas of the world.
Who are the Orientalists?

Poets
Novelists
Linguists
Philosophers
Painters
Economists
Professors
Citizens of countries that colonize
How do Orientalists Think?

Orientalists see binary relationships and emphasize the differences between

the Occident (the West) and
the Orient (the East)...

West = the normal, the safe homeland

vs.

East = the “Other”, the dangerous alien
Binary Relationships contd.

Romanticizing the Orient as sensuous, alluring in a primitive way, mysterious

Reviling the Orient as barbaric, violent, irrational, impenetrable

The opposite of the civilized west
The Image of the ‘Orient’

- West
  - subject
  - Masculine
  - Self
  - strong

- East
  - object
  - Feminine
  - ‘other’
  - weak
The Orient is perceived as a place where progress does not exist.
The Orient has a tendency towards despotism (The exercise of absolute power, esp. in a cruel and oppressive way.) and danger, say the Orientalists.
“Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat-green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science past and present... Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man.”

(Rohmer, S. *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu*, 1913, p. 17)
Sex and Orientalism...

The Orient is often depicted in dominating and sexual terms...

The Orient is conquerable and inferior, feminine in its penetrability...

The feminine Orient awaits dominance of the West; it is a defenseless and unintelligent entity that exists for, and in terms of, its Western counterpart.
Stereotype of Oriental Women: Polar, Contradictory

• Image of ‘farm women’:
  Passive
  Quiet; never quarrel
  Devoted (to family, love, etc.)
  Diligent; endure hardship
  Humble; tender

• Image of ‘whore’:
  Born to please men
  Cannot resist white men
  Prostitutes
The image of the sensuous concubine: passive and waiting to be dominated

Dominant stereotypes of east Asian women in North American media:

*Lotus Blossom Baby*: shy and delicate China Dolls and Geisha Girls

*Dragon Lady*: often prostitutes and devious madams or killers

*Picturing oriental girls: a (re) educational videotape*

by Valerie Soe, 1992.
Anna May Wong:
*Daughter of the Dragon* (1931)
Anna May Wong: 
_Shanghai Express_ (1932)
Nancy Kwan:  
*The World of Suzie Wong* (1960)
Oriental Men are depicted as feminine and weak, yet strangely dangerous because they pose a threat to ‘civilization’ and to White Women.
This is contrasted with the idea of the “Good” Asian Charlie Chan (1925):

“He was very fat indeed, yet he walked with the light dainty step of a woman. His cheeks were chubby as a baby's, his skin ivory tinted, his black hair close-cropped, his amber eyes slanting.”

(Biggers, E. The House Without a Key, 1925, p. 76)
Thus, the people of the orient...

• Are “essentialized” – reduced to their most basic essence.

• Are perceived as biologically inferior.

• Are stereotyped and the stereotype cross countless cultural and national boundaries (i.e., Chinese, Arabs and Turks, Muslims and Algerians all mean the same thing...
"Yellow Peril"

A racial epithet directed against persons from East Asia that was fashionable in Europe and America in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its historical roots can be traced to the persistent theme in Western culture that the barbarian hordes of Asia, a *yellow* race, were always on the point of invading and destroying Christendom, Europe, and Western civilization itself. This interpretation of history contributed to racism in the United States.
"Yellow Peril"
Contemporary Images of Chinese Folk: Orientalist Stereotypes

1. Corrupt legal system and government
2. Traditional; refuse or grudgingly accept the outside world and change
3. Everyone knows martial arts
5. Superstitious, obsessed with luck, avid gamblers
6. Inscrutable
7. Eat cats and dogs
8. Eat rice
9. Spit indiscriminately in public
...tous les Chinois sont des hommes fourbes et cruels, qui portent une nature et qui passent leur temps à inventer des supplices et à manger des œufs pourris et des nids d’hirondelle...

Ces mêmes Européens croient, dur comme fer, que toutes les Chinoises, sans exception, ont des pieds minuscules et que, maintenant encore, toutes les petites filles chinoises subissent mille tortures...

destinées à empêcher leurs pieds de se développer normalement. Enfin, ils sont convaincus que toutes les rivières de Chine sont pleines de petits bébés chinois que l’on jette à l’eau dès leur naissance...
Ne te retourne pas tout de suite... J'ai l'impression que quelqu'un nous suit à la trace.