

**Amy Li: “Nobody’s Asian in the Movies” but Now They’re in Marvel: Asian and Asian-American Representation in *Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.***

What does it mean to be an Asian/Asian-American in pop culture media, especially as a superhero? Though Maurissa Tancharoen wrote and sang in the commentary to *Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog*, “[n]obody’s Asian in the movies / Nobody’s Asian on TV,” times are changing. In the same month that Marvel Comics debuted Kamala Khan, the first female Pakistani-American superhero, *Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (for which Tancharoen is co-writer and producer) introduced television audiences to high-ranking S.H.I.E.L.D. agent Melinda May, and Skye, later revealed as a racebent (half-Chinese) adaptation of the superhero Daisy Johnson.

My paper will explore the tension between the stereotypical aspects of May and Skye as Asian/Asian-American women versus their ‘agency’ as a badass agent and superhero, a particularly important negotiation given the recent NY Times op/ed by Umapagan Ampikaipakan on the “oxymoron” of the Asian superhero. At times *S.H.I.E.L.D.* toes the line between depicting Asian-American characters as racial stereotypes such as the “Dragon Lady” (May, emotionless and expertly trained in martial arts), or avoiding stereotypes to the point of whitewashing (Skye, who in the beginning is only Asian in looks), which Jessica Hautsch in “‘What the Geisha has gotten into you?’: Colorblindness, Orientalist Stereotypes, and the Problem of Global Feminism in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season Eight*” labels as “the result of the ideology of colorblindness;” she adds that whitewashing “eliminates the representation of racial difference and is not uncommon within the Buffyverse, nor in American television in general” (2). As the show progresses, however, both characters gain nuance. May and Skye’s character developments allow them the “multiple identities” which Elana Levine argued were denied Kendra, a Jamaican Slayer, and Satsu, a Japanese Slayer, as Hautsch argues. May’s emotionless façade receives an explanation, while Skye gets superpowers, discovering her heritage along the way.