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Revisiting Charlie Chan: The Oriental Other and the Romance of the White American Nation in Earl Derr Biggers' *The House Without a Key*

The first detective figure of Asian origin emerged in the USA in 1925, when white author Earl Derr Biggers published his novel *The House Without a Key*. Many critics have focussed on Charlie Chan and Chinese American masculinity, but this paper analyzes white masculinity, white nation and the tradition of American Orientalism. The novel was published at a time that witnessed increasing white anxiety towards (Asian) immigration, claims about white racial suicide and racial purity. To some extent, Biggers alleviates the racial anxieties of his white readers, because he depicts Charlie Chan as a humble, racially inferior man subjected to white law and order; yet he re-establishes the future of the nation as a nation where white superiority can still reign - if whites marry other whites. While the novel can be labelled as detective fiction, it also employs a romantic subplot and romantic conventions: the racialization of the Chinese is connected to romancing whiteness.