

All American Girl

By Tammy Sung

If you have the strength to change the channel from "Beverly Hills 90210" on Wednesday nights, you'll see a new face in network land. Margaret Cho, formerly of HBO Comedy fame, stars in ABC's "All American Girl" along with Jodi Long, Clyde Kusatsu and B.D. Wong.

What? Could this be a prime-time national show about an Asian American family? Asian American faces in sitcoms have been rare in the past, and certainly an entire

Asian television family has not graced the television screen before this season. Yet, here it is: Mom, Dad, Grandma and three kids all in San Francisco with their relationships and lives portrayed for our viewing pleasure.

However, many Asian Americans are criticizing the first prime-time network television show that has Asians as the main characters.

One criticism comes from the logistical aspects of the way the actors sound and speak. Stacey Hong, a UNC-CH junior from Staten Island, N.Y., said: "These people are supposed to be Korean, and none of the actors other than Margaret Cho is even Korean. It just sounds completely ridiculous. The word *yuh-bo* (a

almost solely based on stereotypes. Margaret is a second-generation free spirit in a culture clash with her parents.

On the show, the mother continually drops hints about how Margaret should pursue a career in law. Her older brother is a doctor. The grandmother is unassimilated, yet content just watching television and spinning stories about "the old country."

"All the characters are still stereotypically Asian," Lee said. "It is just furthering stereotypes. It doesn't portray what a family is really like."

Amy Huang, a UNC-CH sophomore from Raleigh, said that Cho's character was trying too hard to be all-American. "She just comes across as stupid," Huang said. "Their family life is ridiculous. No parents or grandparents would act like that in real life."

"There is no other prime-time show to counter the image this show puts forth. It just seems to be making fun of Asians, and I don't think that is right. Here's a family that has retained their culture, and then it just laughs at them."

—Tessy Paikaday,
UNC-CH
sophomore

Korean word one uses in addressing one's mate) is so mispronounced that I couldn't figure out what they were saying."

Korean Americans were not the only ones to find fault with the accents on the show. Grace Lee, a UNC-CH sophomore from Chapel Hill, said the characters sounded unnatural. "It sounds like what someone mimicking what an Asian person sounds like," she said. "It's like when Margaret Cho makes fun of the way her parents talk in her comedy act."

One exception to the Asian-accented speech on the show is Kusatsu's character, the father, Mr. Kim. In an Entertainment Weekly article, Kusatsu said that his lack of accent was his way of making a statement. "Not all Asian immigrants have an accent," he said. "That can be a stereotype."

Still, many people say the show seems to be

Computer screens are buzzing with such electronic mail messages as "Margaret Cho is a sellout." The show has even been renamed by some net users as "All AmeriKKKan Girl" or "All-American Capitalist Pig."

Perhaps the criticism of "All American Girl" is so harsh because of the high expectations that the Asian American community has for the first show to place them in the national spotlight.

In an article in Glamour magazine, Cho wrote: "It is the first prime-time sitcom about an Asian American family that America has seen. I am so proud that it's mine. And trust me, getting this opportunity wasn't easy — partly because American TV is not exactly hunting for Asians to put into prime time."

Hong said she expected the show to be of the same caliber as "The Joy Luck Club." "I was really looking forward to it, and maybe I was expecting this serious show that did talk about issues I could relate to," she said.

"It seems that she (Cho) is torn about the whole idea about the show. Is it an Asian thing or a comedy thing? Something seems to get lost in between."

Computer screens are buzzing with such electronic mail messages as "Margaret Cho is a sellout." The show has even been renamed by some net users as "All AmeriKKKan Girl" or "All-American Capitalist Pig."

Huang said it would be better to not have any show on Asian Americans. "It's just giving us bad coverage," she said. "They are trying so hard to be funny that they are just dissing Asians."

Hong agreed, "I don't really see anything positive coming out from the show."

But while there is disappointment in the show, there is some sympathy for the position Cho has been given as the trailblazer for Asian Americans' national exposure. Hong compared Cho's position to that of Spike Lee in the African American community.

"People criticized him saying, 'You aren't answering any questions. You are just creating more problems,'" she said. "His answer is that his job is to make movies about whatever he wants. It's almost unfair to put all these expectations on her."

But many viewers think the show's problems go beyond its portrayal of Asian Americans — the sitcom just isn't funny, they say.

"By being so bad it reflects that the Asian community is something that is not quite up to standards," said Michael Kim, a sophomore at Duke University. "The quality of jokes is bad."

"I'm not offended that they are centered around an Asian core, but it is because they are so bad." •

