Who’s afraid of the big, bad gal?

Must our Asian girls be ‘good’ all the time?

Girls gone wild: (From left) Blake Lively from Gossip Girl, Pamela Anderson and Paris Hilton are free to live it up on TV – but not Asian girls, so it seems. Getty Images, AP

CONVENTION CONTENTION

Speaking of convention, the sentiment against bad girls probably has something to do with the fact that Asian culture places heavy emphasis on homogeneity within society. "Bad girls" are "rebels" and their behaviour is sexually, socially and morally "deviant".

Little Nonya actress Cynthia Koh, who’s had a lot of experience playing bad girls in Channel 8 dramas, reckons that the Asian society is still a very conservative one.

“When the aunties and uncles watch a drama on Channel 8, they’re really into the character. They think you are like that in person,” said Cynthia. “They’ve said to me, ‘Oh, you’re so naughty in that show – why do you like that?’”

“I think it’s because we’re a more judgmental society. Asians have such set codes of behaviour,” said actress, host, and all-around strongly-opinionated woman Wong Li-Lin.

“In Asia, how you behave reflects a bigger picture, or reflects onto the family. We are more likely to label right or wrong; good and bad,” said the Fly Entertainment artiste.

ALL RIGHT FOR WHITES?

Singaporeans don’t mind Western bad girls — in fact, we rather like them on TV. We relish reading about them in magazines. We even dress like them (when they have their clothes on). So why is it that it’s the Asian bad girls we have a problem with?

How come the Asian community raised a ridiculous brouhaha over pictures of Zhang Ziyi sunbathing topless with her fiancé on a private beach, but didn’t bat an eyelid when Amy Winehouse was topless for what seemed like a month on a public beach in the Caribbean?

Do we like our angmohs naughty and our Asians nice?

As an Australian, Gillian Arnold, director of the drama Red Thread which is coming soon to Channel 5, thinks that bad girls in the West are “just a sign of the times”.

“These girls want to be heard. When they create controversy, everyone listens,” she told TODAY.

“They are a part of the complex and imperfect tapestry of Western society, and we accept them. In Asian dramas, on the other hand, the women are good people with good virtues. They play a vital role in sending clear messages about family values and strong family ties.”

IT RHYMES WITH ‘HEH’

Perhaps it has a lot to do with one little word: Sex.

Associate Professor Norman Li, an evolutionary psychologist at the Singapore Management University who studies mating cultures, thinks that bad girls “are a part of the complex and imperfect tapestry of Western society, and we accept them. In Asian dramas, on the other hand, the women are good people with good virtues. They play a vital role in sending clear messages about family values and strong family ties.”

Patriarchy Lives On

So, does it all boil down to male attitudes towards women?

The 19th century Victorians classified women into two categories: Angel or whore. You either stayed in the house and took care of the babies, or you traipsed the streets swinging cider and propositioning men.

There was no middle ground on which a woman could stand.

Could the sad fact be that despite years of “progress” and women’s lib, there are still only two choices open to women: Bad girl or good girl?

On television, the bad girl is a vampy seducer of other women’s men. She flaunts her sexuality and uses it to get what she wants. And she also gets what’s coming.

Good girls smile demurely without showing teeth.

Guys, how many girls do you know fit in either category?