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**Title**

“Of Men and Men: Reconstructing Chinese American Masculinity.”

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7210f4m9>

**ISBN**

978-9997817167

**Author**

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**Publication Date**

1998-03-30

Peer reviewed

## 7 ◆ Of Men and Men

## Reconstructing Chinese American Masculinity

For all the advances in gender and ethnic studies challenging traditional notions of manhood and womanhood and unsettling stereotypes about people of color, as social beings we continue to react to or be shaped by sexually and racially coded characteristics. Judith Butler, in refining her theory of performativity, insists that the social construction of identity is far from free: "The 'performative' dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms. In this sense . . . constraint calls to be rethought as the very condition of performativity. Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance" (*Bodies* 94-95). But if we construe performativity as the stereotypical roles assigned to a particular group, there is then a discernible connection between theatrical and cinematic performance and performativity for people of color in the United States. After all, the limited social representations they see of themselves in cultural media—both "high-" and "low-" brow art—interfere with their formation of identity. In this essay, I would like to focus on the difficulty of self-definition—that is, the limits set on one's performance—resulting from historical inequality and cultural imperialism. Using examples from literature and cinema, I will show how often Chinese American men, and Asian American men in general, who are seldom allowed by the dominant culture to *perform* "masculine" roles, are self-driven to rehearse gender norms. Constraint in this instance is not only "that which

sets a limit to performativity" but "that which impels and sustains performativity" (Butler, *Bodies* 95). Before we can go "beyond gender binarism" and liberate ourselves from dominant scripts for masculinity and femininity, we need to ascertain the anxieties and aspirations that are at stake behind these repetitive performances.<sup>1</sup>

What rights and motives have I as a female critic to deliberate on manhood? That men of different cultures have for centuries prescribed feminine ideals comes to mind as a quick rejoinder.<sup>2</sup> More seriously, in the Asian American (as in the African American and Mexican American) cultural domain, feminism and nationalism have taken on the appearance of a split between women and men. Feminists intent on exposing Asian sexism have been attacked by cultural nationalists who complain that female writers reinforce the denigrating stereotypes about Asian males; the effort of some male writers to reconstruct manhood and instill cultural pride by reviving an "Asian heroic tradition" has also caused consternation among feminists (Kim; Lim; Ling; S. Wong, "Ethnicizing Gender"). Elsewhere I have stressed the dual allegiance of Chinese American women who wish to dismantle Chinese patriarchy on the one hand and redress the invisibility of Asian American men on the other ("Woman Warrior"). I have also discussed contradictory cultural inscriptions of masculinity in the works of three East Asian American female writers (*Articulate Silences*). In this essay, I would like to obviate further the opposition between Asian American women and men by examining differences among male writers and uncovering alternative expressions of masculinity. Just as Maxine Hong Kingston in *China Men* and *Trip-Master Monkey* attempts to identify with her male protagonists, critics too can traverse gender lines. I hope my analysis of Asian American masculinity will encourage greater empathy and less truculent exchange between the sexes.<sup>3</sup>

### "Emasculation" and the "Asian Heroic Tradition"

The editors of *Aiiieeee!* and *The Big Aiiieeee!*—Jeffery Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong—refer to the history of Asian Americans as one of "emasculat[ion]." Although terms such as "emasculated" and "effeminate" presume and underwrite the superiority of the masculine over the feminine (hooks 76; Ling 313), emasculation evokes multiple injuries and carries a special poignancy with regard to Asian American experience. According to Edward W. Said, "the Orient was always in the position both of outsider and of incorporated weak partner for the West" (208).<sup>4</sup> Historical circumstances also consigned many early Chinese immigrants to virtual bachelorhood, since

Chinese laborers who came to the United States in the late nineteenth century were forbidden to bring their wives or to marry white women and were consequently denied paternity. Because of unequal employment opportunities, these men were forced to be cooks, waiters, laundry workers, and domestics—jobs traditionally considered "women's work."

Cultural and political factors further contribute to their feminization. Socialized to respect authority and to exercise verbal restraint, many people of Asian ancestry seem submissive and passive in the eyes of non-Asians. Such cultural difference is deepened by racist politics, insofar as Asians are granted limited acceptance as long as they refrain from "making waves" in American society (Chin and Chan; Chin et al.). The more recent stereotype of Asian Americans as the model minority, whereby they are praised for their ability to assimilate and comply with dominant ideologies, further undergirds the domesticated image of Asian Americans. This assignment, which came into currency in the wake of the civil rights movement, has provoked an insidious comparison between Asian Americans and African Americans—the intractable minority that should follow the Asian American example. Ironically, as noted by the editors of *Aiiieeee!* (Chin et al. xxvi), the African American presence in the United States—in music and literature as well as politics—has been as strongly felt as the corresponding Asian American absence, at least until very recently. Where were the Asian jazz and blues, Langston Hughes and James Baldwin, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X? Because cultural and political visibility has been a male prerogative traditionally, such absence casts yet another shadow on Asian American manhood.

These legacies have produced repercussions in the film and publishing industry. As Gina Marchetti observes, "Images of ethnicity and race always conjure up images of masculinity and femininity" ("Ethnicity" 288; see also E. Wong). Marchetti describes how Hollywood maintains racial and ethnic hierarchies through gendering: "Thus, fantasies of threatening Asian men, emasculated eunuchs, alluring Asian 'dragon ladies,' and submissive female slaves all work to rationalize white, male domination" (289). Elaine H. Kim similarly observes, "Asian men have been coded as having no sexuality, while Asian women have nothing else. . . . Both exist to define the white man's virility" (69). Focusing on the movie imagery of Asian men, Richard Fung divides their roles into "two categories: the egghead/wimp, or . . . the kung fu master/minja/samurai. He is sometimes dangerous, sometimes friendly, but almost always characterized by a desexualized Zen asceticism . . . defined by a striking absence down there" (148). In the bitter words of the *Aiiieeee!* cohort, "the white stereotype of the acceptable and unacceptable Asian

is utterly without manhood. Good or bad, the stereotypical Asian is nothing as a man" (xxx). Furthermore, in Hollywood movies Asian women often fall in love with Caucasian men, whereas Asian men are almost never presented as desirable partners for either Caucasian women, Asian women, other women of color, or other Asian men (Fung; Marchetti, *Romance*; Tajima).<sup>5</sup>

Despite the new cultural awareness in the wake of the civil rights movement and the increasing variety of roles Hollywood has granted Asian women, little has changed in popular portrayals of Asian males other than that Asian American writers and directors are now accused of complicity in disfiguring Asian men (e.g., Moy 115-29). It is unfair to expect any one writer or director to represent a culture, but one cannot help registering that the most popular books and films by Asian Americans have one element in common: the marginalization of Asian American men. One is hard-pressed to find positive male models in the Chinese American literary texts that have won the largest readership, such as Kingston's *Woman Warrior*, David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, and Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club* and *Kitchen God's Wife*. Indeed, Asian men are all but absent in *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club*; they are presented as the epitome of deception and cruelty in *M. Butterfly* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Asian American writers should no doubt continue to expose and combat Asian sexism, but they must also guard against internalizing and reproducing racial stereotypes, thereby reinforcing the deep-seated biases of the American reading and viewing public.

Is the fact that Asian men are marginalized in the most widely circulated works by Chinese American writers merely a coincidence? Kingston wrote both *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*; *The Woman Warrior* is now one of the most widely taught texts in American colleges and universities, while the critical silence surrounding *China Men*, which uses similar narrative strategies, is deafening by contrast. The highly uneven reception of the two books by the same author surely has to do more with subject matter than with literary merit.<sup>6</sup> The lukewarm reception accorded *China Men* (or even *Tripmaster Monkey*) suggests a certain apathy toward Asian men; indeed, a more recent example, Wayne Wang's film adaptation of *The Joy Luck Club*, suggests antipathy. In Tan's novel two of the daughters are trapped in failed marriages with Caucasian men. In the movie not only is one of the Caucasian husbands ultimately idealized but the most obnoxious white husband in the book—the one who forces his wife to draw separate grocery lists for herself and himself and who makes her pay more than her fair share—is reincarnated as Asian (on the movie, see Hagedorn, "Asian"; Nakayama; Payne).

Given the history of skewed representation of Asian American men

(as being either absent, "unmanly," or villainous) in American public discourse, it is understandable that the editors of *Aiiieeee!* and *The Big Aiiieeee!* set out to redefine "Asian American manhood." In *Aiiieeee!* they link the crisis in masculinity to the deprivation of history, language, and a literary heritage. In *The Big Aiiieeee!* they attempt to refashion Asian American masculinity by espousing an "Asian heroic tradition." They glorify the martial heroes featured in Chinese and Japanese epics, such as *Water Margin*, *Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *Chushingura*, implicitly presenting renowned heroes for contemporary Asians to emulate.

I am sympathetic to the editors' effort to reformulate Asian American masculinity. I particularly appreciate their determination to revive an alternative history and literary tradition. The emphasis on loyalty, honor, wisdom, courage, and resistance in these works helps to combat established stereotypes of Asian deviousness and conformity. What I find problematic is their unthinking resuscitation of manly codes that require violence. I believe that it is in part because Asians first settled and are still concentrated in the American West, where the frontier myth of conquest has been especially pervasive, that the editors (themselves from the West Coast) are in thrall of heroism that takes a "Western" form despite their announced intent to forge an Asian heritage. The fact that Asians have been "feminized" historically has no doubt also spurred the editors' masculinist quest.<sup>7</sup>

In an essay at the beginning of *The Big Aiiieeee!*, entitled "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake," Chin foregrounds a Chinese ethos that at once contradicts orientalist perceptions of Chinese culture and aligns Chinese masculinity with white masculinity. He distills the following essence from *The Analects* by Confucius: "We are born to fight to maintain our personal integrity. All art is martial art. Writing is fighting. . . . Living is fighting. Life is war" (Chan et al. 35). Such a worldview is less reflective of Confucius—famous and notorious for his abiding respect for hierarchy—than of the American "national character" that, according to Richard Slotkin, embraces "the myth of regeneration through violence" (*Regeneration* 5). Confucius would also be shocked to hear his teaching summarized as the "ethic of private revenge [and] the ethic of popular revenge against the corrupt state" (Chan et al. 34-35). Chin's drive to counter orientalist constructions thus generates an equally singular interpretation of Chinese culture. Despite his avowed intention to combat white supremacy, his selective and tendentious invocation of Chinese ethos echoes Euramerican ideologies of masculinity, and his nationalist gesture is marred by an apparent counterinvestment in patriarchal prescriptions.

The literary revival of the Asian heroic tradition coincides with the fetishization of the kung fu fighter in American cinema. The only "positive" Asian male image that has made its way to Hollywood is the Bruce Lee figure; the box office success of *Dragon* (a movie based on Lee's life) and the popularity of action movies from Hong Kong—notably those directed by John Woo and Jackie Chan—attest to the continual appeal of that profile. The larger society may enjoy these movies simply as oriental variations on Hollywood gore and mayhem, but for many Asian Americans these films provide images of Asian heroism not previously encountered in American popular culture. One cannot overestimate the magnetic hold these heroic figures have on Asian Americans who seldom see themselves in leading roles in the white media. Because these movies are also eagerly consumed by non-Asians, Asian Americans (who must still grapple with racial slurs and hate crimes outside the cinema) can derive a sense of vicarious acceptance as the larger audience roots for the on-screen Asian fighters. Like some of the martial heroes exalted in *The Big Aiiieeeee!*, these fighters only fortify the association of manhood with violence. Both the literary and cinematic interventions blast effeminate stereotypes by merely reinstating and legitimizing machismo.<sup>8</sup>

### Donald Duk and China Boy

The tenets set forth in *Aiiieeeee!* and *The Big Aiiieeeee!* are fleshed out in Frank Chin's *Donald Duk*, in which the eponymous teenage protagonist struggles to overcome his racial self-contempt by learning about the Chinese heroic tradition and the history of his predecessors in America. As one of the few works by Asian Americans that contain sympathetic father figures, the novel also addresses a concern first articulated in *Aiiieeeee!*: "the failure of Asian American manhood to express itself in its simplest form: fathers and sons" (xlv).<sup>9</sup> Both Donald's father, King Duk, and his namesake, Uncle Donald Duk, are unusually patient in teaching Donald about his Chinese legacy. King Duk initiates the project of building 108 paper airplanes for the Chinese New Year to commemorate the 108 outlaws in the Chinese classic *Water Margin*. As the man who invites and cooks for an entire opera troupe of three hundred people and distributes rice to every household in Chinatown during the New Year, he himself exemplifies the bounty of Soong Gong, one of the most respected heroes in the epic. When Donald mischievously burns one of the airplanes, named after Lee Kuey, Uncle Donald Duk gives him a lesson about his real name: "Your Chinese name is not Duk, but Lee. Lee, just like Lee Kuey" (23). This passing reference to names is one of the many

details in the novel that provoke Donald to learn more about his ancestors and the fabled outlaws.

Chin thus skillfully interweaves the history of Chinese immigrants with legendary characters. The heroes in *Water Margin* are mostly righteous men victimized by a corrupt government; they become rebels with a price on their heads and live separately as a fraternity away from society. Similarly, because of the Chinese exclusion laws in the late nineteenth century, many early immigrants came to the United States as "outlaws"—illegally, by forging immigration documents (hence Donald's fake last name). The strategies by which these men defied racist American legislation were not unlike those adopted against Chinese officialdom by the heroic characters. Furthermore, like the outlaws, the immigrants—ghettoized in various Chinatowns—were also segregated from mainstream America. For Chin, bent on refiguring Asian American manhood, *Water Margin* is a resonant literary source. By linking the Chinese forefathers in America with the fabled outlaws, he recasts those abused "Chinamen" who built the trans-Pacific railroad as undaunted pioneers. The epic also provides Chin with Chinese characters that match well with Euramerican worthies. According to Uncle Donald Duk, "the Water Margin was a place like [Sherwood Forest]. . . . All the good guys who want better government are badmouthed by the [bad] guys in charge, and they go outlaw. . . . Just like Robin Hood. But in the Chinese book, there are 108 Robin Hoods" (22).

Yet some of the Chinese rebels are far more savage than Robin Hood and the Merry Men. It is especially surprising to see that of the 108 colorful outlaws who appear in the Chinese classic, including some very civil ones, Lee Kuey—one of the most brutish and ruthless—should soar to greatest prominence in *Donald Duk*. In the words of Uncle Donald Duk, who introduces the character to Donald: "Lee Kuey . . . gets mad very easily. . . . He goes naked and runs into a fight with a thirty-pound battle axe in each hand. He loves to fight and kill people. When he runs out of the other side of a battle, his body is covered with layers of other peoples' drying blood" (22–23). The implication is that this famous ancestor should inspire the young Donald with awe, though one similarity between Lee Kuey and Donald is that they both lack good judgment. Another figure celebrated in *Donald Duk* is Kwan Kung, whom King Duk describes as "the most powerful character" (67). Power here is again construed as the ability to kill: "One look into your Kwan Kung eyes and he's dead" (67). Although the book effectively explodes the myth of the passive and submissive oriental, it conflates lethal fury with fortitude.

Yet the novel also gives us a glimpse of other ways to fight. Donald provides an alibi for a man falsely accused of murder; he and his friend

Arnold Azalea openly challenge and rectify the distorted representation of Asianness in their American classroom. Their newfound knowledge about the Chinese and Chinese Americans has goaded them to action. Through these youngsters Chin (like Kingston in *The Woman Warrior*) has transformed traditional Chinese fighters into Chinese Americans battling racism with words rather than with actual weapons.

I have argued elsewhere that a pacifist strain is no less pervasive in Chinese literature and culture than the heroic heritage presented as dominant by the editors of *The Big Aiiieeeee!* ("Woman Warrior" 242-43). A reader unaware of these incongruities would be nonplussed by the opposite pronouncements about Chinese beliefs in *Donald Duk* and in Gus Lee's *China Boy*. Donald is taught by his father and uncle about war and revenge in the Chinese heroic tradition, whereas the protagonist in Lee's novel—Kai Ting—is taught by his mother to abstain from fighting under all circumstances; war, according to this narrator, violates the essence of an "ancient, classical education and the immutable humanistic standards of Chinese society" (4). Juxtaposing the two books illuminates the degree to which subjectivity enters into the remaking of a cultural tradition. As Lee Yu-cheng observes, Chin's revisioning of the Chinese American tradition is motivated by a desire to discover a "usable past," which in this case disproves the orientalist stereotype of the effete Asian (115). Gus Lee's rendition of the Chinese tradition, on the other hand, serves to emphasize the protagonist's difficult struggle to become an all-American boy. Despite such dramatic differences in the depiction of Chinese culture, both works argue the need to fight one's way to manhood.

In Lee's autobiographical novel, seven-year-old Kai must negotiate the pacifist teaching of his immigrant mother and the street violence in America, not to mention the abusive behavior of his Irish American stepmother. His mother, who has told him that hurting people will damage his "*yuing chi*, [his] balanced karma" (4), dies when Kai is only six, whereupon he is exposed to the blows of his stepmother Edna and the punches of the Panhandle, a rough neighborhood in San Francisco. Thanks to Colonel Ting, his "Westernized" father, Kai is soon sent to take boxing lessons at the YMCA.

The narrator who lives to tell his tale has fully accepted physical combat as a way of life: "Fighting was the final test of life on the street. It measured a boy's courage and tested the texture of his guts, the promise of his nascent manhood, his worthiness to live and bear friends on poor streets" (90). The climactic ending of the novel occurs in a scene of unmitigated gore. The reader is expected to cheer when Kai finally beats down his vicious opponent on the street, without reflecting on his

equally relentless method of revenge or that Kai is the one who provokes that fight in the first place. This ending recalls a telling simile introduced at the beginning of the book: "Streetfighting was like menstruation for men" (3). The letting of blood by physical assault is thereby sanctioned as a biological passage into adulthood.

The book also suggests that for men of color the demonstration of strength through force has an extra hold beyond the traditional initiation into manhood. The streetfighting takes place in a predominantly black and Hispanic neighborhood. Toussaint LaRue, Kai's African American friend, explains how African Americans come to see physical combat as a privilege: "in ole days, no Negro man kin hit or fight. We belongs to da whites, like hosses. . . . Man fight 'notha man, be damagin white man goods. So he get whipped. . . . Now . . . we kin fights, like men" (98). This passage implies that black men who have been demeaned by whites take up the means of the masters with a vengeance. But in making up for past subjugation by being belligerent toward others, they simply remake themselves in the image of their oppressors. Asian American men may be similarly misguided.

Kai takes Toussaint's remarks to mean that "fighting [is] a measure of citizenship. Of civilization" (98). Ironic as his interpretation may sound, it is not wide of the mark, for the book leaves us with a sobering reflection that street violence is not so different from institutionalized violence.<sup>10</sup> The narrator informs us that "some who survived [the Panhandle] became cops, but more became crooks. . . . Almost to a man, or boy, the children of the Panhandle became soldiers" (4-5). The interchangeability or affinity of cops, crooks, and soldiers is unsettling. As readers discover in *Honor and Duty*—the sequel to *China Boy*—Kai himself, after his training at the Y and on the street, completes his education in violence by entering West Point, though he eventually rejects its military ethos. If the lurid descriptions of brutal hand-to-hand combat in *China Boy* are meant to parody the process by which boys are inculcated in violence and to shock one into pacifism, the novel also capitalizes on what it seeks to undermine.

In light of Lee's description of Chinese culture as being averse to bloodshed, the bodily injuries that mark the protagonist's progression into American manhood also signify the violence of assimilation and the need to obliterate the mother tongue along with its attendant precepts. In the narrator's mind, the two cultures are personified by his two mothers. We are told that "China, like [his] mother, had grown in modern times to distrust men who accomplished things with muscles and swords" (204) and that marrying Edna is "a major-league step toward cementing [his father's] American assimilation" (58). The nonviolent

teaching of Kai's Chinese mother is presented as an obstacle to Kai's adjustment to American life: "This is America! And *she does not exist!*" cries Edna (85). The Chinese mother must literally be dead for Kai to become a self-made American man under Edna's aegis.

### *Cultural Revolution and Pangs of Love*

Where inherited notions of gender are concerned, the linking of virility and violence in *Donald Duk* and *China Boy* is sadly at odds with the challenges posed by feminist and gay studies (though I will later show how it is possible to read against the grain of the two novels to discern alternative models). And the nationalist agenda in *Aiiieeeee!* and *The Big Aiiieeeee!* comes close to reestablishing an Asian patriarchy that excludes dissident voices and discounts sexual differences. The Asian American can recourse to a heroic past, like so many other (cultural) nationalist struggles, underplays the contributions of those who do not fit the profile of a warrior, notably women and gays.<sup>11</sup> Chin's preoccupation with manhood as traditionally defined, for example, often translates as homophobia: "It is an article of white liberal American faith today that Chinese men, at their best, are effeminate closet queens like Charlie Chan and, at their worst, are homosexual menaces like Fu Manchu. No wonder David Henry Hwang's derivative *M. Butterfly* won the Tony. . . . The good Chinese man, at his best, is the fulfillment of white male homosexual fantasy" (Chan et al. xiii). Chin is merely articulating here a widespread presumption in American society at large that a gay person is less than a man, particularly if he happens to be Asian. But in this instance homophobic sentiment is couched as a cultural nationalist discourse against racism. Chin, so sensitive about the "emasculature" of heterosexual Asian men, nevertheless joins the dominant culture in vilifying gay Asians, who are doubly marginalized by racism and heterosexism. In his afterword to *M. Butterfly*, Hwang elaborates on the invidious construction of the gay Asian even within homosexual circles:

Gay friends have told me of a derogatory term used in their community: "Rice Queen"—a gay Caucasian man primarily attracted to Asians. In these relationships, the Asian virtually always plays the role of the "woman"; the Rice Queen, culturally and sexually, is the "man." This pattern of relationships had become so codified that, until recently, it was considered unnatural for gay Asians to date one another. Such men would be taunted with a phrase which implied they were lesbians. (98)

It is only fitting, then, that a provocative challenge to established notions of masculinity appears in *Cultural Revolution* by Norman Wong, a

gay Chinese American. Though billed as short stories, the book is a series of interrelated episodes tracking the history and dynamics of an immigrant family. Two stories in particular, "Robbed" and "Ordinary Chinese People," demonstrate how patriarchal beliefs hurt both the daughter and the son—not to mention the mother—in the family. "Robbed" is told from the point of view of Julia, a toddler who witnesses her mother undergo a painful abortion because the parents do not want to have another girl. The night before the abortion, the family is robbed by a thief who enters the house by breaking a window. After the broken pane has been replaced, the father writes the words "NOTHING INSIDE" (105) on a piece of paper and pastes it over the new glass. Julia, who is inside all this time, "stares at her father's sign. It reads: EDISNI GNIHTON" (105). Julia imagines that the burglar reenters the house by shattering the window again: "The white sign rips in half. . . . The burglar . . . sees nothing inside . . . *except for her*. . . . He hoists her on his back. She holds tight. He . . . takes her away" (108, emphasis added).

Julia's fantasy reveals not only her resentment at being apparently "nothing" to her parents but also her inventiveness at reevaluating herself.<sup>12</sup> The "father's sign," already drained of meaning earlier by her focus on its mirror image, virtually goes to pieces in her mind. She further defies patriarchal order by redefining herself as valuable—as worthy of being stolen. The fact that she "holds tight" to the thief underlines her wish to escape from her father's house, from its sexist disregard for daughters and its preference for sons.

The full irony of this story emerges only when read against "Ordinary Chinese People," a story told from the point of view of Julia's younger brother, Michael, the wished-for son. The Chinese preference for boys is predicated largely on the fact that sons can perpetuate the family name by producing male offspring. But Michael is gay, and his homosexuality thwarts his parents' expectations. Because the Chinese qualifications for masculinity are thus inextricably tied to the reproductive role, Michael's "manhood" is under siege.

The title of the story also calls attention to the distance between Michael's working-class family and the white middle-class family depicted in Robert Redford's movie *Ordinary People* (1980). People of color, laborers, and homosexuals are not among the movie's "ordinary people." But Michael is seduced by the images in the film, which he "secretly watched five times over a weekend": "Michael wished his family were more like the Jarretts. They talked about their problems, problems that seemed real, dramatic, important" (137). The parents of Michael and Julia are too busy working to spend any time with their children, let

and strong women. Although Wong thus calls attention to the arbitrariness of gender constructions by reversing gender roles, his use of three generations of frail and lethargic Chinese men to symbolize a debilitating cultural heritage is disturbing. When Michael tells his mother he doesn't feel well, she scolds: "just like your father. Always sick. Sick in the head. Well, I'm . . . sick and tired of both of you" (143). Even Michael's homosexuality is presented as an "abnormal product of his Chinese parents" (147)—one more manifestation of a general malaise passed down through the generations.

Such a presentation may accurately reflect the depth of self-contempt instilled by racism and compulsory heterosexuality, but it also lends credence to debasing stereotypes about Asian men. Michael himself finds Asian males physically repugnant in general and is attracted to whites almost exclusively on a racial basis, though race and class are often linked in his mind: "Sometimes he imagined his mother marrying a rich white man. They would be living in Kahala, the most expensive neighborhood in Honolulu" (147). His coach, described as "handsome, sensitive, tall," is referred to by race rather than by name: "The white man's voice was like a pair of warm arms around Michael" (138). Michael is also in love with the character Conrad Jarrett, and he fantasizes about becoming involved with him. Both his off-screen and on-screen romances are imagined, unilateral, and consequently unrequited, leading to the triangular fantasy behind his attempted suicide: "His coach would fall in love with him as he had fallen in love with Conrad" (138). Inundated with and dazzled by white images, he aspires to be what he is not, an aspiration that amounts to self-annihilation. His attempt to slit his wrist in the exact manner of Conrad—a mimesis of a mimesis—reveals his fatal wish to be a dead ringer for the white character.

Ironically, this story ends with the reality of a dreaded resemblance: Michael's father lying next to Michael in bed—one infirm Chinese man next to another. His father lectures him on the responsibility of being a number-one son. But Michael knows already that "like his father, he would fail. . . . They were number-one sons in appearance only" (147). Their common physical illness bespeaks their shared weakness in character. The narrator seems to have internalized the colonialist stereotype of the Chinese as the "sick man of the East" and the American image of Asian men as devoid of manhood.

Like Wong's "Ordinary Chinese People," the title story in David Wong Louie's *Pangs of Love* explores the interplay of race, gender, sexuality, and generational differences. "Pangs of Love" recounts the tension between an immigrant Chinese mother and her American-born sons, which results from a language barrier and changes in family structure.

alone figure out their problems. By implication, the problems in his family are unreal, mundane, and trivial.

Haunted by both Chinese and American norms, Michael is kept from coming out. He does, however, try to discuss his sense of alienation with his track coach, with whom he is infatuated. But the coach, white and presumably straight, offers cold comfort. "Don't be afraid," he tells Michael. "We all feel lonely sometimes. It's all a part of growing up, of becoming a man" (138). Yet "becoming a man" has radically different meanings for the coach and for Michael. The coach draws on a cliché that arises out of the "universal" experience of growing up as a white heterosexual male. His definition of "man" is precisely responsible for isolating Michael. Unable to communicate with either his family or his coach, he tries—in line with the script of the film—to commit suicide.

Michael's attempted suicide can be variously interpreted. It may simply be a desperate way to attract the coach's attention, as the narrator suggests: "It occurred to Michael that if he did to himself what Conrad had done to himself, then his coach would fall in love with him" (138). Instead, the attempt backfires and confirms his "abnormality" to the coach, who pushes him away completely: "This is out of my hands," says the coach. "There are people out there who can help you" (139). For the coach's heterosexual center to hold, Michael must be cast "out there." In light of the story's insistent refrain of Michael's "responsibility as the number-one and only son" (146), however, the attempted suicide can also be seen as self-punishment. Regarding the social prohibition against sexual "deviance," Judith Butler observes: "When the threat of punishment wielded by that prohibition is too great . . . it may be that we effectively punish ourselves in advance" (*Bodies* 100). The concept of advance self-punishment to forestall societal condemnation evidently informs Wong's story. Michael's attempted suicide, like Gallimard's suicide in *M. Butterfly*, can be seen as a self-sentencing for an unspeakable "crime."<sup>13</sup> In Redford's film, Conrad Jarrett tries to kill himself because of his unresolved guilt at failing to prevent his older brother from drowning—a hidden cause that surfaces only after repeated sessions of psychotherapy. Michael's attempted suicide reflects his unspoken shame for violating the expectations of both his parents and society at large. Wong thus exposes the extent to which patriarchy regulates sexuality and blames both patriarchal Chinese culture and white culture for casting Michael as out of the ordinary—as queer, deviant, and delinquent. Incisive as Wong is in his critique of Chinese and American gender norms, however, he fails to offer any positive models of Asian men, heterosexual or gay. All the Chinese men in Michael's family are depicted as diffident and physically weak, in stark contrast to the invariably defiant

When the narrator, heterosexual himself, is asked by his mother—Mrs. Pang—why his gay brother has no girlfriends, he becomes tongue-tied. One is reminded of a similar scene in “Ordinary Chinese People” when Michael cannot begin to tell his mother about the motives behind his suicide attempt: “Michael knew that his coach was speaking too quickly for his mother to comprehend. Michael would have to explain it all again to her in Chinese. Explain what?” (139). The narrator’s speechlessness in “Pangs of Love” also has as much to do with the language barrier (his mother does not speak English and his Chinese is at best that of “a precocious five-year-old”) as with the concept of homosexuality, which he believes is incomprehensible to his mother, a woman from another time and another culture. Mrs. Pang is eager to see her sons married so she can have grandchildren. Like Michael’s parents, however, she is unlikely to have her wishes fulfilled. One son is gay; the other—the narrator—seems likewise unable to carry on a conventional family. His fiancée, Mandy, has left him for another lover; he is currently dating Deborah, a “rebound among rebounds,” whom he has no intention of marrying (84). The traditional Chinese household is on shaky ground; even homosexuality does not guarantee patrilineage.

As in Wong’s “Ordinary Chinese People,” the subversive potential of Louie’s story in decentering the patriarchal family is achieved at the expense of impugning Chinese American manhood. The narrator, who sees his mother as backward and unsophisticated, is himself riddled with insecurity, especially in dealing with Japanese men and white women. He works for a corporation that manufactures fragrances, under a Japanese boss named Kyoto: “Every time we meet he sizes me up, eyes crawling across my body, and lots of sidelong glances. *Who is this guy?* It’s the same going-over I get when I enter a sushi joint, when the chefs . . . take my measure, colonizers amused by the native’s hunger for their superior culture” (79). The narrator, acutely aware of his difference from Japanese men, expresses a combination of resentment at their condescending gaze and discomfiture at being gazed upon as a Chinese American fazed by Japan’s former conquest of China and present economic strength.

Mandy and Deborah further unhinge his sense of masculinity: “Deborah wants me to move out of my mother’s place, says I’m a mama’s boy, calls me that even as we make love” (85). Although it is not uncommon in Chinese homes for adult sons and daughters to live with their parents, the narrator does not dispute Deborah’s Eurocentric bias. His manhood was called into question earlier by Mandy. He and Mandy used to make love with the aid of a gamy musk perfume, “each drop equal in potency to the glandular secretions of a herd of buck deer” (81). They would use the perfume “whenever Mandy was feeling amorous but

needed a jump start” (81), as though the narrator needed to shore up his sex appeal and potency with the synthetic fragrance. Still, he could not make the relationship last: “Within a year, about the time Sony purchased Columbia Pictures, she fell for someone named Ito, and broke off our engagement” (80).

“Pangs of Love” presents the narrator as a man unsure of his attractiveness and adequacy. His masculine anxieties vis-à-vis Japanese men and white women converge in Mandy’s selection of a new lover. Already feeling self-conscious about being Kyoto’s “right-hand slave” (84), the narrator must take special umbrage at Mandy’s preference for a Japanese man. Worse still, Mandy’s departure coincides with Kyoto’s request that the narrator alter the composition of the musk perfume; he infers from the request that the “manly scent of musk is no longer manly enough” (82), no doubt spoken with a sniff at his own sexuality. Although Mandy simply leaves one Asian man for another, Japanese men, with their imperial past and superior economic present (not to mention their samurai icon), have often been perceived as more dominating and more sexy (and sexist) than Chinese and Chinese American men. In the reductive words of Bernardo Bertolucci (on the differences between the Japanese and Chinese members of his film crew for *The Last Emperor*): “They are very different . . . The Japanese have this myth of virility. They are more macho. The Chinese are the opposite, more feminine. A bit passive” (qtd. in Chow 5).<sup>14</sup>

The narrator, who is daunted by the myth of Japanese puissance, seems to share Bertolucci’s questionable assumption. His sense of being less potent than Mandy’s lover is hammered home when he tries to convey that lover’s ethnicity to his mother by pointing at a Japanese wrestler—whom he describes as a “Samurai Warrior”—on television (94). We have already been told earlier that the entire Pang family used to watch wrestling on Saturday nights: “It was myth in action. The American Dream in all its muscle-bound splendor played out before our faithful eyes” (94). The linkage of brute force with success runs deep in America (Slotkin, *Gunfighter*). (One is reminded of the China Boy’s initiation). The narrator, in equating manhood with physical, financial, and imperial power, short-circuits his own masculinity. “Pangs of Love” thus undermines Chinese patriarchy only to reimpose patriarchal norms. It also accentuates the precariousness of Chinese American manhood, which stands trial before both Caucasian women and Japanese men.

This impression is borne out by several other stories in Louie’s collection. Although these stories feature male protagonists who are romantic and imaginative, if somewhat eccentric, in contrast to the stereotype of the insipid or misogynist Asian male, many of the male characters betray

contrary, is told that he doesn't "sound like anyone's father" (131). George's escapade with Phyllis heightens the narrator's sense of deprivation and inadequacy: "My heart needed massage; in my stomach a little man was trying to punch his way out" (134). It is as though the positions of the thirty-year-old speaker and teenage George were inverted: the older man is the one still groping for his manhood. He tries to alter the situation by voicing paternal solicitude: "I asked [George] if he had gloves, a hat, a scarf. I told him zip up tight" (136). George, instead of taking the part of the son or apologizing for trespassing, tells the narrator upon leaving the house: "Thanks for the visit. . . . I think you'll like it here" (136). With remarkable self-possession and speaking like a man, George reassures the narrator.

"The Mover" thus highlights the narrator's difficulty in establishing his manhood—as a lover and as a father. Although one need not assume that the narrator is Chinese American to appreciate the humor and pathos of this story, the peculiar insecurities that waylay the protagonist clearly recall the predicament of Chinese American men, who were denied fatherhood historically and are still stigmatized as sexually deficient by U.S. popular culture. As Claude Steele has shown in his study of female and African American students in educational testing, those who suffer from "stereotype threat" invariably exhibit anxiety during performance: "Performing in domains where prevailing stereotypes allege one's inferiority . . . creates a predicament in which any faltering of performance threatens to confirm the stereotype as self-characteristic. This predicament . . . can cause an apprehension and self-consciousness that directly interferes with performance in that situation" ("Threat"). The male characters in Louie's fiction are all too conscious of this threat, albeit in a sexual terrain; they cannot avoid scrutinizing themselves through the lens of the stereotyping majority.

James S. Moy has castigated contemporary Asian American playwrights such as David Henry Hwang and Philip Kan Gotanda for allegedly creating Asian (American) men who are just as disfigured as established stereotypes. What Moy calls "flawed self-representations" (115) in drama has a certain parallel in the Asian American fiction analyzed here, in which the problem lies as much in deliberate inversions of stereotypes as in unintentional reinscriptions. Unlike the plays criticized by Moy, however, these literary texts successfully capture a range of individual difference and revitalize Asian American male images. The teenage and adult protagonists in these works all possess personality and sexuality, in contrast to the faceless and desexed Asian figures that populate Hollywood cinema. Still, none of them can disentangle from the prevailing ideology of manhood or escape its hegemonic hold. The male

a sense of deficiency vis-à-vis non-Asian women and men.<sup>15</sup> For instance, the protagonists in "Birthday," "Social Science," and "The Mover" have all been abandoned by a Caucasian wife or lover; they all try to gain a sense of vicarious power by assuming the role of a white man. In "Birthday," Wallace Wong is deserted by his lover. But he clings to the role of her son's father by trying to displace the biological father, a Caucasian. In "Social Science," Henry is a jilted husband threatened with eviction because the landlady has decided to sell. A prospective buyer, Dave Brinkley, is interested in Henry's ex-wife. In a fantastic subterfuge, Henry impersonates Brinkley so as to win back his wife but succeeds only in giving the escrow papers to another buyer.

This theme of impersonation—out of both envy and rivalry—is especially pronounced in "The Mover." The narrator and his girlfriend, Suzy, have just moved into a new apartment. But Suzy, after cataloging "all that was wrong" with the narrator, walks out on him (120). As he languishes in the dark on the floor of his new apartment, without heat, electricity, furniture, or lover, he pretends that he is "dead, lying in a morgue in China" (122). A teenager named George—apparently the son of the former resident—and his girlfriend Phyllis enter the apartment and proceed upstairs to a room the narrator and Suzy "had designated as [their] bedroom" (124), unaware that the new tenant has already arrived. The narrator surreptitiously follows the couple upstairs and through a keyhole watches them make love: "I saw plenty through my sharpshooter's quint. . . . At once, my intruders looked like a spirited heap of laundry and an exotic form of torture. But . . . who could mistake the sounds of the wondrous suction of love" (124). Just as Michael wishes to be Conrad, the narrator here wishes to be George; each desires to be an active (white) participant instead of a lonely (Asian) spectator in front of a screen or at a keyhole.

Meanwhile, Phyllis's father comes looking for his daughter. On an impulse, the narrator pretends to be the father of the boy: "I can assure you, I began, 'your daughter's safe with my boy.' . . . I was astonished by my daring, and certain, despite my thirty years, that my voice lacked the easy authority of a parent" (125). After Phyllis's father has left, the narrator, who fantasizes a resemblance between Suzy and Phyllis, also tries to find himself in George: "All I wanted was to see his face, to see myself there as I had seen Suzy in the girl's face" (134).

The narrator's impulse to assume successively the roles of George's father and of George reveals his desire for the paternal authority and sexual bravado these non-Asian men possess. He registers the voice of Phyllis's father as "full, confident, mature" (125). The narrator, on the

protagonists in *Donald Duk* and *China Boy* try to measure up to American notions of manliness by valorizing physical aggression; those in *Cultural Revolution* and *Pangs of Love* are conditioned by the dominant culture to see Chinese American men as subordinate to their Euramerican counterparts. All four works attest to the power of cultural imperialism in gendering ethnicity and in "ethnicizing gender" (S. Wong).

### Alternative Models

Michele Wallace argues that

blacks had been systematically deprived of the continuity of their own African culture not only by the oppression of slavery . . . but also by integration and assimilation, which had denied them the knowledge of their history of struggle and the memory of their autonomous cultural practices. In the process of assimilation, integration and accommodation, blacks had taken on the culture and values of whites in regard to sexuality and gender. (xix)

The same holds true for many Asian Americans. To find a concept of masculinity that is not already implicated in U.S. cultural hegemony and racial hierarchy, that is compatible with both the nationalist impulse to reclaim an Asian legacy and the feminist desire to combat machismo, I turn first to Chinese classics and drama. My intention is not to substitute one template for another but to furnish counterexamples to the pantheon of martial heroes erected by the editors of *The Big Aiiieeeee!*

I grew up in Hong Kong where I was exposed to one of the most irresistible Chinese male images—that of a *shushen* or poet-scholar. This ideal is propagated in Chinese romance and opera (e.g., *Peony Pavilion*, *The Western Chamber*, *Butterfly Lovers*, and *The Flirting Scholar*). The poet-scholar, far from either brutish or asexual, is seductive because of his gentle demeanor, his wit, and his refined sensibility. He prides himself on being indifferent to wealth and political power and seeks women and men who are his equals in intelligence and integrity. (True *shushen* are not to be confused with the elitist literati or Mandarins, who could be quite corrupt.) If reviving the image of the martial hero can counteract effeminate stereotypes of Asian American men, surely reclaiming the ideal of the poet-scholar will combat their cultural invisibility.

This model of the poet-scholar belies popular perceptions of Asian men as inarticulate, unromantic, and unimaginative, fit only to become computer nerds, engineers, or kung fu fighters. It further offers an ideal of masculinity that is at once sexy and nonaggressive and a mode of

conduct that breaks down the putative dichotomy of gay and straight behavior. I retrieve this image not out of any nostalgic longing for a specific historical type, however. What comes to mind when I think of the poet-scholar is not whether he is actually a poet or a scholar but the attributes associated with him: attentiveness, courtesy, humor, personal integrity, indifference to material and political interest, and aversion to violence. To me, these are qualities that very much become a man.

Although I locate the poet-scholar in Chinese classics, he is still alive and well. I personally know a number of Asian American men—both heterosexual and gay—who embody that ideal. In American society, it is unfortunately an underrated one. Hence, many of these men—like the male protagonists in *Cultural Revolution* and *Pangs of Love*—still strive to be more "American-masculine."<sup>16</sup> I may thus be presenting Asian American men with a double bind in criticizing the martial hero while advocating the poet-scholar model. If they try to emulate the martial hero, they risk valorizing brute force and perpetuating patriarchal mores. If they pattern themselves after the poet-scholar, they risk appearing "unmanly" to Americans steeped in the New World configuration of gender, thereby reinforcing the popular perception of Asian men as effeminate—as befitting the model minority. Yet to live according to the "Western" ideal, to live in acute awareness of the white gaze, Asian American men may constantly find themselves falling short. It is especially ironic that contemporary Chinese American male writers, who correspond to the traditional *shushen* by race, gender, and profession, should endorse physical violence or express ethnic self-contempt for not having a piece of the American beefcake.<sup>17</sup>

I do not mean to belittle the valiant attempts by Asian Americans to challenge prevailing perceptions about Asian masculinity and femininity. But it takes even greater courage to defy the Euramerican norms and to refuse to be held hostage to them. Asian Americans can resist one-way adaptation and turn racial stereotypes into sources of inspiration by demonstrating that what the dominant culture perceives as "feminine" may in fact be a transgressive expression of masculinity. If African Americans can recodify black as beautiful, Asian Americans, and perhaps non-Asians as well, can learn to see "effeminacy" (for want of a better word) in men as desirable. From both nationalistic and feminist standpoints, a quest for Chinese American manhood should allow us to reclaim an alternative repertoire rather than simply reproduce clones of Western heroes.

Masculinity, like femininity, is multiple. The fact that the cherished ideal of the poet-scholar—an exemplar of Chinese masculinity—may

strike most Americans as unmanly is sufficient to point to the arbitrariness of gender construction. But I am not suggesting that the poet-scholar is man par excellence nor trying to proffer a foolproof formula for manhood. Quite the contrary, I wish to contest any monolithic standards of gender—especially those of masculinity that have vitiated the self-worth of men with different cultural or sexual preferences. My invocation of the poet-scholar, like Chin's summons of the Chinese outlaws, is meant to conjure images of Asian American masculinity that contradict popular representations.

Nevertheless, I recognize that for any positive Asian images to take hold in the United States, they must first contend with cultural hegemony. About a year ago, a Hong Kong movie entitled *Flirting Scholar* was shown in a Los Angeles theater that frequently screens Chinese action movies. At first pleasantly surprised that a film featuring a Chinese poet-scholar had finally made its way to California, I was soon disabused. *Flirting Scholar* is based on a well-known Chinese story, which is in turn based on a real Chinese poet's life. But the famous story had been drastically altered to turn the traditional scholar into a deadly kung fu fighter in disguise. The changes undoubtedly heighten the movie's appeal to an American audience. Thus, the globalization of the movie industry, instead of fostering greater diversity, can in fact accelerate cultural imperialism.

The incident also reminds us that "performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation" and suggests that one cannot simply transplant a paragon from another culture regardless of the existing conditions on American soil. The icons of both the martial hero and the poet-scholar are quite remote and removed from the concerns of Asian Americans here and now. The martial hero underwrites physical aggression in an already all-too-violent society. Although there is much to admire in the poet-scholar, he is too detached from worldly politics to inspire those whose very consciousness as "Asian Americans" emerged in the wake of the civil rights movement. Advocating such a model may further smack of elitism in view of the high drop-out rates of underprivileged youngsters in high schools and colleges.<sup>18</sup>

Let us return, then, to the American environs of *Donald Duk* and *China Boy*. If we can stop thinking about manhood as embodying the American ideal of rugged individualism, or what Wallace calls "superficial masculine characteristics—demonstrable sexuality; physical prowess; the capacity for warlike behavior" (xix-xx), we can begin to discern different contours of masculinity even in these two novels that spotlight machismo. Both works contain male characters who embody what Nel Noddings, following Carol Gilligan, describes as "caring." Although

Noddings proclaims caring to be a "feminine approach to ethics," she adds that "there is no reason why men should not embrace it" (2). Indeed, male exemplars of this ethic can be found in both novels. King Duk in *Donald Duk* demonstrates it on collective and individual levels. What makes him an admirable figure is not so much his ability to play the menacing Kwan Kung as his unusual capacity to minister to the many less fortunate members of his community and to instill ethnic pride in his son by countering dominant perceptions of the Chinese. In explaining Chinese customs to Donald and imparting to him a sense of communal responsibility, King Duk also plays the role of a cultural transmitter, a role often reserved for strong mothers in Asian American literature. As mentioned earlier, Donald Duk's own courage in disputing the stock Chinese images presented in the classroom and in standing up for a wrongly charged suspect is evidence of valor that is life-affirming rather than life-threatening.

The ethic of caring, enacted by men of diverse racial origins, also softens the poverty and violence depicted in *China Boy*. Uncle Shim, who resembles the classical Chinese poet-scholar, helps Kai against great odds to retain a vestige of Chinese culture and a sense of self-esteem after his mother's death. Hector Pueblo, a Mexican auto mechanic, rescues Kai from a ferocious beating, tends him in his garage, and alerts Kai's father to his son's plight. Tony Barraza, Kai's Italian American boxing teacher, ensures that the hungry boy is well fed. Barney Lewis, his African American boxing teacher, on discovering that Edna has removed all the photos of Kai's beloved mother from the house, goes out of his way to obtain one for Kai. All these surrogate fathers "share their life gifts" with him (147); they nurture and succor him when his own father seems oblivious to his tribulations. But the character Kai most cherishes is his peer Toussaint (Toos), who, despite his dubious equation of fighting and manhood, literally extends his hand to Kai when all the other boys are engaged in the ritual of China boy bashing. Kai recalls, "My primary bond to him was for the things he did not do. He did not pound or trap me. He never cut me down. Or laughed with knives in his eyes. Then he opened his heart by explaining things to me, giving me his learning, and taking me into his home" (97). The passage turns around the dominant conception of masculinity as (aggressive) activity. Kai is forever drawn to Toos because he refrains from the cocky and blustering acts associated with boys. Toos also inspires in Kai reciprocal caring: "I had never had a friend before, and I cared for him as few lads have for another" (99).

In a book that centers on male mentoring, it is important to remember that Kai learns about caring as well as fighting from men. If their

efficacy as martial or pugilistic instructors enables Kai to survive physically, their caring is what makes him wish to continue to live. Noddings remarks, "When the attitude of the one-caring bespeaks caring, the cared-for glows, grows stronger, and feels . . . that something has been added to him" (20). For Kai, who has felt abandoned by his biological mother and abused by his stepmother, and who at one point wished to "evaporat[e]" (290), this something is nothing short of the courage to go on. Caring women such as Kai's sister Janie, Angelina Costello, and Mrs. LaRue are equally important to Kai. But in shifting Noddings's emphasis from feminine to masculine caring, in showing how well the male characters manifest a nurturing behavior traditionally associated with women, I wish to underline precisely how *dis-arming* such behavior is in men and how attainable it is for men of all ethnicities and classes.

### Conclusion

It may seem retrogressive to reinvoke the notion of masculinity at a time when scholars in ethnic, gay, and feminist studies are repeatedly stressing the arbitrariness of gender construction and the radical indeterminacy of categories such as sex and race. I have tried to show in this essay how these categories still govern our everyday lives and determine social hierarchies. I have also argued that the subjugation and reconstruction of Asian American manhood are legitimate feminist concerns. In turning a deaf ear to the grievances of Asian American men, feminist scholars risk homogenizing patriarchy on the one hand and enabling masculinist projects to proceed apace on the other. "Men in feminism" have for some time confronted the concerns of women (Jardine and Smith); women can likewise empathize with the predicament faced by men, attend to the differences among men, and participate in the process of rethinking masculinity. Only by engaging in such reciprocal investigations can we move beyond the conflicts within and between feminism and (cultural) nationalism to arrive at new kinds of connections.

No amount of academic theorizing can immediately undo a history of inequity and insidious representation. To this day, masculinity and power—both physical and political—still figure in conjunction. Men who have always enjoyed masculine perquisites may well be able to afford to ignore gender expectations. Men of color looking for equality may still aspire to play roles that have been associated with domination. Because racism toward Asians has traditionally been couched in gendered terms, many Asian American men have either internalized racist stereotypes of Asians as lacking in masculinity or rebelled against the

stereotypes by assuming pugnacious roles to prove their manliness. Nevertheless, to try to understand the motives for such repetitive performances and to begin to entertain alternative scripts will, I hope, prepare the stage for a brave new cast.

### NOTES

An earlier version of this essay was delivered in a session entitled "Beyond Gender Binarism" at the Modern Language Association convention in San Diego, 1994. I thank Russell Leong and Jinqi Ling for their comments on an earlier draft. I am also grateful for the support provided by the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University and by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

1. While most of my examples are drawn from Chinese American fiction, the challenges faced by Chinese American men in the United States are confronted by many other Asian men as well, though the stereotypes associated with different national groups can be contradictory. For instance, whereas Chinese men are considered asexual, Filipino men are often represented as oversexed. The different perceptions about Chinese men and Japanese men will be discussed later in the text.

2. All the paragons of womanhood, be they Homer's Penelope and Helen of Troy (as well as her reincarnation in Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* and Goethe's *Faust*), Ruth in the Old Testament, the Virgin Mary in the New Testament, Shakespeare's Cleopatra, Spenser's Faerie Queene, Samuel Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa, Puccini's Madame Butterfly, or her contemporary Miss Saigon, have been created by men, not to mention those myriad counterparts created by Asian men.

3. In an interview by Kay Bonetti, Kingston likened herself to Tang Ao in *China Men*. Just as the character Tang Ao is made to feel what it means to be of the other gender, so the author enters the realm of men and becomes "the kind of woman who loves men and who can tell their stories" (interview for the American Audio Prose Library, Columbia, Mo., 1986). For various perspectives on the interplay of nationalisms, feminisms, and sexualities, see Parker, Russo, Sommer, and Yaeger, *Nationalities and Sexualities*; see also Wallace, *Black Macho*.

4. In the words of Song Liling in Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, "The West thinks of itself as masculine—big guns, big industry, big money—so the East is feminine—weak, delicate, poor . . . but good at art, and full of inscrutable wisdom—the feminine mystique" (3-1).

5. *Eat a Bowl of Tea* and *The Lover*, two popular films based on novels, feature attractive Asian men. But the male protagonist in *Tea* is impotent; the one in *Lover* is, in Jessica Hagedorn's words, a "pathetic Chinese millionaire boy-toy" dominated by a French adolescent girl (xxii).

6. Kingston is herself upset by the unequal attention given to her first two books: "I don't like all this overpraising of my daughter and rudeness toward my sons—especially since my writing has gotten better" ("Personal Statement" 24). Reluctance to confront the racist treatment of early Chinese immigrants has probably also contributed to the slighting of *China Men*. See R. Lee, "Claiming Land," for further discussion of the marginalization of this work.

7. See Cunningham, "Between Violence and Silence," and Lane, "Homosexuality," for the dialectic of emasculation and masculinist response across different racial groups.

8. It should be noted that Hong Kong movies, unlike the traditional epics (which contain few heroines), frequently feature female fighters, so that physical prowess is not strictly associated with masculinity. Just as Asian American men who endure effeminate stereotypes find the Asian male heroes uplifting, so many Asian American women, often stereotyped as demure "China dolls," find themselves drawn to the Asian heroines on screen. When the emphasis is on acrobatics and swordsmanship, I too enjoy these movies. But, partly as a result of Hollywood influence, the more recent movies have zoomed in on bloodshed and violence.

9. Unfortunately, the mother and daughters in *Donald Duk*, who all endorse assimilation into Euramerican culture, are little more than caricatures, as though Chin wishes to counter Kingston's and Tan's detailed delineation of mothers and daughters and sketchy characterization of Chinese men in *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club*.

10. Viet Thanh Nguyen elaborated on the thin line between criminal violence and institutionalized violence in a paper entitled "Postcolonialism and the Discourse of Violence: A Transnational Reading of Gus Lee's *China Boy*," delivered at the Modern Language Association convention in San Diego, 1994. One need only recall the beating of Rodney King to see the continuing blurring of the line.

11. In *The Big Aiiieeeee!* Chin condemns as accomplices with white ideology any Asian American writers who do not write out of the Asian heroic tradition. His wholesale denunciation of these writers in the name of championing an authentic literary tradition unwittingly reproduces the strategy of the white literary establishment, which has traditionally censored voices that do not echo white male "universals," especially voices of women, gays, and people of color. See Chiu, "Uncanny Doubles," on how Chin "reiterates some of the exclusionary tendencies of mainstream American nationalism in his scapegoating of women" (95), and Eng, "In the Shadows," on "the need to refrain from seeking homophobic solutions to racism" (110).

12. I thank my student Kelly Jeong for her insights on Julia's ability to reset her own worth and on the ironic tropes around manhood in "Ordinary Chinese People."

13. See Eng, "In the Shadows," for a probing analysis of *M. Butterfly*, especially with regard to Gallimard's "advance self-punishment purchased in exchange for a promise of sexual impunity" (95).

14. Early Japanese immigrants were also more fortunate than their Chinese counterparts in that they were allowed to bring their wives and "picture brides" to the United States.

15. Louie, my colleague at UCLA, has repeatedly told me and my students that even though the ethnicity of his protagonists is not always explicit, he invariably has Asians or Asian Americans in mind.

16. Kingston distinguishes between "Chinese-feminine" and "American-feminine" in *The Woman Warrior* (172).

17. On this point see also S. Wong's critique of the *Asian Pacific Men* calendar ("Subverting Desire"). One may argue that the masculine ideal privileged by the editors of *The Big Aiiieeeee!* is influenced more by African American than by Caucasian models. But African American men too have been indoctrinated in white

America's ideal of masculinity. Of course, the "occidental" ideal takes many forms other than those inspired by frontier heroes—including the courtly lover, the knight errant, the debonair intellectual, and the "Mr. Smith" idealist who goes to Washington. But Asian American men, in order to counter stereotypes, tend to favor the more aggressive "Western" models.

I should also add that the Chinese poet-scholar found in classics and opera is typically pale and emaciated; he could certainly benefit from some martial training. In fact, yet another kind of Chinese masculine ideal is embodied by someone who is *wen wu shuang quan*—"accomplished in both the literary and martial arts" (S. Wong, "Ethnicizing Gender," 127n. 3).

18. I thank Russell Leong and Jinqi Ling for alerting me to this point.

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EDITED BY  
SANDRA KUMAMOTO STANLEY

# *Other Sisterhoods*

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- ◆ Literary Theory and
- ◆ U.S. Women of Color

UNIVERSITY OF  
ILLINOIS PRESS  
*Urbana and Chicago*  
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University of Illinois  
Manufactured in the United States of America  
1 2 3 4 5 C P 5 4 3 2 1

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Other sisterhoods : literary theory and U.S. women  
of color / edited by Sandra Kumamoto Stanley.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-252-02361-7 (alk. paper).—

ISBN 0-252-06666-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)

I. American literature—Minority authors—  
History and criticism—Theory, etc. 2. American  
literature—Women authors—History and criti-  
cism—Theory, etc. 3. American literature—  
20th century—History and criticism—Theory, etc.  
4. Women and literature—United States—History—  
20th century. 5. Literature and society—United  
States—History—20th century. 6. Minorities  
in literature. 7. Ethnic groups in literature.

I. Stanley, Sandra Kumamoto.

PS153.M56085 1998

810.9 9287'08996073—dc21 97-4689 CIP

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## ◆ Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge permission to use the following material in this book:

Chapter 1: Excerpts from "that dark shining thing," by Gloria Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987). Reprinted by permission of Gloria Anzaldúa.

Chapter 3: Excerpts from "There It Is," "They Came Again in 1970 and 1980," "If the Drum Is a Woman," and "Rape," by Jayne Cortez, in *Coagulations: New and Selected Poems* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1984). © 1984 by Jayne Cortez. Used by permission of the publisher.

Chapter 6: Excerpts from "If I Am Too Brown or Too White for You," "Notes on a Conspiracy," "The Well-Intentioned Question," "Margaret Neumann," "Excavation at Santa Barbara Mission," "Muskogee," "For the Campus Committee on the Quality of Life," "For the Complacent College Students Who Don't Think People Should 'Live in the Past,'" and "To Make History," by Wendy Rose, in *Going to War with All My Relations* (Flagstaff, Ariz.: Northland-Entrada, 1993). Used by permission of Wendy Rose.

Excerpts from "Vanishing Point: Urban Indian," "Builder Kachina: Home-going," "The Endangered Roots of a Person," "The Day I Was Conceived," "Walking on the Prayerstick," "Anthropology Convention," "Matriculation," "Handprints," "Academic Squaw," and "Indian Anthropologist: Overhanging Sand Dune Story," by Wendy Rose, in *Lost Copper* (Banning, Calif.: Malki Museum Press, 1980). Used by permission of the publisher.

Excerpts from "Ya Don Wanna Eat Pussy," "I Walk in the History of My People," "I Am Not Your Princess," "Ceremony for Completing a Poetry Reading," and the preface, by Chrystos, in *Not Vanishing* (Vancouver,