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Beyond "Looking for My Penis": Reflections on Asian Gay Male Video Porn

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SINCE RICHARD FUNG'S PIONEERING ANALYSIS OF RACE AND SEXUALITY in gay Asian video porn (Fung, 1991), the genre has been transformed. No longer is white sexuality the dominant paradigm in Asian porn. Instead, the predominant image now being offered is sexuality between and among Asians. Numerous videos present Asians of various ethnicities getting it on with their fellow Asians. At times, in line with the influx of transnational capital into porn production, it is difficult to ascertain where (in Asia) the film was made; the packaging merely indicates it is "produced" in the U.S. (Some packages tout, however, that it is filmed on location in Thailand, for example.) Much of what is available on video store shelves in the U.S. (and online) appears filmed in Asia rather than in the U.S. Asian American gay male porn then, as a genre does not contain much content that is made in America even though it is distributed here. In addition, the Internet and digitalization has made such images accessible to a world-wide audience, with the click of a mouse. CD-ROMs, Web-sites, and adult pay-for-view digital photos and videos, are now the rage.

This essay looks at a subset of what's out there: Asian American gay male porn on video, and how it has changed since Richard Fung first looked at it.

Why the transition since Fung to a focus on Asian-Asian sex? (For a discussion of whether or not what Fung described still exists, see the round table discussion in Yung, 1998 and Fung's own reflections in Fung, 1998).

There are two alternative explanations for this. The first, more generous explanation, credits the emergence of the open queer Asians and the proliferation of support groups for Asian queers in north America for having a salutary effect on commercial gay porn, including gay Asian porn. In an arena where the quest for the Great White Knight appears increasingly displaced (as evidenced by personal ads that more and more seek same-race

partners) in real life, it is not surprising that commercial porn producers are following suit and making films where the white guy is no longer the dominant figure, or even present!

Another, more plausible if darker explanation, credits not the gay movement but market forces for the shift. Asians remain marketable objects of desire and delicacies to be consumed, and porn producers, who undoubtedly make more money marketing white porn stars have decided that there is nonetheless a niche market that caters to non-white depictions. Hence a visit to any adult video store will see boxes and boxes of mainstream porn videos (featuring the latest Great White find), but also specialty shelves, where the nonwhite actors are shelved. On the one hand, such segregation means that those seeking white meat need never encounter anything different; on the other, those with special tastes can easily find the few videos that cater to their special needs. Indeed, the success of high quality print erotica featuring Asian youth (such as those put out in the OG "Oriental Guy" series), underlines the existence of a specialty market for such gay male Asian images.

Indeed, the marketing for these videos suggests that it is still the allure of the exotic, erotic Oriental that still underlies much advertising of gay Asian male porn in North America. In Fung's analysis, he focused on the work of an actor with the stage name of Sumyong Mahn, in fact a Vietnamese American from Orange County, California (see Tsang, 1996, p. 161). Mahn is featured on the cover of his most famous video, *Asian Knights*, but he is not alone. His naked torso is right next to an inset photo of a white actor. The cover plugs the video as a feature where the sensuous East meets the erotic West.

The sensuality of the East is what is stressed in today's adult video box covers aimed at highlighting Asian gay sex, with dreamy-eyed, languous, and boyish models featured. But the potential video buyer or renter is reminded that one can see "sweet smooth hairless buns with lots of action" (cover for *Asian Dreams, Vol. 2* or for *Asian Cuties*), or "smooth hairless buns with lots of action" (School Ties in Asian cover). Not a lot of originality, of course, but it does evoke a boyish image, even if the models portrayed look older. Other videos promote a remote land where you are encouraged to venture: *Oriental Islanders* has wordy text on the back cover amidst a collage of photos: "A group of adventurous oriental men are out exploring a jungle island when they decide to make their trip hot and steamy . . . This is one adventure you don't want to miss."

This focus on lands far away from urban life (where presumably the audience with a VCR lives) suggests that the intended audience for Asian-Asian gay male videos is the sex tourist, whether in fact or vicarious. It also suggests that the audience is not necessarily just rice queens (those whites attracted to Asians), but also sticky rice-Asians who prefer other Asians. In fact, while almost every rice queen I've encountered has his own collection of Asian gay porn, I'm finding, increasingly, Asians who have watched Asian-Asian porn, even if their collection cannot match a rice queen's.

I would venture that for an increasing number of Asian queers in North America, their first exposure to porn may well be Asian-Asian porn—in fact some of my Asian friends specifically ask for such tapes. Hence, in contrast to videos like *Asian Knights* which were criticized by Richard Fung for its portrayal of Asian sexuality subjected to a white man's sexual dominance, videos today present more democratized sex play, in which no one necessarily plays the dominant role. There is clearly democratic sexual exchange among the Asian partners. In fact, what distinguishes above all the videos of today from those of Richard Fung's period are the amount of time practically all of these Asian-Asian videos spend on foreplay. There is a lot of nurturing, kissing, and licking, especially of the nipples and chest area. In contrast to what one expects from hardcore gay (white) porn, there is no rush to the "money shot"—these videos, like anything in Asia, take their time. It's not wham, bang and that's it. No, there's no rush; it's the Asian way, the video seems to say.

The filmmakers (and they invariably are still white, even if the actors are Asian) seem to think that the audience is not ready for anything very kinky. In most of the videos, the guys do nothing more exciting than vanilla sex; there is not even much S&M. Lack of variety in sexual repertoire is duplicated by lack of variety in the setting: Many of these videos are filmed inside hotel rooms in unnamed cities or countries.

(This suggests that the actors in these videos are probably underpaid for what they could get if they appeared in a video made in the U.S.) While the actors do talk with each other, the audience can't hear anything, presumably because the actors are not speaking English. Instead, some god-awful orientalist music is played in the background. Among the current batch of actors, two stand out. The buff Brandon Lee is specifically profiled on many videos, while the biracial (white/ Korean) Jordan Young with his boyish looks and lean body is easily marketable as a porn star with cross-over potential.

Among all the current batch of videos, one stands out: *Shanghai Meat Company* (HIS Video, 1991). Although he is not on the list of credits, its main star is none other than Quentin Lee, an independent film director, later to win fame for *Shopping for Fangs*, a cross-over Asian American youth feature film. Set in San Francisco's Chinatown, the video opens as if it were a travelogue, but this is a place where "Asian fantasies" are realized, and where "hot Oriental guys know how to have sex." These words appear on the screen as a black actor makes out with an Asian, a rare and transgressive scene in Asian gay cinema.

Eventually both blow each other and each jerk each other off. This famous director, whose face and torso decorate the box cover, eventually shows up as Peekay Chan, who's addicted to sex. His dad owns the Meat Company, "so he can do anything he wants." As the words on the screen state: "If he wants to fuck, he fucks." Chan engages in mutual fellatio with a Japanese guy, while looking bored. Eventually both come. There is no dia-

logue, just words on the screen describing certain characters, as in a silent movie. But the movie is not silent, with music playing throughout. By including actors of all shapes, *Shanghai Meat Company* appears to be challenging conventional norms of beauty. Chan himself is no hunk, but looks boyishly cute. Quentin Lee himself appears in Ming-Yuen S. Ma's artistic look at Asian gay porn, *Slanted Visions* (1995).

Asian gay porn rarely make any "best of" lists, but three did in "The Best of Gay Adult Video 1999": Far East Features' *Asian Persuasion* was cited (because of actors Brandon Lee and Brad Davis Mikado); Men of Odyssey Video's *Bangkok Boys Town*, and Sex Video's *K-Waikiki*.

Beyond commercial porn, among the more interesting of those video artists who have incorporated erotica into their shots have been a group of young Asian American filmmakers. Among them is Nguyen Tan Hoang. When an MFA student at University of California, Irvine, Nguyen made "7 Steps to Sticky Heaven," a creative blend of racial politics and erotica. In one scene, he films himself eating rice, in the next he's sucking cock. Its the penultimate Asian-Asian sex film, with all the fun that is missing in commercial porn. He even films himself fucking with his friends.

Nguyen's 24-minute film (made in 1995) is more interesting than all the adult gay Asian films put together. And Fung himself tried his hand (in "Chinese Characters") at safe sex videos, but found it ultimately inadequate as pedagogy (Fung, 1993).

The future of this genre, as an art form if nothing else, belongs to the independent filmmaker. The commercial porn scene remains, ultimately, boring and unsatisfying, quite unlike the spurt in queer films from Asia that have captivated the festival circuit (Berry, 1997). Unlike the commercial filmmaker whose main goal is market penetration (for want of a better word), independent filmmakers seem to film because they have fun and have something to say. And their videos show it.

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APPENDIX

Asian Gay Male Erotic Videos (Commercially available):

Ambush

- Asian Body Builders In Hot Core, 1
- Asian Body Builders In Hot Core, 2
- Asian Cuties Vol. 1
- Asian Dreams Vol. 1
- Asian Dreams Vol. 2
- Asian Dreams, Vol. 3
- Asian Force
- Asian Knights
- Asian Pesuasion
- Asian Persuasion #2
- Asian Sex Odyssey
- Asian Studs Vol. #1
- Asian Studs Vol. #2
- Asian Studs Vol. #3
- Asian Studs Vol. #4
- Asian Studs Vol. #5
- Asian Studs Vol. #6
- Asian Studs Vol. #7
- Bangkok Boys Town
- The Best of Exotic Collection Vol. #1
- The Best of Exotic Colleciton Vol. #2
- Boys of Bankok
- The Boys of Pattaya
- Crem of the Coconuts
- Deja Vu
- Entering the Dragon
- Fortune Nookie
- Geisha Boys Vol. # 1
- Geisha Boys Vol. #2
- Geisha Boys Vol. #3
- K-Waikiki
- Lust at First Sight
- Oriental Island
- Memories of Bamboo Island
- Men of Tokyo

Pacific Rim
The Penetrator
Red Hot Beaux Thai
Room Service
School Ties in Asian
Sextasy in Thailand
Sexual Healing
Shanghai Meat Company
Thai Boxer in Fighting & in Loving
Thai Erotica

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