Identity Politics of Asian American Drama : The Theatrical Landscape of Philip Kan Gotanda and Velina Hasu Houston

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I. Introduction

Asian American Drama has its origin closely related to the Asian American movement of the 1960s. The movement, represented by the newly-formed term "Asian American" as "a replacement for the exoticizing, imperializing epithet 'Oriental'" (Kondo ix), [1] urgently called for political coalition and solidarity, and a sense of collective identity among Asian Americans with disparate racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Since the start of organized theatrical activities such as East West Players (1965-) in Los Angeles, Asian American Theater Company (1973-) in San Francisco, Pan Asian Repertory (1976-) in New York, Asian American Drama has been challenging and transforming the conventional notions of race forged by dominant racial ideologies symbolized by the black-white binary, with presentation of diverse issues evolving around racial multiplicities, multiculturalism, and multiethnicities. Never racially monolithic but diverse, Asian American Drama has its dynamism in staging not only "a colonization of consciousness" (Kondo xiii), but contradictions and tensions within and intra-ethnic differences among Asian Americans. [2]

One of the defining characteristics of Asian American subjectivity lies in the notion of change, whether it is associated with sociopolitical or cultural milieu, or with gender consciousness. Along with Frank Chin, David Henry Hwang, Philip Kan

Gotanda, Velina Hasu Houston, Amy Hill and others, an increasing number of Asian American dramatists have presented and represented various forms of transformation of Asian American subjects as a theatrical strategy for projecting and interrogating the Asian American subjectivity in the shifting multiethnic-racial-and-cultural milieus and also for disrupting, destabilizing and deconstructing the dominant, "orientalist" discursive construction of Asian Americans. The Asian Americans transform themselves for survival in the country which, asserting itself as the land of dreams, democracy and of equality, has marginalized, silenced and ignored them. They metamorphose in search for racial, ethnic, and gender identity by trying to reconcile their ethno-cultural heritage with the present reality, and to come to terms with themselves. In the course of transformation, many confront conflicts, pains, disillusionment, and despair even if they are awakened to a renewed self-identity, or a newly-acquired understanding of themselves in the surrounding socio-cultural context.

This paper attempts to explore identity politics of the Asian American men and women represented in Asian American drama with focus on self-fashioning-and-refashioning and metamorphosis[3] through the discussion of two Asian American playwrights of Japanese descent, Philip Kan Gotanda and Velina Hasu Houston.

II. Philip Kan Gotanda, [4] *Day Standing on its Head* (1994)

Gotanda's *Day Standing on its Head* renders the self-fashioning-and-refashioning, psychological journey of a Sansei (third generation) Japanese American law professor, Harry Kitamura, whose dilemma concerned his transgression of trying to be part of white America at the cost of betraying his Asian American faction, which needs to be overcome by a battle inside himself.

The curtain rises with Harry's narrative of a dream about his arm disappearing immediately followed by his monologue to the effect that a prestigious law journal

accepted his planned article on one of the seminal strikes by the Asian American movement in the early 70s, which involved him and gave him a chance to meet his wife Lillian. The scene shifts to Harry's lecturing his class on the campus unrest among the Third World students with focus on the infighting between "two competing factions vying for power," the pro-Maoist Yellow Guard of which he was a founding member and the Asian Americans For Action, leading to the disbandment of the former. It is when a student points out the male leaders' "stupid boyish prank" (8) as the real cause of the disbandment that Harry's self-searching, psychological journey begins.

It is a trans-spatiotemporal odyssey revolving around Harry's introspective activity, which, going beyond time and space, intertwines dream with reality, the present with the past. In the course of the odyssey, Harry encounters visionary images and scenes all relating to his present state of mind, which is a mosaic mixture of the past and the present intermingling with conscious/unconscious desires and pangs. Thus, projected and enacted on the stage are his marriage life on the verge of collapse; illusory scenes revolving around Nina the Nape Woman, an embodiment of his unfulfilled sexuality; a Japanese Samurai movie and a Japanese soap opera coming to life from TV screen; Harry's father's funeral entwined with a fishing scene of Harry and his fisherman father; a dream about Harry's amputated arm; a parachuting dream leading to the reenactment of the crucial moment of Harry's involvement in the past Asian American students' infighting.

Harry's introspective odyssey reaches its climax with his re-encounter with his former self. He now sees his face as a "dog face," "Silent, obedient, dog-face," comparing himself to a dog "that ran home with its tail between its legs" (38). He shifts into finding himself surrounded by his fellow student activists of the 70s and confesses that he betrayed them by informing the school officials of their plan to cut off the head of the school president's dog. Joined by Nina, they start to persistently urge Harry to kill the dog. Instead, he "drives the blade into his own chest" (39).

This is not only a revealing act of Harry's atonement for the past transgression. It also represents Harry's assertion and exertion of his own will to take full responsibility for his own deed, overriding the demanding irrationality of the radical Asian American faction as well as the command of the dominant white authority. Harry finds his heart bleeding now, signifying his regaining of his own will and heart. The curtain falls with Harry awaking from a deep sleep to find "Night is . . . day standing on its head" (41).

The theatrical representation of Harry's self-searching odyssey presents some issues relating to Asian American identity politics. First, sexuality or gender is closely related with ethnicity or race in their identity politics. [5] Asian American men have been symbolically emasculated with their masculinities negated by the dominant white culture (Lee 27-29,62-81; Ling 312-14,317-18). [6] Regaining masculinity often leads to recognition or establishment of one's racial identity. This equation of re-masculinizing with (re-) establishing racial identity holds true for Harry. Harry's dream about his disappearing arm has a symbolical significance in signifying loss of a masculine phallus, namely castration, and also depravation of his means, ability and qualification to write the Asian American movement, which he betrayed. His conjugal relation with Lillian on the verge of collapse due to his unwillingness to have a child endorses his psychological rather than physical incompetence to have a sex with Lillian, which leads her to an extramarital affair, and thus manifests his symbolical emasculation affecting his racial identity. Furthermore, his figurative emasculation is tainted with a homosexual touch as a waiter in the Dream Club kisses Harry.

The emasculation image of Asian males is forged by the dominant, orientalist ideology of White America, embodying the whites' hegemony over Asians. Harry's symbolical emasculation manifests his subservience to this dominant ideology and is closely linked with his traumatic attempt to become another member of the model minority by betraying the Asian American faction. The stereotypical image of the

emasculated Asian men and the myth of model minority are both sociopolitical apparatuses invented and deployed by the whites' racist supremacy. In this sense, his failed marriage and successful assimilation into white culture, both causing him persistent feelings of unfulfillment and guilt, attest to his emasculation by and subordination to the white regime at the cost of his Asian American racial identity. One scene shows Nina driving a knife into Harry's chest. "*Harry staring aghast at the knife sticking out of him*," Nina cries, "he has no heart. No heart. How could I ever be interested in a man who has no feelings, no passion, no fire. The man has no heart. He's already dead and he doesn't even know it" (19). Here, his heart, which does not bleed at all, represents his loss of the Japanese American "heart," which he has suffered since his transgression of betraying the Asian American faction. It is noteworthy in this respect that Harry's self-fashioning-refashioning process is facilitated by Nina the Nape Woman, presumably a product of Harry's unfulfilled sexuality, who, as his initiator, guides him in the course of his journey.

Second, a parents-child or father-son relation in the Japanese tradition should be noted as a key factor in the identity politics of the Japanese American. Harry betrayed his Asian American faction hoping to be successfully assimilated into the white society, by which he thought he could make his parents' dream come true. However, his reminiscence of his father as a fisherman reenacted on the stage suggests Harry's misunderstanding of his father's wish, which, contrary to his expectation, was presumably for Harry to live as an independent Japanese American with pride and faith in himself and his cultural heritage without degrading himself by being subject to racial power relations. Harry is a victim of what Michael Omi called "internalized racism," which represents "how we buy into racism, how we participate in it, and how we engage in a kind of dance of allowing ourselves to be victimized" (Omi xxiii). The background for his internalized racism is suggested by the striking contrast between his mother's prosperous, doctor-relatives and father's seemingly uneducated Hawaiian relatives at his father's funeral, the former representing a model minority

successfully assimilated into white society:

> Harry: . . . I sat with my mother's side of the family. They are very proper. No one yells, no one ever misbehaves, and they all have professional careers . . . .
> Uncle: I'm a pharmacist . . . .
> Aunt: [Trying to top each other] I'm a dentist . . . .
> Uncle: My son's a pediatrician . . . .
> Aunt: My daughter's a brain surgeon . . . .
> Harry: . . . [. . . Two of FATHER'S RELATIVES enter. They're all Hawai'ian—they gamble, they drink . . . . (15-16)

It should be noted here that when Harry later confesses his betrayal of the fellow activists, he identifies himself with the model minority who is burning with rage under the silent frozen mask:

> I told the school officials what we were planning to do. [Beat.] They like people like me. They do. Quiet, hard working. The model minority. We always do what we're told, we're always bowing our heads—we're not dangerous, we're not sexual, we're always wearing this silent frozen mask while inside I want to rage and scream. . . . (39)

Thus, Harry's racial and familial background, nurturing not only the internalized racism but also what Dorinne Kondo calls "a colonization of consciousness" (xiii), has fashioned Harry's orientation leading to his dilemma as to which to choose, the Model Minority[7] or the Resisting Minority.

The third and the most important issue is the trans-spatiotemporal framework of

the setting, [8] which is closely linked with the metamorphoses of characters. In this theatrical framework, Harry's stream of consciousness mixed with unconsciousness unceasingly flows, crossing boundaries between the present and the past. In Harry's mind, the past and the present coexist simultaneously and ubiquitously, intertwining with each other, blurring their distinctions into the melting of reality and dream. For Harry, the past exists not only as the key to solving the obsessive trauma but as an agent in precipitating his reconsideration of the present in relation to his racial, cultural heritage. The present, in turn, confining him in a perpetual deadlock, never stops forcing him to confront and reinterpret the past. Depending on the reinterpretation of the past in relation to the present and vice versa, the present itself endlessly undergoes transformation waiting for the next delineation or demystification. This circular chain of reinterpreting the interrelationship of the past and the present in a desperate attempt to demarcate his identity politics does not end until he can complete his self-fashioning-refashioning, coming to terms with himself.

As Harry's mind travels over time and space, Harry transforms into another Harry from a different time frame with other characters metamorphosing into different figures. In terms of performance, the same actor/actress plays contrastive, or even conflicting roles in terms of his/her relation to Harry. For example, Harry's fisherman father is played by an actor who plays the Old Man, who then turns into the School President, Harry's white boss who enticed him into betraying his comrades, dangling in front of his eyes a promise of a position at his college and an easy passing into a white society. Meanwhile, an actor playing Joe Ozu has multiple roles: Man #1 in Harry's dream; a Harry's student, who points out the male leaders' boyish prank as the cause of the disbandment of the Yellow Guard ; Man (Man #1) enacting a Japanese soap opera on the video with an actress who plays Nina; the Dog of the School President which has its neck slashed by Sam at Harry's confession scene ; and finally Joe himself, who appears, dressed identically with Harry who is bleeding from the heart. Joe Ozu is Harry's alter ego and his initiator, who represents and

reenacts Harry's initiation process by playing these roles relating to various parts of Harry's life. Note, for example, Joe's playing the Dog corresponds to Harry's discovery of himself as a silent and obedient dog, projecting Harry's past transgression and his newly-acquired perception of his former self.

Aside from multiple roles played by one actor/actress, a single character undergoes a drastic transformation. Back in the 70s Yellow Guard scene, Sam appears as a radical leader of the pro-Maoist Yellow Guard, rebelling against the hegemony of the white culture. It is he who hit upon an idea of cutting off the head of the School President's dog. Sam got this idea from the famous scene from the movie "The Godfather," where the mafia sent a Hollywood producer the head of his favorite horse. [9] However, towards the end of this play, this radical activist Sam metamorphoses into a stockbroker, who says "I'm very rich" (40). Sam has been transformed into someone representing the white capitalism which used to be the target of his criticism.

These metamorphoses, embodying the shifting perception of the subject in his/her introspective activity, also connote the fluidity of human relationships, a possibility that one can at any moment transform to an entirely different figure, overriding race, personality, gender and so forth. In other words, one is interchangeable with another, depending on Harry the subject's viewpoint. It means that the same person, the same event, the same phenomenon could look or actually be different, depending on the viewpoints or perception of the subject. Metamorphosis, facilitating actors/actresses to play plural roles, not only deconstructs the conventional fixation of roles based on bodies marked by race, ethnicity, and gender. It also projects what David Henry Hwang calls "the fluidity of culture" which is "born of ever-changing experience and therefore subject to continual reinterpretation" (Hwang viii).

The metamorphoses of Harry and of other characters in the course of his self-searching odyssey represent a fluid shift in Harry's subjectivity, value judgments,

and in his perception of the surrounding world, while projecting the racial, cultural and sexual backgrounds precipitating the metamorphoses. *Day Standing on its Head*, depicting Harry Kitamura's self-fashioning-refashioning process with his undergoing metamorphoses, manifests the identity politics of a Japanese American who goes through ceaseless introspection of his positioning in the shifting racial and cultural matrix in a trans-spatiotemporal realm of consciousness.

III. Velina Hasu Houston, [10] *As Sometimes in a Dead Man's Face* (1994)

The trans-spatiotemporal framework finds another variant in Velina Hasu Houston's *As Sometimes in a Dead Man's Face*. In this play, this unique time frame reflects conflicts and struggles over identity crisis encountered by the so-called "mixed-blood" Amerasians[11] born of interracial unions, who cannot belong to any existing racial category and thus suffer from racial and ethnic indeterminacy.

The play shows the protagonist's transformation into herself at shifting points in the past, enacting various scenes from the past intermingling with the present. Thus, the stage gradually unfolds the relationships of Samantha, her adoptive older brother Daniel, and their mother Emiko, shedding light on segments of the family history over a period of thirty years from 1964 to 1994 revolving around their interraciality: Samantha's hospitalization and her trauma about fire; Daniel's birth and adoption leading to his life at a reform school; Emiko's memory of B-29 bombing during WWII; the growing semi-incestuous relation of Samantha and Daniel in contrast with Emiko's persistent antagonism against Daniel; Samantha and Daniel's correspondence projecting their sexual and physical development leading to their sexual awakening ; long years of Daniel's disappearance followed by his reunion with Samantha and Emiko; Samantha's childhood semi-incestuous sex with (or rape by) Daniel resulting in her traumatic experience of a fire; and Daniel's final parting from Samantha and Emiko. With the story thus unfolding, Samantha's stream of

consciousness in which the past and the present, coexisting simultaneously, fuse into trans-spatiotemporal dimension is represented theatrically by effective use of lights, sounds, and the transformation of the characters. The interracial Amerasian of Japanese descent, going back and forth between the present and the past, is engaged in an endless reconsideration of her relation with her adoptive brother and their interraciality in search for her idiosyncratic, ethnic-gender identity.

The play proposes problematics that engage hybrids born of WWII. Being "mixed blood" and being "born of war," as Samantha and Daniel are, shows that the historical event called war, which brought about the mixed-blood children, determines the power relation between nations, namely the victor and the loser, and that those born out of the two races are marginalized as outcasts who have no racial groups to belong to either in the victor's country or the loser's. Masks of different features worn by the protagonists such as "a mask of iridescent tattoos," "the plain mask," or "no mask and damaged face," are markers signifying the indeterminate identity of the marginalized, outcast mixed-blood Amerasians and manifesting the sufferings and trials they undergo due to racial indeterminacy. [12]

However, it does not follow that the interraciality of the hybrids is always represented negatively. Samantha uses a color metaphor to distinguish interraciality as something special:

> SAMANTHA: You see, Mother. We're different. When you mix red and blue, you get violet. It's easy when you're painting on paper, but not so easy when you're painting pigment.
>
> EMIKO: What are you talking about?
>
> MAN [Daniel]: I'm violet.
>
> SAMANTHA: Violet.
>
> MAN: It means I get to choose what I want to be because I don't fit into what's already there.

SAMANTHA: No, it means being real, being special.

MAN: It means camouflage. It means life is make-believe. (78)

In contrast to Samantha's comment on the color metaphor, David's interpretation is cynical. It is because he suffers from extra racial indeterminacy.

Among those hybrid children born of war are war orphans of the mixed-race who suffer twofold racial indeterminacy: they cannot identify their parents' (or rather their American father's) racial or ethnic identity, which aggravates their identity crisis, making their racial identity all the more indeterminate. Unlike Samantha whose father is an "upstanding African American soldier" with a "medal of good conduct, citations for bravery" (97), Daniel, being "the only brown Amerasian in the orphanage outside Tokyo" and "adopted before you [Samantha]' re born" (96-97), represents mixed-blood war orphans. Emiko says to him, "But you're not Chicano and you're not black and you're not white, okay? Whether you like it or not, your mother was Japanese and your father was Mexican or maybe African American . . . You're mixed . . ." (77). In fact, in his desperate attempt to find an ethnic group which would accept him, he repeatedly steals things to give to children of various racial groups, all of whom in turn reject him, calling him "chink-face" or "nigger." (89). Furthermore, his hybridity born of unidentified parentage is equated with contamination of pure blood and "deseases" by Emiko, who, calling his unidentified mother "A streetwalker with a tattoo," abuses him by saying "Bad blood means bad life wherever you [Daniel] go. Japanese don't want bad blood. It doesn't wash out. It won't wash out" (76). Daniel's desperate search for his mother is inscribed in his body: "*On his chest is the tattoo of a heart with ribbons and the word 'Mom' in the middle of the heart*" (77). As Daniel repeatedly says, "Samantha's my mother" (78), his semi-incestuous love for Samantha reflects his craving for a mother substitute, suggesting his struggle to discover his racial identity or to come to terms with his interraciality by securing maternal raciality.

It must be noted here that Samantha's awakening to her racial identity as a mixed-blood Amerasian is closely linked with her sexual rather than gender awakening, which is brought about by her sexual relation with Daniel. As is already mentioned, the gendered race consciousness of the Amerasian has often been presented and represented as the emasculation obsession of Asian American men. Here, however, the semi-incestuous relationship between Samantha and Daniel suggests a possibility of creating a new interraciality through the sexual union of the mixed-blood man and woman. In other words, sexuality is directly related to racial hybridity in that the sexual union of hybrids gives birth to a new mixed-blood person.

Josephine Lee points out, "interracial marriage (sometimes branded miscegenation)" represents " a theatrical fascination with traversing, sundering, or transgressing the boundaries demarcating Asia from non-Asian (especially white) [which] is not new" (192). [13] And "The theatrical treatment of taboos such as interracial sex can arouse audiences and the playwright seem politically progressive, yet result in a dramatic outcome in which racial boundaries are ultimately reinforced" (Lee 192). However, with the shifting demographics, the recent multiracial milieu in the U. S. shows a different picture. According to Lisa Lowe, "once arriving in the United States, very few Asian immigrant cultures remain discrete, impenetrable communities; the more recent groups mix, in varying degrees, with segments of the existing groups ; Asian Americans may intermarry with other racialized ethnic groups . . . . The boundaries and definitions of Asian American cultures are continually shifting and being contested from pressures both 'inside' and 'outside' the Asian-origin community" (66). [14] Thus, the present prospect of the ongoing hybridization going hand in hand with multiculturalism in the United States tempts one to assume that interracial sex is no longer a taboo.

However, in Houston's *As Sometimes in a Dead Man's Face*, the cultural, social and biological taboo of interracial sex is intensified as semi-incest. Furthermore, that Samantha has her internal organs extracted and is confined in the

closed space of a hospital room signifies her body deprived of its ability to bear a child of the new race :

> SAMANTHA : The tube. The tube goes in your nose. It's about the size of number-two lead pencil. It goes in and they say swallow hard and it shoves its way down your throat, scraping, gagging —and they say don't gag, don't cough—and it pokes into your stomach and they say good girl, Samantha, good girl. And they say appendicitis, gallstones, kidney stones, bowel obstruction, fucked-up life and they take out the knives, take out the knives, and I— (76)

> SAMANTHA : . . . The doctor said. She said that I can't have children. Well, not that I can't but that I shouldn't. (91)

The anatomical dismantlement or deconstruction of her body, which is inscribed with the interracial identity, symbolizes difficulties and obstacles confronted by interracial unions and racial hybridity even in the multicultural, social context. [15]

Houston herself is a hybrid "Amerasian born of America's first war with Asia" and "the daughter of one such Japanese woman [war bride] and an American soldier who was half Native American Indian and half African American" (qtd. in Uno 155). She does have an older adoptive brother identical with Daniel. [16] Therefore, it is not surprising that she directs her creative impulse to delving into her family history with focus on the Japanese "war brides" and their mixed-blood children, exploring problematics as to interraciality born of war. *As Sometimes in a Dead Man's Face* articulates her such effort. The metamorphoses of Samantha, Daniel and Emiko are instrumental in retrieving, making visible, and spatializing another history of the hybrid Japanese Amerasians erased and ignored by the dominant regimes of

representability. They are multi-dimentional and multifaceted representations of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality inscribed in the body of the Amerasian.

IV. Conclusion :

The identity politics of Japanese Americans consists of incessant, conscious/unconscious introspective activities involving the subject's endless recurrence of metamorphosis in the trans-spatiotemporal dimension. This process of self-fashioning-and-refashioning of Asian American /Amerasian subjectivity involves problematics, which are symbolized by the image of anatomical deconstruction of Asian American/Amerasian bodies represented by Harry Kitamura's dream of the disappearing arm and Samantha's postoperative body with its internal organs extracted.

Gotanda renders the identity politics of an Asian American male of Japanese descent, with his renewed, idiosyncratic identity overriding racial conflicts and with his restoration of masculinity precipitated by female sexuality. Meanwhile, Houston depicts the awakening of a mixed-blood Japanese Amerasian female with her gendered, interracial identity facilitated by her semi-incestuous relation with her older adoptive brother. Gotanda and Houston differ in that Gotanda makes a political issue of the conflicts between races, with still deep-rooted racial boundaries, whereas Houston explores racial hybridity born of war as a new multicultural, multiracial possibility.

Yet, Gotanda and Houston, with different focuses, styles, and backgrounds, share an artistic impulse to dramatize the identity politics of Asian Americans of Japanese descent. Their theatrical representation of the trans-spaciotemporal setting projecting the past and the present in juxtaposition not only presents the racial, cultural, political, and gender-related problematics revolving around the identity politics of the Japanese American from the historical perspective, but show their metamorphosis as a strategy of identity politics in the ever-changing multiracial and

multicultural matrix.

Notes

An earlier version of this paper was presented at an international drama conference "Crucible of Cultures: Anglophone Drama at the Dawn of a New Millennium" organized by the Department of English of the University of Brussels in Brussels, Belgium on 19 May 2001.

1 Kondo makes explicit the concept of "Asian American" as follows :

> "Asian American" is a historically specific, coalitional identity that embraces peoples of Asian origin, and with the increasing use of the term "Asian Pacific American," peoples from the Pacific Islands. "Asian Pacific Americans" come from nations of origins often with rivalrous, sometimes even mutually hostile, relations ; it is the shared historical horizon of racism in this country that creates a common struggle and political solidarity. Thus, "Asian American" is a strategic alliance, not an inert, monolithic category. And like any collective identity, it is in turn crosscut by other forces, including gender, class and sexuality. Above all, "Asian American" and "Asian Pacific American" call forth new kinds of racialized subjects and perform new kinds of racial identities (ix).

Lisa Lowe elaborates on a concept of political unity put forth by the articulation of an "Asian American identity" and on the crucial need for the "building of 'Asian American culture'":

> The articulation of an "Asian American identity" as an organizing tool has provided a concept of political unity that enables diverse Asian groups to understand unequal circumstances and histories as being related. The building of "Asian American culture" is crucial to this effort, for it articulates and empowers the diverse Asian-origin community vis-à-vis the institutions and apparatuses that excluded and marginalize it (Lowe 70-71).

For a brief discussion of the concept of "Asian American," see also Lee (16), Lowe (66-67), and Wei (1). On Asian American history, culture, and cultural politics, see Lowe ; Okihiro; Palumbo-Liu ; and Takaki.

2 For book-length studies on Asian American theater, see Lee (1997) and Kurahashi (1999). For Asian American drama anthologies, see Berson's *Between Worlds* (1990), Roberta Uno's *Unbroken Thread* (1993), Velina Hasu Houston's *The Politics of Life* (1993) and *But Still,*

Like Air, I'll Rise (1997), Brian Nelson's *Asian American Drama* (1997). Several book-length studies on Asian American Literature and Asian American Studies are useful for understanding socio-political history of the Asian Americans and their literature, multiracial and multicultural issues, and problematics concerning gender and race represented by Asian American drama and prose : Cheung, ed. *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (1997) ; Kim, *Asian American Literature* (1982) ; Juan, ed. *The State of Asian America : Activism and Resistance in the 1990s* (1994) ; Li, *Imagining the Nation* (1998) ; Lim and Ling, eds. *Reading the Literatures of Asian American* (1992) ; Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (1996) ; Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams* (1994) ; Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American : Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (1999) ; Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (1998) ; Trudeau, ed., *Asian American Literature* (1999) ; and Wong, *From Necessity to Extravagance* (1993).

3 I am grateful to Takayoshi Ishiwari for bringing to my attention the concept of postmodern metamorphosis, which helped me formulate my own argument and analysis of Asian American metamorphosis.

4 A Sansei, a third-generation Japanese American, Philip Kan Gotanada (1949-), is a renowned playwright and filmmaker, who, along with David Henry Hwang, is a pioneer in Asian American Drama, having achieved remarkable success in the theater. With more mainstream theatrical venues staging his plays such as *A Song For A Nisei Fisherman, The Wash*, and *Yankee Dawg You Die*, Gotanda, "leap[ing] from the 'margins' to the mainstream of the theater world" (Omi xvi), has now become a powerful voice for Asian Americans in American Theater.

Gotanda's creative exploration of the Japanese American experience derives largely from his experience of growing up in a Japanese American community in Stockton, California, which mediated his perception of America, forging his outlook of Japanese America. As Michael Omi comments, "Drawing upon the sensations experienced in the Japanese American community in Stockton, Gotanda recreates a slice of that world and illuminates it for his audience. He depicts the rituals, the relations, the conversations, and, in essence, the sight, sounds, and smells of Japanese America" (xvii). For further information and discussion on Gotanda and his work, see Omi (xi-xxvi), Berson (30-34), Trudeau (101-113), and Vorlicky (190-200, passim).

5 On this issue, see Ling (1997) and Wong (1992).

6 Ling distinguishes the notion of "emasculation" from that of "feminization" in term of the racial gendering of Asian / Asian American men :

> Rather, the two terms ["emasculation" and "feminization] appear to occupy related yet different layers of a socially produced configuration, in which "emasculation" more fully

suggests the overall social consequence of the displacement of Asian men's subject position, whereas "feminizaiton" constitutes but one specific form of Asian men's racial gendering in America, as differing from (not opposed to) another form to which they are sometimes subject – the perception of them as sex fiends. Both these forms of cultural racism toward Asian men in America contribute to their social and political "emasculation" in a context of patriarchal capitalism. (314)

Discussing David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (1986) as illuminating the West's self-serving application of the "feminization" of Asians and Carlos Bulosan's autobiography, *America Is in the Heart* (1946) as showing the white men's construction of Filipino male immigrants as sex fiends (314-17), Ling argues, "The racial gendering of the Asian/Asian American man reflected in Hwang's and Bulosan's texts thus illustrate not only the institutional need to 'emasculate' Asian males in the process of their incorporation into American society, but also the dependence of such 'emasculation' on the ideological norm of male domination over women" (317).

7 The "model minority" myth, along with "yellow peril" discourse, is a strongly-operating, politically strategic apparatus forged and deployed by U.S. Orientalism and white supremacy to maintain hegemony over Asian Americans by racializing and gendering them as an inferior, malleable, homogeneous, feminine race, who, never challenging the dominant white society, can be assimilated into American life. On other aspects of this subject, see Lowe (68) and Kim (18-19, 177-180). For an incisive discussion of the complicit relation of the "model minority" and the "yellow peril" myths, see Okihiro (141-145), who elaborates this issue by discussing two racial archetypes, Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan, as representations of the yellow peril and model minority.

8 Many of Gotanda's plays place their characters in the trans-spatiotemporal dimension. About one of such plays, *Yankee Dawg You Die*, Vorlikcy comments, "Freeing characters' lives from the constraints of time, space, and action to create variations in male subjectivity, the playwright of nonrealism deconstructs cultural codings that forge, in drama, one's social identity" (191).

9 Actually, the Yellow Guard scene is accompanied by music similar to "The Godfather" theme suggestive of the affinity between the Yellow Guard and the mafia. This similarity is more explicitly represented by the Italian Samurai who "Looks Mafioso," emerging with "a musical tag similar to the theme from 'The Godfather'" (14) from a Japanese samurai movie which comes to life.

10 Velina Hasu Houston (1957-) calls herself "An Amerasian born of America's first war with Asia" and "the daughter of one such Japanese woman and an American soldier who was half Native American Indian and half African American" (qtd. in Uno 155). A leading

Asian American playwright and scholar, Houston's creative impulse to delve into her family history as portrayed in her family trilogy including *Asa Ga Kimashita* (*Morning Has Broken*), *American Dreams*, and *Tea*, not only documents history of the Japanese American experience and of the Japanese "war bride," but also explores interracial relations in light of the politics of culture, race, class, gender and sexuality. Houston continues to open up a new vista of Asian American Drama : "I will never cease to be political because I will never cease being female or being multiracial, multlicultural person of color" (Houston 1993a, 213). For further information on Houston and her plays, see Houston (1993a, 207-217), Lee (199-204), and Uno (155-160).

11 According to Palumbo-Liu, "The term 'Amerasian' was coined by Pearl Buck in *East Wind, West Wind*, and referred to children of Asian mothers and American fathers left fatherless in Asia ; its redeployment signals the historical continuity of America's engagements in Asia and the effects of those engagement" (252). However, the term "Amerasian" now refers more comprehensively to individuals born of Asian fathers or mothers and American fathers or mothers either living in or outside the United States. Houston, not confining the reference of the Amerasian to those left in Asia, defines the Amerasian as "someone who is half Asian (usually native Asian) and half American," adding that "The American half can be of any racial extraction" (1993a, 9).

12 Emiko "wears a mask of a sad-faced Japanese woman." (76). Her mask may possibly represent sorrows of a Japanese woman who knows the hardships awaiting her mixed-blood children, feeling burdened with grave responsibility for giving birth to them without much resource.

13 Lee lists representative New York productions of plays which "portrayed doomed love affairs between interracial couples" : *A Japanese Nightingale* (1903), *East is West* (1918), *His Chinese Wife* (1920), *Aloma of the South Seas* (1925), *Uptown West* (1923), and David Belasco's *Madame Butterfly* (1900) (192).

14 On the subject of hybridity, see Lowe (60-83), who, stressing "heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity in the characterization of Asian American culture" (66-67) as "concepts that assist us in critically understanding the material conditions of Asians in the United States, conditions in excess of the dominant, 'orientalist' construction of Asian Americans" (67), elucidates the concept of hybridity as follows : "By 'hybridity,' I refer to the formation of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations . . . . Hybridity, in this sense, does not suggest the assimilation of Asian or immigrant practices to dominant forms but instead marks the history of survival within relationships of unequal power and domination" (67) ; also see Palumbo-Liu (34, 49).

15 Houston explores the problematics as to interracial love and hybridity also in *Tea* (1987), which portrays the lives of five Japanese war brides, revolving around the death of one of

these women, Himiko. In this play, Houston presents two contrastive aspects of hybridity. One is a positive image as a new racial identity characterized by appearance and intelligence:

> Setsuko: . . . She doesn't look Japanese, they say, and she doesn't look Negro. And I am glad because I have created something new, something that will look new and think new.
> Chiz: . . . Hybrid Japanese.
> Teruko: Mixed Japanese kids at school are very smart. Teachers say they've never seen anything like it. (187)

However, the other aspect projects the ruthless violence and death encountered by the hybrid Japanese as is shown by a tragic death of Himiko's daughter Mieko: "Someone made her [Mieko] dirty, stabbed her in the chest many times and then raped her as she died. Left a broom inside my little girl's body. Her brassiere was shredded by the knife" (198). Lee comments that "Her horrible death is tied not only to the violence of men, but also, the play suggests, to 'the confusion of ... [her] Amerasian skin'" (202).

16 Houston's "older adoptive brother, Joji Kawada Houston, one of the first Amerasians born after World War II, disappeared in 1984" (Houston 1993a, 208-209). Note here that Daniel is identified with Masao Kawada in *As Sometimes in a Dead Man's Face*: Samantha says, "Daniel Sedgwick and Masao Kawada are the same people . . . He's been missing for ten years" (91).

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