

BAGMAL NEWSLETTER

BOSTON ASIAN GAY MEN AND LESBIANS

APRIL 1988

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STAFF for this Issue

S. H. Chua
Arthur Carbonell
Jin Gui

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Boston Asian Gay Men &
Lesbians (soon to be AMALGM)
c/o Glad Day Bookshop
673 Boylston Street
Boston MA 02116
(617)-267-3010

The BAGMAL Newsletter is published monthly except during the summer, when a bi-monthly schedule may be in effect. Subscription is \$10/year. One free sample issue will be sent upon request, after which payment is expected. Subscriptions will be exchanged with other organizations. The Newsletter staff encourages submissions from its readers. All contributions not accepted will be returned provided a SASE is enclosed.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHINESE LESBIANISM PART I

translated by Barry and S.H. Chua

The following are excerpts from the chapter on Chinese lesbianism in Sam Sasha's (Xiaomingxiong) *A History of Homosexuality in China (Zhongguo Tongxinai Shilu)*. Sam Sasha, a Hong Kong gay activist wrote and published the original in Chinese several years ago. We hope this translation will make the material accessible to a larger audience. Part II will appear in next month's newsletter. Thanks to Sam Sasha.

S.H. and Barry

The Traditional Role of Women in China

Chinese women had no real standing of their own in traditional feudal society. Since the beginning of Chinese history Chinese women were treated as subordinate, lowly, passive, gentle, docile "organisms". The *Yijing (I-Ching)* advised the Chinese woman "not to seek satisfaction but to remain chaste and faithful to her husband.... In the family, the woman's place is on the inside, the man's on the outside. With the male and female in balance, heaven and earth will be in harmony." This is to say that the woman should stay peacefully at home; the affairs of politics and society are the concerns of man. To be otherwise would upset Confucianism's "Five Conventions".

Owing to the influence of Confucianist, male-centered family ideology, ideas such as "the death of a female is a small thing, the loss of her virginity is of major importance" and "the man on the

(continued on Page 8)



The Museum of Fine Arts' New Chinese Cinema series features *A Good Woman*, which depicts the oppression of women in traditional Chinese society. The picture above is from *Yellow Earth*. (see page 6)

AMALGM - Our New Name

Jack Lo, co-chair

April 17 1988 is an important date for members of the Asian gay and lesbian community. We have renamed our organization as **Alliance of Massachusetts Asian Lesbians and Gay Men (AMALGM)**. Our new name symbolizes an evolution of the Asian gay and lesbian community. It also indicates a new sign of the solidarity between Asian lesbians and gay men.

The proposal to rename our organization was announced in January 1988. The process finally resulted in a choice between adopting the proposed new name AMALGM or retaining our original name Boston Asian Gay Men and Lesbians (BAGMAL). At the April 17 meeting those who favored AMALGM were Arthur, Sally, Takeo and Jack. Those who favored retaining BAGMAL were Vickie, who represented a few others whom she had talked to, and Siong-huat who was not present but had sent in a letter.

We evaluated both names in a pros-and-cons manner:

AMALGM:

- AMALGM as an acronym has the definition of mixtures of different elements.
- AMALGM tells people we welcome Asian lesbians and gay men in Massachusetts, not just Boston.
- For the first time we place lesbians before gay men since lesbian women are always in a secondary status even within the "gay and lesbian community".
- AMALGM also signifies the solidarity and alliance of

Asian lesbians and gay men.

BAGMAL:

- BAGMAL has existed for about a decade.
- We have a long history and are established in the community. People recognize BAGMAL as representative of the gay Asian community.
- The sound of AMALGM is not any better than BAGMAL.

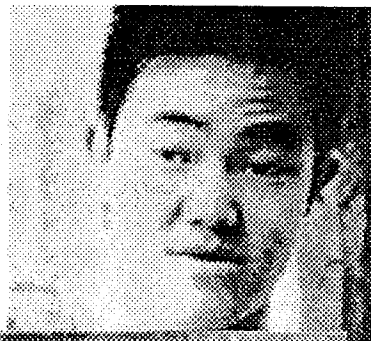
Both sides did not agree on the connotations of the other. Some feel AMALGM represents a step forward for the Asian lesbian and gay male community. Our scope will cover all of Massachusetts instead of just the Boston area. AMALGM does imply our organization's awareness of racism, feminism, culture and homophobia issues. We are moving towards a new era. Those who favored AMALGM also feel confident enough that people will learn our new name, and will be able to recognize AMALGM (formerly BAGMAL) as an integral part of the lesbian and gay community.

It is unfortunate that only 5 members attended this important meeting. However from an organizational view point we must reach a decision through the available resources. The debate was set in an open atmosphere.

AMALGM stands for our organization and our community which is moving forward in a progressive manner. Your continued support is crucial for the development of the Asian lesbian and gay community. •••

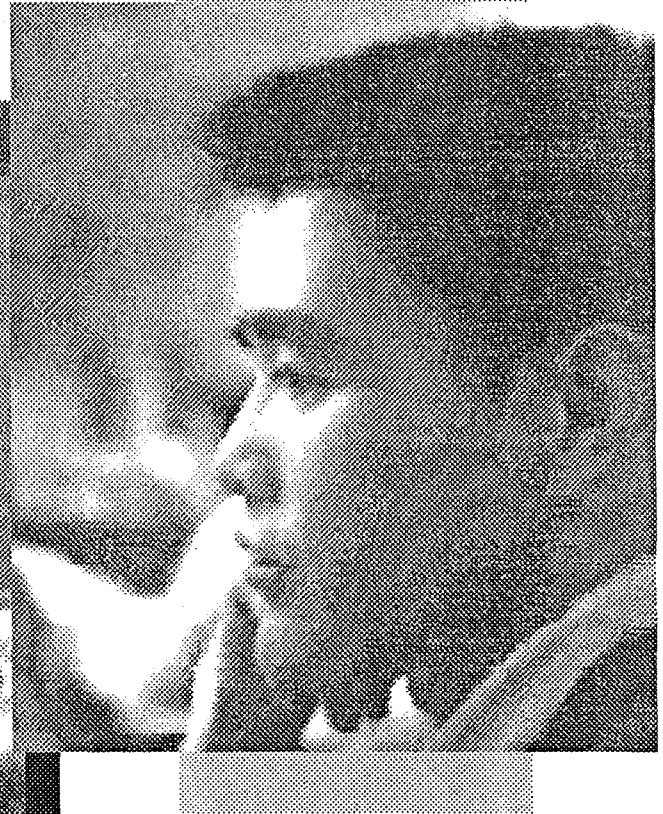
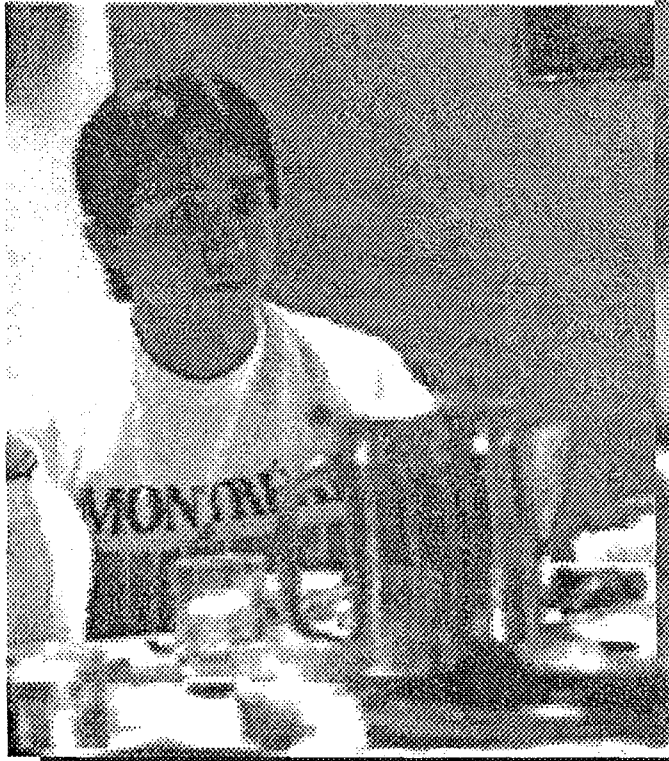
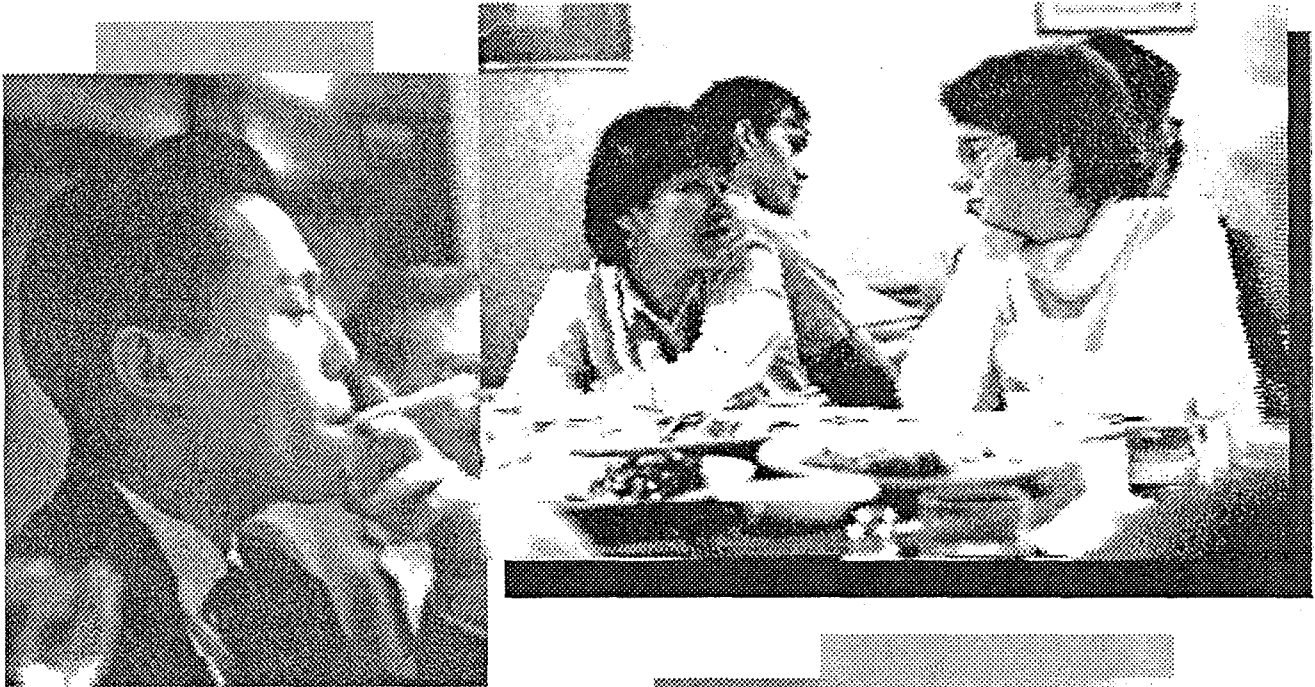
CALENDAR

VIDEO PARTY Richard Fung's ORIENTATIONS



Orientations the pioneering video about Asian lesbians and gay men by Richard Fung of Toronto will be shown at a video party at Siong-huat's on Sunday May 8 beginning at 6 p.m. Richard's video lets Asian gay people speak for themselves; the diversity of experiences, age and ethnicities represented is awe-inspiring. The video runs for 1 hour. After that we will all go out to dinner together at a nearby restaurant. We are asking donations of \$3 to help pay for the video rental. Dinner is dutch. Place: 91 Westland Ave. #420 Boston. Directions: Down the street from Symphony Hall. Subway stops: Auditorium or Symphony on Green Line, Mass. Ave. on Orange Line. Please bring a dime to call from across the street (there is no door bell). Tel: 536-9309. This is a BAGMAL (AMALGM) social event - all Asian lesbians and gay men and their friends are welcome.

*CHINESE/VIETNAMESE NEW YEAR BANQUET
FEBRUARY 1988*



*Clockwise from top left: Tony, Connie & Barbara, Jack and Johnny
(Photos: Arthur Carbonell)*

Asians and AIDS

by Jack Lo

The AIDS epidemic has drawn global attention. However the issue of Asians and AIDS is being neglected both within and outside the Asian community.

There are myths that AIDS is a gay white American disease and that Asians have a special immune system against the AIDS virus. A recent study from San Francisco reports that there are 79 new cases of Asians diagnosed with AIDS since the last six months. This is 3.1% of all new AIDS cases in San Francisco. Asians comprise 0.9% of the total cases of AIDS nationally. Experts feel this figure is underreported. San Francisco is the only city that breaks down statistics for Asians. There are no other specific data gathered on Asians with AIDS. Other than San Francisco most other cities in the U.S. have categorized whites, blacks, Latinos and Hispanics as racial target groups for the incidence of AIDS but Asians are not one of the racial categories. Until recently San Francisco's Center for Disease Control (CDC) categorized Asians as "others". There have been suggestions to the CDC to break down each Asian ethnic group since different ethnic groups from Asia have different cultural backgrounds and needs. However this suggestion was turned down; the reason given was that this ethnic breakdown was not worth it and was too much trouble.

There is a lack of counseling resources for Asians with AIDS. Some Asians hesitate from going to the doctor until they become very sick. Many Asians feel that being diagnosed with AIDS will

jeopardize the standing of their families and place burdens on their families as well.

There are no bilingual counseling and safer sex material targeted towards Asians who do not speak English adequately to express their feelings on AIDS.

The nature of most Asian culture is not to talk about sex which also forbids Asians from discussing the issue of AIDS candidly.

Because the issue of AIDS and Asians is being neglected by society in general, many Asians themselves choose not to deal with the issue. Asians who test positive for the HIV virus or who contract AIDS face tremendous isolation and rejection.

There is an Asian AIDS Project in San Francisco. This is a one-year old government-funded organization which employs two full-time staff and two interns. The purpose of the organization is to reach the general Asian population including youths, community organizations, schools, etc. The group designed an Asian model for stopping AIDS. The group also provides service and referral. At this time, the Asian AIDS project does not have the resources to provide direct counseling. The project does hold discussions on AIDS-related issues targeted towards Asians with AIDS, the Asian lovers of people with AIDS and others. This is the only known Asian AIDS-related organization.

In Boston the South Cove Community Health Center, a Chinatown Health Clinic is working on the protocol for blood screening

for the HIV virus. Employees of the center attended a conference at the Boston City Hospital last October and a conference in New York on AIDS and minorities. These conferences discuss the issues of AIDS and the fear of AIDS. The center is planning to design safer sex material in Asian languages. According to Helen Wong, the center's health educator, most Asians in Chinatown are rather conservative and the Asian population in Boston is not very big. For these reasons she feels it is difficult to carry on AIDS education in Boston Chinatown on a larger scale.

Please turn to Page 11 for Safer Sex Guidelines.

What is the Point of View of Chinese Medicine on AIDS?

In its March 28 1988 issue *Outlook Weekly*, a Chinese magazine published in Hong Kong reports on 2 prominent Chinese doctors' medical experience with an AIDS patient. One doctor is from Beijing, the other is Chinese American. These doctors determined the disease as a "warm disease". The virus invades the body's internal energy and blood. They developed three treatment procedures. The first step is to replace warm blood with clean "cool blood". They adopted the prescription of a famous "warm blood disease" specialist from the Ching Dynasty. The second step is to work on internal energy and yang. The third step is to use stronger herbs of both treatments emphasizing the production of positive blood and energy. The magazine reports that the treatment is effective but that larger-scale research is still required to find the cure for the disease.

Gadding about with Arthur Carbonell

Man, did I get my ass in a sling this week. Two women went and really put the screws to me and sent me through all kinds of changes. But when it was over and done with - Nirvana!

I retrieved a message to me from Jack Sunday morning from the BAGMAL (AMALGM) hot line stating that Karin had left a letter with Nadia. Later, SH told me that Karin's letter was in response to what I had written in the March issue of Gadding About. Jack left the letter at Glad Day for me to pick up. SH and I had planned on getting to together Wednesday evening to work on the newsletter you're now reading. Enroute to SH's apartment, I stopped by Glad Day to pick up the letter. Outside, I tore open the envelope and anticipated reading what I thought to be a few casual mild remarks. I had spoken to Karin earlier to ask if she would write an article on the Asian Lesbians of the World Slide Show. I also casually asked her about the letter she had written about my article. She retorted that it was just a mild response to what I had written.

Rifling through the stapled, handwritten pages, I noticed that there were two letters and not one. The first had been written by Nadia, the second from Karin. Reading through the opening lines of Nadia's letter, I noticed a hostile tone to the writing. Halfway through, I was stunned! "Oh Shit!" I said. "What is this?" I couldn't read a piece of this nature out on the street, so I briskly crossed over to the Boston Public Library, walked up to the mezzanine level and set my self down to read through the two letters. It was read. I WAS LIVID!!! FIT TO BE TIED! I read it twice, thrice, then once more. I couldn't believe it. Can it be, is it possible? . . . that, Nadia's emotion got the best of her and had read more into the article than there was. Just some bit of trifle. Words written merely to titillate.

At the office the next morning, I asked Carol and Gloria, both educated, Carol in her early thirties and Gloria in her upper forties. I explained the situation. "Well no wonder!" exclaimed the both of them. Simply put, they stated that women have been looked upon as mere sex objects with no regards to their intelligence. Women liked to be complimented on their attractiveness, but not when it excluded everything else about them. Their answers were vague to the question of femininity. They said nothing to the dictionary's definition of femininity: soft and gentle. That was the extent of their knowledge of the women's movement.

That afternoon, I checked out three books from the Boston Public Library on the women's movement for a deeper understanding of the issue. The three hours of skimming and reading altered my view on women. I felt compassionate. Nadia's reaction to my piece was now better understood.

In a nutshell, from what I've managed to grasp of the issues, the women's movement is thus, the struggle to liberate themselves from the tyranny of their sexuality which directly affects their socio-economics and psychology.

This column is not meant to be intellectual, rather, a means to form a sense of cohesiveness amongst the members in the group. However, I am impelled to assert a few statements regarding the women's issue. The breadth and depth of the subject is such that definitive statements cannot be made but, rather, to issue forth ideas to be mulled and deliberated.

All things are viewed from perspectives. Thus, upon what perspective is the women's movement based? Does it take into account all of the ramifications? What, in essence, is man? (man, here, encompasses women) Is man

essentially a spirit creature inhabiting, for the moment, a material form? Or, is man purely biological? And, if he is purely biological, what are thoughts? Is there, and if there is, man's purpose in being? What is man's relationship to his community, the world, and the cosmos? What is the nature and purpose of man's sexuality? Is the women's movement addressing itself purely upon the mundane? How does the movement define femininity and masculinity?

For some, the majority of the above questions posed may not appear to have any bearing on the topic of discussion. In order to make effective and constructive changes, understanding relationships amongst varying factors must be considered, and weighed. For to address an issue for the sake of the self or specific group without regarding its affect upon others would be courting disaster. In particular, the women's cause. In changing the psychology of women's femininity, the attracting forces between men and women may be negated. A case in point: Carol and Gloria related to me how through the course of their relationships with men, always at a certain given point in the relationship, the man simply backed off and ran. This was the case too with their women friends. They think it is fear, fear of what, they are not certain.

As to the remarks made on Nadia's appearance at the banquet, I simply meant that Nadia showed good taste. Her choice of wearing apparel with regards to line, form, proportion, color and texture harmonized with her form and persona. With my new found knowledge and understanding of the women's issue, I do agree that the mere mention of women's liberation does allude to a political statement. However, the style, and line to the garment

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In Response:

On reading "Gadding About with Arthur Carbonell" in the March issue of the BAGMAL Newsletter. I was dismayed to find that reference had been made to my attendance and appearance at the BAGMAL New Year's banquet.

First, my name was used in this publication without my knowledge, and my consent. Second Arthur's description of my attire is loosely used to support an aesthetic and political statement that I neither agree with nor particularly exemplify. And third, Arthur uses his statement of aesthetic preference to make an inverted attack on feminism and/or feminists by projecting an aggressive and violent stance on a woman.

Arthur begins by stating that my "smart and stylish" attire reminds him of "how women came into full swing." He comments that "V" will call me and gun me down with both barrels", and then he finishes with his idea of femininity, "I don't think there is anything quite like a woman's femininity, especially when she's wearing White Shoulders (it's a perfume!)"

Arthur begins with the simple mention of my attendance at the banquet and moves through to fairly sexual image of femininity. This final image holds the illusion that I may have arrived that night with my shoulders bared, wearing White Shoulders flaunting my "pre-feminist femininity". This is not a direct reference to me - it is a subjective fantasy. I do not see myself, nor do I wish to be seen as a paragon of pre or post feminism. And in the future, I do not want my name to be used in this publication without my consent. It seems that we women have yet to be fully liberated from the idea that our primary virtue lies in our appearance.

Nadia

BAGMAL Newsletter April 1988

April 23, 1988

Dear Arthur Carbonell (BAGMAL newsletter editor), et al:

Thanks for sending me the last newsletter. It looks like I missed an elegant banquet at Chinese New Year's which was probably a good thing, as I might have forgotten to squeeze into a frilly dress and pumps - and who knows what you'd say about me in the next newsletter.

Oh, Arthur, didn't you hear gay men rejected sexism long ago? Once upon a time, gentlemen thought it civilized to comment on the physical appearance of ladies, who thought it civilized to dress up for men. But as we move into the latter part of the century (call it "post-women's liberation" if you want although it'll be news to a lot of women that we've been freed), the parameters of civilization have changed.

Perhaps it's not obvious to gay men, but traditional notions about female sexuality are confining to most women. Part of being a lesbian is rejecting male standards of beauty and femininity - and adopting our own. Unfortunately, sexist society doesn't understand our motives, and stereotypically casts us as "fashion-impaired."

Arthur, dear, it's not that lesbians can't dress well. We just don't want to dress for you.

Sincerely,
Karin A. San Juan

Editors' Note: Our policy is not to publish the full name of anyone in the Newsletter without their explicit permission. We reserve the right to report on events using first names. Please inform us if you are uncomfortable with this.

Movies

The Museum of Fine Arts' popular Spring '87 series of Chinese movies is being repeated this year. The schedule is as follows:

May 5 5:30 p.m. *Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige 1985; Guanxi Studio) 90 minutes.

May 5 8:00 p.m. *In the Wild Mountains* (Yan Xueshu 1986; Xi'an Studio). 105 minutes.

May 12 5:30 p.m. *Sacrificed Youth* (Zhang Nuanxin 1985; Beijing Film Academy Youth Film Studio). 100 minutes

May 12 8:00 p.m. *A Good Woman* (Huang Jianzhong 1986; Beijing Film Studio) 110 minutes

May 19 5:30 p.m. *The Black Cannon Incident* (Huang Jianxin 1985; Xi'an Studio) 107 minutes

May 19 8:00 p.m. *On the Hunting Ground* (Tian Zhuang-zhuang 1986; Inner Mongolia Studio) 83 minutes

All films are by China's "fifth generation" of filmmakers, graduates of the Beijing Film Academy after it reopened following the Cultural Revolution. *A Good Woman* is especially interesting in its depiction of the traditional oppression of Chinese women as it tells the story of an 18-year-old girl trapped in an arranged marriage to a 6-year-old boy. Tickets are \$3 (students, seniors and MFA members) and \$3.50 (general admission) and can be purchased 1 hour before each show. Series tickets for all 6 shows can be ordered in advance. Call 267-9300 ext 306 for more info. If last year's attendance is any indication you are well advised to arrive early or purchase the series tickets in advance.

Niezi

The Outsiders based on Pai Hsien Yung's novel *Niezi* will be playing May 4-6 at the Nickelodeon Theater 606 Comm. Ave. Boston as part of the 4th annual Boston Gay and Lesbian Festival. We apologize for wrong dates in our last issue. (For times: 424-1500)

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Have you remembered to renew your subscription? The Newsletter staff is working hard to bring you news, reviews and articles which are lively, entertaining, informative and controversial. If you have received a notice from us please send in your subscription renewal. We need your financial support to carry on. Remember the Newsletter is only \$10/- a year for 11-12 issues - less than \$1 per issue. Please renew now.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Gay and Lesbian Speakers' Bureau is seeking people of color to participate in their speaking programs. Please call 354-0133 for more information.

**Northeastern Asian
Lesbian, Gay and
Bisexual Retreat
Planned**

The first retreat for Asian lesbians, gays and bisexuals in the Northeast will take place on a farm in upstate New York from Friday evening to Sunday May 20-22 1988. This retreat will address the critical problems and social needs of Asian lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Organized by an independent network of Asian lesbians and gay men from four northeastern cities, the retreat will tackle issues which include social and racial isolation in both the Asian and gay communities and personal and political difficulties in interracial relationships and existing "Asian and Friends" gay organizations.

Workshops will also offer opportunities and time for Asian Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals to support one another through shared experiences and to strategize together around how to counsel one another, create viable and effective support networks and organize to change problems which exist in present organizations. Caucus time and workshops are also planned to include the special needs of Asian lesbian, gay and bisexual youth, older people and people with disabilities.

Attendance at this retreat will be limited. Confidentiality assured. For more information, contact the following number before May 7 1988.

617-623-1129

Gadding: from Page 5

does exemplify the general trends of the late 50's and early 60's. Leaf through any Vogue magazine of that period and the photographs will substantiate my statement.

The line, "Vickie will call me and gun me down with both barrels," was not written in the literal sense. Such a sentence in English literature would be termed a metaphor. It is a figure of speech transferred to some object but analagous to that which is properly applicable. Translated in plain English: "Vickie will call me to express her anger and dismay." But where is the aggressiveness that Nadia claims there is? I do not understand what Nadia means by "subjective fantasy". If Nadia does not see herself as a paragon of pre or post feminism, then she is not. You are what you think you are. As far as mentioning Nadia's name in the Newsletter please see Editors' note in the Letters column.

I am surprised at the tone Karin used in her response to the same article and segment just discussed. I feel I was being addressed to as some prancing pansy. If prancing pansy to Karin is a guy who likes being masculine or strives to be, despite the fact that one is built more for pleasure than for physical power, then, I am, to Karin, a prancing pansy! And to me, I am that I am! What ever standards of beauty the new woman selects, I'm sure it will be pleasing so long as it adheres to the language of art: line, form, proportion and harmony.

Whew!!! Next!

To Sam: The party at 1270 was terrific! I was astonished when I heard that 1270 had been rented for the evening. Everyone, I'm sure had a great time, I know I did.

To Michael Blake: Thank you for all the work you and Takeo put in in presenting a fantastic spread last Sunday 24 April. The food was simply fantastic! The folks that were not able to attend missed a great deal. ...

Lesbianism: from page 1
 outside the woman on the inside" have all lodged firmly in the minds of contemporary Chinese people. These ideas also account for the relatively permissive attitudes in the past towards Chinese homosexuality. Paradoxically present-day Chinese society as a result of having adopted Western religion and Western socialism now impose prohibitions against homosexuality.

If we compare the women's movements of the past both in and outside China with the gay rights movement of the seventies, we can find many similarities. Traditionally women in the past were not considered full human beings. In fact in the West it was not until the mid-20th century that women won the right to vote and to hold electoral office. In China women to this day abstain from divorce. Both before and after the anti-Japanese war many people consider that "divorces have never occurred in China in the past. All marriages last till death even if the match is imperfect. The increase in the number of divorces in recent years is due to laws permitting divorce. Therefore the most effective way to protect marriages is to outlaw divorce..." Others have the opinion that "the women's movement is the reason for divorces. Divorce is the result of women leaving the home and entering society."

Consider the discussion on homosexuality in recent years in Hong Kong newspapers: "China has never had homosexuality. The rise in the number of instances of homosexual behavior in recent years is the result of English law that permits homosexuality. The effective way to protect society therefore is to prohibit homosexuality through the legal system.....The gay movement of the West (or foreigners coming to

the East) cause homosexuality. Homosexuality is the result of males betraying the family system becoming self-indulgent and licentious." Is today's homosexual "problem" then the "woman's question" of yesteryear?



From the play "Lianxiangban" (late Ming early Qing) which depicts lesbianism

Chinese and Western attitudes towards lesbianism

Attitudes towards lesbianism differ from those with regard to male homosexuality. Traditional Western views of lesbianism in fact resemble those of the Chinese - the attitude is on the one hand never to mention it and on the other to ignore if at all possible. Dr Kinsey in the book *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* notes that in the course of legal research he found thousands of cases in both Europe and the U.S. of prosecutions of gay men but cases involving lesbians were very rare. In China while there are numerous works of fiction, non-fiction and poetry in the past thousands of years describing, extolling, celebrating and criticizing male homosexuality similar material on lesbianism is rare. In fact many stories on lesbianism mainly served to accom-

pany male-centered heterosexual concerns.

It is not hard for us to see why the male-dominated societies of the West abhorred homosexuality. Homosexuals were thought to be willing to play the female role; they were considered to pollute religious teachings and to demean their roles as men. Social domination by men in the East on the other hand expressed itself through extolling and condoning close friendships and love between males, even permitting two men to share the same sleeping quarters. Men are allowed free, uninhibited social intercourse while women can only wait at home. It is these attitudes that we find in societies such as in Arabia and Japan which permit male homosexuality while subordinating women. Because women did not occupy positions of importance in Eastern and Western societies of the past their relationships were naturally not viewed with the same gravity as those between men. In fact because Queen Victoria herself did not believe that lesbianism existed her ministers did not legislate against female homosexuality with the result that male homosexuality became illegal while lesbianism remained unaffected. In addition the reason for the scarcity of material on lesbianism in Chinese history is that the recorders of history were all men who cared little for the welfare and rights of women. Even female historian Ban Chao advised women to abide by Confucianist principles, criticizing Empress Wu Zetian for overstepping her Confucianist-assigned role as a woman.

Chinese lesbianism

Although historical material on lesbianism is scarce lesbian activi-

(continued on Page 9)

Lesbianism: from page 8

ties were in fact much more extensive (popular) than male homosexuality in China. Lesbian activity did not vary widely from one dynasty to the next but was very stable. In the Ming Dynasty descriptions of lesbianism could be found in novels written in diary form which suggested that lesbian behavior was permitted in this period.

However it must be made clear that many erotic paintings which depict female homosexuality are similar to the "lesbian" drawings and movies of the West which merely seek to fulfill the fantasies of their male audience. All in all they serve to gratify male supremacist, feudalistic and male-centered ideology.

Ladies of the Imperial Court (Han)

In the traditional feudal courts of China there lived only three types of people - the emperor, maids of honor who were available to serve his pleasure at all times and eunuchs. As a result other than pleasuring the emperor the women of the court were virtually without any freedom sexually. If during her lifetime she did not receive the favor of the emperor, the maid of honor could only look forward to dying within the imperial palace walls. Maids of honor were also known to be discharged from the palace when they have grown old. Those who were lucky enough to be favored by the emperor had to be constantly on guard against jealous intrigue by other maids of honor or possibly plots of murder hatched by the empress. As a result partly for self-preservation and partly to foster good will among themselves, maids of honor would pair up with one another and live together as man and wife, maintaining a form of lesbian relationship

known as "dui shi" (roughly translated as "mutual eating" with connotations of cunnilingus, translators). These relationships did not only occur among maids of honor. During the reign of Emperor Wudi, it is said that Empress Chen asked her maid to dress in male attire and they lived together as a couple after the former lost favor with the emperor....

Buddhist Nuns (Yuan and Ming Dynasties)

At a time when most Chinese men esteemed Confucianist, Taoist and Buddhist teachings the majority of women were exclusively Buddhists with a minority of Taoists. In Chinese society the case of women becoming Buddhist nuns have always been looked upon unfavorably in general. In the Yuan and Ming dynasties nuns were described as licentious and fraudulent in many dairies and reports. In addition Buddhist convents and temples for nuns were depicted as dens of perverted sexuality.

Traditionally Confucianist thought exhorted women to be subordinate to man, to bear his children and tend his family. Naturally those women who leave their homes to pursue Buddhist teachings (who leave the Jing and betray the Dao "li jing pan dao") thus disobeying the family system cannot escape the ridicule and criticism of male chauvinist Confucian scholars. Apart from this as described in *The Tale of the Blue Chamber* published in the Yuan Dynasty prostitutes who were no longer favored by their customers or who had been sold turned to Tao convents and Buddhist temples for nuns as their last and only resort. In addition in the Yuan Dynasty those women who roamed the country as nuns were actually prostitutes some of whom eventually ended up as the concu-

bines of the Mongols.

As a result of these various backgrounds the traditional Chinese conception of the Buddhist and Taoist nun is either that of a lesbian or a prostitute. For example Tao Songyi of the Yuan Dynasty believed that women should not enter the residence of other females in order to avoid trouble (The implication here is that lesbian activity may take place. This also implies that in Chinese history there were no clear-cut and unambiguous restrictions against lesbianism per se.) The women referred to by Tao Songyi were Buddhist nuns, Taoist nuns and female soothsayers. Because these women roamed the country and could enter the homes and chambers of other women it was possible for them to engage in lesbian activity without obstruction.

Shun De, Gwandong (Qing Dy- nasty and Contemporary China)

Just as male homosexuality was popular in Fujian Province during the Ming Dynasty so Shun De in Gwandong (Canton) is well known for its women silk workers who remained unmarried and virgins their whole lives. These women were called "old aunts" and lived together in "old aunt homes". They formed alliances with one another and pledged vows sealed in blood not to marry. They referred to one another as sisters and lived intimately as husband and wife loving one another through happiness and misfortune and remaining unseparated until death. There is a ceremony that sanctifies this form of relationship called "comb-up". During the ceremony the girl pledge just like a bride has her long pigtail combed upwards. She then faces the altar, kills a cock and drinks its blood and makes a pledge be-

(continued on Page 12)

The Heterosexualization of Modern China

Bret Hinsch

(Bret Hinsch is a graduate student in early Chinese history at Harvard. He is currently finishing up the manuscript for a book entitled *Passion of the Cut Sleeve, A History of Homosexuality in China.*)

Imagine that Britain had crushed the American Revolution. Instead of becoming father of his country George Washington would have gone down in history as a rebel with wooden teeth. What if the South had won the Civil War? Today in Alabama school children would be learning about it as a glorious defense of states' rights. It is easy to forget that history is never written by the losers of a struggle. Gay Chinese history is no exception. During this century, gay people in China have depended on heterosexuals for information about their own history. As a result the history of homosexuality in China has been systematically distorted and ignored, leaving gay Chinese and Chinese Americans without a historical context for their own experiences.

This phenomenon is not limited to China. In John Boswell's pioneering work on the history of Medieval European homosexuality, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, he describes some of the tactics used by European historians to expurgate the gay past. For example the original editors of the Loeb classics, for generations the standard translations of Greek and Latin works, translated Greek references to homosexuality into Latin (and Latin into Greek) instead of rendering them into English. Particularly salacious passages would be translated into Italian which, as Boswell notes, reflects poorly on Anglo-Saxon attitudes toward the morality of Italians. More often, offending references were purposely mistranslated or simple ignored, robbing modern readers of an accurate knowledge of the gay past.

This trend has continued in Western

translations of Asian works. Early translations of Persian and Arab literature, such as that by Sa'di and Hafiz, got around the problem of presenting homosexual literature to heterosexual audiences by altering gender pronouns. With a stroke of the pen, handsome boys were transformed into beautiful women. The greatest work on Chinese



Qing Dynasty's famous novel on male homosexuality *Pin hua baojian*.

sexuality, Robert Hans van Gulik's *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, overtly belittles the role of male homosexuality in the past thousand years of Chinese sexual history. His selective myopia seems easily explained when we note the passages in which he refers to homosexuality as a "vice". Even more recent works, such as Nathan Mao's translation of the Li Yu's early Qing dynasty short story collection *The Twelve Towers*, downplay homosexual themes. In one story Mao's translation falsely asserts the heterosexuality of the male protagonists, when in fact the original clearly describes their love and adds that "in the capital there weren't

any young people who didn't desire them; there wasn't a single one who wasn't jealous of them".

This falsification of gay history is not limited to the West - modern Chinese scholars have been just as guilty of distortion and neglect. The importance of historical accuracy is not just a question of abstract academic importance. One of the most common arguments against homosexuality heard repeatedly in China is the misinformed assertion that homosexuality is a recent import from the West. Only when Chinese people are made aware of the fact that homosexuality in China has a history of development and acceptance far superior to that of the West will homosexuality be once again accepted as a normative expression of Chinese-ness.

A quick glance at Chinese history reveals a remarkable record of tolerance for homosexuality. Bronze Age documents reveal stories such as the love of Mizi Xia for his lord. The majority of rulers of the Eastern Han dynasty (206 BC - 9 AD) were openly bisexual, the dynasty collapsing when an emperor tried to pass the dragon throne on to his male lover. A fourth century dynastic history tells of homosexuality so popular that women had trouble finding husbands. Tang dynasty poets celebrated their male friendships in immortal verse, while Song records describe huge numbers of male prostitutes. By the Ming dynasty an anonymous literatus compiled what might be the world's first gay history. And in Fujian province some men took public vows in homosexual marriage ceremonies.

During the nineteenth century, homosexuality in China was still open and widely accepted. Sodomy laws enacted by conservative Manchus earlier in the dynasty, the first such laws in Chinese history, had become dead letter. Sections of major cities had theaters

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and tea houses catering to a clientele with shared homosexual interests. Famed literati publicly courted attractive actors. Literature expressing gay sensibilities culminated in the 1860s novel *A Mirror for the Appreciation of Flowers* (*Pin hua baojian*). Then something happened. Today homosexuals in mainland China languish in prison camps. Those who dare to make gay friends live in guilt and fear. And the works of Taiwan's Pai Hsien-yung, one of the few authors who can bring themselves to openly explore homosexuality in fiction, express melancholy decadence.

This shift surely represents one of the greatest transformations of sexual morality ever experienced by a culture in such a short time. Accounting for it is not an easy matter. At present I can only offer a few theories. Anything more substantial will have to await future research by those more familiar with modern Chinese history.

Following the humiliation of China at the hands of the Western and Japanese imperialists, Chinese developed a love-hate relationship with the West. Students of the May Fourth Movement saw Western science and technology as the salvation of China. But along with modernization of Chinese science came the desire to adopt "modern" Western ideas. Thus Marxism and democratic liberalism came to be the accepted political ideologies. Western clothing replaced what were often more beautiful and practical Chinese equivalents. And the Chinese finally began to heed missionary criticisms of their sexual morality.

Christian missionaries had championed a realignment of Chinese sexuality along the Western European model. Feet were unbound, prostitutes put out of business, and concubinage outlawed. In importing Western sexual morality, however, the Chinese also imported Western intolerance of homosexuality. Stripped of the original religious language, these ideas became accepted by Chinese eager to uncritically emulate the West in every respect. As a result,

the current views of the Chinese Communist Party on homosexuality have nothing to do with the Chinese tradition, but are in fact a secularized version of *Leviticus* and Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*.

This new sexual morality was sanctioned by the greatest object of adoration imported to China since Buddhism - Western Science. Until the Stonewall riots and the gay rights movement in the United States and Europe forced a reevaluation of scientific perceptions of homosexuality, the scientific community had been almost uniformly hostile to what it perceived as a form of sexual pathology. In importing Western science, the Chinese also imported Western scientific misconceptions. The reverential attitude toward science cultivated by Chinese intellectuals made effective criticism of these views impossible.

Effective appeal to Chinese tradition as a guide for modern society became more difficult due to changes in literary language. Chinese reformers advocated vernacular baihua literature as a replacement for the difficult and mannered classical literary language. With young people no longer proficient in classical Chinese, they were effectively cut off from the sources of their tradition. Access to classical works was made more difficult by the simplification of Chinese characters, with many young people now unable to recognize non-simplified forms. In his novel *1984* George Orwell describes a society in which changes in language give an authoritarian regime the power to rewrite a history that would coincide with the present. In this way China's homosexual past has been destroyed. A government and society imbued with a new form of sexual morality has projected that morality back into the past.

Many Chinese now regard the West as a cesspool of sexual and moral decadence. Outstripped by the West in material terms they take consolation in their own moral superiority. They often single out homosexuality as evidence of the spiritual pollution which now in-

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SAFER SEX GUIDELINES



Following is information obtained from the AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts on safer sex.

How do you play safe?

Most sexually transmitted diseases are spread by germs moving from one person to another. Some body fluids are less dangerous than others; for example saliva and urine transmit some germs but not others. Certain body fluids such as semen, blood, menstrual blood, and female genital secretions carry a risk of transmitting the AIDS virus, the hepatitis-B virus, chlamydia and the bacteria causing gonorrhea and syphilis. These fluids when shared through sexual contact can spread disease. You can limit this spread by not sharing germ-carrying fluid.

- Safe - Dry kissing; Masturbation on Healthy Skin; Oral sex on a man with a condom; External watersports; Touching, massage, fantasy
- Less Risky - Vaginal intercourse with a condom, Wet kissing, Anal intercourse with a condom
- Risky - Oral sex on a man without a condom; Masturbation on open/broken skin; Oral sex on a woman
- Dangerous - Vaginal intercourse without a condom; Anal intercourse without a condom; Internal watersports; Sharing a Needle; Fisting; Rimming

***Harmful to your judgement - Amphetamines (Speed); Amyl Nitrite (Poppers); Alcohol; Marijuana; Cocaine

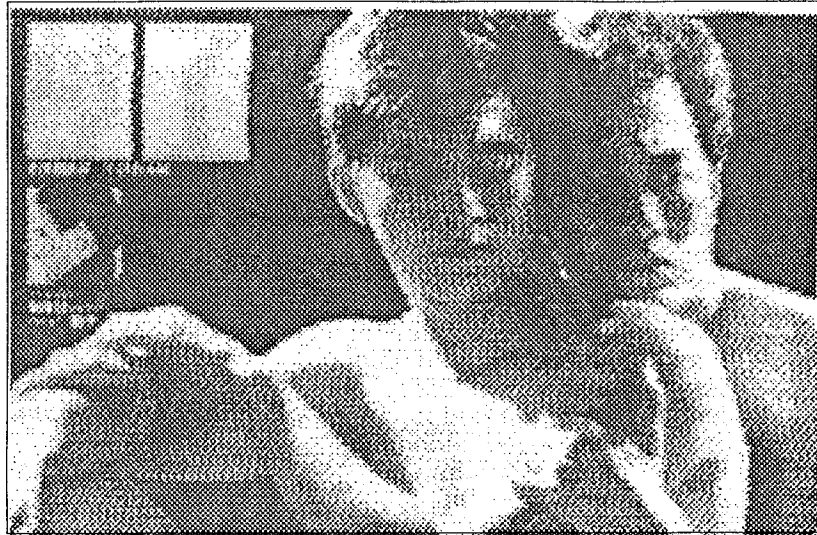
More information can be obtained through the AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts, Tel: 536-7733. ...

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fore the god. In fact should a young woman choose to "comb-up" her previous engagement to a man will be nullified and her fiance can no longer force her to marry him. The male party can only ask to be reimbursed for gifts and the cost of a new engagement to another girl. This fee is usually shouldered collectively by the group of sisters who have pledged allegiance to one another.

A work published in the Ming Dynasty addresses this situation in the story of a girl of the Shun De Village called Jin Lan. "Jin Lan had pledged alliance with a group of sisters. After her marriage she refused to return to her husband's home to fulfill the vows of husband and wife. In fact only after all the sisters were married would each choose to live with her husband. If forced these girls were known to commit suicide together. This bad habit was hard to stop through legal and moral means. When Li Diechiao became governor of Shun De he attempted to stop this practice by punishing and publicly humiliating the father and brothers of the offending girls. The father and brothers were made responsible for returning the girls to their husbands and must ask for forgiveness. He also thought that by ignoring threats of suicide he could cut down on the practice. " In addition among these girls who were forced to marry there were those who did not have anything to do with their husbands and in fact allowed their husbands to take a second wife. These women were called "bu luo jia".

The women described here were largely employed in the silk industry. Traditionally the silkworm rearing areas were considered divine and pure places. Men were not allowed in them. With the decline of the silk industry many of these women entered domestic service and were known as "ma



Ah-Ching seeks love in Taipei's New Park and elsewhere in The Outsiders playing at the Nickelodeon May 4-6 (see Page 6)

jie" ("mother sister", translated literally).

The homes where they lived - the "aunt houses" - were also strictly out-of-bounds for men. This includes close relatives such as fathers and brothers.

Shanghai: Mo Jin Dang - The Polishing Mirror Gang (Early Ming)

There is a book *Qing Bai Lei Chao* describing a Madam Hong and the prostitute Jin Sai Yu and their deep dislike of men. "Among Shanghai's prostitutes is a Madam Hong who lives in the Foreign Concessions and is among one of the eight wonders of Shanghai.... Her contacts with men were few while she spends her time with women. She heads a group called the Polishing Mirror Gang. In this gang women love another with an intensity that surpass male-female affairs. Often there are jealous fights. In these instances Madam Hong assumes the role of judge and executioner. None of the gang members would defy her judgement.

"There was a prostitute called Jin Saiyu who was extremely beautiful and had the same 'disease' as

Hong. To gain Hong's favor she left home with her riches, changed her name to Chen and came to live close to Hong. Hong lived a luxurious life and spent lavishly on those women she favored. However she always got much more in return.

"Although Hong's crowd were initially confined to one neighborhood, Gradually more and more women joined her gang all of them sharing the view that man is a repugnant creature."

From this one can see in the ten-mile Foreign Concessions area the extent to which women were prepared to lavish gold on their lovers. ••• (continued next issue)

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fects America and Europe. Yet the homosexual oppression of which they are so proud originated in the West, while the acceptance of homosexuality which they abhor is more typical of native Chinese sexual ideas. This truth reveals an irony which may be of little solace to Chinese and Chinese American gays. The millstone of history has little respect for right and wrong, crushing people randomly in its path. Even so, Chinese gays can be sure that they not only have truth on their side, but they are supported by five thousand years of history as well. •••