



A M A L G M

Learning to be Proud

by S.H.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

You know how fussy Chinese men are especially when it comes to food. Still I was shocked once when I witnessed this boyfriend of a good friend of mine throw a fit because the dinner she had prepared wasn't to his liking. And she did not even seem fazed by this. And all along I had thought she was this very modern and progressive feminist.

GAY VS. STRAIGHT PRIDE

I was reminded of this incident thinking of the upcoming annual Gay and Lesbian Pride Celebrations. I was actually thinking about what it means to be proud - proud to be gay that is. To be proud taken out of the context of being gay obviously does not make much sense. What does it mean for example, to be "proud to be straight"? In fact at last year's pride rally a bunch of hetero teens (straight youths?) marched through the crowd shouting that they were "straight and proud". Obviously they felt insecure with the large numbers of fags and dykes around but ordinarily being straight and being proud of the fact are taken for granted by heterosexuals. Laws, the media, social and cultural institutions proclaim endlessly the supremacy and rightness of being heterosexual. Hets take for granted simple acts like holding hands in public or kissing on the bus which homos make great efforts to suppress. Pride for the powerful comes naturally, the powerless have to learn it through many years of painful re-self-education.

All this may seem quite obvious but each year as we try to persuade gay people to march with us we hear again and again these same comparisons: "Straights don't make a big deal of their sexuality, they don't advertise it why should we, etc."

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A M A L G M

ALLIANCE
OF MASSA
CHUSETTS
ASIAN LES
BIANS AND
GAY MEN

May 1988

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MARK YOUR CALENDARS

June is a busy month filled with events celebrating gay and lesbian pride. Come celebrate with your friends at AMALGM.

★ June 5 Sunday beginning 8 a.m. **From all Walks of Life** sponsored by the AIDS Action Committee - A Pledge Walk to Benefit AIDS Care and Research. Walk begins 10 a.m. from the Boston Common. If you are not walking but would like to sponsor those in AMALGM who are you can call AMALGM's hotline 626-6000 to give your pledge. The walk is 10 km. Suggested pledge is \$2 per km.

★ June 11 Saturday assembling at 11 a.m. City Hall Plaza. **18th Annual Boston Lesbian and Gay Pride March with Rally** at 2 p.m. at the Boston Common. An estimated 40,000 people marched last year. Come join your friends and neighbors at AMALGM. We'll have a new banner this year. John Manzon who recently joined us will be speaking at the rally. Watch out for him.

★ June 18 Saturday 7:30 on. AMALGM's own **CelebrAsian Massachusetts '88** featuring an evening of politics, music, theater and dance. Come out and support this event. Many at AMALGM are working hard to make this an entertaining and enlightening evening for everybody. Dance with DJ and cash bar begins at 10 p.m. Tickets are available at Glad Day and New Words (\$4.00) and at the door (\$5.00). Call 622-6000 for more information.

★ June 19 Sunday 7:00 a.m. - 6 p.m. **The Names Project Quilt** can be viewed at the Park Plaza Castle Boston. The Quilt which now contains about 4,000 panels each commemorating an individual who has died of AIDS has been called the largest community arts project in North America. Call 451-9003 for tickets and information.

▼ A CALL TO MARCH ▼

*The Lesbian and Gay Pride March - Rightfully Proud
June 11 Sat 11:00 a.m. City Hall Plaza*

For Love

We will march, with our loved ones, our brothers, our sisters and our friends. This is a day we celebrate our love - without fear

For Life

We will march. We march for people who have died of AIDS, and people living with AIDS. We march against inadequate funding for AIDS research and education. We march against gay bashing.

For Pride

We will march. We are not Geisha Girls. We are not China dolls. We are Asian lesbians and gay men.



Text: Jack Lo

Photos: S.H.



For Our Rights

We will march, for gay and lesbian rights, for foster children rights, for the right to live, to work and to be ourselves.

For CelebrAsian

We will march. We will not remain invisible. We will carry our banners, our balloons. We will celebrate. We urge all of you to join us at the Boston Lesbian and Gay Pride March.



(This is the continuation of the chapter on lesbianism excerpted from *A History of Homosexuality in China (Zhongguo Tongxinai Shilu)* by Hong Kong author and gay activist Sam Sasha (Xiaomingxiong) and translated here from the original Chinese text. Part I in last month's newsletter began with an analysis of the traditional role of Chinese women and a comparison of Western and Chinese viewpoints on lesbianism. The chapter then surveyed evidence of lesbianism among ladies of the Imperial Court, Buddhist nuns and the women silkwormers of Shun De, Canton Province. Part I ended with a description of an early Ming Dynasty novel about a lesbian society in Shanghai - the Polishing Mirror Gang. Part II concludes this chapter. Special thanks to Sam Sasha).

A Brief History of Chinese Lesbianism Part II

translated by Barry and S.H.

LESBIANISM IN CHINESE LITERATURE

Among Chinese literary works as described in the chapter "Novels and Plays" homosexuality was often a major theme. Several books in fact had explicit and detailed descriptions of lesbian relationships, such as the characters Qiang Guan and Wei Guan in the Qing Dynasty novel *Dream of the Red Chamber (Honglomeg)* by Cao Xueyin, also Cuan Jianxue and Cao Yuhua in *Sweet and Pitiable Companion (Lianxiangban)* written by Liyu in the late Ming early Qing period.

Other than the above works Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng's *The Golden Plum (JinPingmei)* from the Ming Dynasty and *Flower Shadows from Behind the Curtain (Gelien Huaying)* also from the Ming had lesbian content as well. Not only that the latter novel even contained descriptions of a woman whipping another to the point of drawing blood, then cutting off her hair all the while deriving sexual pleasure from these acts. This was an early instance of the appearance of S/M

with women as the participants. However when one considers the traditional views of women in Chinese society - as either "birth machines" or "sex toys" (whores) - whether the scene is one of a woman whipping another woman or a man whipping a woman, both instances arise from the viewpoint of a profoundly male chauvinist society and have little to do with the S/M found in segments of modern homosexual communities in the West. In Japan today many heterosexual pornographic magazines, movies and novels feature scenes of bondage and whipping of women. This phenomena must certainly be related to the dominance of male-centered ideology which was carried into Japan from ancient China in the past.

THIRD SISTER FENG

In the chapter entitled "Third Sister Feng" in Pu Songling's novel *Stories from the Chatting Room (Liaochi Zhiyi)* we find the story of the eleventh daughter of a wine-making family Fan of the town of Lu. Beautiful and talented, eleventh sister Fan never-

theless refused many a man who asked for her hand in marriage. One day at a blossom party Miss Fan met Third Sister Feng and both were attracted to one. "Walking shoulder to shoulder and laughing merrily then chatting warmly and intimately they fell deeply in love...." A note from the editor in this section reads "Note: A man who falls for another male is common; but a woman who loves another woman - such a passionate emotion is like a silkworm that wraps itself in silk." From this it can be seen that in the Qing Dynasty male homosexuality was seen as a common phenomenon but people were shocked and surprised when women were attracted to one another. This is in contrast to present attitudes which tolerate lesbianism but not male homosexuality.

When they were about to part Miss Fan gave Feng her gold hairpin and was given a green hair-clasp in return. "When Fan returned home she recounted her meeting and showed her family the clasp. It was neither gold nor

History: from page 4

jade. No one recognized the ornament and all were in awe." Miss Fan missed Feng so much that she fell ill. When her parents knew this they tried their best to seek Feng but no one could find her.

Eventually Feng appeared before Miss Fan and when she knew that Fan was ill on her account her tears "flowed like rain". However Feng did not want their relationship to be known so as to avoid trouble and scandal and Miss Fan agreed with her. From then on they "spent their time together, sharing the same bed and were very happy. Miss Fan soon recovered from her illness. They swore to be sisters and shared each other's clothes and shoes." Eventually their affair became known to Fan's parents who were very glad that their daughter had acquired an intimate friend. This discovery however caused the two girls to "flush red with embarrassment"



"Flower shadows behind the Screen" contains scenes of "lesbian" S/M

Not too long after Feng had to leave because of pressing matters and there was nothing that Miss Fan could do to stop her. After bidding her farewell Fan "wept bitterly on her bed as if having lost a spouse." Later on Feng introduced a seventeen to eighteen year-old student Meng Anren to Miss Fan hoping that she would accept his hand in marriage. Feng knew that Miss Fan was "ready for marriage, but she was still in the hold of a magic spell". Miss Feng also gave Fan's golden hairpin to the young student. However at the same time Fan's parents had been forced to promise her in marriage to a wealthy tradesman. On the wedding day Miss Fan committed suicide.

The student Meng hearing of this, cried bitterly and was ready to kill himself on Miss Fan's grave. At this time Feng arrived and with a special drug was able to bring Miss Fan back to life. Miss Fan begged Feng to stay with her and Meng; she wanted the three of them to live together forever but Feng resolutely refused. At this point Miss Fan tricked Feng by getting her drunk. She then tried to get the student Meng to rape Feng hoping that in so doing she could force Feng to stay.

Feng became very angry. She had no choice but to tell all. "I am a Fox Spirit. It is because of my special attraction for beautiful women that things have reached this stage today. This special magic charm cannot be resisted by mere human beings. If I stay this spell will take hold again and cannot be stopped. Both of you have a good future in front of you. Take good care and love one another". With this she departed. Finally when the father and son of the rich tradesman's family had been arrested and tried Miss Fan returned to her family. ♦

Message from the Editorial Board

This is the first issue of the Newsletter since our change to the new name AMALGM. We are also fortunate to have enlisted the expertise of graphics designer and artist Kamil Yunus who developed our logo and designed the new look of the newsletter. Please let us know your opinion.

Please send in your \$10 subscription payment if you receive an expiration notice from us.

And please note our new mailing address:

AMALGM
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Prudential Station
Boston MA 02199

LETTER: from page 9

I certainly see imperfections in *TMOT* and *Passport*. Unfortunately, it is easier to advocate the need for culturally sensitive gay material than it is to produce them. They pages of *Passport* are open to your readers and members, and I hope you will take advantage of that.

Sincerely yours,

Steven Kotz.

Editor's note: Readers may want to check out the source material for themselves. Back issues of BAGMAL's March 1988 Newsletter which contains S.H.'s reviews are still available. Unlike the International Wavelength which has sacrificed the lucrative "Blond Surfer/Big Dick" market to bring us "culturally sensitive gay materials" we are crassly commercial at AMALGM and require \$3 for the March '88 issue. The Men of Thailand is still available at local gay bookstores and was \$21.95 at last sighting. ♦

Where are all the Asian -

(This article has also been submitted to the newspaper *Soyjourner* which is published from 143 Albany Street Cambridge 02139)

I have heard it said that people in the community are dying to read about Asian lesbians. What are they? Who are they? Why are they? As Asian lesbians and gay men we want to encourage people to learn more about us. Of course we want to assume that the lesbian and gay community won't simply regard us as an oddity because we are Asian. At the same time we

of Asian lesbian visibility?

The most obvious factor is naturally the relatively small percentage of Asians in the general population of this country. A large proportion of these Asians are new immigrants and refugees who are struggling to survive in an alien country, and who are concerned above all in making a living for themselves and their families. These people have little time or will to devote to other issues, and when they do, they have language barriers and other communication problems.

racially only part Asian. Among native-born Americans, there are still the differences between working-class and middle/upper class, big city natives and small city natives, older and younger. There are also differences between the experience of those from the East Coast and elsewhere. Any two Asian-Americans will have several difference combinations of such differences, highlighting their lack of common ground. When Asians do band together, these different backgrounds are often the source of conflicting viewpoints and philosophies for solving problems and working together.



want to believe that the Asian community will accept us without condemning our gay identity. Many of us are just beginning to taste and feel what a wonderful difference Asian gayness can offer to all groups that we touch.

But there is as always, another scary side. When we walk in a room we represent the unrepresented. The Open House we are having may be for many the one and only exposure to Asian lesbians and gay men. Our popular media have polluted the water of understanding with the model-minority stereotype. We feel in our hearts that we must try to share the true beauty of Asian lesbians and gays with you, our community.
Anon. Asian lesbian.

For most of us it is a rare occurrence to meet an Asian-American lesbian. Even among the Asian gay community, there are often only a handful of participating lesbians. Why this lack

Another large obstacle is the general problem that Asian-Americans have in organizing themselves. Asians are such a diverse group that there is often a lack of solidarity and interest in solving common problems. The incredible variety of cultures, religions and languages that comprise the ethnic background of Asians do not foster strong bonds. People from the Indian subcontinent wonder whether they should organize with people from East Asia; Christians wonder whether their principles will be compromised by Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, atheists; those from developing countries wonder whether their values will be understood by those from wealthier countries; and so it goes. There is also the additional cultural component of Americans who no longer have strong ties to Asia. Many of these people feel they have little in common with "FOB's" ("Fresh off the Boat"), and many are themselves of mixed heritage, being

There are further factors hindering the organization of Asians, and particularly women. Many Asian cultures emphasize promoting one's group, as opposed to the individualism encouraged in America. For many people brought up with these values, it is very difficult to counter the mainstream and rock the boat for changes. This is one of the reasons for the stereotype of Asians as docile and submissive, and it is doubly so for women. Although there are many strong Asian women, there are also many for whom it is easier to accept the stereotype and assimilate quickly into American society where a ready-made niche awaits them, especially in the supposed "post-feminist" era. Furthermore, the struggle to overcome the view of Asians as foreign and exotic leads many Asian-Americans to disregard their Asian heritage altogether, alienating themselves from the others, which is yet another force which separates

American Lesbians?

Sally Oey

some Asian lesbians from their sisters.

Strict immigration laws until the 1960's also made it imperative that Asians promote the welfare of their families first, since only those with kin in the U.S. were allowed to immigrate. Many American lesbians who maintain strong ties to their families are afraid to come out at home, especially if there are still ties to Asia, where homosexuality is even a greater taboo than in the U.S. The reputation and safety of relatives in the powerful gossip networks are important considerations for some, and

hamper their coming-out process. On the other hand, for some it means they are free of cultural assumptions and proceed with forming their own unique identities, apart from any racial or sexual group.

Many lesbians turn to the women's community, which is much larger, organized and accepted. There are many worthwhile issues for any woman in the women's community, so it is very easy to find some which will be more important to individual women than building a community with a handful of Asian lesbians. But many of these Asian women must

collect the lesbians scattered among the variety of feminist, Asian, college and other political alliances, and those buried in the mainstream culture. Asian lesbians who do not live near large cities are especially isolated. Many feel that they are the only Asian lesbians in their community, whether that community is mainstream, Asian, lesbian or any other group. In response to this, and to educate people about the Asian lesbian experience, there has been a recent increase in Asian lesbian writings, for example, works by Kitty Tsui, Barbara Noda, and Merle Woo. In New York City and California,



furthermore, many Asians view homosexuality as an American phenomenon. Today many lesbian and gay Asians who are foreign nationals lead closeted lives for fear of being denied citizenship or being deported.

As with other women of color the day-to-day oppression of racism and sexism is often too discouraging for Asian women to come out as lesbians. Some Asian lesbians who do decide to network with other gay Asians contact gay Asian groups and discover that they are made up mostly of men, many of whom are ignorant of or insensitive to women's issues. In this respect, such groups sometimes fail to be a good support resource for Asian lesbians. For those of mixed heritage, called "hapa" on the West Coast (short for Hawaiian "hapa haole" - "half white"), identity is often an even more complex issue. These people experience racism on all sides, and the need to fit in may

deal with the subtle racism and ethnocentrism in this relatively supportive environment as well. According to one woman, Ellen Eades, "Many lesbians err by assuming too much, either by assuming that any questions they have on Japanese culture I can answer, or by using me as their sole source material for Japanese people...Many other lesbians err by assuming too much in the other direction - by assuming that they already understand, by virtue of being oppressed by sexual preference, my position of being oppressed by race - completely...Such assumptions are insulting." Among the few Asian women's groups, there is often little interest for the concerns of lesbians, and there are more important issues that all in the group agree to work on.

In the face of problems like these some Asian lesbians are presently attempting to organize, and a small community is beginning to coalesce. But it is a slow and painful process to

organized groups of Asian lesbians are establishing themselves in the community. Last May, women on the West Coast held the first Pacific/Asian Lesbian Retreat, attended by almost 80 lesbians of Asian heritage. A group in the San Francisco Bay area publishes a monthly newsletter, *Phoenix Rising*, by and for Pacific/Asian lesbians. Here in the Boston area, the Association of Massachusetts Asian Lesbians and Gay Men (AMALGM, formerly BAGMAL) is attempting to reach out to the lesbians in the area. AMALGM is presently organizing an open house, Massachusetts CelebrAsian, where all will be welcome to hear a panel discussion by Asian lesbians and gay men, a slide show of Asian lesbians, and more. This event will be held at 7 p.m. June 18 at the Emmanuel Church, 15 Newbury Street Boston. For information and to contact AMALGM call (617)-622-6000; to subscribe to *Phoenix Rising*, write them at P.O. Box 31631 Oakland CA 94604.◊

Hail AMALGM! This your initial journey out into the world in your newly transformed self from BAGMAL to AMALGM, how now do you fare? Being of the old guard, I knew BAGMAL well, and though I was instrumental in your transformation, surprisingly, I feel nostalgia over the demise of BAGMAL. Yet we all know too well don't we that things in the world are always in a state of flux, that the spirit of BAGMAL was much

the centuries by going forth and lending a helping hand to those in need regardless of who they are thereby demonstrating the essence of impersonal love.

In displaying your qualities, consider too the cultural heritage from the many parts of Asia. Even amongst ourselves, how much do we know of the cultural heritage of our cousins: Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, the

cal beauty from the Greeks. Consult the paintings and sculptures of China, Japan and India, there you will discover what the concept of classical beauty of the East is.

And so AMALGM, you have before you the prospect of an adventure whether for good or for bad, especially now in the most exciting period of all recorded history. As we speed towards the

Gadding About With Arthur Carbonell

too staid to withstand the current flow of the times.

Now, in the persona of AMALGM, young and vigorous, pulsating with fresh new energy, the new guard takes reins with the intent of making an impact through the establishment of a stronger voice and a new image for Asians who are comparatively of an ancient line of people amidst the glamour and youthfulness of the West, the Caucasian. Let us hope that the old guard will always be on hand to advise and steer while you supply the energy and vision.

What exactly are the strategies planned in your new role? How do you propose to instigate a change in the thinking of the West towards the new breed of Asians? In your struggle for a voice loud enough to be heard, will you expose the hurt inflicted upon you by your younger brothers and sisters of the West, who, for the most part are ignorant or uncertain of you, by hissing and snarling and making light of them? Or, will you instead act out the role of the older brother and sister by displaying your qualities which have been refined through

Philippines, Korea, Tibet, to name a few. Inform your brothers and sisters of the West by sharing with them the cultures of the East. By their knowledge of the East they will readily understand you and know how to interact with you with ease which in turn will foster understanding and respect for each other.

Yes, Caucasians are pretty aren't they, but equally, so are you. Don't try to compete with their type of beauty with yours. Both of you are of different expressions. For beauty is created from within. Physical beauty is merely skin deep, skin that is clear and radiant, the sparkle of the eyes, the rich color and texture of the hair, the way it hangs and flows, the carriage and gait of the body and of primary importance, the expression and joy of the spirit within. Your confidence in yourself as an individual and your pride in being an Asian, let it radiate outward from the heart and you will be amazed how your attitude will create a physical beauty which people will take notice and acknowledge! Instead of emulating the standard beauty of the West, the East has its own. The West bases its idea of classi-

cal beauty from the Greeks. Consult the paintings and sculptures of China, Japan and India, there you will discover what the concept of classical beauty of the East is. And so AMALGM, you have before you the prospect of an adventure whether for good or for bad, especially now in the most exciting period of all recorded history. As we speed towards the

ORIENTATIONS: VIDEO PARTY AT SH'S

The video, *Orientations*, is a fifty-five minute series of interviews produced by Richard Fung in collaboration with the *Gay Asians of Toronto*. It interviews a diverse range of Fags & Dykes in Toronto, discussing their coming out, organizing, cruising in general, bar hopping, cavorting in restrooms, going out in drag, and fighting racism and discrimination. It is a no-holds bar look at our counterparts in Toronto. After the video party where we consumed bowlfuls of home-made a la SH popcorn, a group of us trooped over to Bangkok Cuisine on Massachusetts Avenue for dinner.

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RETREAT AT UPSTATE NY

The most exciting event thus far was a retreat held on a thirty-acre farm in upstate New York, a few miles outside the village of Fleischman. It was a non-AMALGM event organized by Don, Andrew, Fernando, Jin and June from various parts of the east coast. There were twelve women and twenty three men from Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Boston, New York City, and Ithaca, New York. Sleeping accommodations were in two buildings. Jin was the Chef who feted a terrific cook-out of turkey, chicken, spare ribs, franks, and for dessert, strawberries and cream. We toasted marshmallows for a while engaging in conversation around the fire. The men, at eleven p.m. stormed the *Maverick* bar and disco forty miles away. It must have been quite a sight for twenty three Asian men to suddenly troop into the bar and up the winding staircase to the disco room. By 1 a.m. most of us had had enough of dancing and drinking and so down the spiral staircase we went. Down the staircase, I heard one of the fellows remark, "Aw, they're all leaving!"

I can't begin to say enough about how beautiful the farm area is. Standing in the midst of it all, marveling at nature, the clean air, the stillness, the running brook, the sounds of birds and insects, soothed the body and spirit through and through. There is talk that such a retreat will be a bi-yearly event. The next retreat is tentatively set for the Columbus Day three-day weekend in October, when the foliage should be at its peak. Look out for an in-depth write-up with photos in the next issue.◊

Letter to the Editor The Wavelength Doth Protest...

8 May 1988

Dear Sir,

I'm responding to the review "Gay Asian Images: Whose Point of View?" written by S.H. Chua in the March 1988 BAGMAL Newsletter.

I am one of the owners of **International Wavelength**, a company whose specialty is gay ethnic cross-overs and contact between American gays and gays in Asia, Latin America and Europe. International Wavelength is the importer or distributor of *Oriental Guys*, *Thailand Song of Life*, and *The Men of Thailand*, all reviewed by S.H. We also publish the cross-cultural periodical *Passport*.

First thank you for the thoughtful and provocative review of *Thailand Song of Life*. Your reviewer is very perceptive in noting how little this video owes to Western erotic sensibility. In fact, the video is an adaptation of a well-known Thai novel, dispenses with most Western story-telling conventions, and accurately portrays much of the Bangkok gay scene (from what I know of that scene). The criticisms of *Oriental Guys* - namely that it seems to owe everything to Western erotic sensibility - are also perceptive. The staff of the magazine is entirely Asian, and production and printing is done in Singapore and Hong Kong, but I think the magazine has yet to find a distinctively Asian voice to match the stunning good looks of its Asian models.

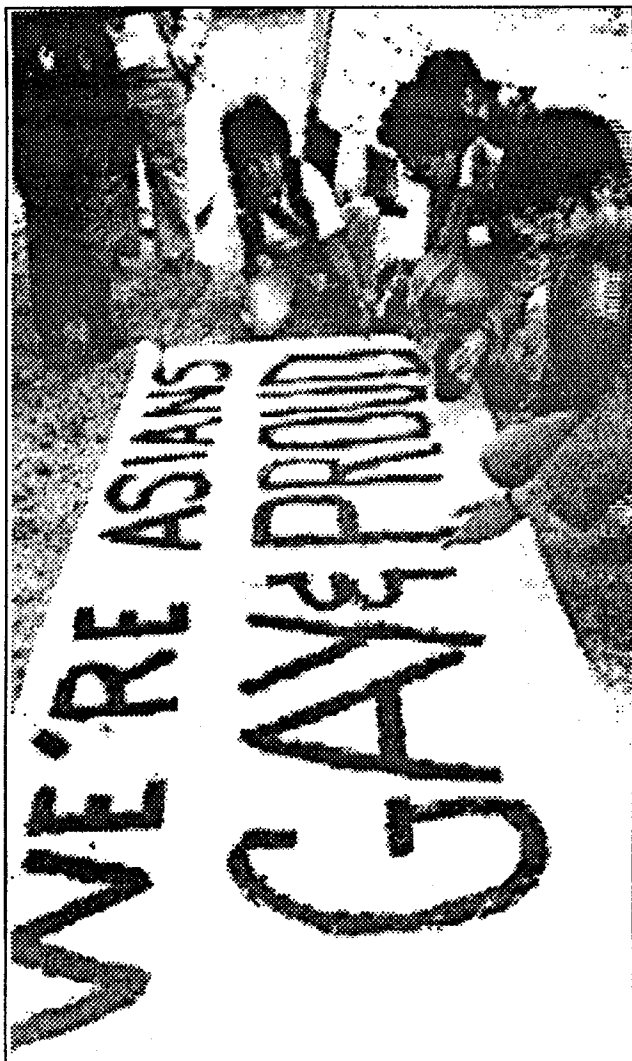
Second, no thanks at all for your reviewer's unfair and inaccurate dismissal of *The Men of Thailand* and our magazine *Passport* as strictly for the sex tourist. S.H. is so eager to find examples of Western condescension that he ignores most of TMOT and misrepresents parts that he does discuss. The authors of TMOT plainly state

throughout the book that the Thai gay scene exists and flourishes on its own and that the Western visitor to Thailand will have a deeper experience, and more fun, by getting to know the Thais and trying to adapt to their ways (please note the article "Bangkok Diary No. 1" in *Passport's* May Issue). Your reviewer notes that TMOT says "cruising" is unnecessary in Thailand; according to your reviewer, TMOT's preferred alternative is the commercial sex scene. Your reviewer is mistaken. What TMOT is fact says (see pages 1 and 2 of Chapter 4) is that it is easy to meet Thais in any social situation, so it is not necessary to seek out special places for furtive cruising.

I suspect that what turns your reviewer off about TMOT is something that also concerns me: the authors' frequent and broad generalizations about Thai attitudes and beliefs. Are these generalizations inaccurate and self-serving, as your reviewer suggests? I think that's for the Thais to say, not your reviewer. I do know that the manuscript of TMOT was reviewed by several Thais before its publication, and that one of the authors (Eric Allyn) currently writes for a splendid Thai periodical, *NEON* (now that we distribute *NEON* in the US, we will eventually carry some of its articles in translation in *Passport*).

As for *Passport* - it serves primarily as a cross-cultural personal ad, international news magazine and publishes erotica that dares to depart from the Blond Surfer/Big Dick formula dominating American gay magazines and videos. *Passport* articles and features have included movie reviews (generally of foreign films far out of the American commercial mainstream), personal viewpoints, the scenario and dialogue of *Thailand Song of Life*, news of organizations dealing with AIDS issues from a culturally sensitive perspective, and information about and listings of ethnic and cross-cultural gay social organizations (including BAGMAL).

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(photo: Daniel Tsang)
Final touches are put to the Asian Contingent's banner at the First March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights 1979

LEARNING TO BE SELF-CENTERED
Learning to be proud to be gay is an ongoing process. Many of us have come to terms with not feeling ashamed, or not feeling guilty about being attracted to those of one gender rather than the other. This seems to be the "good" sense of being proud - taking pride, feeling good about oneself. Being proud also has that added negative meaning which implies arrogance, self-indulgence, selfishness and insen-

sitivity to the needs of others. But why not. I think gay and lesbian people have much to gain by learning to be arrogant, self-interested and selfish, to be proud in this sense also.

This might seem to go against much of our upbringing. As Asians we are trained to be modest, polite, to defer to others in social conduct. But look again. There is always one standard for those in power another for those who are oppressed and discriminated.

Take the example of the lover of my Chinese feminist friend whom I mentioned earlier. Now he needs no lessons on being self-indulgent and arrogant. In fact all his training as a Chinese male - the *raison d'être* of the Confucian family - has taught him that he has every right to be self-centered and arrogant. His mother devoted her whole life to pampering and meeting his every need now it's the turn of his girlfriend and later his wife. He knows he has every right to throw a fit if his needs are not met. Not a pretty sight perhaps. Yet if only gay people can learn to have that same sense of righteousness, the same sense of outrage when our rights are not protected and our needs are overlooked. We badly need the self-confidence, the arrogance and self-centeredness that No.1 Son can do without.

On Not Giving Up The Front Seats

Think of how often we have stepped aside so that others may pass. "I don't want to hurt my parents." "Straight people might not understand." "My straight friends might be offended". We take great pains to rearrange our lives, to hide and lie about ourselves, to distance ourselves from our gay friends and lovers, in order to accommodate the needs and sensibilities of straight people. What we need is the opposite of accommodation; we need to learn to be arrogant, uncompromising when our self-interest is at stake - the attitude that says "Fuck them if they can't take it."

In the middle of a recent assignment for the Newsletter I was struck by a remark of the young man I was interviewing. We were discussing some of his friends, gay

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teenagers like himself, who had been kicked out of their parents' homes when their gayness was discovered. My respondent told me how he was saving up money in case he needed to leave home. "If they don't want me why should I want them", he said of his parents. How refreshing I thought. Compared to the many gay sons and daughters who spend so much of our lives kowtowing to our parents' demands however unreasonable, here is someone who knows to put his own self-interest as a gay person first on the agenda. No knee-jerk filial piety for him. I thought of the many years of anguish and unhappiness I could have saved if I had learnt this attitude at his age.

WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON AND WHY?

Learning to advance our self-interest, to look after our own needs, not to give up the seats at the front of the bus - this lies at the core of our struggles and the struggles of all oppressed peoples for rights, respect and recognition. In fact we should be suspicious when people join struggles where their self-interests are not apparently at stake. Are they just do-gooders or do they have other motives? We know to doubt those Marxist-Leninist types who come to our demonstrations and meetings trying to sell us papers that explain our struggles to us. But what about those white gay people who are always yelling about "racism in our movement" but who don't seem to be involved in any other issues that affect them more directly? What are their motivations? Where do they come from? On a more sinister note the local media reports that now there

are police agents infiltrating the mass meetings of the gay community.

Not having one's self-interest at heart as a gay person is a sure sign that there is still residual guilt or shame about being gay. This takes many forms which though dissimilar in symptoms point to the same route cause - a lack of gay pride.

CLOSET POWER

On one extreme there is the deeply closeted gay person who rarely if ever acknowledges that his gayness is important. "What I do in my own bedroom has nothing to do with anyone else" is a remark we've often heard. "Least of all yourself" we might add.

Take the case of this gay acquaintance of mine - a renowned "China watcher" with international credentials. He was quite shocked once when I suggested to him that he should tell an Asian bookseller friend of his that a certain book they were seeking was available at Glad Day, our local gay/lesbian book store. "But my friend runs a legitimate business" he proclaimed implying that anything to do with homosexuality, even an important community resource like a gay bookshop, was illicit, unmentionable in front of straight people. Besides acknowledging to his friend that he knew such a bookshop would blow his carefully constructed cover.

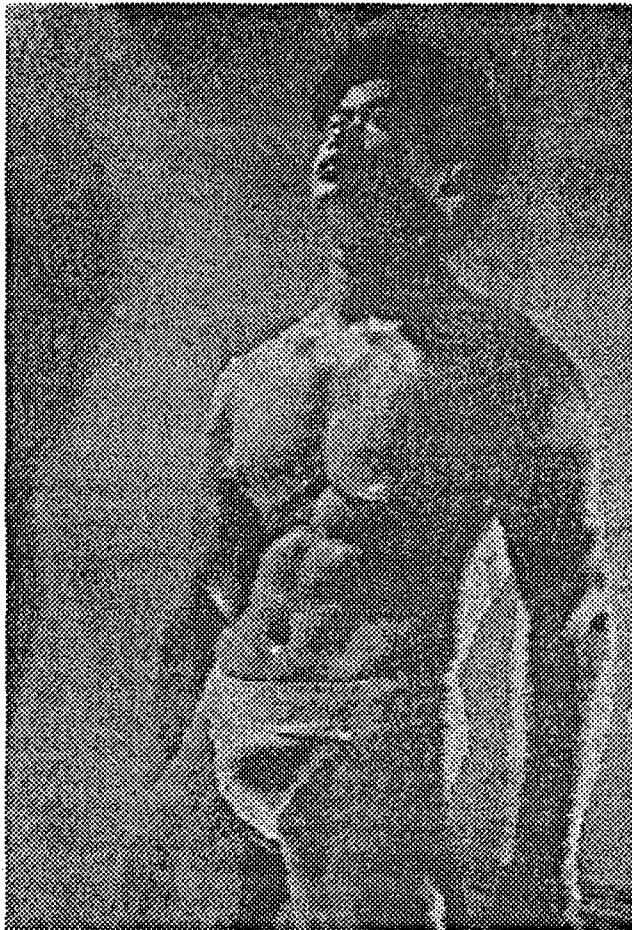
Many gay people who are very closeted about their homosexuality do have pride, but it is the unstated, "natural" pride of the powerful that they take on. That is they hide behind and emphasize the privileges of their class, or profession, or gender - as successful white professionals, as capable, all-important No. 1 son, etc. In

fact it is not unusual to find that those who are the least proud of their gayness are also the ones most arrogant about being male, or being white, or being economically successful. These people overcompensate to cover up their homosexuality. Lacking gay pride themselves they gravitate towards the interests of the privileged and powerful as a way to distract others from their homosexuality.

LESS OPPRESSED THAN THOU

At the other end of the spectrum we find gay people who identify instead with the interests of the powerless. They take up the struggles and rights of all oppressed groups - black South Africans, battered women, sperm whales - all except their own self-interests as gay people. In the gay movement especially there is a brand of politics that works on the assumption that oppressions fall into a hierarchy. There are oppressions based on race, class, gender, physical disability, sexuality. Each such oppression can apparently be ranked in order of severity. Alternately and it amounts to the same thing severity is ranked by counting oppressions - which group is doubly oppressed, which group quintuply. Concrete discussion of the issues and how to link these up to form coalitions degenerate into arithmetic, with people guiltling each other as to who suffers more oppressions numerically. Gay men who subscribe to this brand of politics learn to put themselves very low on the totem pole. How many oppressions can they count for themselves as gay men - one or two at the most - and it's all just based on runaway, uncontrolled male hormones anyway. As a result they learn to put their issues and self-interests last on the agenda.

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At an AMALGM meeting where we debated the Newsletter's editorial policy there was concern raised that some lesbian readers might be offended by explicit representations of gay male sexuality in the publication. To support my position that the Newsletter should not shy away from addressing controversial issues if we feel they are important I suggested the analogy with discussions of racism. White readers of the newsletter might turn off to articles about racism but these issues are too important to ignore. We have a duty to educate and to in-

form. One participant in this debate, a gay man, disagreed by pointing to the masthead of our newsletter. White gay people he proclaimed were not included in the definition BAGMAL (our name at that time), lesbians were. My position was really tantamount to excluding the interests of Asian lesbians. I was truly shocked at how large his blind spot was. Could he have missed the GM in the definition BAGMAL and wasn't his position tantamount to excluding the issues and interests of Asian gay men. Or was it so obvious that gay men should automatically step down

and suppress their self-interests when another group objects, a group perhaps higher in rank in the hierarchy of oppression?

GAY ARROGANCE WEEK

Learning to be assertive, arrogant, demanding and uncompromising when our rights and interests as gay people are at stake - this is a process which we must undertake as individuals and as a movement. Gay and lesbian pride week is a celebration of our efforts to be open, proud and uncompromising and a good reminder of the need to renew our efforts to learn to be proud: Are there a few more people we can be honest with this year, a brother or sister or parent we should stop lying to, a few more instances when we should demand that they be sensitive to our feelings instead of our always accommodating to theirs? If you have not decided to march with AMALGM this year at the parade perhaps you need to ask yourself "who and what is stopping me and why am I letting them?"

LET THEM CLEAN IT UP

For the weeks of Gay and Lesbian Pride coming up let's learn to put our self-interests as gay people first on the list. We want to be proud but we should also be arrogant, self-indulgent, selfish, uncompromising where our needs and rights as gay men and lesbians are concerned. Like my friend's boyfriend, Mr. No. 1 son let's learn to throw up what we don't want to swallow. If they don't like it they can clean it up.◊