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WRITING DESIRE, REWRITING CHINESENESS[1]

Ronald Baytan
De La Salle University

This essay discusses the author's poetics and politics as a writer, specifically how his subject position as Filipino Chinese and gay informs what and how he writes. He explores and thus explains what it means to be a Chinese Filipino gay writer, what it means to be a pilgrim of the Word, what it means to discover poetry and to use it to affirm an abjected identity, resurrect a forgotten voice, reconstruct a bigoted history and proclaim the intransigence of desire.

Poetry is art, identity and politics—all rolled into one. Using the fabric of metaphor and music, poetry proclaims what is beautiful, what is true, what is just. What we write is an extension of our being—or maybe what we write is exactly who we are—how we powder ourselves with words, bejewel our lives with symbols, and clothe our minds with metaphors. There can be no poetry without beauty, without the "I," without ideology.

In this essay, I shall discuss my poetics and politics as a writer—how my subject position as Filipino Chinese and gay informs what and how I write. What does it mean to be a Chinese Filipino gay writer? What does it mean to be a pilgrim of the Word? What does it mean to discover poetry and to use it to affirm an abjected identity, to resurrect a forgotten voice, to reconstruct a bigoted history, and to proclaim the intransigence of desire?

This is my story, and this is the poetry of the queen who sings the blues.

CHINESE RETELLINGS

In 1998, I was writing narrative poems for Professor Martin

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Anderson's class and doing research on Chinese Filipino gay men. While looking for materials on Chinese homosexuality, I stumbled upon Bret Hinsch's book called *Passions of the Cut Sleeve* (1990), which chronicles the tradition of male love in China from the Zhou to the Qing dynasty.[2] He uses mainly literary and historical documents pertaining to same-sex love as his evidence. I had read about same-sex love in China before, but I saw the connection between my poetry and my research only in Professor Anderson's class. I knew then that the time had come for me to address the issue of ethnicity in my poetry.

So why retell Chinese same-sex narratives?

The whole tradition of male love in China is lost to my generation. The only popular story is that of the cut sleeve, but even this may evade the consciousness of a typical Chinese Filipino. The stories have been subjected to institutionalized forgetting. Of the hundreds of tales one learns in Chinese preparatory schools, not one would be homosexual in nature, especially since the Chinese schools thriving in this country are Christian fundamentalist in orientation. It is perfectly possible that the older generations (the *hua quiao* or soujourners, the G.I.'s or genuine *Intsik*)—especially the educated ones—know about this tradition. But why is the tradition absent in our cultural memory? Why has it been obliterated from our world? Thus, I have decided to rewrite these legends for the simple reason that I want to reclaim *our* history. What has been subjected to cultural amnesia, I wish to save. No one else in the Philippines to my knowledge has worked on these tales; no one else—save for Dr. Richard Chu and Dr. Michael L. Tan—has talked about sexuality and Chineseness in this country.

The older generation laments that the young ones are no longer "Chinese." Many of us apparently do not speak Chinese well, are ignorant of Chinese traditions, customs and social practices, and marry outside our race. But I wish to ask: What constitutes Chineseness? How do we draw the line between the authentic and the inauthentic? How does one reclaim a "lost" Chinese identity? Which traditions must be promoted, which practices must be preserved, and which values must be upheld? If we are to retrieve our fragmented histories, should we not also try to do this from the purview of sexuality? If we are going to resurrect Fa Mulan in our consciousness and the other tales that codify a certain mode of desiring, promote a heterosexual way of life and prescribe procreation as the natural

and only logical function of sex, should we not likewise recover the tales of Jifang and Ruiji, Long Yang and Wei, Emperor Ai and Dong Xian, and show the breadth and scope of Chinese eroticism, if indeed we want to preserve whatever is left of our culture?

How does a gay Chinese Filipino, then, make the issue of sexuality central to this "re/sinicization" process?[3] It is imperative that he or she reconstruct the Chinese Filipino identity by actively reinscribing the self in the culture's memory. The love that had been kept from speaking has to finally speak up. The "militant" Chinese Filipino gay/lesbian will have to retrieve the lost stories that affirm his or her desire; and he or she must redefine Chineseness from the vantage point of his or her sexuality. If Chineseness is indeed to be questioned or defined, the task cannot be done without invoking the discourse of sexuality, without reconstituting the Chinese self from the hetero/homo binary.

When a Chinese Filipino gay refashions the Chinese identity by retelling what is lost, he or she reclaims the homosexual space his/her homophobic culture has tried to obliterate. Contrary to popular belief, history is not purely about remembering; it is also about forgetting—for in the final analysis, what is remembered is dependent on what is forgotten and on who remembers.[4] The hegemonic heteropatriarchal culture has chosen to forget its same-sex past, and so the Chinese Filipino gay writer has to counter this by making sure that what has been lost is recovered, reconstructed, and re-told, and this must be done with the gay Chinese Filipino as one of the storytellers.

I have written the male love tales because I wish my lesbian, gay and queer kinsfolk to connect with the other Chinese homosexual identities. The gay and lesbian/queer discourse in the Chinese world has exploded in the last fifteen years, and hardly anyone in the Philippines (save those in academia) is cognizant of this development. Why are the Chinese in the Philippines not as militant and active as those in the other Chinese cultures, for instance, in Hong Kong and Taipei? Why are there only very few Chinese Filipino men and women in LGBT pride marches? I believe that the narratives serve as ways of returning home to the mythical China of their parents and grandparents, of refashioning the Chinese identity, and of connecting with the other queer Chinese. Historical forces have definitely cut off the Chinese Filipino from his or her queer brethren but the gay and lesbian narratives can serve as links. There is so much that

we can learn from the politics and activism of the other LGBT Chinese cultures, but one has to first look for the thread that binds them all, and one of them is the tradition of male love in China.

In the Chinese world, no one is supposed to talk about homosexuality and everyone is expected to be heterosexual, to marry someday and to have kids who will continue the family bloodline and help in the family business. This is the life the Chinese are supposed to live.[5] We are told that Chineseness and homosexuality do not go well together. Homosexuality is always blamed on the Filipino *bakla,* always on the Other. The irony of this is that during the Spanish colonial period, the Spaniards blamed the Chinese for introducing sodomy to the so-called natives of the islands.[6]

Perhaps historical forces have shaped the way the Chinese Filipinos view homosexuality. It is possible to assume that the Chinese who migrated to our country mostly came from the poor or merchant classes, so they would not have been so familiar with the literary and historical texts about homosexuality.[7] It is also possible to take Hinsch's position that two important events in the twentieth century ushered in changes in the way the Chinese in the Mainland view same-sex relations: one, the change in the literary language from the classical to the vernacular (*bai hua*), for this cut off the people from the cut sleeve tradition; two, the implantation of Western discourses on sexuality in China, for this firmly entrenched in the people's consciousness the Western hetero/homo binary which medicalized homosexuality and, ironically, made the Chinese look at same-sex love as an import from the West and as a sign of Western excess or aberration.[8]

It must be reiterated, however, that the cut sleeve tales all point to the inevitable conclusion that same-sex love has been an integral feature of Chinese culture for thousands of years. By rewriting these stories and legends, I would like to resurrect the voices of marginalized subjectivities that have been excluded from the grand narratives of the Chinese Filipino culture.

By retelling the *cut sleeve* tales, I wish to emphasize the tradition of male love to which my fellow Chinese Filipinos belong and from which they can draw inspiration. We are, indeed, fortunate in that the Chinese have a veritable body of historical writings and literary works that affirm who and what we are. Because China has had a very long and sophisticated

history as a civilization, the Chinese have a literary history which contains stories of same-sex love.[9] The Chinese men who love men have a written proof of their existence throughout China's long history, and they have been represented in more than one way, in ways beyond the stereotypical, whereas the *bakla* or gays in the Philippines have just begun writing their desires.

Perhaps last in my objectives for rewriting Chinese legends is that I wish to offer my readers—especially (Chinese Filipino) gays and lesbians—models for the affirmation of homosexuality. The tales of the cut sleeve depict the beauty and the pathos of human love and extol virtues like compassion, sincerity, fidelity and selflessness. These narratives show the Othered reader: *You can find a longtime companion, you can be happy, and you should be proud of who you are.*

REWRITING ANG KONG'S PAST

In rewriting the legends, I depended much on two texts: Ameng of Wu's *The Cut Sleeve* (1996) and Bret Hinsch's *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (1990). I tried my best to be faithful to the original stories and made little changes in terms of plot and politics. The reason is that I found the narratives affirmative. Despite the fact that these stories come from a world with its own ways of mapping sexual desires, a world operating at a different time-frame, they are in harmony with three characteristics of the modern homosexual identity theorized by David Bergman: permanence, genuineness of experience, and equality of relations.[10]

One of the narratives I have retold in Hinsch's book is Li Yu's "A Male Mencius' Mother Educates His Son and Moves House Three Times"[11] and I gave it an eponymous title: "Ruiji." This poem is the tale of two lovers, Ruiji and Jifang. Ruiji wins a male beauty contest held in the village square; and is spotted by Jifang. It is love at first sight, and the two decide to live together as a couple. However, Ruiji—fearing that he will have to marry someday—castrates himself. Quite amazingly, his wound turns into a female sexual organ. Ruiji is, however, punished for his self-inflicted "crime"; Jifang takes the blame and dies. And Ruiji is left to take care of Jifang's son, Chengxin. He takes care of him so well that upon Chengxin's passing of the government examination, the people call him *Mencius' Mother*, "the paragon of widowhood who devotes everything to the education of her son."[12]

In Ruiji's story, contemporary readers might interpret the beating and death of Jifang as an example of homophobia and gay bashing. But it is clear in Hinsch's work that Ruiji and Jifang were punished not because they shared same-sex relations. In fact, as Hinsch demonstrates, we are told even in the Li Yu narrative itself that two men can live together as a couple—the way a husband and a wife do.[13] The assumption is that both men marry and fulfill their procreative duties. A same-sex affair can exist side by side an opposite-sex partnership. What is in question in the Ruiji-Jifang narrative, then, is the defilement of the body, not the condemnation of same-sex relations. Hinsch avers that the nature of the crime has to do with "filiality."[14] In addition, the mounting violence is also caused by envy. Ruiji was the most beautiful man in the town. So the townspeople vented all their anger on Jifang, precisely since he was the "cause" of Ruiji's castration the irony is that the guilty one was Ruiji and not Jifang.

I have made some changes to the Ruiji-Jifang story in terms of narrative detail and focus. In the original version, after the castration, Ruiji transforms into a woman. I have decided to end my first retelling with only the violent act:

In pain and pleasure, Ruiji lay
In bed waiting to show
Jifang the essence
Of his love.

My purpose here is to heighten the selflessness of Ruiji. I refused to end with the transformation because this might only reinforce the myth that men-loving-men wish to become women, or that the solution to their problem is sex-change. The omission may be considered radical, since Hinsch claims that the Ruiji story is one of the rare examples of the gender transitive model of homosexuality (meaning, one involving a crossing of gender boundaries) in the cut sleeve tradition.[15] I have inadvertently removed the proof of this model of homosexuality by not mentioning it at all. My reason is that the gender-change ending is couched in heterosexist terms. The affair seems to have achieved a happy resolution because Ruiji and Jifang are now a male-female couple. I have retained the post-castration part of the story, since the focus of the narrative is Ruiji as a parent. Whether Ruiji—Chengxin's "mother"—has a female sexual organ or not is irrelevant to the point; and this is not mentioned in"Ruiji, Mother of Chengxin." In my retelling, I emphasize Ruiji's parenting skill. I wish to convey—albeit indirectly—the idea that parenting is not dependent on

a person's sexual preference. As in the original, the narrative is even more dissident because the single parent who makes everything work, who rears a good son and is named *Mencius' Mother*, is a man of the cut sleeve.

The two poems, "Ruiji" and "Ruiji, Mother of Chengxin," however, are connected because the ending of the second poem goes back to the meeting of Jifang and Ruiji "where everything began." In the poem's ending, though Ruiji cannot forget the violent death of Jifang, he has learned to move on with his life. In addition, I have also retained the sexual innuendos attending Chengxin's growing-up years. In the original story, Chengxin is chased by his teacher and scholars, suggesting that he is very beautiful. I have added details regarding his beauty by comparing him to both Jifang and Ruiji:

> *Chengxin grew up to rival even Ruiji in beauty,*
> *His body glistening like newly picked plums,*
> *Soft and smooth, a ripening reflection*
> *Of Jifang's physique, though more elegant*
> *And more serene. Long Yangs and Mei Meis came*
> *To taste the maddening fruit, but Ruiji*
> *Guarded the orchard well.*

In the Li Yu story, Chengxin seems to be coveted only by boys and men at different points in his life. I have decided to add Meimeis ("little sisters") to heighten his beauty. Likewise, in describing him, I have decided to use agricultural metaphors since these are most commonly used in the description of men of the cut sleeve. Besides, I was trying to pun the word "fruit." If Chengxin was a fruit and was described in contrast with his two fathers, this should suggest that he probably also liked men.

Some legends were not easy to retell. "The Cut Sleeve" proved to be difficult to write because, after all, how can one retell a very short and famous narrative? This is the story:

> Emperor Ai was sleeping in the daytime with Dong Xian stretched out across his sleeve. When the emperor wanted to get up, Dong Xian was still asleep. Because he did not want to disturb him, the emperor cut off his own sleeve and got up. His love and thoughtfulness went this far![16]

What I did was to locate a significant event in Dongxian's life, an event

that I could connect with the cut sleeve. All I knew when I started to write the poem was that it had to end with the cut sleeve. I remembered that after Emperor Ai's death, Dong Xian committed suicide.[17] This prompted me to situate the poem temporally between Ai's death and Dong Xian's suicide. So instead of merely highlighting the humbling nature of love (because Ai the Emperor cuts off his sleeve for his beloved), I decided to add more pathos to their story by showcasing the suicide. Some may say it is sad that Dong Xian killed himself, but life proved meaningless after Ai's death. Dong Xian would much rather die with his beloved than be killed by the enemies. He loved Ai till death, and before he lost consciousness, he remembered the cut sleeve incident which was the most profound proof of Emperor Ai's love.

"Emperor Wu, Confession" is an experiment in storytelling.[18] Emperor Wu (then King of Jiaodong) and Han Yan studied together. They developed a friendship that grew stronger and stronger until Wu's ascension; thereafter, Han Yan became the emperor's most trusted warrior. One day, Liu Fei the King of Jiangdu—the emperor's brother—paid the emperor a visit to hunt with him. Since the emperor was not yet ready to leave, he sent Han Yan to go ahead with his retainers. Liu Fei thought the emperor was passing by so he ordered his soldiers to get off the road and he himself knelt down to honor the emperor. Han Yan raced through the road swiftly that he did not even notice the king; but the king saw him, realized his mistake, and took this act as an insult. The angry Liu Fei reported this incident to his mother the empress dowager. This was the beginning of the old woman's hatred towards Han Yan. So years later, when Han Yan was accused of having an affair with one of the women of the royal court, she ordered that he be put to death. And no matter how much the emperor pleaded with his mother, Han Yan had to die.

In the original narrative, the death of Han Yan is chiefly the empress dowager's decision and the woman who supposedly cavorted with Han Yan is inconsequential. What I tried to do in the retelling is to downplay the empress' grudge since to discuss this would only force me to narrate the source of her hatred, which was irrelevant to my plot. In my retelling, I zeroed in on the supposed infidelity of Han Yan, and I made Emperor Wu partly responsible for Han Yan's death. I also gave the woman more narrative space. I, therefore, highlighted the erotic triangle in my poem. Every love triangle should involve jealousy—this is what ultimately kills Han Yan.

I played with the narrative structure. Instead of using linear plotting beginning with the illicit affair, I began with the death of Han Yan in this confession. "And the messenger proclaimed: / He is dead." I then flashed forward to the present and back again to the night Han Yan was supposed to die. Basically, the narrative kept shuttling back and forth from the present to the past and further past. In the middle of the poem, I showed how Han Yan died—by suicide (which is different from the original). I immediately followed this with the woman's confession. In my version, then, it is true that Han Yan had sexual relations with the woman, but it was only a one-night stand and he did not defile her, which was the allegation. I gave this woman a name, Meimei, and I made her confess her "sin," too.[19] I ended the narrative with the parting between Han Yan and Emperor Wu, the emperor's last glimpse of his beloved:

From my window, I saw him
Running through the footpaths
Of my orange grove, and he faded
In the arms of midnight mist.

In the real narrative, Han Yan is killed and the story ends. In my retelling, I have invested his character with more depth and complexity: In the end, Han Yan killed himself to prove to Wu his love. He shall not be killed by anyone else. He had to die by innocent hands—his own.

"Mizi Xia" (or Mi Xia) and "Longyang" echo each other thematically in that they both underscore the precarious nature of love.[20] Viscount Mi Xia was once the lover of the Duke of Wei. When his mother got sick, he used his highness' chariots and the duke did not complain and complemented him for his filial devotion. One day Mi Xia offered his half-eaten peach to the duke because it was sweet and delicious—the duke praised him for his selflessness. Now that the duke no longer loves him, the duke claims that Mi Xia had once stolen his chariot and had the audacity to offer the duke a half-eaten peach. In my poem, I hardly utilized this narrative. I focused instead on Mi Xia's fear—that one day, the king would lose his love for him; and I turned Mi Xia into a symbol: jade.

The poem originated from an exercise in Professor Martin Anderson's class. We were asked to think of a character, literary or otherwise, and turn him or her into a symbol. I was at that time reading the cut sleeve

tales, and so Mi Xia's sad story came to mind. I decided to drop the funny narrative because in the first place, it was very short. There was nothing more I could squeeze out of or develop from the story. On the other hand, I realized I could give Mi Xia more self-knowledge and, therefore, more pathos. Instead of focusing on the Duke Ling of Wei, I reworked the tale from Mi Xia's perspective and his understanding of his position in Wei's life. In a way, the conflict in the poem already foregrounds the events that will actually take place: Wei will find someone else. The story reiterates the fleeting side of love, the one grounded on physical beauty. What is worn, what is used, what is objectified—like a piece of jewelry—one can get tired of, one can always replace. This is what happens to Mi Xia: "the jade / He (duke) wears around his wrist."

The same sentiment—the same fear of not being loved long and true enough—is evident in "Long Yang."[21] The original tale is actually a happy one: Lord Long Yang and the King of Wei are fishing in the lake. Every time Long Yang catches a bigger fish, he wishes to throw away the smaller one. Suddenly a strange epiphany comes to him: he is the fish that can be caught and thrown away. He weeps, the king asks him why, and he tells him the reason. The King, out of love for Long Yang, issues an edict: "Anyone who will dare offer me beautiful people will be executed together with his family!"[22]

In my Long Yang poem, it is the king who rejoices every time he catches a bigger fish. And I end the poem with the king rowing the boat back to the palace. Will he issue the edict as well? The poem does not say so. But one must take note that the one rowing the boat is the King, not Long Yang. This says so much about King Wei's character because under no conditions should the suzerain work. The pain of being replaced is retained in the poem—the only difference is that I ended with this pain, to highlight the pathos of my character:

Yang could feel his heart
Beating like the water
Shaken by Wei's rowing arms.
He folded his arms across his chest
As if to comfort himself, and gazed
At the fish for a long, long time.

With the other legends—"Quan," "Qinshu," and "Pan Zhang"—I have

tried to be faithful not only in terms of narrative detail and structure but also in terms of poetic imagery.[23] The Chinese male love tradition basically uses recurring images to denote male love and male beauty. Fruits like plums, cherries and peaches are often used to describe the beauty and freshness of a young and beautiful man. Jade—the most significant gemstone for the Chinese—is always compared to the skin of the beloved. I have used this in my retellings. There are also phrases which I retained, one of which is "sharing the pillow" to denote living together. It was crucial that I retain it as a detail in the poem because the poem "Pan Zhang" was after all grounded on this image.

After reading my retellings, the reader may come away with the impression that so much importance is placed on youth and beauty. This holds true for the male love tradition in China. Beauty and youth go hand in hand to define what is desirable, and who must be loved. Ruiji is the most beautiful man in his town, Quan suffers from Yan Shi Fan's hands because he is beautiful yet cannot be possessed, Qinshu—despite his thinness—is desired by his co-workers, Mi Xia is loved by Wei for his youth. I did not change this obsession with beauty because to turn the characters into ugly men would have changed the story. One may safely say that the "lookist" tendencies in the Chinese narratives have been left unchallenged in my poetry. Nevertheless, isn't the legend or the myth principally about the good, the noble, and the beautiful? Is obsession with beauty not a transcultural phenomenon? Yes, different cultures will have to have different concepts of beauty; but it is an undeniable fact that in every culture, someone has to be considered blessed with good looks and someone has to pay the price for being homely and odd-looking.

In addition, despite the seeming predominance of beautiful men in my cut sleeve narratives, it is character that matters in the end. The beginning of love is the visual feast, the skin. But what sustains love—if it is true—is not the flesh but the soul. Ruiji fell in love with Jifang and sacrificed everything to become a good parent to Chengxin because he saw Jifang's kindness. The King of Wei had so many other fish to catch—men more beautiful than Long Yang—but he refused to cavort with other men. Pan Zhang and Wang Chongxian grew old together studying poetry and calligraphy.

By looking at the different tales of the cut sleeve, one sees the complex faces of love—the finite versus the eternal, the selfish versus the

selfless, the coward versus the heroic, the object versus the subject. Some stories end tragically. Some stories contain violence—against someone else, against the self: Ruiji castrates himself for Jifang, Jifang is killed by a horde of jealous people, Dong Xian and Han Yan commit suicide, Yan Shi Fan castrates his unreachable Quan, Wei verbally destroys Mi Xia. But every story, of whatever nature, for as long as it is about love—necessitates tears.

In the end, why should Emperior Ai, Dong Xian and Long Yang live on in my poetry? We can read their stories to see who we are and to affirm our existence as a group of people. What I would like to show through my retellings is the bond between these historical and literary figures and the people of my generation. These men are my *ang kong*, my true affectional grandfathers. Because in handing down to us the legacy of a life lived with courage, passion and quiet dignity, they have given us a life and an identity we can be proud of.

NOTES

[1] This is a revised version of an essay that first appeared in the postlude of my creative dissertation entitled *The Queen Sings the Blues: Politics and Pathos in the Poems of a Gay Chinese Filipino*, Ph.D. English (Creative Writing), University of the Philippines, April 2003. It is hoped that this revised work makes up for the theoretical blind spots, occasional typos, and citation errors in the earlier work.

[2] Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). It must be acknowledged that one of the main texts for the tales in Retellings is Bret Hinsch's book. The other is Ameng of Wu(xian)'s *The Cut Sleeve* (excerpts), trans. Giovanni Vitiello in *The Penguin Book of International Gay Writing*, ed. Mark Mitchell (New York: Penguin, 1995), 31-39.

[3] For lack of a better word, I am using "re/sinicization." There is a problem with the word because it seems to me that the term assumes that something is amiss, that something pure has become "inauthentic" when the debate should very well question the notion of the "authentic." This is one of the theoretical limitations of this paper, I must acknowledge. This paper that supposedly proclaims heterogeneity and fragmentation of the unified "I" reverts to some form of essentialist humanist poetics/politics. This problem of "Chineseness" is addressed in my academic papers. Please read: Ronald Baytan, "Preliminary Notes on the Chinese Filipino Male Homosexual Identity," *Intercultural Relations, Cultural Transformation, and Identity, The Ethnic Chinese: Selected Papers Presented at the 1998 ISSCO Conference*, ed. Teresita Ang-See (Manila: Kaisa Publications,

2000), 587-627; and Baytan, "Sexuality, Ethnicity and Language: Exploring Chinese Filipino Male Homosexual Identity," *Culture, Health and Sexuality,* Vol. 2, Number 4 (2000): 391-404.

[4] Walter Benjamin offers an illuminating insight on the nature of history. Please read: Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents*, ed. Dennis Walder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 362-364.

[5] For a nonfiction narrative on this, please read: Ronald Baytan, "Pua Iyam," *Ladlad 2: An Anthology of Philippine Gay Writing*, ed. J. Neil C. Garcia and Danton Remoto (Mandaluyong: Anvil, 1996), 7-14.

[6] All the references to the sodomitic acts of the Chinese can be found by checking the index to *The Philippine Islands*, ed. Emma Helen Blair, James Alexander Robertson (Cleveland: Arthur Clark and Company), 195. For extra secondary references, see page 13 of Milagros C. Guerrero, "The Political Background," *The Chinese in the Philippines*: 1770-1898, Vol. 2, ed. Alfonso Felix, Jr. (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1969), 1-17. Albert Chan, "Chinese-Philippine Relations in the Late Sixteenth Century and to 1603," *Philippine Studies*, (Vol. 26, 1978), 51-82. For a thorough critique of the sodomitic chronicles from the optic lens of sexuality and gender construction, please see J. Neil C. Garcia, *Philippine Gay Culture: The Last Thirty Years, Binabae to Bakla, Silahis to MSM* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1996), 138-161, 319-322.

[7] Of course the implications of this assertion are not desirable, not to mention patently elitist.

[8] See Hinsch's discussion of this matter, 1990, 168-169.

[9] I got this idea from Eve Sedgwick's comparison of the homosexual and the Jew in *Epistemology of the Closet* (California: University of California Press, 1990), 81. She states: "Unlike gay people, who seldom grow up in gay families... who have with difficulty and always belatedly to patch together from fragments a community, a usable heritage, a politics of survival or resistance; unlike these, Esther has intact and to hand an identity and history and commitments she was brought up in...."

[10] David Bergman, "The Structure of Homosexual Discourse" (1991), *Contemporary Literary Criticism Yearbook 1992*, ed. James Draper (Michigan: Gale Research, 1993), 625. The only concept not glaringly present in the narratives is "Otherness"; for in the tales, the men are not othered because of their sexual and affectational preference. In using Bergman's categories, I do not mean to denote that the Chinese characters are homosexuals, for clearly they all came from a time when the Western concept of the homosexual had not even been invented yet. What I am trying to point out is that their stories fit quite well some aspects of modern homosexuality and, whether or not the Chinese have the concept of the homosexual, the stories—by virtue of their visions of same-sex love—can be used as role models for today's homosexual identity and relations. This logic, of course,

is ultimately essentialist.

[11] Hinsch, 1990, 126-129.

[12] Hinsch, 1990, 129.

[13] Please read Hinsch 1990, 127-134. Hinsch quotes Li Yu: "In Fujian the southern custom is the same as that for women. ... [I]t is just like a proper marriage with a formal wedding" (127). Hinsch also states: "This ritual was not simply the product of Li Yu's wild imaginings: men apparently found it desirable to construct homosexual relationships along the lines of heterosexual marriage" (129).

[14] Hinsch , 1990, 128.

[15] Hinsch, 1990, 129.

[16] This is Bret Hinsch's translation of Wuxian Ameng's (or Ameng of Wu) work in Hinsch, 1990, 53.

[17] The source of this aspect of the tale is Hinsch, 1990, 46.

[18] The main source of this tale and the summary here is Hinsch, 1990, 48. Hinsch quoted pages 465-466 of the second volume of [Sima Qian] Ssuma Ch'ien's *Records of the Grand Historian*, translated by Burton Watson, 2 volumes (New York: n.p., 1961).

[19] Looking back, I feel that I should have named the girl "Mey Li" (beautiful) or "Li Hua" (beautiful flower), instead of "Mei Mei" (little sister). Admittedly, it would be quite unthinkable for parents to name their child "Mei Mei" as "mei mei" means "sister" and can only be used as a nickname. "Mey Li," on the other hand, is a common Chinese name for girls. Apparently, many Chinese parents name their child after characteristics that they wish their child would possess or think the child possesses.

[20] The main source of the Mi Xia tale is Ameng of Wu, 1995, 31.

[21] The main source of this tale is Ameng of Wu, 1995, 32.

[22] Ameng of Wu, 1995, 32.

[23] The main source of "Quan" is Hinsch, 1990, 121-123; "Qinshu"and "Pan Zhang," Ameng of Wu, 1995, 32 and 36-39.

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Ronald Baytan

THE CUT SLEEVE

Dong Xian had dreamt
Of this day many, many times:

When he stepped
Out of the emperor's chamber,
He headed for his beloved Ai's grave,
Holding a sword firmly in his hand
To protect himself.

Without any heir, without any doubt,
Ai had declared Dong Xian
Emperor.

At his deathbed, Ai dismissed
Dong Xian's protest:
"How can a man rule the earth
Without Heaven's decree?"

Ai reached for Dong Xian's palm,
And handed him
The imperial seal. He said: "A force
Equal to the Heavens
Has mandated your reign."
And Ai took his last glimpse
Of human love.

But the enemies
Of the Hans never slept.
A few hours from now,
Dong Xian knew Wang Mang

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And his armies would seize
The palace. And kill him.

No. Dong Xian chose to spend
The morning watching
From Ai's tomb
Cherry blossoms kissing
The earth's many lips.

He soon summoned the sword
From its sleep, and the loyal subject
Honored its duty: It painted
The ground red.

Before Dong Xian could shut
His ears to the world's wailing,
Memory took him back
To the red chamber
One misty morning:

He was dreaming
Across the sleeve
Of Ai's tunic, blooming
With golden chrysanthemums.
And careful
Not to wake him, Ai the Emperor
Cut off his sleeve.

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LONG YANG

There in the sky's mirror—the expanse of blue
Water, the two of them lay, Long Yang
And the King of Wei. Today the lake
Was their possession, and nothing could be heard
Except their voices and the splash of water
Opening itself to the lovers' hooks.

Lord Long Yang looked at his empty basket,
And knew the fish found the king more
Charming. Every time a bigger fish appeared,
Wei would say Here is a better catch and whistle
In excitement. Something always has to please him
More, this Long Yang realized and he started

Weeping. "We can share the fish, beautiful
One," Wei tried to comfort his peach
But Yang replied, "The fish you caught earlier
No longer interests you. Soon
You will throw it back into the water
Because there are more beautiful
Ones waiting for your noble hook."

The king did not say a word, and rowed
The boat back to the golden palace.
The oars sliced through
The lake and Yang could hear his heart
Beating like the water
Shaken by Wei's rowing arms.
Yang folded his arms across his chest
As if to comfort himself, and gazed
At the fish for a long, long time.

EMPEROR WU, CONFESSION

And the messenger proclaimed:
"He is dead."

The trees have changed
Their color, but Han Yan still
Breathes in my memory,
His heart throbbing like rain
Falling on delicate palms
Of leaves the color
Of flaming mandarins.

I wear Yan's words
Like layers of silk, heavy
And thick on my body:
"She is not telling the truth."
That night, he took the back route,
And never returned.

Mei-Mei, the favored one, claimed
Yan had seized the plums
Of her ripeness, for the warrior's eyes
Could open even the women's quarters.
So furious was the empress dowager
That she ordered his arrest, death, both.

Finding him smelling of women's
Powder several times, I listened
To the news—to my faithless nose.

I let the hunt happen.

His sword glinted
In the fields, and the armies
Found him cold, arms

On his chest, a pendant of gold
In his grasp, bearing
The name of the one
Heaven knew he loved.

Mei-Mei later confessed
She mounted him in his sleep,
And the emperor's steed ran
Wild across a heartland
Of bleeding plums.

Mei-Mei and I burn
Offerings.
We have built a palace
Of wishes for his spirit.
Yet paper is not enough.
The flickering flame speaks
Of purple skies one windy night:

From my window, I saw him
Running through the footpaths
Of my orange grove, and he faded
In the arms of midnight mist.

*

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