

By Oliver Wang

AsianAvenue.com Interview

February 2003

When this film is finally finished, you might not find the DVD at Amazon.com. A team of Asian American filmmakers is setting out to create something never before seen: a professionally produced all-Asian American adult film. The movie's principal creator is not a porn baron nor is he some yuppie with deep pockets and a callow mind. He's none other than Asian American Studies professor, Darrell Hamamoto from UC Davis.

Hamamoto originally sketched out the idea for an "Asian American porno practice" in a 1998 essay entitled "The Joy F--k Club" (reprinted here). The essay opens with an anecdote about how his course titled "Theoretical Perspectives in Asian American Studies." His students, when asked who they fantasized about, met the question with "equal measures of defensiveness and evasion," leading Hamamoto to the conclusion that their "sexualized semiotic universe...is overwhelmingly inhabited by Euroamericans, to the virtual exclusion of all but a select few people of color." In other words, even our sexual fantasies, we dream of white bodies, not yellow or brown.

Hamamoto's foray into adult cinema is intended to finally give Asian Americans the opportunity to literally view themselves as sexual beings. In parallel, director James Hou is producing a "making of" documentary, *Masters of the Pillow* to explore issues of Asian American sexuality in society. This project is just now getting off (no pun intended) and promises to spark a variety of conversations within our communities. AsianAvenue.Com recently interviewed both Hamamoto and Hou about their projects and excerpted the following:

AsianAvenue.Com: When did you first have this idea about advocating an Asian American adult movie?

Darrell Hamamoto: The idea started to germinate after I got back from a year-long stay in Japan, in 1994. I had been immersed in an all-Yellow environment and here I was back in White Supremacist America with self-flattering White images bombarding me. My idea of a Yellow erotica was an aggressive response to the militant White bombardment of my psychic no-fly zone.

AA: How does one go about making a socially responsible porno? Or is that what you're even aiming at?

DH: All "porno" is socially irresponsible by definition. That's why the arbiters of responsibility/irresponsibility feel the need to create a separate category called "porn" or "porno." This actually works in favor of the pornographer or eroticist (as I prefer to called), because it creates a social taboo that begs for violation.

AA: James, what attracted your interest in terms of documenting this project?

James Hou: Asian American men have been stereotyped in this society to such a large degree

it's almost become a self-fulfilling prophecy. I think Silicon Valley is a good example of that. We have a ton of brilliant Asian American men over there but if you asked most of them if they felt secure about their sexuality, you'd probably get some pretty mixed responses. The whole model minority myth has come at the expense of our sexuality being undermined. My film is about changing that perception through visual stimulation.

AA: This project will likely invite some degree of criticism given how controversial pornography continues to be in American society.

DH: I invite criticism. I want to begin a national conversation among Asian Americans about the scope and nature of a sexuality that I argue has been warped by White supremacist thought/behavior, the history of anti-Asian exterminationism, colonialism, removal and relocation, deportation, and anti-miscegenation laws.

JH: I'm sure there will be a lot of people offended by this film. But I think there is a significant segment of the Asian American community that is going to be glad to see someone willing to tackle these issues head on.

AA: Do you feel the need to "justify" this project in terms of your larger social and political designs for it?

DH: I don't need any sort of excuses to do what I feel is right and necessary. No fancy academic theory; no coded discussions that go by the au courant designations "The Body," "Sexualities," "Desire." I seek full-frontal honesty.

AA: Part of the problem you're addressing is how modern media fetishizes both Asian men and women, yet, isn't fetishism part of what makes images pleasurable? How can you empower with exploitation yet offer pleasurable images at the same time?

DH: Fetishism stands at the heart of what it means to be a sexualized creature. Part of this exercise is to exorcise such politically correct nonsense...from an understanding of our powerful and potent sexuality. Even if it were possible to strip human beings of their fetishistic fantasies, our mode of sexual expression would be somewhere on the order of two snails conjugating on a wet sidewalk.

AA: How have you gone about finding participants for this project? Was it harder finding men or women to participate?

DH: It's actually more difficult to find men. They all want to get-it-on, but most don't want to show their faces. There are tons of Yella womenz who want to appear on camera doing the Wild Thang. But I think having a hunkalicious Yella man is a crucial part of the equation. After all, this picture is meant to be a proudly erect statement on Asian American male sexuality.

For more information on their project, visit their WWW site at: www.mastersofthepillow.com .