

Mythopoesis in Frank Chin' s *Donald Duk* and *Gunga Din Highway*: An Adoption of Heroic Martial Posture to Counteract American Commodity Fetishism

Zeineb Abbassi

PhD student, Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sousse, University of Sousse
Tunisia

Abstract

*The Chinese American writer Frank Chin dramatizes the predicaments faced by all U.S twentieth-century minority cultures, whether oriented around ethnicity or around sexuality and how to transform themselves from marginal cultures into emergent cultures capable of challenging the mainstream one. This transformation depends in large on a shift in perspective. Part of what it means to be emergent is to associate yourself with the idea of the new. This newness, however, is a matter of perspective: what is new is what looks new from the vantage point of the dominant. So, it should not surprise us to discover that some cultural forms that we might designate as emergent are, in fact, hundreds, perhaps even thousands of years old. In this context, Frank Chin deals with mythopoesis whereby he adopts myths which have seized the imagination of classical writers. Mythopoesis adopts the ancient stories and transposes them to a symbolic meaning. Indeed, the mythopoetic dimension examined in Frank Chin's writings arises because of the cultural conflict between Chinese Americans and American mainstream culture. Accordingly, focus in this paper is going to be on how Frank Chin adopts the mythopetic dimension in his novels *Donald Duck* and *Gunga Din Highway* and the way he adapts this dimension to counteract American hegemonic culture and commodity fetishism in late capitalist America.*

Keywords: Mythopoesis, Adoption, Adptation, American Hegemonic Culture, Commodity Fetishism.

For a long time, Chinese Americans have been a voiceless people because of the racial discrimination. Chinese Americans lost their masculinity and were feminized. This kind of image is the consequence of the hegemonic power, which dominates the ideology of people. In Chin's work, he takes Chinese myths and legends as the valuable tool to remind Chinese Americans their heritage.

However, Chin's attitude toward the method of using Chinese culture has changed a little. In the very beginning, he insisted that Chinese American writers should articulate Chinese American identity by completely rejecting of both Chinese culture and white mainstream culture. Since the mid-1980s, he began to appropriate Chinese culture and set up the models for Chinese Americans.

His desire to rebuild the Chinese Americans' masculinity couldn't be fulfilled unless he reinvents and redefines the past from his subjective artistic vision. It is a strategy for him to rebuild the Chinese

American masculinity. For Chin, only by defining Chinese American culture with heroic images and

masculine deeds could Chinese survive in America. In his eyes, Chinese must have been and be heroes and fighters. Chin's strategy in reconstructing Chinese American masculinity to subvert the stereotype formed in the hegemonic power.

The Chinese American Frank Chin dramatizes the predicaments faced by all U.S twentieth-century minority cultures, whether oriented around ethnicity or around sexuality and how to transform themselves from marginal cultures into emergent cultures capable of challenging the mainstream one. So, it should not surprise us to discover that some cultural forms that we might designate as emergent are, in fact, hundreds perhaps even thousands of years old. In this context, Frank Chin deals with mythopoesis whereby he adopts myths which have seized the imagination of classical writers.

Actually, mythopoesis recreates the ancient stories. And while mythology presents its stories as if they actually took place, mythopoesis, transposes them to a symbolic meaning. Indeed, the mythopoetic works arose when the literal account of the legend could no longer be accepted. They arose in periods of crisis, of cultural transition, when faith in the authoritative structure was waning (Wang 121).

The living myth would not restore the dead past, but would redeem its living heritage. The myth also contains the tradition of re-creation. Unrest, disquiet and revolt are as much part of man's history as is the tradition of idolatry. The Culture hero in mythopoesis chooses his tradition, rejects the stultified in favor of the creative roots in the past. His choice of tradition is a recollection of man's native genius. By aligning himself with the high levels of the past, man gains the dignity of belonging without becoming depersonalized. The myth is of particular importance for the modern artist who feels himself estranged from the divisiveness and uniformity of our age.

In *Donald*

Duk, Frank Chin uses Chinese myths and legends. He finds that they are the best sources of the heroic tradition. For Chin, these stories represent the heroic tradition of ancient Chinese culture. He even praises *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* because it "explores the ethic of private revenge, the individual as soldier's constant battle to maintain personal integrity".

For *Outlaws of the Marsh*, he comments it explores "the idea of the mandate of heaven, or the Confucian idea of the oppressed people rebelling and forming a large alliance to avenge themselves against the corrupt state" (Chin et al., 1991, p.39). In both of the stories, there are the

protagonists who are rebellious and militant. They fight against the corruption for their own dream. These stories form the collective communal memory of Chinese Americans. For ethnic writers, myths and legends are important strategies of resistance and self-affirmation in novels.

They serve both as content and as organizing principle in the plot. Though some of the inherited

memories might be lost, distorted or forgotten as time passes, but most of them are still in the collective consciousness. In *Donald Duk*, Chin examines the heroic tradition included in these two novels, and also how this heroic tradition has been carried on by the Chinese immigrants in the New World. The heroic images and deeds of the protagonists subvert the feminized stereotype of Chinese Americans.

Kwan Kung is a protagonist in *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*, who along with Liu Pei (Liu Bei)

and Chang Fei (Zhang Fei) swears an oath of brotherhood in Chang's peach garden. This is a famous centuries old myth and has become the model for every subsequent brotherhood club. Among the three brothers, Kwan Kung has always been highly praised for his loyalty, courage and integrity, and is a perfect example of the ethic of private revenge preached by Confucius (Wang 120). He

is "the God of war, plunder and literature" (Chin, 1991, p.150) in Chinese culture.

In this novel, Kwan Kung is transformed into a foreman who leads the other 108 Chinese Americans to build the railroad in the west of America. Foreman Kwan Kung has the eyes "like

Dad's eyes, but more so" (Chin, 1991, p.77), because Dad has hawk eyes, which can see everything

through. In his leadership of these Chinese builders, he shows courage, intelligence and compassion. His bravery and wisdom are the important factors for him to deal with his recalcitrant boss, Charles Crocker, coowner of the Central Pacific Railroad.

There is not a trace of passiveness and docility in Kwan's character. As a leader, he leads Chinese

workers to go on strike for back pay, to compete against the Irish workers and to establish the world record by laying ten miles of rock in ten hours. Kwan is no longer the sheep type of the stereotyped Chinaman who acquiesces to the silence or absence of Chinese Americans in American history. As a heroic embodiment of Chinese Americans, Kwan is "antithetical in everyway to the image of the quiet, passive and submissive Oriental house boy" (Cheung, 1993, p. 242).

The 108 outlaws are also mentioned in this novel. They are "an extension of the heroic tradition

and stand for the ethic of popular or collective revenge against the corrupt state, or the

mandate of heaven" (Chin, 1991, p.35). In *Donald Duk*, the 108 outlaws are transformed from Chinese literary characters into the 108 Chinese American railroad builders. After Chinese arrived in America, they were not welcome. Most of the laws excluded them. Thus, they lived in the hostility of the whites, like the 108 outlaws who were excluded by the government in Song dynasty. However, they were not as passive, docile and coward as recorded in American history. In the railroad building, those intelligent immigrants took up a bunch of dangerous jobs the Whites scared to take. They showed masculinity as men. The masculine and heroic images are counter to American colonizing stereotypes that would keep them geographically restricted and removed from American history.

Chin admires the 108 outlaws of *Outlaws of the Marsh* for their extraordinary talents and fighting skills. He integrates the historical facts with fantasy. By so doing, the author is incorporating the Chinese American fathers into the heroic tradition represented by the outlaws. By comparing Chinese Americans to the outlaws in the legends, Chin asserts that his Chinese Americans possess all the manly qualities defined by the dominant discourse. He locates his heroic tradition and finds his ideal manhood in the form of an aggressive, combative, and workaholic "outlaws" identity. He tries to legalize this "outlaw" identity for his Chinese Americans in his works. In *Donald Duk*, Chin examines how the heroic tradition has been inherited and handed down by immigrants in the New World. As soon as Chinese Americans arrived in America, they found themselves unwelcome. In such situation, they didn't leave the heroic tradition behind them. They didn't reject or forget Chinese myths when in the face of new experience and in the process of making history and language. What they experienced in the New World made them feel like the 108 outlaws in *the Outlaws of the Marsh*. It was the 108 outlaws who helped them to face the difficulties and to fight against the exclusion, as well as to maintain their masculinity. It was King Duk who mentioned the 108 outlaws for the first time in the novel. He intended to build 108 planes and paint the outlaws on them. On the fifteenth of the Chinese New Year, the Lantern Festival, he wanted to bum them on the Angel Island. Among the 108 outlaws, some were very famous, such as Soong Gong "The Timely Rain", Lee Kuey "The Black Tornado," Yin "The wrestler" and Wu Song "The Tiger Killer." They frequented Donald's dreams. In Donald's dreams, he imagined the 108 outlaws as Chinamen who just arrived in America. In the dream, they were godlike. Their images were great and masculine. Like the wrongly judged outlaws in Song Dynasty, Chinese immigrants are wrongly treated in America. However, for Chin, Chinese people are not as passive, docile and feminized as described in American history. By citing the traditional heroes in the legends, Chin presents the masculine

tradition of Chinese and subverts the hegemonic power of the mainstream culture. This subversion designates his attempt to prove the historical presence and contribution of the Chinese in the United States because they were and are there in a way not as represented in the official history books. In *Donald Duk*, however, he seems to be less preoccupied with the model of white patriarchy and more engaged in constructing an Asian American manhood that relies on Chinese icons of masculinity, such as Kwan Kung and Lee Kuey. Different from his earlier works dominated by themes of insurmountable alienation and nonidentity, *Donald Duk* is driven by a homing plot that, in Goldstein-Shirley's words, "transcends the traditional bildungsroman, offering a protagonist whose coming of age represents a counter-hegemonic gesture" (1).

To loosen the assimilationist hold on Donald's consciousness, Chin employs the narrative strategy of dream scenarios that thrust the boy repeatedly into the male world of the transcontinental railroad construction. Interestingly, Chinese food punctuates each of Donald's dream sequences, in which he becomes an eating and laboring member of the Chinese community, remaking Asian American history. Ho succinctly points out, "To consume Chinese food is to consume Chinese history" (38). Donald's preference for American food and rejection of Chinese dishes are an overt expression of his subscription to white culture and his belief that only white people are men enough to make history. When shopping with his father for the New Year's banquet, the most important and elaborate meal of the year, he asks for "a filet mignon wrapped in bacon" (39). But in his dreams he feels at home among the Chinese and relishes their kitchen.

In the morning before work, he follows the crowd to "the *deem sum* people's camp." "The *juk* is made, hot and fresh. For a penny he gets a steaming bowl of fresh white *juk* and a dish of three steamed pastries stuffed with fish and chicken" (72). Nourished by *deem sum*, Donald enters the heroic, historical event of the record-breaking track-laying contest between the Chinese and Irish workers.

Donald's dream world is populated not only with familiar people from San Francisco's Chinatown but also with mythical characters from the Chinese classics. Through these dreams that spill from time to time into his waking consciousness, Donald comes to understand and value Chinese American prowess, and eventually comes to embrace his ethnicity. Donald's dreams constitute the heroic history of the Chinese contribution to the building of the United States—the return of the repressed that renders real the officially erased history, which, via the oral lore, has become the Chinese American collective memory. In his dreams Donald lives this history, visceral in its triumph and disappointment, its toil and dignity, its violence and pride. The construction of the transnational railroad, therefore, becomes a privileged site for the attempt to constitute a new Asian American male subjectivity. This new subjectivity, however, challenges as well as colludes with the dominant culture.

As Viet Thah Nguyen notes, "Donald embarks on his masculine young adulthood through

a journey from the Chinese ghetto to the frontier West, a space of violent character formation [. . .] fundamental to the American imagination" (135). Powerfully shaped by Hollywood representations of the West and cowboys, Chin locates the primary site of Donald's character formation in the body politic. Ironically, this bodily based subject making has always already been inscribed in the practices

of domination "because the history of American legislation concerning Asian immigration has been explicitly a biopolitics of bodily regulation, shaping the Asian American community

through acts targeting gender, sexuality, race, and class” (V. T. Nguyen 133). What Nguyen refers to are the numerous laws that prohibited the entrance of Chinese women (the Page Law of 1875 and the resulting formation of the bachelor societies), Chinese laborers (the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Law and its ensuing revisions), and a variety of city ordinances of San Francisco that targeted the Asian body as the object of discipline and punishment (regulations on living space, the cutting of the queue as a penalty, etc.).

The masculine presence in Donald’s dreams is no longer the white iconic figures Chin has evoked elsewhere—John Wayne, Gary Cooper, and the Lone Ranger. Instead, it comes from Chinese literary tradition. Kwan Kung—a legendary figure in the Chinese classic *The Three Kingdoms*—leads the Chinese railroad workers. In a significant scene, Kwan seizes Crocker’s “six gun in his hand” and leaps onto Crocker’s white horse, “splashing mud all over Crocker” (78). Single-handedly, Kwan secures the first victory for his followers. “Kwan lifts Donald Duk into the saddle behind him and rides off to the Chinamen’s camp. Crocker chases after on foot, a white suit in a crowd of black” (78). Sitting high and proud on Crocker’s horse, Kwan boldly declares to his followers, “They say it is impossible to lay ten miles of track in one day. We begin work at dawn. By sunset we will look back on more than ten miles of track. Do that and Crocker’s horse here is ours to eat” (78). Here Kwan’s offering of the enemy’s horse for a celebratory feast constitutes a hyper masculine act. To eat the white horse, to assimilate the power of one’s enemy by eating him or his horse, is metonymic of the neutralization of white men’s power and of the feminization of the dandy owner of the Central Pacific Railroad dressed all in white.

Under Kwan’s tutelage, Donald shifts his identification away from Fred Astaire. Kwan places on him the demand of loyalty and revenge—loyalty to Chinamen and revenge for the injustice against them. Donald performs his vengeance through reconstructing the obliterated history of the Chinese railroad workers. It is through his vengeance that Donald unlearns his identification with whiteness. Three-fourths of the way into the novel, Donald, for the first time, is able to turn the tables on Fred Astaire with a poignant question, a question with a tone of vengeance: “I have always dreamed of being Fred Astaire. Did you ever dream of being like me?” (124). Astaire replies, “Oh, no. I have always dreamed of being Fred Astaire” (124). To both Donald and the reader, Astaire’s answer illuminates the asymmetrical nature of the minority’s identification with white icons and thus the coercive power exerted at the site of subject interpellation by the hegemonic culture, particularly by the ideology of assimilation. Anne Anlin Cheng writes, Racialization in America may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a dominant, standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others. The national topography of centrality and marginality legitimizes itself by retroactively positing the racial other as *always Other* and lost to the heart of the nation (10).

Astaire’s answer to Donald’s question denies the possibility of a two-way traffic of looks between the white national Self and the racialized Other—the possibility for Donald to see Astaire looking at himself through Donald’s eyes. Both lost in and angered by the chasm that Astaire’s answer has opened up, Donald falls back on a cliché, but one with some edge: “All that matters to you is you are what you always dreamed you’d be” (125). The palpable melancholia in Donald’s remark seems to initiate an effort to break free from his obsessive identification with the white icon. This small vengeance constitutes the first act of what Anne Anlin Cheng calls “the conversion of the disenfranchised person from being subjected to grief to being a subject speaking grievance” (7). In becoming a subject speaking of grievance,

Donald avenges the wrongs done to the Chinese railroad workers by first researching the history of the transcontinental railroad construction in Chinatown's library and then, when finding nothing about the Chinese in that particular history, by articulating the injustice of the historical elision. "Report[ing] a crime," as defined by Maxine Hong Kingston, "is vengeance" (53). In Donald's character development, his realization of the historical erasure of Chinese labor becomes a defining moment. He says to his father, "I dreamed *we* set a world's record [. . .]. I dreamed *we* laid the last crosstie, and it's true. [. . .] *We* made history. Twelve hundred Chinese. And they don't even put the name of *our* foreman in the books about the railroad" (137, 122, emphases mine). Donald's claim to the collective marks the beginning of the novel's resolution.

Before his journey concludes, Donald confronts the hegemonic culture epitomized by Mr. Meanwright and thus proves to be a man. In the classroom when the teacher begins to lecture on the Chinese, Donald feels for the first time "flashing hot blood and angry [. . .] at what he hears all the time" (149). He raises his hands and says, "Excuse me, Mr. Meanwright. You are incorrect, sir." [. . .] "Mr. Meanwright, what you just said about the Chinese is not true." [. . .] "Yes sir, I am offended." [. . .] "You are . . . sir, Mr. Meanwright, not correct about us being passive, non competitive. We did the blasting through Summit Tunnel. We worked through two hard winters in the high Sierra. We went on strike for back pay and Chinese foremen for Chinese gangs, and won. We set the world's record for miles of track laid in one day. We set our last crosstie at Promontory. And it is badly informed people like you who keep us out of that picture there." (150) In this public fashion, Donald finally faces and triumphs over his worst fear: being identified and identifying himself as a Chinese. Chin ends this chapter with Donald wishing Mr. Meanwright a Happy New Year in Cantonese— "*Goong hay fot choy*"—a language he has disowned until now (152).

Donald Duk's plot, centering on the rite of passage of a Chinese American adolescent, in the form of instituting his ethnic as well as gendered identity, hinges chiefly on four father figures, two real and two mythical—his father King Duk Uncle Donald Duk, Kwan Kung, and Lee Kuey. The real men incarnate the mythical men by playing them in a Cantonese opera. In the portrayal of the father character, the owner and chef of a thriving Chinese restaurant in San Francisco's Chinatown, Chin's strategy is to embed the discourse of masculinity in that of food. One of the recurring scenes is King's kitchen, where Donald and his white friend Arnold often observe and sample Dad's cooking. It is a kitchen in which the "steam and smoke bloom and mushroom-cloud about Donald Duk's father as he tosses piles of raw shrimp paste and bowls of cold sliced fish and fruit, and waves his tools into and out of the roiling atmospheres" (63).

Larry Louise, the Chinese Fred Astaire, appropriately describes this scene as "Godzilla versus the nuclear missiles" (64). Alluding to the original Japanese "Gojira," a cautionary tale against nuclear escalation, this image invokes a samurai-informed masculinity rising up to avenge its annihilation by America's wanton power and technology. Even though in *Godzilla* the giant lizard is created by French nuclear testing, it is Manhattan, the birthplace of the atomic bomb, not Paris, that is trashed (article). With this allusion, Chin transforms the kitchen into a symbolic site of violence and destruction. In this kitchen the wok becomes "the hot steel," the spatula the sword, and the chef a "swordsmen" (64, 65). The military ambiance surrounding this chef is further enhanced by the history of his training, for King has learned to cook "in the kitchens of the most powerful men in the world" and often tells "the story of how he passed the war in the kitchens of presidents, prime ministers, premiers, lords and

generalissimos” (9). Painstakingly, Chin eradicates all feminine vestiges from King’s kitchen not only with analogies of war and martial arts but also by making his cooking performative. Like a martial artist, King takes on challenges. Donald and Arnold often sit in the kitchen and “challenge the extent of Dad’s knowledge of food and cooking. Whatever the boys read about and ask for, Dad cooks without a book. Whatever it is, he cooks it” (9). Others often address King Duk as *sifu*, which means simultaneously a master chef and a kung fu master. The interchangeability between these two identities becomes apparent in the scene of ancestral worship, a ritual always performed via food and drink. The family shrine is set up on the altar table in the dining room. In front of it “stands an incense burner with smoldering sticks of incense punk. A steamed chicken on a platter and three little rice bowls filled with perfect mounds of rice [. . .]. There is a bottle of Johnny Walker Red [. . .]. The red envelopes of *lay see* are the donations of the immediate family to immediate family causes [. . .], the war chest” (65). Family and friends take turns paying respect to the ancestors’ shrine. Their stylized manner is unmistakably associated with martial arts. “He lights a stick of incense and holds it in his right hand and covers his right hand with his left, like a swordsman in a kung fu movie meeting a swordsman on the road of life” (65). With one sweep of the pen, Chin transforms what has been demeaned as a demonstration of Chinese heathenness and passivity into a masculine scene of militancy.

Metaphors of war and martial arts thus sustain the descriptions of this kitchen and its owner

—a semiotic site where the enjoyment of masculine assertion colludes with that of cooking and eating. Chin’s predilection for food is gleefully indulged in this novel, as it is set significantly around the Chinese New Year, a time of cooking and feasting and performing rituals. This is also a time when King must incarnate his mythical model, Kwan Kung, “the god of fighters, blighters and writers,” by playing or more accurately by becoming him in the Cantonese opera (67). King fits this role not simply because he is a good actor but because he embodies the god’s virtues—fierceness, loyalty, and self-discipline. It is significant that Chin makes Kwan Kung (or Guan Yu), the most worthy warrior in *The Three Kingdoms*, the god of both literature and war, who thus embodies the *wen-wu* dyad that has been central to the historical construction of Chinese masculinities. *Wen* means “cultural attainment,” and *wu*, “martial valor.” While these two qualities have been given different weight at different moments in Chinese history, their balance has never ceased to be the ideal (Louie 14). As Kam Louie explicates, “Ideal masculinity can be either *wen* or *wu* but is at its height when both are present to a high degree” (16).

Chin’s transformation of the god of war into the god of literature and war serves to idealize King as a cosmopolitan model of the balanced *wen-wu*, with his American birth, martial arts training in Hong Kong, military service in the U.S. Army, opera performance, and culinary arts. All of these contribute to King’s Asian-American-ness as the new model of Chinatown masculinity “to replace,” as Ho points out, “Hop Sing of *Bonanza*” (24). In *The Three Kingdoms*, however, Kwan Kung is not known for cultural attainment; his reputation as the best warrior rests on courage, loyalty, and discipline when it comes to women. He regards desiring and desirable women as obstacles to true brotherhood; he “would rather decapitate a beautiful woman than be tempted by her” (K. Louie 46). Therefore, for King to take the Kwan Kung role, he must exercise the ultimate self-control. He explains to Donald, Nobody wants to play Kwan Kung. Too risky.

What if they accidentally forget and eat a hotdog? Or one bite of a *cha siu bow*

goes down their throat before they remember? Kwan Kung does not accept the mess up of responsibility allowed by Western psychology.

Real men, real actors, real soldiers of the art don't lose control.

Just like Doong the Tattooed Wrestler in *The Water Margin*, when the most beautiful woman in the empire [. . .] coos and croons all her seductive know-how on Doong, he never gives in and never forgets his mission. Never. (68)

Here Chin's distinction between real and fake men pivots on a man's relationship to appetite, both sexual and alimentary. The punishment for undisciplined appetite, curiously, falls on women. "There are stories about the actor who played Kwan Kung recently and did not take the part seriously, and maybe slept with his girlfriend that night before [. . .] and when he takes the stage his girlfriend's hair turns white and she has a miscarriage" (67).

Misogyny is an indisputable component in this model of contained masculinity. Ironically, the mainstream culture's distinction between "real" and "fake" men is precisely what has incited rage in Chin, but only because the mainstream's distinction has been made along racial lines. He writes in *The Big Aiiieeeee!*

It is an article of white liberal American faith today that Chinese men, at their best, are effeminate closet queens like Charlie Chan and, at their worst, are homosexual menaces like Fu Manchu. No wonder David Henry Hwang's derivative *M. Butterfly* won the Tony for the best new play of 1988. The good

Chinese man, at his best, is the fulfillment of white male homosexual fantasy, literally kissing white ass. (xiii)

Fraught with homophobia, Chin's rage doesn't simply derive from the white man's stereotype of Asian American manhood but also from Asian American men's own subscription to it. It would become particularly maddening to Chin if he had any inkling, however slight, of the near totalizing extent of this stereotype, so much so that he himself has operated within its matrix as well, and that is exactly what Daniel Kim charges. In reading Chin's "Riding the Rails

with Chickencoop Slim," Kim argues persuasively that Chin has put "his own libidinal investment in white men and the manhood they embody;" "his fervent loathing for Fu [Manchu] also expresses a kind of homophobic self-loathing: what he sees and hates in Fu—an eroticized desire for the white man—is something he sees and hates in himself" (286). Though a victim of this mainstream distinction between "real" and "sissy" men, Chin nevertheless reevokes the same divide in *Donald Duk* in his attempt to remasculinize its Chinese American male characters. Buttressing Chin's delineation of "real" Chinese manhood in *Donald Duk* is the intertextuality of another Chinese classic, *The Water Margin*. This warrior tale, which portrays 108 exiled and self-exiled renegades, whose code of ethics is nothing but fraternal loyalty, is essential for advancing *Donald Duk*'s narrative and for achieving its final resolution. This classic is also the source of the third father figure for Donald, Lee Kuey, representing another competing form of masculinity, the singularly *wu* model. At the onset of the novel is the description

of the 108 balsa-wood model planes that King's family is making. Each of them is painted with the face of and named after one of the 108 warriors. King plans to fly these airplanes off Angel Island on the night of the fifteenth day, a day customarily called the Little New Year, and watch them burst into flames over the Pacific Ocean. Chin's choice of Angel Island is patently significant as it is the most historical and thus most recognizable site where America has exercised its emasculating power over Chinese immigrants by confining, interrogating,

traumatizing, and sometimes deporting them. What could be a better symbol of revenge than launching the 108 renegades, firing and afire, into the sky off Angel Island? Donald doesn't understand yet the symbolic value of his father's plan and steals one of the planes on New Year's Eve for an early taste of the thrill. He sets it flying and in flame over the rooftops of San Francisco's Chinatown. This stolen and consummated plane, bearing the nickname the Black Tornado, happens to be Lee Kuey's, thus establishing Lee's relationship with Donald early on in the narrative. Deserving the nickname, Lee Kuey is a killing machine and a dark and fearless devotee of the outlaw brotherhood in the marshes. Chin's description of this mythical character runs amok. "All the Black Tornado's muscles balloon and pull at their roots pounding rage. It's the battle-axe freak who likes to run naked into one end of a battle and come out the other covered in layers of drying blood, with a bloody axe in each hand" (159). In this presentation of a warrior is an extravagant masculinity that Chin glorifies and covets. In a ventriloquist moment, Chin becomes Lee Kuey by having King declare publicly, "I wish Pearl Buck was alive and walk into my restaurant so I can cut out her heart and liver" (135). Lee Kuey becomes the means of Donald's final identification with the Chinese heroic *wu* tradition and thus instrumental to the young protagonist's completion of the rite of passage. Like Kwan Kung, Lee appears in Donald's dreams, demands Donald's attention, and imparts lessons of pride and valor in his own right. " 'You better remember me!' Lee Kuey talks in a voice of crunching gravel, 'Cuz I am out to get ya! I have the blood of punks like you drying into scabs all over my body!' " (114). Although Lee, invariably appearing in disarrayed, bloodied clothes with one axe over his shoulder and another in the other hand, is not exactly a model of manly responsibility, as Kwan is, he nevertheless exemplifies characteristics that are bedrocks of masculinity in both the East and the West, qualities such as valor, loyalty, and a big appetite. Chin revises the classical character of Lee Kuey to enhance masculinity with the other extreme: undisciplined appetite. Lee boasts to Donald, "I am the only one to eat the flesh of his dead mother, because I was hungry and knew she loved me"—an episode Chin has invented despite the original character's reputation as a filial son (159).

Chin furnishes Donald with four father figures that embody competing and yet overlapping masculinities. Their task is delivering him from his eroded and threatened psyche and giving birth to a confident and proud Chinese American man. These father figures find no rivalry in the mother Daisy Duk, who effaces herself quite jocularly. Daisy, after all, is not meant to be a mother. With its unisexual origin in Walt Disney, the Disney Duck family knows no mother figure. The father figure of Lee Kuey is indisputable, given claims to both Donald's ancestral history and biology. Chin insists that Lee Kuey remains a hero in Chinese history despite his senseless killing of the innocent and has him proclaim, "I am the only one to murder a little boy and still be counted a hero. Because I did it out of stupid loyalty [. . .], everything sort of worked out" (159–160). As it is, Chin also makes Lee Kuey Donald's ancestor, for Uncle Donald Duk tells the child, "[Y]our Chinese name is not Duk, but Lee, Lee, just like Lee Kuey" (160). This blood connection entitles Lee to his claim to Donald's education and well-being. Thus, he commands, "Don't back away from me, boy. I thought you and me were alike, kid. Anger! Hate! I thrive on it"(160). Then "he pulls a red envelope out of his bag. 'Goong hay fot choy!' " wishing Donald Happy New Year like a regular uncle (160).

The novel's first resolution takes place at this moment, having established the kinship between our young protagonist and Lee Kuey, having succeeded in schooling Donald in the proper behavior and attitude that comport to masculine conduct, and having forged an ethnic identity secured in the Chinese heroic tradition. Hence, near the end of the novel, Chin revisits the scene of male competition (Donald's encounter with the Chinatown "gang kids") that initially demonstrates Donald's "sissy" self (5). Donald watches a "tall thin Chinatown kid in a camouflage field jacket, military web belt with an army plastic canteen [. . .], plastic helmet-liner and steel helmet [. . .], blue jeans bloused into the top of highly polished black jump boots laced with white parachute cord [. . .]." As this kid approaches, "Donald says, 'Don't mess with me,' with his shoulders, his chest, his neck, his face, his eyes, and walks on. No one messes with him" (134). Both Donald's masculinization and ethnicization are partially made possible through an embedded discourse of food/appetite and masculinity, and this discourse becomes actualized in part by ridiculing women as well as by excluding their participation in food production and ethnic existential choices. In other words, the portrayal of women as culturally impoverished consumers is one of the necessary conditions for Chin's restoration of Chinese American male dignity. His language describing the food practices in King's kitchen evokes cooking's affinity to martial arts and war. This affinity further disassociates the two kinds of cooking—restaurant and home cooking. The traditional divide between these two modes of the same activity solidifies the system of value in gendered labor. While restaurant cooking has been regarded as male and professional, categorized as production and generating exchange value, cooking at home has been seen as female and domestic, thus belonging to the categories of reproduction and use value. Cooking at home as non remunerative work does not even enter into the orthodox Marxist analysis of labor and capital. Chin's masculinization of King's kitchen not only relies on the gendered divide between professional and domestic cooking but also attempts to banish the association of cooking with women by excluding Donald's mother and twin sisters from productive labor. Rather, they are but passive consumers. As representatives of passive consumers, these women necessarily lack individuality. All three female members of the Duk family are given identical character traits, so identical that it is hard to tell them apart; they are cheerful, uncomplicated, theatrical, cartoon funny, callow, and whitewashed. Eileen Fung points out that Daisy Duk's "subjectivity—if there is any sense of that at all—stems from her theatrical impersonations of performers in American cinema (i.e. Greta Garbo, Katherine Hepburn), which further reinforces her distance from Chinese traditions and cultures" (262). With the erasure of her ethnicity, Daisy Duk must relinquish her parental responsibility toward her son and must leave his ethnicization to her very ethnic husband, to Kwan Kung, to Uncle Donald, and to the mother eater Lee Kuey. Indeed, none of the women agonize over their ethnic or cultural identity as their men do. Their primary presence in the novel comes through their naïve bantering with each other and cute interjections into men's conversation. Chin describes, "The twins often talk as if everything they hear everybody say and see everybody do is dialogue in a memoir they're writing or action in a play they're directing. This makes Mom feel like she's on stage and drives Donald Duk crazy."

"Is that Chinese psychology, dear?" Daisy Duk asks.

"Daisy Duk inquires," says Penelope Duk.

"And Little Donnie Duk says, *Oh, Mom!* and sighs."

"I do not!" Donald Duk yelps at the twins.

"Well, then, say it," Penelope Duk says. "It's a good line [. . .]."

[. . .]

“I thought it was narrative,” Venus says.

“Listen up to some Chinese psychology, girls and boys,” Daisy Duk says.

“No, that’s not psychology, that’s Bugs Bunny,” Dad says.

“You don’t mean Bugs Bunny, dear. You always make that mistake.”

“Br’er Rabbit!” Dad says. (5–6)

Although this dialogue also presents King in a somewhat cartoonish manner, his characterization gets plenty of time and space to develop into a unique individual. Yet the Duk women remain flat and stunted throughout the novel. Fung correctly charges that Chin denies these women “any sense of human authenticity” (263). As their characterization precludes much possibility of agency, these women serve to set off the men as agents, producers, and providers. King’s kitchen regularly feeds crowds of diners, and when it is closed for the New Year holiday it offers free dinner to more than “150” relatives and friends at one time (31). Such a highly productive site banishes the association of cooking with domesticity. In creating such a situation, Chin places women outside the kitchen and assigns them the position of passive consumers. Except for one occasion in which Daisy is found “shelling shrimp, busting crab, blanching chickens for Dad to finish and sauce in the woks,” all the women in the novel are denied participation in the now masculine economy of cooking and feeding (69). King as the primary producer/provider not only cooks for armies of people but also offers free food to the community. The Frog Twin sisters “wait outside Dad’s restaurant when the garbage is put out. Now and then, when Dad knows they are out in the alley, he gives them a fresh catfish to take home” (10). On New Year’s Day, King drops fifty-pound sacks of rice at his neighbors’ doorsteps. As Chin bestows the glory of generosity on King, he assigns the disgrace of being charity cases to women. Fung writes of *Donald Duk*, Here, the ethnic men are both laborers and consumers, displacing the ethnic women from both public and domestic work as well as denying them their consumption. As the men construct a kind of social reality based on the context of market economy and nationalist discourse, the women, like food, embody exchange and fetishistic values.

In other words, the process of producing and consuming food constructs complex power dynamics based on gender and class differences that ultimately lead to a language of legitimacy and exclusion: namely, deciding who gets to obtain, cook, and/or eat food signals an economy of power, exchange, and desire. (256)

Chin’s presentation of cooking as masculine/productive labor in this novel engenders a class divide and thus an economy of asymmetrical power relationships between men and women, between the working and the nonworking, between producers and consumers, and between consumers and charity cases. One may argue that the masculinization of cooking succeeds in breaking down the binary between the public and the private in blurring the distinction between home and restaurant. It is precisely through this breakdown, however, that Chin exiles the Duk women from their traditionally gendered space without offering them an alternative location for meaningful labor and subject formation.

Chin takes his cultural project one step further by blending this aggressive form of masculinity with aspects of Chinese heroism in his novel *Gungua Din Highway*. This aggressive masculinity complements the heroic tradition in Chinese culture because both are in part based on strength and agency for ethnic men. The cultural privilege given to men by the Chinese heroic tradition breeds feeling

s of dominance. As with black masculinity, this promotes the values of extreme individualism, nation, and aloofness. The result is a tough Asian man, and like his tough black brother, Chin argues, that "true" Chinese heritage is marked, not by submissiveness but by a warrior tradition:

"All of us men and women are born soldiers. The soldier is the universal individual. ... Life is war. The war is to maintain personal integrity in a world that demands betrayal and corruption. All behavior is strategy and tactics. All relationships are martial." (Chin, "Come All" 39).

As a result Ulysses' challenge to Mr. Mah in *Gunga Din Highway* can be read as an example of Chinese heroism, for his behavior harkens back to Chinese heroes. The argument is sparked by Mr. Mah's implication that Ulysses has nothing useful to say; he tries to silence him. Earlier, Ulysses and his friends declared themselves Brothers of the Oath of the Peach Garden, alluding to *the Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, where Lowe Bay, Kwan Yu and Chang Fay "swear to serve China and save the people" (73). Chin elaborates in an essay that Kwan Yu, the brother Ulysses emulates in the novel, "is the exemplar of the universal man, a physically and morally self-sufficient soldier who is a pure ethic of private revenge" (Chin, "Come All" 39). When Ulysses asserts his independence to Mr. Mah, he enacts Kwan Yu's self-sufficiency. Just as those heroes fight for China, Ulysses fights in Mr. Mah's classroom and demonstrates a form of Chinese heroism, for just as they fought for the honor of China, so too Ulysses 'fights' for his own Chinese American identity in Mr. Mah's classroom.

While the characters cannot pick up swords and start a war against those they perceive as their enemies, they can use language to enact their Chinese heroism. In his encounter with Mr. Mah, Ulysses uses language to create his own reality and wrestle control from those who exercise power over him. This can be seen when Ulysses later challenges Ben Han's girlfriend about their 'true' Chinese tradition:

The fact is that Chinese literature--The Three Brothers of the Oath of the Peach Garden, Sam Gawk Yurn Yee, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Fung Sun Bong and Kwang Kung has nothing to do with your fiancée's strange tales. The stories she says are Chinese aren't and never were. She's not rewriting Chinese anything, man. She's just doing a rewrite of Pearl Buck and Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu. ... This isn't Chinese. This isn't the Three Brothers.

This isn't Kwan Yin. How does she get away with this bullshit? (261, 275)
Ulysses is upset because he knows the power of language. By butchering the stories, Ben's girlfriend compromises Chinese culture and its value for Chinese Americans. Ulysses counters by referring to 'true' Chinese literature made up heroic sagas and daring acts of bravery. He advocates

retaining the battles and courageous deeds of the heroes. These attributes, Cheung asserts, "show further that Chinese... have a heroic--which is to say militant heritage" (Cheung 241).

By doing so, he himself acts heroically to save Chinese culture, just like the Three Brothers of the Oath of the Peach Garden. Furthermore, Chin and his colleagues highlight the relationship between language and an Asian American masculinity that incorporates elements of Chinese heroism:

Language is the medium of culture and the people's sensibility, including the style of manhood.

Language coheres the people into a community by organizing and codifying the symbols of the people's common experience. Stunt the tongue and you have lopped off the culture and sensibility on the simplest level, a man in any culture speaks for himself. Without a language of his own, he is no longer a man (Chan 271).

The quest to use language to describe Asian American cultural expression becomes the measure of a man. The articulation of cultural expression recaptures masculinity taken away through language by the dominant culture. Language holds the power of the Asian American community, and without it, Asian American men are not men. Chin and his colleagues view language as a weapon they can use to articulate their experiences as Asian American men.

As Asian American men, they also recognize the negative ramifications of language for their masculinity. Language in this sense refers not only to a general means of communication but also to English specifically as a linguistic system which excludes Asian American men. In the eyes of Chin and his colleagues language becomes a weapon wielded against them, a two-edged sword that may put them at a disadvantage in their quest to enact a masculinity based on heroism: Minority writers, specifically Asian American writers, are made to feel morally obliged to write in a language produced by an alien and hostile sensibility. ... Only Asian Americans are driven out of their tongues and expected to be at home in a language they never use and a culture they encounter only in books written in English. This piracy of our native tongues by white culture amounts to the eradication of a recognizable Asian American culture here (Chan 266).

Language functions as a tool against Asian American men to force them into a homogenous cultural discourse that silences them as ethnic men. This use of language is wholly imperial and oppressive, presumably providing nothing of value culturally for the minority writer. It is also less of an issue for the African American writer, who is more at home because s/he speaks the same language. Chin and his coauthors also link language and the dominant culture that produces it, indicting both for their imperialism toward Asian American men. While Chin's conflation of black masculinity and Chinese heroism results in a complex response to emasculation of Asian American men by the dominant culture, it fails to offer alternative definitions of masculinity outside the aggressive vein. Elaine Kim in *Asian American Literature* observes that "Chin flails out at the emasculating aspects of oppression, but he accepts his oppressor's definition of masculinity" (Kim 90).

So does Ulysses, for within the confines of the novel he does not challenge the dominance that defines masculinity nor does he explore alternative masculinities such as the scholar, the teacher, and the humanitarian (Harris32). A more flexible form of heroism would create a more comprehensive discourse on masculinity rather than just one that confronts emasculating forces.

King kok Cheung in his study of Chinese masculinity points to the Chinese male image of the sushen, or poet-scholar, as a Chinese alternative to masculinity:

“The poet scholar, far from either brutish or asexual, is seductive because of his gentle demeanor, his wit and his refined sensibility. He prides himself on being indifferent to wealth and political power and seeks women and men who are his equals in intelligence and integrity. ... Surely reclaiming the ideal of the poet scholar will combat [the] cultural invisibility [of Asian American men]” (87).

Chin's conflation of masculinities also dissociates Ulysses from the very black masculinity that informs his identity. During his formative years, Ulysses feels distanced from African Americans. While covering a riot in a black neighborhood, Ulysses thinks about his estrangement:

“I don't know this ghetto. This ghetto doesn't know me. ... I'm a Chinaman. Why am I trying to feel like I've been here before? Everywhere outside of the Mother Lode country I have been a stranger all my life. ... 'Home,' the way the Negro dishwasher standing at a urinal talks about 'home' in New Orleans, is not the Oakland ghetto or Chinatown” (142).

Given that his character takes so much from black masculinity to form his identity, this seems curious. Despite Chin's assertions in his essays that the plight of African American and Chinese

American men are similar, he directs his protagonist to question any attempt to draw parallels between the experiences of the two groups of ethnic men. To a certain extent, Chin describes Ulysses' alienation in the black neighborhood as equal to the alienation he feels as a Chinese American in the dominant culture. Since Chin has already declared the dominant society the enemy, he implies a similar characterization for the African American community as well. Similarly, Chin champions ultimate authority for the individual. In the novel Ulysses takes a giant step away from communalism when he quits activist theatre, declaring, “no more doing it for the people. No

more organized poetry” (346). Ulysses goes from directing Chinese American activist theater to writing Hollywood zombie movies: “If *The Night of the Living Third World Dead* brings in just \$30 million, I can quit writing for the Four Horsemen [Hollywood executives] and be rich enough to be forgotten” (345-346). Ulysses embraces the self-serving art of commercial writing.

He wants to make enough money to be able to make his own brand of art without any responsibilities to an audience. Because Ulysses is ‘pure self invention,’ he is free from cultural obligations and expectations, including those imposed even by Chinese American culture. By choosing to produce zombie movies, Ulysses does not have to engage

racial issues at all.

This shift towards individualism diverges from the communalism advocated by many Chinese American critics. A concept like Asian American panethnicity underscores communalism: Yen Lee Espiritu sees within it large scale identities, concerted action against dominant groups, and challenges to the allocation of power in society where all benefit under the Asian American umbrella (Harris 32).

Conversely, Chin sees individuality as a strategy to combat racism and discrimination. Such individuality also appears to disavow complete allegiance to any ideology, including that of African American masculinity.

Frank Chin's unconventional defense of Asian American masculinity may act as a lightning rod for a wide range of scholars and critics, but it also affords a unique opportunity to witness interethnic dynamics at work. Chin embeds some of Reed's key elements regarding ethnic masculinity in his novel and writings, adapt others to complement Chinese heroism, and rejects still others. In doing so he provides a complex response to the emasculating figures promoted by the dominant culture

References

- Chan, Sucheng. *Asian Americans: An Interpretative History*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991.
- Cheng, Anne Anlin. *The Melancholy of Race*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Cheung, King-kok. (1993). *Articulate silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press
- Cheung, King-kok. "The Woman Warrior versus the Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?" In *Asian American Studies: A Reader*, ed. Jean Yu-wen Shen Wu and Min Song, 307–323. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 2000.
- Chin, Frank. *The Chickencoop Chinaman*. In *The Chickencoop Chinaman / The Year of the Dragon*, 4–66. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981.
- . "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake!" In *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*, ed. Jeffrey Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong, 1–92. New York: Meridian, 1991.
- . *Donald Duk*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1991.
- . "The Eat and Run Midnight People." In *The Chinaman Pacific & Frisco R.R. Co.: Eight Short Stories by Frank Chin*, 8–23. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1988.
- . "Railroad Standard Time." *The Chinaman Pacific & Frisco R.R. Co.*, 1–7.
- . "Riding the Rails with Chickencoop Slim." *Greenfield Review* 6.1–2 (1977): 80–89.
- , and Jeffrey Paul Chan. "Racist Love." In *Seeing Through Shuck*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz, 65–79. New York: Ballantine, 1972.
- Fung, Eileen Chia-Ching. "'To Eat the Flesh of His Dead Mother': Hunger, Masculinity, and Nationalism in Frank Chin's *Donald Duk*." *LIT: Literature, Interpretation, Theory* 10 (1999): 255–274.
- Goldstein-Shirley, David. "'The Dragon Is a Lantern': Frank Chin's Counter-Hegemonic *Donald Duk*." *49th Parallel* 6:1–11.
- Harris, Ian. *Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities*. Bristol: Taylor & Francis, 1995.
- Ho, Jennifer Ann. *Consumption and Identity in Asian American Coming-of-Age Novels*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Kim, Elaine. *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982.
- Kim, Daniel Y. "The Strange Love of Frank Chin." In *Q & A: Queer in Asian America*, ed. David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom, 270–303. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.

Louie, Kam. *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2002.

Nguyen, Viet Thah. "The Remasculinization of Chinese America: Race, Violence, and the Novel." *American Literary History* 12.1–2 (2000): 130–157.

Wang Xiaoxue (2014). *A New Historicist Analysis of the Rewriting of Chinese American History in Donald Duk*. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 10(2), 118-124.