



# Geisha of a Different Kind: Race and Sexuality in Gaysian America (Intersections)

*C. Winter Han*

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In gay bars and nightclubs across America, and in gay-oriented magazines and media, the buff, macho, white gay man is exalted as the ideal—the most attractive, the most wanted, and the most emulated type of man. For gay Asian American men, often viewed by their peers as submissive or too ‘pretty,’ being sidelined in the gay community is only the latest in a long line of racially-motivated offenses they face in the United States. Repeatedly marginalized by both the white-centric queer community that values a hyper-masculine sexuality and a homophobic Asian American community that often privileges masculine heterosexuality, gay Asian American men largely have been silenced and alienated in present-day culture and society. In *Geisha of a Different Kind*, C. Winter Han travels from West Coast Asian drag shows to the internationally sought-after Thai *kathoey*, or “ladyboy,” to construct a theory of queerness that is inclusive of the race and gender particularities of the gay Asian male experience in the United States.

Through ethnographic observation of queer Asian American communities and Asian American drag shows, interviews with gay Asian American men, and a reading of current media and popular culture depictions of Asian Americans, Han argues that gay Asian American men, used to gender privilege within their own communities, must grapple with the idea that, as Asians, they have historically been feminized as a result of Western domination and colonization, and as a result, they are minorities within the gay community, which is itself marginalized within the overall American society. Han also shows that many Asian American gay men can turn their unusual position in the gay and Asian American communities into a positive identity. In their own conception of self, their Asian heritage and sexuality makes these men unique, special, and, in the case of Asian American drag queens, much more able to convey a convincing erotic femininity. Challenging stereotypes about beauty, nativity, and desirability, *Geisha of a Different Kind* makes a major intervention in the study of race and sexuality in America.

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