Diasporic Chinese Masculinity: Brian Castro and Multicultural Australia*

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ABSTRACT

In the late twentieth century, stereotypes of masculinity both in the West and in China were deconstructed as never before. I explore this process, one which has been aided by increased East-West contact, in two novels by Brian Castro, an Australian writer of partly Chinese descent who prides himself on writing in a postmodern manner. Castro began publishing fiction in the 1980s, when race and ethnic relations in Australia were being hotly debated in the context of a new multicultural policy. It was at a time when Chinese men were being unfavorably portrayed in both Chinese and English writing. It was also a time when East Asia was on the ascendency, so the idea of what constituted Chineseness generated much discussion, culminating in Tu Wei-ming's 1991 thesis "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center." In this paper, I show that in the novels *Birds of Passage* and *After China*, Castro uses Chinese Taoist icons such as *yin-yang*, and Australian paradigms such as Clancy of the Overflow, to destabilise the accepted masculinity ideals of both China and Australia. This debunking produces the fanciful idea of a masculinity that is neither Chinese nor Australian as traditionally understood.

KEY WORDS

diaspora
Australian bush
Chineseness
masculinity
postmodern
multiculturalism
periphery
center

wen-wu
yin-yang

Lao-tzu (Laozi)
Clancy

> The whole notion of culture is that it only grows outwards, at the margins. . . . Far from seeing multiculturalism as a set of humanistic platitudes concerning culture-bridging . . . or as a series of folkloric dances and ethnic festivals, I see it as the idealisation of a kind of disturbance of the core.
>
> —Brian Castro, "Necessary Idiocy and the Idea of Freedom"

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
>
> —W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"

In my recent book *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, I stress that as a social construct, Chinese masculinity is a rapidly changing notion in the current globalizing world. I end the book by examining the transformations of the Chinese masculine *wen-wu* ideal by tracing its trajectory in Western countries in written and cinematic forms. I insist that in the twenty-first century, understandings of Chinese masculinity must take into account how it has been transformed by East-West contact. It is only through research into these changes that we will have a more accurate conception of how Chinese masculinity is conceived and of the role that it plays in the modern world.

Significantly, while the West paid scant attention to China prior to the Opium Wars—and when they did, China was described as a magnificent country of learning and culture—by the beginning of the twentieth century, the marvels of Cathay as described by Marco Polo

had long since given way to shadowy images of sin, drugs and pagan barbarism. The most popular and influential written texts projecting such an image are those by Sax Rohmer, who presents in detail "a mental picture of Dr Fu Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man" in *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu*. The mental image is that of "a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat-green" (17). This spectre appears in numerous films made in the 1920s and 1930s, and the most recognisable Fu Manchu role was tellingly performed by Boris Karloff, the renowned horror film actor.

There were other images, most notably that of Charlie Chan, which were meant to be likeable and humorous. Even though Charlie Chan was created "as a refutation of the Fu Manchu characterisation of the Chinese," he is, as Gloria Chun says, "devoid of any assertiveness and sexuality . . . [and] self-effacing to a fault" (19). The Charlie Chan symbol was created at a time when China was bullied by the Western powers and invaded by the Japanese. He is thus not a threatening figure. America could and did patronise the Chinese, so that even a "positive" portrayal of a Chinese man gave us no more than a good-natured castrato whose favourite phrases are "I am so sorry. I have made stupid error. Captain—is it possible you will ever forgive me" (19).

These stereotypes of Chinese men, the rapist or the clown, plagued conceptions of Chinese masculinity throughout the twentieth century. They impacted on the self-conceptions of the Chinese themselves, and for decades, the phrase "Sick Man of East Asia" provoked strong feelings of self-pity or fury in many Chinese. As stereotypes, the images of Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan are meant to be fixed and commonly accepted. In the late twentieth century, however, the East-West relationship was changing fast and nothing stayed the same. Constructs were being deconstructed and cultural artifacts dispersed. Postmodern perceptions of the world did not allow beliefs to remain unchallenged and canonical works to stay on their pedestals. Stereotypes of masculinity were also exploded. In this paper, I will explore how this is done in two novels by Brian Castro, an Australian writer of partly Chinese descent who prides himself on his postmodern

style.

Brian Castro and *Birds of Passage*

Born on a ferry traveling from Macau to Hong Kong, Brian Castro has an unusual multi-ethnic background. His father was of mixed Portuguese, Spanish and English descent and his mother English and Chinese. He remembers the Hong Kong of his childhood as a place that practiced "successful multiculturalism before anyone ever trumpeted it," a place where he never had cause to use the word "identity" except when displaying his bus pass. In 1961, when he was 11, his parents sent him to boarding school in Australia. For the first time, he "was asked not *who* are you, but *what* are you" (*Estrellita* 149). It was only then, in the Australian environment, that he realized he was supposed to look Chinese, and "became, from that moment of being named a 'Chink,' defensive, anxious, unsure" (*Estrellita* 43). As he matured he was increasingly forced to consider notions of national, cultural and racial identity. Over the course of his literary career Castro has recorded many of his thoughts on these issues. Since 1983 he has published seven novels, all of which have received critical acclaim, as well as two works of non-fiction and numerous essays and short stories. Three of his novels, including the most recent fictionalized account of his family history, *Shanghai Dancing*, feature Australian-Chinese men as narrators or protagonists. This essay focuses on what his writings reveal about Chinese masculinity in a multi-ethnic, diasporic context.

Tseen Khoo has noted that Castro is the only Australian author of Asian descent who can be labeled "established" (*Banana Bending* 182). Castro did not earn this distinction by creating heroes who are assertive and confident. His Chinese protagonists are often depicted as being just as anxious and unsure as the young Castro was, leading Khoo to observe that Castro's "fictional revisions of Chinese-Australian masculinity and gender associations erode perceived cohesive images and inform them with his style of inconclusive humanity. This incompleteness and hesitancy define Castro's method of presenting images of men who are constantly confused and uncertain about their

roles" (*Banana Bending* 130–31). Such images are exemplified in the two protagonists in Castro's first novel, *Birds of Passage* (*BOP*). This novel was joint winner of the 1982 Australian/Vogel Award, and heralded the style and themes that critics now recognize as characteristic of Brian Castro. I will now look more closely at this novel.

Most critics are impressed by Castro's mastery of contemporary literary theory, and he is often described as a "writers' writer." A summary of the plot of *BOP* is sufficient to show the postmodern emphasis of the novel. This postmodern style invites a reading that focuses on gender identities. Seamus O'Young, a part-Chinese orphan (he calls himself an ABC, Australian-born Chinese), feels alienated from his peers. He recalls feeling "at one with the people" when he visits Chinatown, "but then the strange tones of their language only serves to isolate me" (11). He finds a faded journal behind a mirror in his foster parents' house. It was written by Lo Yun Shan, a teacher from Southern China who came to Australia during the gold rush of the mid-nineteenth century. Shan cohabits with a prostitute Mary Young, who soon falls pregnant. Their life is complicated because Mary is fleeing another man, Clancy, a fugitive from the Eureka Stockade insurrection. Clancy eventually catches up with Mary and Shan, and in a fight Shan kills Clancy. Reading of the trials of Mary and Shan, the young Chinese orphan of the 1970s convinces himself that he is somehow related to this Chinese man from the colonial period. Inspired by this search for his "roots," Seamus begins to learn Chinese and uses a dictionary to decipher Shan's diary. The novel then evolves as a form of cross-century dialogue—Seamus painstakingly translates Shan's diary and simultaneously writes down his thoughts on the process—creating a form of trans-temporal communication. As Shan digs for gold, so Seamus deliriously tries to excavate in Shan's writings his own roots and a sense of stability and identity. Both men, however, become increasingly fragmented personalities as the novel progresses, so much so that they threaten to merge, and the reader (and presumably writer) of the novel is also repeatedly invited to identify and merge with the lives of these men.

Even this sketchy summary indicates the degree to which the novel is an intellectual exercise, informed by postmodernist literary theorists such as Roland Barthes. Castro acknowledges his debt by having Barthes appear in a cameo role in the novel as a middle-aged man who "had a kindly face that seemed overcome by sadness" (71). Such "self-referential games" have become a signature of Castro's creative writing. Furthermore, in numerous essays, Castro offers an abundance of interpretive insights into his own creative pieces. It is ironic that for someone who is so very aware of the "death of the author," his critics and readers are constantly reminded that the author is always there directing them. This is so much the case that some critics have indicated "that he would be better advised to write novels rather than to write about writing them" (Pierce 156), but there is no debate about Castro's erudite and disciplined mind, playing with and undermining cultural premises and recreating myths from both East and West in his novels. In this essay, I examine the significance of this author's iconic paradigms from China and Australia. In particular, I will explore the masculine identities that his protagonists "elicit."

Marginal Culture as Commodity: But Whose Margins?

The seemingly marginalized and vulnerable heroes of *BOP* betray a deliberate attempt on the part of their creator to question accepted cultural norms and symbols of manhood in both the Chinese and Australian traditions. Castro willfully refuses to "inherit" his cultural past/s and in the resulting state of "disinheritance" (*Estrellita* 203–27), invents his own legacy that could act as "a kind of disturbance of the core." This "disinheritance" refers not only to the European and Chinese legacies, but more importantly also to the Australian one. Castro's protagonists are portrayed as existing at the periphery of the dominant cultures. But by juxtaposing or mixing the "center" and "margins" of European and Chinese culture, these protagonists, though detached from the societies in which they live, effectively destabilize and erode accepted cultural norms. Instead of always moving outwards and unilaterally impacting on the fringe, therefore, cultural norms are

cleverly reconfigured so that now they may also be transformed through an inward movement, from the margins in toward the center.

This has also been the understanding of most critics of *BOP*, and the merits of such a reading cannot be denied. As a migrant himself, Castro sees creations such as Lo Yun Shan as men from the margins, bound to create instabilities within the core of the dominant culture. Indeed, even though Castro claims that *BOP* "was written entirely without a sense of context" (*Estrellita* 26), this claim is disingenuous because as Castro himself goes on to say, racial invectives against Asian immigration and the rabid nationalism associated with these hostile feelings have already burst onto the Australian scene. These emotions had simmered for a long, long time. Perhaps like the woman writers in China who resist being labeled simply as "woman writers," Castro fears the stigma that is attached to being an "ethnic writer" and wants to claim that *BOP* was not part of the multicultural wave. He is certainly correct to insist that cultures are not static and that minority cultures and identities are not and should not be seen simply as a series of rituals such as folkloric dances and ethnic festivals. He explains that he should not be constrained as an ethnic writer, and that he had experienced writer's block for several years before realizing he was overdetermined by "multicultural" expectations and assumptions. Nonetheless, it remains true that migrant cultures and identities continue to have currency in the literary sphere in Western countries such as Australia. And it is perfectly legitimate for critics such as Wenche Ommundsen ("Writing as Migration") to insist on multiculturalism as a crucial element in understanding Castro's writing.

I should stress again that I am not suggesting that culture and ethnic identity are easily discernible and constant entities. As social constructs, culture and identity may or may not have a concrete basis. What is significant is how the craftsman contrives these artifacts and what they tell us about ethnic relations. How does the artist represent Chinese culture? How does he represent Australian culture? Answers to these questions assume a certain perspective, and when the novels under consideration are by Castro, the perspectives of both author and

reader are strongly influenced by Western ideologies. Such a truth, while obvious, is not always recognized. Even Castro seems not to be mindful of it in his interpretations of the reception of his work in China. I will come back to this point when discussing masculinity in *After China*. As a prelude, it would be helpful to relate here how the Chinese in China are happy to Orientalize Chinese culture as part of the national wealth-creation program. My intention is not to move the focus of my investigation to China, but by first showing how "culture" is perceived by consumers in China and researchers of China, it will be easier to demonstrate that the "core" can be "margin" and *vice-versa*. My intention is to disturb the equilibrium of both cores, the Australian and the Chinese.

One of the most remarkable developments in the Chinese treatment of their own culture is the degree to which they are happy to sell their cultural icons. In a recent book designed for the popular market, *Culture Is Good Business,* the author Feng Jiuling discusses the virtues of selling traditional Chinese artifacts and provides advice on how to do it. The premise that culture is good business has not always been accepted in China, and the international context in which the case was argued is interesting. For nearly three decades after the People's Republic was established, the Chinese in China have kept developments in/of Chinese thinking outside China firmly on the outside. This only changed with the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. Throughout the 1980s, the Chinese looked for inspiration outside, and found it around the fringes of their nation.

The phenomenal economic emergence of the so-called four Asian tigers—Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore—between the early 1960s and 1980s is well known. Within the space of a few decades, these economies progressed from Third World to First World status. This "Asian economic miracle" was explained in terms of "Asian values." For the ethnic Chinese, these values were equated with Confucianism, and voices, including those of political leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew, were raised on behalf of the revival of Confucianism. The recognition that the diasporic Chinese could play a role in Chinese thought thus became popular in the 1980s and intensified throughout

the 1990s. Diasporic Chinese were identified as having played a pivotal role in the emergence of the East and Southeast Asian economies with their apparent business ethics of familial coherence and communitarianism, values that prompted the "Asian economic miracle." It comes as no surprise that Feng Jiuling romanizes her name as Foong Wai Fong in the book. She is in fact Malaysian Chinese. The reverse flow of ideas, the lecturing of the homeland by members of the Chinese diaspora, is now commonplace.

One of the clearest indications of this reversal in the way of treating the nation's philosophical heritage was the establishment of the Academy of Chinese Culture [*Zhongguo wenhua shuyuan*] in the early 1980s. Part of the Academy's mission was to integrate the research on Chinese culture in China and the West. Thus, scholars from outside China were invited to research and work at the Academy. One of these visiting scholars was Tu Wei-ming, a professor from Harvard University. Tu Wei-ming's participation in the explorations of Chinese values proved eventful in terms of the growth of a new Confucianism outside China. Tu had written an influential article in which he argued that essential Chinese culture was now to be found more outside China than inside. The title of this article summarizes its content most succinctly: "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center." Even though his idea that real Chinese culture resides outside China may not have suited some, Tu was welcomed by many, and most of his speeches and reflections have been published in China.

While there is something incongruous about the claim that the practitioners of "real" Chinese culture live not inside China but abroad, it is clear that the question of who has possession of "the" Chinese culture is very pressing for the tens of millions of ethnic Chinese who live outside China today. Even when they do not want to claim any connection with "the" Chinese culture, often the racialized politics of their own national and local contexts demand that they consider the question of "a" Chineseness. The reactions to and reflections on this issue are numerous and diverse. Some, such as the Sinologist Gregory Lee who like Castro is part Chinese, are bemused by the fact that even though they look totally Western they often confuse ethnic Chinese

with their mastery of the Chinese language and cultural skills. Gregory Lee also writes lyrically about his Chinese grandfather in Liverpool (90–112), and his passion for things Chinese clearly stems from his Chinese heritage. Others, such as Ien Ang, an Australian of Indonesian-Chinese descent, write extensively about being categorized and judged "inauthentic" Chinese because of their lack of Chinese language skills.

Be that as it may, it is clear that Tu Wei-ming's concept of the periphery being the center immediately attracted many detractors as well as adherents. And so it should, because the notion that there is an immutable Chinese identity that could be transported from one place to be grown in another is both attractive and problematic. It challenges comforting notions of cultural authenticity that have commonly relied on geographic space as markers. Tu Wei-ming uses the metaphor of a tree to indicate that Chinese culture grows and blossoms on foreign soil. The subtitle to a volume he edited to explicate "the changing meaning of being Chinese today" is entitled *The Living Tree*. His 1991 "The Periphery as the Center" article leads this collection. While the tree metaphor is a useful one, the notion that the roots of Chinese culture have withered in China but prospered outside is more than incongruous, given where Tu Wei-ming is based. While China is desperately trying to reclaim its "Central Nation" status, the acceptance of Tu's thesis in effect spells the surrender of that status. Harvard can claim to hold the right to interpret the world. It is the Center, and from there, it can appropriate what was once seen as Chinese to be its own. The West, in this case represented by America, by a sleight of hand has therefore claimed to have inherited "intact" the Chinese cultural legacy, so that it once again takes a central position. Australia is, like the United States, an important player in this "Westernizing" process. Now we may return to Castro's strategy by which the margins of culture can disturb the core, in the more specific context of Chinese and Australian masculinities.

There is good reason for choosing masculinity as a focus of investigation. Women's sexuality has been more objectified than men's in both China and the West. Indeed, even though many feminists have

protested the focus on women as objects of the analysts' gaze, women and femininity are still seen by many as the proper objects of gender studies. This has certainly been the case with Chinese Studies. The emergence of a "women writers' industry" in China and the corresponding rise of female Sinologists in the West in the last two or three decades of the twentieth century only meant that more was written about women as objects of study. The interest in Chinese masculinity has been abysmally limited. This silence on men is currently changing and there are now many popular books on "how to be a successful man" and other such topics selling in Chinese bookshops.

Chinese-Australian Masculine Identity

In Australian studies the situation is a little better. In fact, in recent years the interest in "masculinity" has experienced faddish growth. In the last two decades, there has been a plethora of academic and popular writing about Australian masculinity (see, for example, Morton; Webb). Such writings reveal a massive insecurity about being a "thinking man" in Australia, a place where the masculine ideal has been a "fantasy world without women apart from Mum and Gran. A world of blokes and beer and footy and emotional mateship; of backyard cricket with Dad and the brothers, punch-ups in pubs . . ." (Roberts 10). This fantasy is being demythologized and reconstructed. However, while Anglo-Australian men attempt to reorient themselves as sensitive new-age guys of the Steve Biddulph mould or neo-masculinist Robert Bly type, Chinese-Australian men, whether straight or gay, keenly feel the difference skin color makes to their sense of identity and masculinity (Ayres; Luke), and their sense of alienation finds no relief in these new "men's movement" groups. Studies of Chinese-Australian masculinity can be counted on the fingers of one hand (see Louie "I Married a Foreigner"; Khoo "Angry Yellow Men"; and Hibbins). Research into Chinese-Australian masculinity, indeed masculinity in the Chinese diaspora in general, is only now gaining some momentum. Furthermore, while the discourse of Dad and Bro in

the backyard playing cricket may be sneered at for its limitations in academic writing, the Man from Snowy River is still being mythologized, emblazoned on the $10 note, and played to audiences in cinemas and on television. It is this Australian icon that *BOP* takes on, and that I will come back to after discussing masculinity in the Australian-Chinese diasporic context.

In creative writing elsewhere in the English-speaking world, Chinese-Western sexual relations were for a long time couched in terms of China=Female; West=Male. This is so glaring that even journalists have observed that Chinese women writers in the West have been successful in recent years because they have stuck to the formula: "A young woman struggles but survives the Cultural Revolution in China . . . to find health, happiness—and a husband—in the West" (Yoon 64). This formula guarantees good marketability because it appeals to the Chinese (both in China and abroad) readers' feelings of having been wronged and Western readers' sense of moral superiority and desire for "Other" experiences. Curiously, according to Suh-kyung Yoon, it is also a formula most often used by women authors. Chinese women's suffering is told and retold by writers such as Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, writers who had no direct experience of China. For Chinese-Australian men, feelings of being belittled by popular Chinese-American women writers have not been helped by women who do have direct experience with China. In China itself, women writers such as Zhang Jie have alleged that Chinese men are becoming effeminate and that there are no real men in China. In Australia direct comparisons have been made with white men. For example, in 1994 a Chinese woman, Shi Guoying, created a huge controversy in Sydney when she publicly proclaimed that, based on her experience, Chinese men were incompetent lovers compared to White men (Zhong). Such narratives of course had their counterparts. Throughout the last two decades of the twentieth century, these controversies raged in both China and the West.

The dual protagonists in *BOP*, Shan and Seamus, can be seen as reactions to and offshoots of these controversies. In an interview with Ouyang Yu, Castro observes that with regard to Chinese diasporic

writers:

> most of the writers you mention are women. This raises another question, since the predominantly female Chinese writers have given the West some false impressions of exile and hybridity. A male Chinese writer in Australia and, one would presume, in the US and the UK, have different problems of identity, since he is constantly seen as threatening the (silent) patriarchy of national character and homogeneity. He is also seen as culturally violating the maternal tongue. I think the Amy Tans have unwittingly played into the hands of host-nation chauvinists because although the woman's position in China, particularly in the past, has been one of servitude and degradation, modern realistic depictions of this reinforces the tableau of 'victimhood,' and underlines the continuing female subject as sensual, oriental and compliant. It is a different case with the male writer, where the self is constantly under construction in a desperate and terrorized way. (Ouyang 77)

Such sentiments may be seen as an attitude of sour grapes toward the popularity of these popular-in-the-West Chinese women writers. It is not my intention in this paper to assess the extent to which these women writers actively reinforce victimhood for dramatic effect or whether they have been "duped." There is no denying that what they have written is what the market wants. Whether their success is dependent on the Orientalizing of Chinese culture is another matter. My aim is to assess how Castro himself, in *BOP*, manages to construct the ideological underpinnings of discourses on sex and gender that would enable Chinese men, desperate and terrorized though they may be, to destabilize the (Australian) patriarchal order. Castro's assumption—that culture, identity, ethnicity and historical memory are not fixed categories—is by now well accepted. I argue that Castro gives a novel twist to this thesis of the constantly changing nature of culture and identity by warping traditional paradigms and icons of Chinese and Western masculinities, and that in the process of construction and reconstruction of the merged products he disturbs the core, not just of

the host Australian culture but of the original Chinese one as well. Criticisms of *BOP* have tended to ignore this relationship between masculinity and cultural identity. Yet if we look at the way diasporic Chinese men write about themselves as "Chinese" and as men, the passionate intensity with which they connect the two is evident. However, when critics examine gender in Castro's writing they tend to do so in relation to women, and even when Castro's masculine and masculinist perspective is highlighted they analyze him in feminist terms.

Lao-Tzu, *Yin-yang* and Other Exotic Commodities

The best illustration of how the patriarchal core is destabilized lies in Castro's repeated use of those Chinese philosophical schools perhaps most popularized (and thus over-simplified) in the West: Taoism and *yin-yang* philosophy. While the feminization of Chinese men and the masculinization of the West are at work in many East-West comparisons, phallocentrism is inherently very strong in traditional Chinese philosophies. At least that's how many scholars of China perceive it. Thus, the relationship between sex and death is summed up by Castro in his description of how the Taoists arrive at immortality: "Now, the Taoists believed that in order for the man to develop his *yang* essence he must copulate with many women frequently without emission, thus supplementing his energy by their *yin*. The more times the man can withhold his *yang*, the longer he will live. . . . The man who never arrived became an immortal" (*Estrellita* 87).

Castro is fond of writing about this putative Chinese belief in the connection between sex and immortality. For example, he relates the grotesque yet humorous tale of an addict who tries to use sex for Taoist pursuits in "Carried Away On A Flower Boat." Dr Lü Ta-ching is obsessed with finding the perfect aphrodisiac and rubs gunpowder on his penis during a marathon session of sexual experimentation with a prostitute called A-Ma. He accidentally knocks over an oil lantern and spills burning oil all over himself. In a blaze of glory his phallus explodes, carrying him into oblivion. Yet even in this brilliant death

there are intimations of immortality, for the prostitute with whom Lü Ta-ching was experimenting with his use of the black powder was really a Chinese goddess, one after whom, it is said, Macau (the Bay of A-Ma) was named. Macau was in fact named after a poor fisherwoman A-ma who apparently saved a ship from a storm and became a goddess as a consequence. Based on this legend, and a little creativity and sensational Orientalism, Castro spins his story.

Lao Tzu is said to have founded philosophical Taoism, which looks at nature in relation to the metaphysical principle of the Tao and sees the dual aspect of all things: even being and non-being are but different sides of the same whole. The *yin-yang* school, in which the masculine and feminine are also opposite aspects of an integrated whole, is a different though related philosophical school; like philosophical Taoism it derives from the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*. Furthermore, it is only in the later religious schools of Taoism that we get the notion of withholding ejaculation to achieve immortality. But who cares? Orientalism is a commodity that sells, as noted by Foong Wai Fong. Indeed, "culture" in general also sells, if it is sufficiently sexualized.

Castro reiterates the clichéd description of Taoist sexuality elsewhere, most notably in the beginning of his second novel *After China*. Here he provides a vignette about Lao-tzu. But again, the style is one of bemusement and exaggeration:

> "During winter," Lao-tzu said, "one should not ejaculate at all." The venerable philosopher, reputed to be a hundred and eighty years old, had already surpassed becoming an Immortal. Ten partners in the hour before midnight. Almost twelve hundred copulations without emission so far this year (c 499 BC). . . . *To build up* yang *essence, one must have sexual relations with many different women as often as possible without emission. Reinforced by the female* yin . . . *man's* yang *essence will flow upwards along his spinal column . . . (and) render him immortal.* (1, emphasis mine)

While *After China* is about a Chinese architect in Australia, there is to all intents and purposes no other connection between Lao-tzu and the novel. Castro is selling an Orientalized Chinese masculinity—just as he has accused diasporic Chinese women writers like Amy Tan of selling an Orientalist Chinese femininity. By doing so, however, he has perhaps inadvertently created a Chinese masculine identity that is populist but unwelcome in China itself. The novel's reception throws light on how the "margins" behave when they are the "centers" and *vice-versa*. In recounting the history of the publication of the Chinese translation of *After China* in China, the translator recalls that this section was expunged from the Chinese version, because "the editor of the Chinese translation said, 'Chapter 1 seems separated from the rest of the novel, and besides, it is full of sex stuff'. Because of the 'sex stuff', Chapter 1 was cut out entirely when the translation was published; the publisher worried about the political and cultural inappropriateness of the chapter in China" (Liang 85). Castro himself seems to accept that its "salacious parodying" (*Estrellita* 133)—that is, the "sex stuff"—was responsible for the chapter being excised.

Castro sees this episode as an example of political-as-sexual repression in China. Yet, if one was to look at what was published in China itself in the 1990s, there was much more explicit and pornographic "sex stuff" and there were more extreme sexual-political parodies. It is possible that the editor may have sincerely believed that the chapter bore no relationship to the rest of the novel, and the sex stuff was an aside, an afterthought. Editors look for rational connections, not apparently random jottings whose connections demand a postmodern eye to detect them. And as the editor also notes, China was not at that stage ready for what seems to be an anarchic structure in which a whole chapter bears no relationship to the rest of the novel. While an Australian readership could make the associations, the Chinese reader is not likely to appreciate the book's postmodern randomness. In this way, the old "center" did not want to have its structures of orderliness disturbed by the margins of another center. This kind of censorship could therefore be based more on judgments of coherence and unity than on those of sexuality and politics.

In fact the publication in China of this and many other books presenting outsiders' portrayals of the Chinese homeland shows that the Chinese are ready to accept most recreations of Chineseness, particularly those written by outsiders with a Chinese heritage. This implies a willingness to admit that identity concepts that originate in China can travel abroad and return, directly impacting on or disturbing the core culture. The fact that Lao-tzu is purged is relatively superficial; the much more profound symbols associated with *yin-yang* and masculinity implicit throughout *BOP* are allowed to return home in their transformed states, and this is much more significant. These transformations are many. I will only point to a few to illustrate their effects on traditional understandings of masculinity.

Selling *yin-yang* and *wen-wu* in Australia

In both his novel *After China* and his short story "Carried Away On A Flower Boat," Castro overtly invokes Lao-tzu and *yin-yang* to frame his narratives. In *BOP*, *yin-yang* imagery less explicitly but more thoroughly informs the construction of the protagonists. Since Castro was immersed in Chinese culture for many years before he came to Australia, it is likely that the symbolisms discussed below are deliberately constructed. But if they are unconsciously produced this reinforces my claim that in the interfacing of various forms of Chinese and Australian masculinity, the core and margins are confused and disturbed. For indeed the Chinese signs are there even if they have become ambiguous and Westernized, as is apparent in the way *yin-yang* is played out in "Carried Away On A Flower Boat." *Yin* and *yang* in perfect combination do bring immortality, but it is an immortality of a deadly and unexpected kind, not one that believers would want to adopt.

To see the permutations and transformations of *yin-yang* as it traveled to Australia, it is sufficient to simply look at the names of the dual protagonists of *BOP*, Lo Yun Shan and his apparent descendant Seamus O'Young. The novel begins with Shan's journal: "Kwangtung, 1856. My name is Lo Yun Shan. I take my name from Tai Mo Shan,

which is the Big Mist Mountain. The mountain is not very high by Chinese standards, but it is constantly shrouded in cloud and mist" (1). In *yin-yang* tradition and Chinese geomancy [*fengshui,*wind-water], mountain [*shan*] is highly masculine, and water [*shui*] feminine. Shan himself thus exudes maleness, while his namesake Big Mist Mountain is surrounded by symbols of the feminine, cloud and mist. Meanwhile, Australian-born Seamus O'Young could connote not just "semen" (with Seamus) but "seas of *yang*"—*yang*-essence surrounded by water. Young is also the current name for Lambing Flats, the site of the most ignominious massacre of Chinese diggers during the gold rush. In the story, we are also led to conclude that Seamus' surname may have been derived from that of Mary Young. However, nothing is as it seems in the novel, and logic simply doesn't work. It is the dreamlike symbols and their connections that count. So when we are told that Seamus' ancestors went by the name of "Sham," "or something like that" (135), we are meant to see the implications of this name (that it is a fake name, etc). If "shan," or "sham," meant "mountain," it is most unlikely to have been Shan's ancestral name, as "shan" is not a Chinese surname. To carry this game of names further, O'Young, or "o' yang," is interesting because *yang*, the male essence, is also a homophone for "*yang,*" meaning "foreign." Seamus is thus a man of foreign lands, a Chinese foreigner, an identity that has shifted from one culture to another, symbolically if not physically.

To further explore how this shift is made, we need to return to the functioning of the *wen-wu* dyad in Chinese culture. It is difficult to find English terms that capture the full meaning of *wen-wu*. Literally it means literary-martial, and it connotes the dichotomies between cultural and martial accomplishments, mental and physical attainments and so on. It is an ideal that all men are supposed to work towards. Because it captures both the mental and physical composition of the ideal man, *wen-wu* is constructed both biologically and culturally. It has been a masculine ideal throughout Chinese history, and there are many traditional idioms to describe perfect men as having both *wen* and *wu*. The epitome of the *wen* man is exemplified in the god of *wen*, Confucius. He is eulogized most as "the paragon of teachers." The most

exalted profession for a man is thus that of teacher, and Shan was a teacher before he departed for Australia.

Wen-wu is a useful construct to describe Chinese masculinity ideals because it is only used for Chinese men. The unique maleness of the *wen-wu* dichotomy becomes apparent when it is juxtaposed with *yin-yang*, the most obvious and most commonly invoked paradigm in discussions of Chinese sexuality. The *yin-yang* dyad is attractive because it seems to dislodge the exclusivity of elements that are male or female. By contrast, the *wen-wu* dichotomy is applied to men only. It is perhaps because of the gender-specific quality of these two dyads that *yin-yang* has become so well known in a West which welcomes Oriental woman, while *wen-wu* is scarcely mentioned in a West where Chinese men have been for the most part simply been ignored or demonized, in an America where the Asian-American male was stereotyped as "inscrutable" and "more conservative" (Doyle 290–91). Of course, the study of the masculinities of ethnic minorities in predominantly white communities is important and can lead to valuable and fascinating insights. In recent years, some of the best work on Asian men has centered on the masculinities of Asian Americans, with some of the most interesting being on gay Asians (Eng and Hom). For the most part, this research shows that for Chinese and Japanese men, the experience of living as a man in the West can be so negative that it can be characterized as "racial castration" (Eng). As Henry Yu observes, "[a]lthough often portrayed as sexual threats to white women, Asian men were also emasculated by stereotypes of passivity and weakness. The image of the Chinese laundryman and domestic worker or Japanese flower gardener, willing to do 'women's work' that no self-respecting white man would perform, served to feminize the portrayal of Oriental men" (131). In Australia Chinese men were stereotyped as clownish cooks in widely-read classics such as Jeannie Gunn's *We of the Never Never* and A. B. Facey's *A Fortunate Life*. Chinese men in the West had no sex appeal. As literary commodities, they did not sell.

As recently as the 1990s, popular racial stereotypes were frequently given academic respectability by social scientists like J. Philippe Rushton, who gathered data on measures such as brain size,

reproductive behavior and sex hormones to try and prove that "people of east Asian ancestry . . . and people of African ancestry . . . define opposite ends of the spectrum, with people of European ancestry . . . fall intermediately" (xiii); Rushton is assuming a model in which mental-intellectual capacity (at which Orientals excel) is in effect the polar opposite of physical-sexual capacity (at which Blacks excel). However, in the *wen-wu* scheme of things mental-intellectual and physical-sexual prowess go together, which contradicts the ideology behind Rushton's (typically Western) model. The popular stories about the sexual gymnastics of the Taoists are one example of the belief that brain power *is* sexual power. But that is the *wen-wu* scheme of things, and it is not one that sells well in the Anglophone world. By reconstructing and adding untruths about the story of Lao-tzu, Castro is selling an Orientalist commodity. At the same time, he is negating the "racial castration" that was the fate of Chinese migrants in the century that separates Shan and Seamus. In this way his "disturbance of the core" is further realized. The "core" in this instance is of course not Chinese but Australian masculinity.

Disturbing Core Chinese and Australian Masculinities

In *BOP*, this core masculinity is represented by the Irish Australian Clancy, whose mistress Mary Young bears Shan's child and who is killed by Shan in a fight over Mary. Again, Castro is playing name games when he identifies this character as Clancy. Clancy has been immortalized in two ballads by one of the most beloved traditional Australian poets, A. B. "Banjo" Paterson (1864–1941), who was also responsible for "Waltzing Matilda," a song that has unofficial national anthem status. Paterson published "Clancy of the Overflow" (10–11) in 1889 and "The Man from Snowy River" in 1890 (1–9). Both poems were originally carried in *The Bulletin*, one of the most influential magazines in Australia. In 1891 (not long before Paterson penned "Clancy of the Overflow"), *The Bulletin* published its "Manifesto." Among the seven points it advocated, we find a "republican form of government" and a "United Australia and protection against the

world." It also lists four things it denounces, one of which is "the Chinese" (Hornadge 6). As one of its most celebrated journalists, Paterson would have embraced the xenophobic nationalism promoted by the magazine. Therefore his Clancy, the quintessential Australian male, could easily merge with the Clancy of Castro's creation. The difference is that in the century separating the two creations, the Australian psyche has itself become a bit schizophrenic.

Australia is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world, yet the overwhelming majority of its citizens live in big cities. Almost all have a migrant background. Although born in a country town, Paterson was educated at Sydney Grammar School and worked as a lawyer in Sydney before becoming a journalist. As a journalist he traveled widely, covering the Boer War in South Africa as well as the aftermath of the Boxer Uprising in China. For his time, he would have been one of the most sophisticated and cosmopolitan Australian men. Yet he is remembered for creating those two paradigms of Australian manhood, the Man from Snowy River and Clancy. Their image appears on the Australian ten-dollar note (it is not clear which of the two is represented, but that is irrelevant), and their exploits have been made into movies and presented in other popular retellings. Clancy is a man of few words, and even his actions are sparse. This drover, we know, loves the Australian bush and looks after his mates, including the nameless Man from Snowy River, who is even more taciturn than Clancy. This nameless young man utters not a single sound throughout Paterson's poem about him.

Like many Australians who romanticize the outback even though they hardly set foot in its inhospitable expanse, Paterson scorns city folk "with their rush and nervous haste/With their eager eyes and greedy, and their stunted forms and weedy." By contrast, the drover is romanticized as one who roams freely in a natural landscape. Silent, fearless and attached to his horse, he has no inclination to sit behind a desk in the city. Paterson fantasizes the bushmen to such an extent that he finishes "Clancy of the Overflow" like this:

> And I somehow rather fancy that I'd like to change with Clancy,

> Like to take a turn at droving where the seasons come and go,
> While he faced the round eternal of the cash-book and the journal—
> But I doubt he'd suit the office, Clancy, of The Overflow.

Australia is a nation of city dwellers who hanker after the bush, and Paterson's ballads "do mythologise the life of the land" (Turner 49). The effect of such mythologizing, however, is to create heroes from the bush who are brave and true but also dumb. And it is this hankering for and fantasy of the staunch and silent type of man that Castro sets out to disturb. He does so by mixing symbols of an infelicitous Chinese masculinity with those of a deconstructed Australian one.

In *BOP*, Clancy is recast as a fugitive from the Eureka Stockade incident. This took place in 1854 near Ballarat, when the easy surface gold was almost mined out. Resentment of the mining licenses was running high, and when the owner of the Eureka Hotel was acquitted after having been charged with murdering a miner, a mob burned his hotel to the ground. The authorities decided to punish the mob, and this led to the setting up of the "Eureka Stockade" to fend off the attacking government troops. But it was a sorry affair since most of the rebellious miners went carousing on the night of 2 December 1854, this being a Saturday, a day when the diggers usually went drinking. Those who stayed behind were completely routed; 22 were killed while many fled. Despite this wretched tale, the Eureka Stockade incident has since been commemorated by nationalists as the beginning of Australian Republicanism, and continues to provide inspiration for writers, artists and political activists. For example, the Eureka Flag is still proudly displayed by Nationalist (and Maoist) groups in political marches and demonstrations. As well as invoking the name associated with Paterson's romantic hero, Castro piles up even more historical allusions to show that the idol of Australian nationhood has outlived his/its usefulness in twentieth-century Australia.

In case the reader still fails to get it, Castro inserts a passage in which Clancy and Shan encounter each other and Clancy delivers a sermon about a future utopia, one in which brotherhood will rule the

day, "an Australia, a country, a united Australia Felix" and a "pastoral paradise without greed or fear" (117). As Cathy Bennett points out, however, "the absence of any mention of the position of women in this supposedly ideal, egalitarian society is a significant absence: it highlights the predominantly male foundations of the early expressions of Australian nationalism" (148). Castro is intent on showing how this utopian nationalism masks a racist and unforgiving soul. While he is himself a fugitive from the law, Clancy feels he has the right to relentlessly hunt down Mary Young and Shan because one is his former mistress and the other a Chinese. It is in their final encounter, when Shan kills Clancy, that Castro uses his artistic license to full effect. Because the novel draws so much on history, one is tempted to look for "truth" and "authenticity." However, to do so would be to look in vain, for the novel's purpose is to depict neither.

By all accounts, the Chinese and their white partners (in the very rare cases where white women lived with Chinese men) in the nineteenth century were discriminated against, and there is no record of their offering any resistance to this discrimination. It was a time when the anti-miscegenation legal system in Australia actively persecuted white women who had relations with "Orientals" (Ryan 1999). By having Shan win the white woman and furthermore kill the white hero of the bush, Castro is shattering Australian history. This scenario is culturally confused, a confusion produced by Castro's resolute effort to debunk and diffuse cultural norms. As Ouyang Yu points out, this "is perhaps the only instance in Australian fiction where a Chinese kills any white man by fighting consciously in his own defence" (Ouyang, "Brian Castro" 37). Chinese cultural norms are also dismantled. Shan is a teacher, exclusively a *wen* man, rather than a more fully-developed *wen-wu* man, according to the traditional model of Chinese masculinity; the norm for the purely *wen* man is that he does not have to fight for his women, let alone kill (Louie *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*). He simply does not engage in physical combat: that is a job for the *wu* (or ideally the *wen-wu*) man. Similarly, Clancy in both historical fact and ideology should not have to fight a Chinaman to win back his lover, let alone be killed by one. Castro has shattered both Chinese and

Australian masculinity paradigms; furthermore, he makes no real attempt to reconstruct the shattered pieces, to suggest a new, more solid and perhaps more "universal" notion of masculine identity.

As Cathy Bennett observes, "[i]n Castro's texts, the tall, tanned, laconic Australian bushman is replaced by tentative, verbally sophisticated, migrant urbanites. Seamus and Yu are heroes of postmodernity" (152). Given that the nature of postmodern discourse is to debunk, deconstruct, diffuse and disperse, it is not surprising that we have a parable that is so culturally perplexing. *BOP* is really as much a late twentieth-century meditation about China and Australia as it is a purported 1860s contemplation of the goldfields of Australia. There is no fixed truth attached to either of these readings; they are both flights of fancy. By mixing disparate images and voices, Castro has succeeded in decentering both Chinese and Australian masculinities. However, his method is quite different from that used by Neo-Confucianists like Tu Wei-ming, who claims to have located the true Chineseness outside of China. In a postmodern world, "things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." In *BOP*, not only does the falcon not hear the falconer, the relationship between them has been severed and the falcon flies free, becoming perhaps in a truer sense a "bird of passage." The price of this freedom, however, is that all certainty is lost. The boundaries have disappeared. In the ensuing anarchy, we look for coherence and salvation. However, given Castro's insistence on deconstructing rather than constructing, we will have to look elsewhere if we are hoping to find guidance, a place where "some revelation is at hand" (Yeats 187).

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