

CHAPTER ONE

The Rise, and Fall, of a Gay Asian American Porn Star

In an article in the Asian American pop culture zine *Giant Robot*, journalist Claudine Ko (1999) recounts her search for Brandon Lee. She refers not to the son of Bruce Lee, who gained cult stardom after dying mysteriously and tragically at a young age while shooting *The Crow* (dir. Alex Proyas, 1994), but the other Brandon Lee, the gay porn star. Ko reports on rumors that Brandon Lee the porn star had been discovered while delivering Chinese food to a gay porn set. As the story goes, the director asked to see his egg roll and was so blown away by the sight that he immediately cast Lee in a porn video. Later in the article, Ko tracks down Chi Chi LaRue, one of the best-known directors in gay porn, who straightened out the story. LaRue claimed to have discovered Brandon Lee at a gay bathhouse in Los Angeles. Impressed by Lee's good looks and ten inches of manhood, she brought him to Catalina, the popular gay video company, which promptly signed him on, and the rest, as they say, is history.

I am not particularly interested in ascertaining which version of the story about Lee's discovery is true. Rather, what I find compelling is the way the two versions can be read as emblematic of how the image of Asian men in gay North American porn has shifted with the appearance of Brandon Lee.¹ Before Lee, Asian porn actors performed the roles of karate masters, Chinatown grocery boys, or their cousins, Chinese food delivery boys, which is to say, they constituted racialized sexual stereotypes. In contrast, Lee is frequently portrayed as West Hollywood boyfriend material, cast in mundane roles as well as pornotopic parts such as real estate agent, young man who inherits a gay brothel, army recruit, porn star, sex party host, biker dude, and most commonly West Hollywood twink.² In other words, Brandon Lee could well be just another random (American) gay guy one could easily find cruising in a West Hollywood bathhouse. He has left his parents' grocery store in Chinatown to live with his white boyfriend in the gay ghetto. This movement from one ghetto to another parallels Lee's transition from ethnic niche to mainstream gay video pornography.

By beginning my study of Asian American masculinity and sexual representation with an examination of gay male video pornography produced in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, I address the common grievance about the representation of Asian American masculinity in American culture, registered in the complaint that mainstream media depict Asian men as effeminate and asexual. At first glance, it would appear that as a top porn star, Brandon Lee is a model of masculine sexual prowess and potency, the rhetorical and flesh-and-blood penis that Asian American cultural critics have been searching for. Put differently, his success would seem to satisfy the goals of Asian American media activism and scholarship. However, in what follows, I look at the ways in which the privileging of topness and remasculinization in the work of Brandon Lee serve to reinforce normative discourses of race, class, gender, nation, and sexuality. The chapter's investigation of contemporary gay male video porn shows how those modalities of difference get articulated through top-bottom sexual positionings. At the same time that I unpack Lee's claim to fame as an Asian top, I also point to the instabilities of his top status by highlighting significant moments in his videos when topness topples as well as instances when bottomhood exceeds its coding as Asian abjection. In addition, I suggest that Lee's emergence marks out a space for a queer, resistant Asian American porn spectatorship that enlarges previous models of porn viewing. Though not without its contradictions, Lee's exceptional porn persona proffers a new sexual visi-

bility for gay Asian American men. His rise, and fall, unlocks heretofore unexplored possibilities for gay Asian men's social and sexual subjectivity, not least by animating new ways of thinking and doing bottomhood. To be sure, the instabilities of his topness illustrate how Lee maintains multiple boundaries (e.g., Asian/American, bottom/top) even as he embodies their blurring.

In his analysis of gay male porn videos employing Asian actors—the one arena where Asian men are depicted engaging in explicit homosexual sex—Richard Fung interrogates the “role the pleasure of porn plays in securing a consensus about race and desirability that ultimately works to our disadvantage [as Asian men]” (1991, 158). Fung describes the feminization of Asian men in gay porn within the context of racialized power relations. Examining the work of Vietnamese American porn actor Sum Yung Mahn, he demonstrates how pornographic depictions of Asian men focus on their submission to the pleasure of white men. In these tapes produced in the mid-1980s, Asian men almost always adopt the bottom role in relation to a white top. In *Asian Knights* (dir. Ed Sung, 1985), the only exception where an Asian top fucks a white bottom, the Asian character is portrayed as serving the white character domestically and sexually as a houseboy.³

The intended audience for these Asian-themed videos is primarily gay white men. A sex scene between two Asian men in *Asian Knights* is edited to conform to the point of view of a white man. What appears to be an Asian-Asian sexual scenario is undercut when the white man enters the scene and occupies the center of the sexual attention, much the way the man enters into a “lesbian” number in heterosexual porn. Most significantly, the white male fear of being fucked is displaced onto the bodies of Asian men. A scene in *Below the Belt* (dir. Philip St. John, 1985) has an Asian actor step temporarily into the role of a white character in order to articulate his anxiety about getting fucked. In this sequence, the Asian male body substitutes for the white male body to receive the punishment represented by anal sex.⁴

Despite the critical attention and popularity of Asian male actors in Asian cinemas and their successful crossover into Hollywood (e.g., actors such as Jackie Chan, Jet Li, and Chow Yun-fat in the late 1990s), as well as the more recent spotlight on Asian American actors Kal Penn, John Cho, Daniel Dae Kim, and Harry Shum Jr., the depiction of Asian men as sexually appealing scarcely figures in mainstream American popular culture. In the realm of explicit sexual representation, one finds that in marked contrast to the overwhelming presence of Asian and Asian American women in heterosexual pornography, there is a notable absence of Asian American men.⁵ Thus, the



FIGURE 1.1:
DVD cover. *The Best of Brandon Lee* (1999).

popularity of Brandon Lee as a gay Asian American porn star represents a startling and unique achievement that demands special attention.

Brandon Lee is the only male Asian American porn actor with the distinction of having a “best of” video compilation, *The Best of Brandon Lee* (dir. Chi Chi LaRue and Josh Eliot, 1999; figure 1.1). Starting in 1997, at the ripe age of eighteen, Lee began acting in gay videotapes geared toward an Asian niche market in Catalina’s Far East Features series, in such popular titles as *Asian Persuasion* (dir. Josh Eliot, 1997), *Fortune Nookie* (dir. Chi Chi LaRue, 1998), and *Asian Persuasion 2* (dir. Brad Austin, 1998).⁶ He then quickly crossed over into mainstream gay porn, appearing in *Dial “S” for Sex* (dir. Chi Chi LaRue, 1998), *Stag Party* (dir. Chi Chi LaRue, 1998), *Harley’s Crew* (dir. Chi Chi LaRue, 1998), *Big Guns 2* (dir. Josh Eliot, 1999), *Throat Spankers* (dir. Josh Eliot, 1998), and *Peters* (dir. Dane Preston, 1999).⁷ After a brief stint in the

U.S. Navy, he returned to making porn in 2004 as a Rascal Video Exclusive actor, appearing in a number of videos in 2004–2005.⁸ The most significant of the videos produced after his comeback is *Wicked* (dir. Chi Chi LaRue, 2005), in which he bottoms for the first time. Concentrating on his work in the period before his comeback, I am interested in looking at the racial packaging of Brandon Lee in the Asian videos where he is depicted as American in relation to his Asian costars and how this process changed in the mainstream videos, where he is the only Asian (and frequently the only person of color), while his racial and ethnic difference is not remarked on. I argue that the making of this gay Asian American top porn star is accomplished through the coding of Brandon Lee as an assimilated (Asian) American. The case of Brandon Lee the porn star shows how American masculinity underlies topness, which then confers the status of gay porn star. His work serves as an exemplary “border study” of the conflicting categories of “American” and “Asian” as they are enacted and performed in top and bottom sexual roles in contemporary gay video porn.⁹ An analysis of Brandon Lee’s star text demonstrates how the two national categories have been constructed in mutual opposition and the manner in which their dichotomous differences manifest themselves through sexuality and gender. But before zooming in on Lee’s racial packaging in the porn videos, we need to consider an earlier groundbreaking intervention in the visual representation of Asian masculinity in mainstream American popular culture.

From Kicking Ass to Fucking Ass

It is not insignificant that an Asian American adult performer takes as his *nom de porn* the name of Brandon Lee, son of martial arts superstar Bruce Lee. This choice of name clearly activates the one “positive” place Asian men occupy within the American popular imagination. The martial arts cinematic genre is set within a visual economy where Asian men are seen as physically powerful, energetic, and graceful. Yvonne Tasker (1997) has noted the importance of a remasculinization of Chinese national identity in the star text of Bruce Lee. The cultivation of the hard and muscular fighting body counteracts the view of Chinese men as soft and delicate, and thus foregrounds a Chinese national identity based on a macho muscularity. Tasker describes a scene in *Fist of Fury* (dir. Wei Lo, 1972),¹⁰ in which a Chinese go-between, a traitorous character affiliated with the Japanese martial arts school, comes to the Chinese school to offer a challenge by taunting the students there as the “Sick Men of Asia.” Responding to this insult, Lee’s char-

acter goes to the Japanese school and defeats the students there to proclaim that he and his Chinese schoolmates are not sick men. Tasker writes, “This assertion of nationalism is very clearly inscribed through the revelation of Lee’s body—as he ritualistically removes his jacket—so that discourses of masculinity and nationhood are complexly bound up together in his star image” (1997, 318). In other words, Lee’s well-trained and disciplined hard body plays a crucial role in the assertion of national identity.

The most striking feature of the Bruce Lee star image in relation to our discussion of the eroticized representation of Asian men is his portrayal of an ascetic, sexually naive working-class hero. In most of Lee’s films, his relationships with women are platonic and lacking in sexual tension.¹¹ In *The Way of the Dragon* (dir. Bruce Lee, 1972), the main female character is his cousin, who first doubts Lee’s ability to help her fight against the Italian gangsters. Once she sees him in action, however, she develops a soft spot for him; but their relationship stays on a tender, familial level. The asexuality of the Lee character is especially pronounced in a sequence from *Enter the Dragon* (dir. Robert Clouse, 1973). In a brothel scene, Lee’s cohorts, John Saxon and Jim Kelley, readily pick out several women from a lineup to join them for the night, while Lee requests only one woman to come to his room. The prostitute chosen by Lee turns out to be a fellow secret spy; needless to say, no romance ensues between them. Hsiung-Ping Chiao (1981) has observed that sex in the Bruce Lee oeuvre is seen as the “corrupting force” associated with decadence and linked with brothels, prostitutes, and slave trafficking. Lee’s films subscribe to a puritan sexual morality, continuous with traditional Confucian values. Nevertheless, a contemporary viewer, who may already be cognizant of the work of recent Asian male action actors such as Jackie Chan, Chow Yun-fat, or Jet Li, can still be struck by the awesome erotic intensity of Lee’s onscreen presence, which remains uneclipsed by other Asian actors working today. Chiao comments on the way in which the desexualization of Lee’s fictional characters at the thematic level is undercut at the level of audience reception: “Puritan sexual morality have [sic] been paradoxically decoded by audiences as sexual stimulants. . . . It has been pointed out that his fights resemble sexual behavior. The open-legged posture before attacking, the slow-motion shots of his tense body, and the expression of excitement and elation intermingle to imply sexual provocation. The subtle tie between violence and sex thus transcends the overt layer of sex-inhibition and becomes emotional retribution for Lee’s ill-fated destiny and plight” (1981, 40–41).¹² While Chiao calls attention to viewers’ resistant reading of Lee’s

eroticism within his films, it should also be noted that Lee's fans, before and after his death, have been fully aware of his off-screen reputation as a ladies' man. They idolize his status as both a lover and a fighter (Nguyen 2007). According to Tasker, the martial arts genre, like the American Western and the action film, allows for the traditionally taboo looking of men at other men. However, Western critics' overemphasis on the aggression of Bruce Lee's films effectively downplays the sensuous and homoerotic force of his performances.¹³ These critics' exclusive attention to the gory violence in his films disavows the homoeroticism of Lee's handsome face, onscreen charisma, and his half-naked body under duress.

Like the masculinist project of the martial arts film genre, the question of remasculinization in gay Asian American pornography occupies a central place in our discussion of Brandon Lee. Like the martial arts superstar, Brandon Lee plays a performer who acts on the bodies of other men, in the narratives and the reception of the videos. Thus, it is fruitful to examine the thematic correspondences and divergences between these two Asian American male stars. Bruce and Brandon Lee both work within film genres where spectacle and performance command more attention than narrative complexity.¹⁴ The decisive moment of transformation underscores their emergence as physically powerful and sexually potent stars. Parallel to Bruce Lee's shift from nerdy country bumpkin to powerful kung fu master, the transformation of Brandon Lee from asexual Asian man to American porn star takes place when the motivating porn narrative gets established and the sexual episodes begin to unfold. While the kung fu movie builds up the viewer's anticipation of the moment when Bruce Lee finally decides to fight, gay pornography provides only minimal preparation leading to the performance of sex and thus offers the viewer little in the way of suspense. The selectively concentrated and distracted mode of porn viewing, the fast-forwarding and zooming in to where the real, exciting sexual performance occurs, calls to mind the kung fu viewer's anticipation of the instant when Bruce Lee, no longer able to contain his anger over the injustices surrounding him, exposes his muscular upper body and shows off his masterful martial arts skills. In the case of Brandon Lee, the metamorphosis from asexual Asian man to porn star is the thrilling moment when he finally exposes his hidden asset. In the words of the *Adam Gay Video Directory* 2001: "He can act, he's good sex, he's a top, and in case you hadn't noticed . . . that dick" (2000, 52).

The visual revelation of the martial arts star's compact, muscular torso and the porn star's erect, sizeable dick, as evidence of each man's "veiled"

masculine prowess, is buttressed, and undermined, by aural effects. Accompanying Bruce Lee's exhibition of visually stunning movements is the involuntary eruption of convulsive grunts and wrathful yells, evoking intense rage. The overdubbing of Bruce Lee's films at these impassioned moments echoes the porn convention of postdubbing of dialogue and sex sounds: the generic dirty talk and repetitive moans in gay pornography. The porn soundtrack offers evidence of authentic sexual pleasure, provides proof of the final delivery of satisfaction, and adds realism by fleshing out the visual performance. But, as in the martial arts movie, the low-budget, out-of-sync, and poor verbal performance also suggests the sex sounds are excessive and faked. In the same way that Bruce Lee's animalistic shrieks are not commonly heard for their piercing sensuality, Brandon Lee's and his Asian costars' obligatory moans and groans are not perceived as adequately convincing sexual responses. (I will have more to say about the complicated relationship between this lack of a perfect match between the audio and visual tracks in the concluding section of this chapter.)

The most essential correlation between the genres of martial arts and gay video porn is their points of view in relation to the eroticized imaging of Asian male bodies. Whereas the sensuality of Bruce Lee is produced by the viewer's resistant reading, going against the grain of the narrative, the homoeroticism of Brandon Lee constitutes the key element of his status as a gay porn actor.¹⁵ However, as stars commanding top billing (one an international martial arts superstar, the other a porn star in the smaller realm of gay male popular culture), both figures are set off narratively from the characters surrounding them. A "respectable working-class ghetto resident" (Kaminsky 1976, 63), Bruce Lee nevertheless transcends his downtrodden status through the performance of martial arts virtuosity. While Bruce Lee is presented as a man of the people who fights against imperialist forces, he stands out from the swarms of Asian male bodies that fight alongside him or more often, get beaten up by him. Similarly, Brandon Lee remains a recognizable, named actor, a fierce top among the anonymous hordes of interchangeable Asian bottoms. Though Brandon Lee is one among other men of the "Asian persuasion," he is marked off as different: he is an American real estate agent to the Japanese house buyer; he is the new owner of the boy brothel, where other Asians are sex workers; he is a porn star, a role model for another Asian character's porn ambition. These multiple differences are premised on an imbalance of power based on a higher economic, social, and cultural status. These power differentials relate to factors of nationality

(Americanness), race/ethnicity (unfixed, unstable), age (youth), size (dick, muscle), language (English speaking), and region (West Hollywood),¹⁶ all of which contribute to his star status and top position. In what follows, I look more closely at these various components that go into the making of this gay Asian American porn star, with a sustained consideration of the spaces and mise-en-scènes in which these racialized pornographic fantasies unfold.¹⁷

The Making of a Gay Asian American Porn Star

Asian Persuasion opens with sunny skyline views of such landmarks as the Capitol Records building and the Fontenoy Apartments located in Hollywood, California. After the credits, the video cuts to two handsome young men asleep in a bed with white faux wrought iron headboards and plush off-white comforters. The porn decor evokes the bougie West Hollywood A-gay lifestyle of the late 1990s. Framed in identical poses on the bed—arms folded in front of their bare muscular chests—Brandon Lee and his boyfriend, Brad Davis Mikado, are awakened by a phone call. The caller is a client who wants to see a house in the Hollywood hills that Lee, the real estate agent, is trying to sell. Before Lee leaves, Mikado makes comments about the sexual nature of Lee's job, which requires meeting strange men at empty houses. Lee denies entertaining any sexual possibilities and suggests that Mikado, who is in the pool cleaning business, probably has more opportunities for sex with his clients, charges that Mikado also denies. Immediately, the viewer notices that the framing narrative of the video revolves around the two main characters' professions, and the familiar pornographic device of infusing characters' professions with homoerotic potentials. Lee is boyish, clean-cut, well built, middle class, and happily settled in a domestic coupledness. We are thus introduced to the world of a novel type of Asian porn character, an assimilated Asian American.

In the following scene, we see Lee, dressed in a pink Hawaiian shirt, finish showing the house to an older Japanese man.¹⁸ The scene begins with Tenji Mito saying, "I like it. The neighborhood's great. And it's large." He looks down meaningfully at Lee's crotch. Lee responds, grabbing his crotch, "Yeah, it is large. And it gets bigger when somebody's lips are around it." Taking his cue effortlessly, the Japanese man proceeds to suck Lee and then gets fucked by him. Mito's comment about largeness refers first to the neighborhood and the house, then to Lee's cock, and we can infer from the context—a Japanese buying property in California—that the term also connotes the spaciousness of America in general. Throughout the scene, the sex is

punctuated by Mito's heavily accented English emphasizing the big size and hardness of Lee's cock, crudely narrating how it acts on him: "Big cock. You've got big cock"; "I feel your hard cock"; and "Your dick make [sic] me come!" Conversely, Lee's verbal expression is limited to generic moans and stock phrases like, "Oh baby, feels so good" and "Yeah, baby, suck it." The position of top is aligned with Lee's coding as an American, associated with his Valley Guy English, his youth, butchness, muscularity, and big dick, set in opposition to the bottom's broken English (hence, marking him as non-American), older age, femmeness, skinny build, and smaller dick. Although the Japanese client may belong to a higher economic class—he is a potential buyer of the property—in the world of gay porn, other factors, such as physical endowment of muscle and genitalia, confer greater status than financial wealth. Nevertheless, a working-class status crucially informs the characterizations of Lee's other Asian costars. The other Asian actors in the video are the pool boys who work for Mikado's pool cleaning company, playing the roles of working-class immigrants.¹⁹ None of them gets to fuck the two white special guest stars, well-known actors Mike Nichols and Sam Crockett. Significantly, unlike Lee and Mikado, whom we see moving between their swanky WeHo condo to their workplaces and back again (the last scene has them fucking in their state-of-the-art kitchen), the other Asian men are restricted to the spaces of their manual labor jobs, in the house of clients and around the backyard pool.

"Where Are You From?" The Spaces of Gay Asian Video Porn

Contrary to frequent dismissals by viewers and critics of gay male porn that too much storyline gets in the way of the real business at hand, namely, the sex, it must be pointed out that the particular settings in which the sex takes place and the narrative motivations for it to occur are of the utmost importance in these racially themed videos. Indeed, in light of the banal and formulaic repertoire of sex acts in the majority of mainstream gay porn productions, it is the specificities of the sexual fantasies and their *mise-en-scènes* that differentiate one production from another. What makes the sex hot is not merely the attractiveness of the actors' faces, the appropriate distribution of hair, the development of large pecs and tight abs, the shape and musculature of the ass, the length and girth of the cock, nor is it wholly the quality of their sexual performance and chemistry. Indeed what constitutes the hotness of a video can be attributed to how well it stages, repeats, and/or innovates on a preexisting collection of homoerotic fantasy scenarios

that can potentially unfold at “all the key phantasmatic landmarks in the iconography of gay male porn itself: the locker room, the gym, the office, the park, the pizza delivery system, the plumber or UPS guy arriving at the door, the prison, and so on” (Cante and Restivo 2004a, 161). Although not especially imaginative or aspiring to originality, such staple “phantasmatic landmarks” allow viewers to pick and choose from the scripts structuring each scene with its attendant cast of characters (e.g., football players in the locker room, executive suits in the boardroom, gangsters in the prison) that would get them off the most effectively. Rich Cante and Angelo Restivo have persuasively argued for the importance of space and, more specifically, the world-making publicity of gay male pornography: “When the action is male-male sex, the spaces in which it transpires can never constitute neutral backdrops. This results from the fact that the acts themselves are nonnormative, whether one conceives the nonnormative as a violation of patriarchal law, or, more experientially, as the excess attached to feeling different and acting like an outsider. Therefore, visually recorded male-male sex acts are always situated in relation to a public via mechanisms distinct from male-female acts, even when their setting is a private space, such as a house or an apartment” (2004a, 142). They go on to claim that the intimate connection between gay male sex acts and public space “constitutes a key aesthetic dimension of the history of all-male moving image pornography” (Cante and Restivo 2004a, 142). While their comments offer insight about the queering of public space in gay porn, what is missing in the analysis is a consideration of how these spaces are racialized. All-male sex might “deneutralize” public and private spaces, but this deneutralizing occurs through various routes and intensities besides homoerotic ones, such as those framed by race/ethnicity, class, nationality, age, gender presentation, region, able-bodiedness, and so on. Cante and Restivo’s “all-male” perspective assumes that all gay male viewers are evenly and seamlessly interpellated into these spaces of pornography, even at the phantasmic level. For, as we recall, in *Asian Persuasion*, it is the Americanized Asian characters (Lee and Mikado) who are allowed entry into various spaces of work and leisure, while the movements of the working-class Asian characters are severely circumscribed: they remain “housebound.”

The portrayal of Lee’s Asian costars as working-class foreigners/immigrants corralled within a constrained space with colonial overtones can also be found in *Fortune Nookie*, another video in Catalina’s Far East Features series. In this video, Lee plays a young man who has inherited a fortune from

a recently deceased uncle. The problem is that the white lawyer, Jacob Scott, refuses to tell him what the fortune is unless Lee pays him legal fees. Lee protests desperately, “But I have nothing! . . . Lawyers suck.” To which Scott replies, “Yes, we do.” Thus, Lee finds himself coerced into having sex with Scott in order to receive his fortune. Scott, dressed in a gray suit, orders Lee to take his clothes off and perform for Scott’s pleasure.

The fortune turns out to be a brothel, where the sex workers are Asian men. They are managed and mistreated by a vicious white drag queen—in bad Japanese geisha drag—named Pixie (Vida de Ville). The Asian boy prostitutes are forced into working there for economic reasons. One of them, Niko Time, complains to Pixie that he wants to quit, but she reminds him that he has nowhere else to go. Another male prostitute, Tishiro Ho, tells his coworker, Erik Tenaka, that he is afraid that Pixie will fire him. Ho worries about his job security, especially since he has two kids to support. After taking over the whorehouse, Lee tries to make friends with Time, who also fears losing his job. Lee tells him, “I have a new job for you.” Time replies, “OK, let’s get it over with.” But what Lee has in mind is giving Time the pleasure of firing the bitchy Pixie, who has been embezzling money from the business. They bond over the expulsion of the drag queen, and Lee gives Time Pixie’s job. Time agrees to have sex with Lee and gets fucked by him.²⁰

Sexual coercion and consent in *Fortune Nookie* are thematized around not only racial stratification but also class-inflected power relations. As in *Asian Persuasion*, an internal differentiation, and valuation, of the characters’ sexual, gender, and economic capital becomes readily apparent in *Fortune Nookie*. Whereas Lee is coerced into having sex with the tie-wearing white lawyer (who tells him, “You have a lot of fees to work off, boy. . . . I’m pretty expensive”), after inheriting the brothel, Lee occupies the position of power over Time and the other Asian male prostitutes. Though he is poor at the beginning of the video, Lee’s inheritance affords him a promotion in the economic and sexual hierarchy. However, the status of the immigrant sex workers under his charge remains relatively unchanged. The interaction between Lee and Time, though coded as more consensual in opposition to those between the two Asian men and their white sex partners earlier in the video (lawyer Jacob Scott and John Paul Morgan, respectively), continues to be structured by unequal power relations, with Lee’s position as boss dominating over Time’s status as employee. Sex in this video is tied to economic necessity, not utopian fantasy, sexual expression, or free choice. The use of Asian actors with heavy accents and FOB (fresh-off-the-boat) appearance

and demeanor suggests an overlap of the actors' real-life situations with their characterizations in the porn narrative. Their actual low economic position and tenuous immigrant status resonate with their characters' marginalized positioning as sex workers threatened with unemployment. That is, their eroticization as sexual bottoms correlates with their bottom status in social and economic terms.²¹ This dynamic corresponds with what Richard Fung has described as the lack of an empowering subject position for the gay Asian porn viewer due to the fact that these videos' ideal viewers are white gay men. While white subjects both within and outside the videos are accorded a multiplicity of social and sexual positions, Asian men's roles are extremely limited and fixed. In a more pronounced manner than the pool boys in *Asian Persuasion*, the male prostitutes in *Fortune Nookie* are firmly confined within the interior space of the boy brothel, unable to leave due to their dismal economic prospects outside of it. Time, as the only sex worker elevated to the position of manager, continues to be sequestered physically inside the walls of the brothel.

The spatial limitations imposed on Asian subjects in gay video pornography—as fantasy objects and as porn viewers—constitute a vital component of “how Asian porn obsessively catalogues the sexual uses of racial markings and racialized bodies” (Capino 2006, 208). The gym becomes the karate dojo; the pizza guy turns into a Chinese food delivery boy; the prison transforms into a boy brothel; Los Angeles's sunny Griffith Park morphs into “an out-of-the-way place located in a dingy back alley in San Francisco's famed Chinatown.”²² Paradoxically, as “Asian” categories—with dizzying racial and geographic connotations—become deployed to visualize Asian characters performing “gay male sex” for the camera, these videos effectively exclude these Asian characters from being seen as members of gay male communities. Recall that in *Fortune Nookie*, Tishiro Ho, one of the male sex workers, is depicted as “gay-for-pay,” a father with two kids to support. The casting of Ho as heterosexual trade begs credibility due to his feminine gender presentation, soft nelly voice, and unconvincing enactment of a role usually deemed as a “straight-acting” or butch gender performance. With their FOB demeanors, it is inferred that these Asian immigrant characters (and actors?) live in poor ethnic ghettos far from the affluent gay neighborhoods of West Hollywood and the Castro. Their exclusion from gay membership parallels the depictions of Chicano/Latino men in contemporary gay U.S. porn. As Christopher Ortiz has argued, gay porn featuring Chicano/Latino men frequently sets their locations in Latino neighborhoods, “the barrio,” or

other class- and racially coded environments such as prisons and construction sites. A common fantasy figure that populates these sites is “the straight macho Chicano/Latino man who fucks ‘me’ (a white man)” without reciprocation; Ortiz (1994, 39) points out that such a stereotype prevents Chicano/Latino men from being seen as belonging to a gay community. Whereas Chicano/Latino characters are coded as macho, hypersexual, straight tops, and thus not qualifying as properly out and proud gay citizens, Asian characters are not conferred gay membership due to their effeminacy, desexualization, and exclusive bottom role (rather than the standard gay sexual versatility accorded to white men). Both groups of men of color are excluded from normative white gay American citizenship as a result of their racial-ethnic foreignness, working-class professions, and tenuous immigration status.

Looking at the spaces of Brandon Lee’s Asian-themed videos and other Asian-niche productions, we get a fuller picture of how Asian sexuality is not only excluded from gay U.S. communities but also from the territorial space of America itself. Daniel Tsang, in a discussion of the *mise-en-scène* of gay Asian videos produced for the North American market, has noted the prevalence of the vague, timeless space of a remote land in the majority of these works. These fantasies of the sensuous East, of “lands far away from [Western] urban life” (Tsang 1999, 474–475), position the viewer as either an actual or a virtual sex tourist.²³ Other videos in Catalina’s Far East Features Series corroborate this point, significant to note since they were released contemporaneously with Brandon Lee’s Asian videos. Both *With Sex You Get Egg Roll* (dir. Peter Romero, 1999) and *Chew Manchu* (dir. Mark Jensen, 2000) exploit the associations of Asian sexuality with prostitution and sexual slavery, and thus, set their storylines in nebulous, mysterious, ahistorical interiors (although the exterior shots are all of Hollywood skylines): in *With Sex* the major narrative points occur in a dark, cavernous Chinese restaurant where the food delivery boys also double as call boys; similarly, the key scenes in *Chew Manchu* take place in the shadowy dungeon-like rooms of villain Chew Manchu (a low-rent gay porn version of Fu Manchu), called the House of Chew Manchu.

The logic of Asian porn actors stationed in Orientalist locales lends strong support to Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis’s classic psychoanalytic insight that “fantasy . . . is not the object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its sign: he appears caught up himself in the sequence of images” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1986, 26). To bring the quotation to bear on the Asian gay porn videos, we might say

that their fantasies concern not only the bodies of Asian actors and the sex acts that they carry out, but, just as imperative, the mise-en-scènes in which they transpire. Though it is clear that, to some extent, narrative does take a secondary role in much of gay porn, it is also critical to examine the racially marked motivation of the staging of sexual fantasies in Brandon Lee's and other Asian-themed videos. The viewer of a video like *Asian Persuasion* is not just watching sex between men, but what the bodies and the sex with/between Asian men look like. The racial and ethnic coding of the actors occupies the central place of the sexual fantasy.²⁴ In watching the excerpt of a sex scene between Brandon Lee and Brad Davis Mikado in the *Best of Brandon Lee* compilation, a viewer might very well miss the point that Mikado, with his racially mixed appearance, is supposed to be read as Asian in this video. Seen outside the original context (*Asian Persuasion*), Mikado appears to be just another white porn actor.²⁵ The logic of these videotapes bespeaks the need to exoticize/eroticize racial difference by conjuring up a generic, slapdash Orientalia that, paradoxically, aims to reference vague notions of cultural authenticity. Consequently, we see credits in chopstick fonts, East Asian names, and characters having sex for money in settings like Los Angeles's Chinatown, Hong Kong, or Bangkok. Or, as Tsang notes, even when they are set in a no-place like anonymous hotel rooms in nameless countries, we are aware that this document of fantasy depends on the fact that the actors are from somewhere else, not here in the United States, but from an ahistorical, unspecified Orient. This point bears out Susan Koshy's claim about one of the primary features of American Orientalism, its deployment of "extraterritoriality." As she explains, "desire for the Orient/al is produced as a form of *extraterritorial desire*, a sign of the exotic that can be *acquired and consumed* . . . but is predicated on distance, on the foundational condition of belonging to another world, and hence must be *excluded from the space of the family and nation*" (Koshy 2004, 71, emphasis in original).

The emplacement of Asian men in another time and place, outside of Euro-American gay male spatial and temporal modernity, is confirmed on video box covers with their address to a specific type of consumer. The text for the video box packaging of *Fortune Nookie* is written on white elongated rectangles made to resemble paper strips from fortune cookies: "You will travel soon to the Far East for a pleasurable experience you won't forget," "Your love for men of Asian persuasion will increase and intensify," and so on. The second-person address replicates the phrasing of fortune cookies, but also positions the viewer as not of the Asian persuasion, a Western (and

most likely) white viewer. The video promises to deliver the Far East to the viewer or to bring him there virtually, thus confirming Tsang's point that the ideal viewer of these tapes is the sex tourist. However, though it does not explicitly announce it, the setting of *Fortune Nookie* seems to be contemporary Los Angeles. We can deduce this from such clues as exterior shots of a Silverlake neighborhood, the use of a white drag queen to play the role of the bitchy madam Pixie, the Southern California architecture, "guppie" furnishings, and kitschy porno-set decoration of the rooms. Like *Fortune Nookie*, *Asian Persuasion* also mobilizes references to the Far East in its video box cover: "Do you need some persuading to experience a far east [sic] encounter? How about letting 8½ luscious inches make up your mind? How about smooth supple chested men giving you their eager, far east [sic] cocks standing firm in sweet scented nests of jet black hair. Super-hung Catalina discovery Brandon Lee has what it takes to persuade you. Just in case you need it!" The punning on the word "persuasion" activates two levels of meaning. The first refers to belonging to a religion or, in this case, a racial group, while the other meaning is a play on the verb "persuade," implying a sexual seduction.²⁶ While one can appreciate the cleverness of the double entendre and the gimmicky rhyming, this emphasis on the viewer's needing to be persuaded to try a "far east encounter," to find Asian men desirable, to buy the video, depends on the "common sense" of Asian men as undesirable and unsexy. The video box text must provide evidence—such as "8½ inches" of "far east cock standing firm," "smooth supple" chests, and "nests of jet black hair"—in order to persuade the potential (white) porn consumer to consider trying Asian cock. Again, like *Fortune Nookie*, *Asian Persuasion* is actually set in contemporary Los Angeles, as we can see from the exterior shots of the LA skyline in the credit sequence, in the house in the Hollywood hills that Lee shows the Japanese buyer, and the fancy Southern California home where Mikado and his pool boys go to work cleaning pools. What the discrepancy between video packaging and actual shooting locations suggests is that even when Asian men are removed from the ethnic ghetto of Chinatown and placed in the generic porno locales of West Hollywood, in conventional, pornographic historical time and space, they are still seen as carrying the timeless, mysterious, mystical Orient with them. Their inscrutable, exotic sexuality continues to hold hidden, unexploited "Far East" pleasures unknown to the white man.²⁷

The novel intervention of Brandon Lee into this gay pornographic video-scape demonstrates that even as these titles include him in their publicity material referencing the discourse of Far Eastern sexual mysticism, in the videos themselves, he stands apart and in opposition to the other Asian characters. As enumerated above, his unique porn persona rests on his construction as an assimilated (Asian) American; more specifically, it is his prodigious genital endowment that constitutes the prized visual marker of difference from the foreign Oriental abjection embodied by other Asian actors. Various commentators have registered astonishment at the sight of such a dick on a small Asian man. Josh Eliot, the head director at Catalina who directed Lee in several videos, recalls being impressed by his cute face, but his great surprise came at the first sight of Lee's dick, which inspired Eliot to add another scene for Lee in *Asian Persuasion*. The porn magazine *XXX Showcase* puts it this way: "18-year-old Brandon has a hard-on almost as big as he is" (Lawrence 1998, 45). While this comparison stresses the large size of his cock, the comment implies that he has a small body that is out of proportion with his dick. In spite of the fact that so many commentators both inside and outside the videos keep remarking on the size of his penis—which "ranges" from 8½ to 10 inches, depending on which source one believes—it must be pointed out that in the world of gay pornography, the size of Lee's dick is not that extraordinary. The exaggeration and hype around Lee's sizeable equipment, I would contend, can be attributed to its attachment to the body of an Asian man. As suggested in the *XXX Showcase* citation, the big dick attached to the body of a five-foot-seven Asian man is considered out of proportion. This question of weight-height proportion does hold a positive valence in the gay male sexual marketplace, judging from the frequent invocation of this requirement in personal ads in gay newspapers and on gay websites.²⁸ Creative camera angles can easily correct any anomalous pairing of actors that might expose the secret of the vertically challenged yet well-endowed porn actor. A moment of mild shock registered for me when I was watching Lee in a four-way scene from *Dial "S" for Sex*. He is standing next to white performer Sam Crockett and merely reaches Crockett's shoulders. This medium long shot is held only for a minute or two before switching to a low angle underneath their cocks. From this worm's-eye view, Lee and Crockett, standing side by side, appear to be the same height; photographed this way, their similar stature—including the all-important cock size—thus implies their status

as peers, as equal participants in the sexual scenario, as objects of desire standing upright while getting their cocks serviced by kneeling partners.²⁹

The formal strategy of shooting from below visually showcases Lee's cock as it is licked and sucked by his costars (both white and Asian), and then as he fucks them with it. Lee's pleasure in getting sucked and in fucking constitutes the main sexual action and hotness of the videos, while his partners' pleasure derives from having Lee's cock penetrate their mouths and asses. In the scene between Lee and Tenji Mito in *Asian Persuasion* discussed above, a low-angle shot features Lee's cock in center frame as Mito, visible only by neck and chin, sucks it enthusiastically, his head bobbing from the top right edge to the center (figure 1.2). In the very same shot, in the upper left, we see Lee's face contorted, mouth agape emitting moans of pleasure, as he gazes at his cock going in and out of Mito's mouth. The shot economically and effectively aligns the viewer with Mito's pronounced enjoyment of Lee's cock as the "French active" partner in the scene. In the video's final scene, Lee and Mikado have sex after a long day at work. As porn conventions dictate, the scene ends with anal intercourse. The shots alternate between medium long shots of Lee fucking Mikado from behind (as the latter bends over a kitchen island countertop) and low-angle close-up shots of Lee's cock pounding Mikado's asshole (figure 1.3). Although the sequence concludes with high-angle shots showing the action from above, that is, Lee's top POV, the raucous verbal reaction of Mikado throughout the scene privileges his bottoming experience as recipient of Lee's vigorous pumping. Both of these scenes—the one between Lee and Mito that opens the video and the one with Lee and Mikado that ends it—submit to the rule of maximum visibility, displaying sexual acts from the best possible angles, especially those depicting intercourse (known as the "meat shot" in heterosexual porn with penis penetrating vagina). These exceedingly well-lit omniscient shots taken from the carpet looking up (documenting oral and anal sex), an "impossible" perspective that belongs to no one, actually serve to affirm the desiring perspective of the bottom, even at the risk of disrupting cinematic illusion.³⁰

Indeed, in addition to attributing to Lee's big cock the powers to grant oral and anal pleasures to his partners, these videos also equip it with the capability of giving delight merely through the sense of sight. In *Fortune Nookie*, Lee's cock becomes a spectacle that arrests narrative flow. During various points during their foreplay kissing, Lee and Niko Time stop and look down at Lee's erect cock with their mouths wide open as if in awe (figure 1.4). After the two performers move from kissing to oral sex, Lee's cock re-



FIGURES 1.2 AND 1.3: Shooting from below. *Asian Persuasion* (1997).



FIGURE 1.4: Brandon Lee's cock. *Fortune Nookie* (1998).

mains the focal point as Time sucks on it while jacking off his own cock, which continues to be hidden away under his boxers. Such a visual fixation on Lee's endowment proves that such a "novel" sight in gay moving-image porn generates erotic thrill for Lee, Time, and us viewers. Here I want to sound a word of caution against the uncritical embrace of Brandon Lee, a big-dicked Asian American butch top, as what Asian American and other politically progressive gay porn fans have been waiting for. For although his work does invert the passive houseboy-bottom paradigm critics like Fung have protested against, this new and improved "positive image" of the Asian American top comes about at the expense of consigning other Asian men to the familiar position of unassimilable bottoms. Though the Asian penis has been found, there are only a few inches of it to go around, or it comes to resemble another white dick, tinted yellow. At the same time, it is vital that in acknowledging the shortcomings of Lee's top masculinity, we do not lose sight of the fact that the "image of servitude," or Asian bottomhood, is not only an injury and a liability, a position forced upon hapless, victimized Asian male subjects. We should also be open to viewing it as a position that can be enthusiastically assumed and pleurably occupied. I examine these issues more thoroughly below in my discussion of Lee's "fall from the top."

Even though I have been discussing the Americanization of Brandon Lee in relation to his Asian costars, a similar process is at work in the mainstream gay videos in which he appears as well. *Big Guns 2* is a generic Catalina gay video that takes the military as a sexual background. Porn star Steve Rambo begins the tape by introducing the cast through a voice-over, read as if from a journal entry that he is writing. While conventional descriptions of white, macho, army-porno types comprise most of the voice-over characterizations, descriptions of the men of color exploit racial stereotypes. For instance, Rambo portrays the three black men as hypersexual studs; his voice-over makes references to a “six-foot-five monster of muscle and a tool between his legs that would make anyone’s knees weak” and “a chest as hard as a rock and lips that could make a dead man come when he puts them into action.” One Latino character is described as “streetwise from East LA,” while another is said to possess a “burrito [that] was jam-packed with sour cream [and] was constantly being munched on.” Whereas the black and Latino actors are ascribed racist characteristics, Lee’s Asianness is not explicitly commented on: “And finally there’s Brandon. You might call him our mascot. I guess when you’re as youthful-looking and cute as he is and feature a giant, fucking dick to boot, everyone wants to be your friend.” There are no crass references to his egg roll, teriyaki sauce, smooth, hairless skin, or his Oriental exoticism. The video begins with everyone being awakened in boot camp by Lee’s moans while masturbating. Taking his role as mascot seriously, Lee here acts as the instigator of the orgy action that ensues. Not just an ordinary army recruit, he is painted as a special member of the unit, someone who everyone gets along with and gets off to.³¹

The distinctions between “American” and “Asian,” big dick and small cock, top and bottom sex roles, Americanized and *FOB*, also extend to the mise-en-scènes of Lee’s non-Asian-themed videos. The army barracks in *Big Guns 2* resemble your generic gay porn fantasy scenario, the only difference being the multicultural cast of characters detailed above. The living room in which the four-way orgy from *Dial “S” for Sex* takes place is the same setting, and in fact is the exact set for another of Lee’s videos, *Stag Party*. It is a typical Southern California bungalow living room with French doors opening up onto a sunny backyard or balcony. This setting typifies most of the settings of Lee’s other videos—the middle-class, gay, white milieu of West Hollywood. As I suggested at the beginning of the chapter, this constitutes a

significant shift from the ethnic ghettos where previous Asian-themed porn videos were based.

In contrast to the persistent emplacement of Asian men in sexual encounters that can take place only in the Far East or the Chinatowns of the United States, Lee's crossover into the mainstream of gay porn videos concomitantly allows him to leave the ethnic ghetto once and for all and set up residence in the contemporary urban gay male ghetto of West Hollywood. In these videos, Lee is portrayed simply as a West Hollywood twink whose Asianness is seldom noted. In *Dial "S" for Sex*, he comes home to find his white boyfriend, Drew Andrews, jerking off while talking on the phone with an anonymous caller. Lee and Andrews proceed to have sex together, and later are joined by two white friends who drop by unexpectedly for a four-way orgy. At the end of the scene, we find out that Lee came home on a lunch break and must go back to work. Before doing so, he reminds his boyfriend, "Don't forget that Mitch is coming by to pick up those papers. Don't forget to call him, OK? Gotta go. Bye." Neither the preceding sex scene nor anything that comes after narratively motivates this line. Its only purpose, it seems to me, is to establish Lee as a regular guy living in generic pornotopia, in a tame coupledness occasionally spiced up by kinky sex. In addition, the throwaway line establishes Lee's class credentials as a white-collar executive type who inhabits a vanilla world far away from that of Asian porn characters with their dirty manual labor and/or commercial sex work.

The video that locates Lee most firmly in the West Hollywood gay scene is *Peters*, which is a porn remake of the Winona Ryder vehicle *Heathers* (dir. Michael Lehmann, 1989). Lee plays the Winona/Veronica character, here called Daniel Sawyer. This typical American name erases any connection to any "Far East" identity. After throwing up on one of the circuit-partying Peters at an exclusive sex club, Daniel/Lee is rebuked by one Peter Chandler (Patrick Allen), who threatens to reject Daniel/Lee from their West Hollywood in-group by telling him, "Might as well move to the Valley, Daniel."³² Another reference to the West Hollywood gay scene is invoked when Daniel/Lee and his cohort Jack Long (Gage Michaels in the Christian Slater role) make a rendezvous with the two bullies Buzz and Rahm at the Hollywood Spa, the largest gay bathhouse in Los Angeles. Taken together, these narrative elements demonstrate how Brandon Lee's appearance in mainstream gay porn recodes him into just another gay pornotopic character, carousing within the hegemonic space of gay, white, male, affluent West Hollywood.

The color-blind casting of Lee in the starring role of Daniel Sawyer in *Peters* signals the most extreme instance of his legitimization as an American.³³

“No, Where Are You Really From?”

In a milieu dominated by an ideal of white, American, masculine physical perfection, what is it about Lee that has enabled him to enter into the segregated world of mainstream gay pornography? I propose that Lee’s crossover is made possible by a certain degree of racial instability accruing to his star image. This ability to penetrate into the mainstream is part and parcel of an undecidable (inscrutable, unfixed) Asian ethnicity.

In addition to their name, the other “coincidence” linking Brandon Lee, cult star of *The Crow*, and Brandon Lee, porn star of *Fortune Nookie*, is their racial ambiguity. The son of Bruce Lee was hapa (half-Asian, half-white), a fact that is seldom mentioned as a result of Hollywood’s typecasting of Brandon Lee as a martial arts actor. Consequently, most commentators are invested in establishing a patriarchal lineage by emphasizing the connections between father and son (the Little Dragon and Son of the Dragon). The racial/ethnic ambiguity of Lee the porn star proves trickier. In his first foray into gay porn, he appeared in a video titled *Glory Holes of L.A.* (dir. Bianco Piagi, 1997) under the name of Sean Martinez. It was not until his second video, *Asian Persuasion*, that he took on the name Brandon Lee. In the context of mainstream gay video pornography, where young, white, well-built actors are the unquestionable norm, any departure from this type represents a special niche, a zone in which differences such as race become heavily commodified.

The “trouble with Asians” is the difficulty of telling them apart. But in the world of gay video porn, it is not necessary to discriminate the “minute” differences among Asians. Rather, it suffices to connote cultural authenticity by conjuring an all-encompassing Orientalia. Thus, most Asian actors have East Asian or, more specifically, Japanese-sounding names, such as Tenji Mito, Hiro Sukowa, Erik Tenaka, and Niko Time. Other actors take on Japanese first names and Chinese last names, like Tishiro Ho. Others Orientalize their names for an Asian video, as in the case of Brad Davis Mikado and Jean Russo Chen. The former usually goes by Brad Davis in his other videos. The addition of “Mikado” implies a hidden Japaneseness in his person. Josh Eliot, director of *Asian Persuasion 1* and 2, suggests the practical necessity of using “not quite Asian” actors like Davis in the Asian-themed videos in order

to safeguard against the risk of Asian actors changing their minds and renegeing on their commitment to appear in a video on the day of the shoot.³⁴ This bit of extratextual information notwithstanding, the mixed-race reference in these actors' names also exploits the exoticism traditionally associated with interraciality in the United States. This transgression draws upon the historical prohibition against miscegenation. For instance, Gina Marchetti has called attention to Hollywood cinema's depiction of Eurasians as evil, deceitful, and dangerous. In the context of gay porn, the bi-/multiculturalism of mixed-race actors also provides a form of "the-best-of-both-worlds" exoticism, invoking difference but also similarity—threat and spice, as well as comfort and familiarity.

Far from being merely camp and kitsch (like the short, butch names used by white actors), naming in the Asian-niche videos plays a large role in the racial packaging of the tapes, since the producers are selling eroticized-exoticized racial and ethnic difference. Quentin Lee, who played Peekay Chan in *Shanghai Meat Company* (dir. Tony Chan, 1991), claims that the white producers of the video gave themselves Asian names in the credits in order to sell it as being an authentic "by-Asian-for-Asian" videotape. Along these same lines, we can appreciate Brandon Lee's assumption of a recognizable Asian American name from a cult martial arts celebrity. This choice of name exploits the cultural association of Asian men in the popular imagination with the kung fu action genre. Inadvertently, he may have inherited the racial ambiguity of the real Brandon Lee as well.

Brandon Lee's real name is Jon Enriquez. He was born in Mobile, Alabama, on March 18, 1979. His ethnic background is Filipino, with a mix of Chinese, English, and Spanish. I propose that Enriquez's previous appearance in gay porn as Sean Martinez reveals an attempt to present himself as Latino, hence drawing on the closer association of Latinos/Chicanos with hypersexual appeal.³⁵ It's significant that Enriquez's choice of porn name is aligned with East Asian and Asian American connotations after he decided to appear in Asian-themed videos. In the United States, there is an automatic association of Asia with East Asia. The Far East/East Asia axis grounds the Orientalist fantasies of gay pornography. To support this observation, I mention here several other titles in Catalina's Far East Features series: *Pacific Rim* (dir. Mitchell Dunne, 1997), *With Sex You Get Egg Roll*, *Chew Manchu*, and *Crème of Sum Yung Gai* (director uncredited, 2004). In the discourse of Oriental sexuality—based on an *ars erotica* (erotic art), with its links to Eastern knowledge and experience of pleasure—the sexuality of Filipinos does not

figure strongly. Regarded as dirty and impure, too mongrelized and Westernized due to four hundred years of colonial contact with Spanish and American cultures, Filipinos are excluded from this exotic framework.

In an article about the taxi dance halls in Filipino immigrant communities of the 1920s and 1930s, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (1998) refers to the threat posed by the interracial mingling between the “little brown monkeys” (the male Filipino laborers) and “white trash” (women who worked at these dance halls) to the hegemonic American discourse around racial purity represented by the eugenics movement. Jinqi Ling has noted that the classification of Filipinos as U.S. nationals and as Malays (rather than Mongolians) in the same period allowed Filipino men relative freedom of movement and interaction with white women. Ling writes, “The invention of Filipino males’ threatening sexuality is thus bound up with white men’s concern about securing their social power, a concern brought to the point of crisis by Filipino workers’ participation in the labor movement” (1997, 319). My brief mentions of Filipino male labor history in the United States aim to emphasize the historical coding of Filipino men as sexual threats to white American manhood. Along with the “corruption” of the Philippines by Western colonial forces, the image of Filipino men as “irresistible studs” prevented the incorporation of Filipinos in the exoticized, feminized, and domesticated discourse of Orientalist, racial fantasies. It is this particular historically inflected, racialized sexual dynamic that enables, even in the late 1990s and into the 2000s, the transformation of Jon Enriquez/Sean Martinez—identities that are couched in the threatening, opaque, and vexed framework of Filipino American sexuality—to the more culturally intelligible (and easier-to-consume) Brandon Lee.

I contend that the conventionally handsome face of Brandon Lee functions as a product of a mongrelized Filipino American interracial mixing after many generations.³⁶ The colonial and imperialist legacies of the Philippines have produced what some of my Filipino friends jokingly refer to as a “mutt,” a mixture comprising indigenous Filipino, Malay, Chinese, Spanish, and American biological and cultural, somatic and psychic ingredients. One can see this mutt mixture reflected on the face of Brandon Lee as a set of hybridized, Westernized facial features: most meaningfully, the double eyelid, the tall nose bridge, and the brown skin. It is also this “unplaceable” face that permits a crossing of ethnicities. Because “all Orientals look the same,” the face of Lee animates a variety of racial connotations, going from Jon Enriquez to Sean Martinez to Brandon Lee. Enriquez, Martinez, and

Lee's ability to pass resides precisely in exploiting this hidden disguise of the exotic, inscrutable Asian mask in order to put forth a legible, average American face. As an Asian American fan of Lee observes, "Compared to the other Asian guys he's with in the videos, he's definitely a better watch. The other guys usually aren't cute. . . . They make funny noises when Brandon Lee fucks them and have that annoying Asian edge to them—kind of like my brethren that I shy away from at gay Asian clubs."³⁷ In contrast to the "closed," single-lidded eyes and foreign, FOB demeanor of his Asian costars with their often unintelligible verbal recitals, Lee's open American face is "a better watch," and the English-speaking, American viewer can hear his Valley Guy accent without great effort. Furthermore, doesn't the register of surprise and pleasure of seeing an "American" dick attached, out of proportion, to the face and body of an Asian American man indicate another *passport*? Isn't this big (enough) dick the appeal and the prerequisite, the pass for admittance into the world of white gay mainstream pornotopia? Is this the dick that is finally big enough to rival, and fuck, white men?

The Fall of Brandon Lee

Up to this point, I have focused on the early phase of Brandon Lee's career, from the beginning in 1997 to his departure from the industry in 1999. This brief period was pivotal to the construction of his image as a gay (Asian) American porn star, largely due to his crossover from an Asian niche market to a more mainstream one. In 2004, after serving in the U.S. Navy, Lee returned to gay porn as an exclusive actor for Rascal Video. No longer the clean-cut Asian American twink from his early years, Lee reemerged in the industry with an edgier look: thick muscular build, body decorated with copious tattoos, cocky demeanor, and an aggressive performance style. The most significant change in Lee's porn persona was his decision to bottom for the first time in *Wicked* (figure 1.5). It appears as if his butch makeover were created to offset the turn to bottoming. Before discussing *Wicked*, let me backtrack and propose that his previous videos amply prepared the viewer for Lee's momentous "fall from the top."

From the beginning of his career, Lee's topness has always been a shaky affair. Adding a new dimension to the argument I made above about Lee's persona as an American top, here I highlight moments in his videos when bottomhood makes itself felt. For instance, I referred above to the scene in *Fortune Nookie* with Jacob Scott as the lawyer who coerces Lee into having sex with him in exchange for Scott's lawyer fees. Even though Lee tops Scott

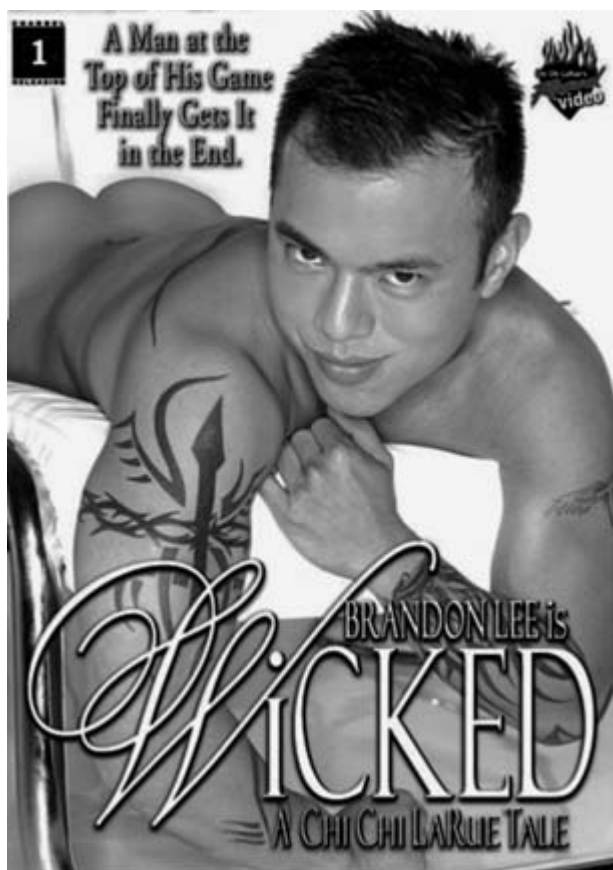


FIGURE 1.5:
DVD cover.
Wicked (2005).

in this scene, Scott, the consummate “bossy bottom,” holds the upper hand throughout the sequence as he repeatedly calls Lee “boy” and orders him to “fuck me like a man.” Before they even get to the fucking, Scott demonstrates his power when he directs Lee to strip naked and pose in a variety of positions—standing, bending over, sticking up his ass—while Scott remains clothed, watching, and rubbing his cock through the trousers of his business suit. Lee’s function in this scene (incidentally, what many viewers consider the hottest scene in *Fortune Nookie*) as a passive top who is bossed around and objectified by the bottom is reinforced when at the end of the sequence, he kneels on the floor while Scott jacks off and comes on Lee’s face and chest.

Another moment when Lee’s topness is called into question can be found in *Asian Persuasion 2*. The scene in question shows Tommy Lin, an aspiring

porn actor, seated in the waiting room of Catalina Video watching Brandon Lee, the porn star, perform a solo jerk on a TV monitor. Lee directly addresses Lin (and by implication, the porn viewer), throughout his masturbatory routine. This video within a video mirrors the porn viewing situation, and thus can be said to teach the viewer “how to watch Brandon Lee,” characterized here as an autoerotic top, a top that must constantly acknowledge his susceptibility to bottomhood. Throughout the sequence, there is a constant switching between his position as top—the subject acting upon the viewer—and as bottom—as the object of someone else’s desire. While on his stomach humping a pillow, Lee looks at the camera: “I want my ass eaten out really good. . . . Nice tongue in my hole.” He fingers and spreads his hairless asshole. But then he shifts from this bottom position (getting eaten out) to top: “Bend your knees so I can fuck you. . . . I need a tight ass for my cock.” However, what we immediately see is his spread butt cheeks. At the end of the scene, he flips over on his back, shoots on his own face, and ends by wiping his cheeks and eating his own cum, while looking directly at the camera. To be sure, in the context of the post-AIDS solo jerk, the eating of cum constitutes a resignification of risk and sexual taboo associated with the exchange of bodily fluids.³⁸ The ingestion of his own cum crystallizes the constant switching between top and bottom that Lee directly solicits, visually and verbally, from the viewer throughout this solo-jerk scene; put differently, he performs this switching in addition to soliciting it. Lee’s self-facial dramatizes the enormous pressure brought to bear on the racially inflected fantasy of an Asian top porn star performing for another Asian man who desires him and desires to be like him. Moreover, the coming and shooting on his own face can be seen as a complex negotiation of the ways in which an Asian American top porn star must also address the desires of non-Asian spectators, particularly in the context of North American gay porn, spectators who are not used to seeing an Asian American actor in the role of a top. These moments of Lee’s autoerotic topness, then, exemplify what José B. Capino has argued is the determining component that makes Asian porn Asian, namely, sexual availability. Capino writes, “The pleasure of Asian porn’s plenitude is intensified by the compulsory sexual availability of virtually all the Asian figures within the diegesis of video pornography” (2006, 212–213). However, against Capino’s observation that this Asian sexual availability is made possible by the ways “the racialization and sexualization of Asianness are hyperbolized equally and together” (209), Lee represents a special case because, as I argued at length above, his hyperbolic sexualization as a top porn actor

is accomplished through a process of deracialization or, more precisely, a racial disavowal, albeit a process that remains uneven and unsustainable. The self-sufficient sexual repertoire he performs for the viewer (rimming and fucking his own ass, eating his own cum) demonstrates his racially unremarked sexual availability for the viewer, acting in turn as an invitation for the viewer to perform these same acts on him.

The destabilization of Lee's top status traced in these examples finds its full realization in *Wicked*. Looking closely at the narrative motivation for Lee's bottoming in this video can tell us how Lee's relatively secure status as an American top porn star mediates and accommodates this radical shift in his porn persona. In *Wicked*, Lee plays himself, the porn star Brandon Lee, but one whose celebrity has inflated his head to diva proportions. The first scene in the video pairs Brent Everett and Jan Fischer in a mechanic's garage. As the scene ends, Lee enters the porn set and throws a hissy fit, claiming that that was supposed to be his scene. The director (Doug Jeffries) replies that since Lee doesn't bottom, he had to cast another actor who was willing to bottom for Everett, who only tops. The following scene shows another pair of white actors, Tag Adams and Tommy Ritter, on a country barn set. Lee barges in, interrupting the two actors' conversation, saying, "Do you know who I am? Everybody kisses my ass around here. Let's start with you!" In response, Adams eagerly dives in to rim Lee's asshole. The end of the scene finds Adams and Ritter jacking off and ejaculating all over Lee's face. As the director yells "Cut!" a furious Lee shouts, "This will be the last time I get cum on my face!" Back in his dressing room, Lee is visited by the Ghost of Porn Past (Kurt Young), who advises Lee to change his prima donna ways because they are negatively affecting the people around him. Lee replies that everyone loves him, but the Ghost tells him differently. They look into a magic mirror and observe a scene between two of Lee's former costars, both of whom left the porn industry due to their bad experiences working with Lee. Next, Lee is visited by the Ghost of Porn Present (Chi Chi LaRue), who espouses the positive power of cooperation and teamwork, of what can happen when "everybody work[s] together to get the job done." Through the same magic mirror, she allows Lee to witness a very hot three-way sex scene between Johnny Hazzard, Joey Milano, and Luca DiCorso. Lee is impressed: "I wish I had been in that scene!" Back to reality, the assistant director comes to tell Lee that the actor who was supposed to bottom in the final scene canceled, thus putting the whole production in jeopardy. Having learned his lessons from the two Ghosts' visitations, Lee heroically volun-

teers to fill in for the missing actor. In the final scene, Lee bottoms for Shane Rollins. After taking turns sucking one another, Lee declares, “I want you inside me.” Rollins takes his time preparing Lee’s ass, by rimming it, spitting his saliva into Lee’s asshole, fingering it, and finally penetrating Lee. As a dramatic turning point in Lee’s career and the climactic scene of *Wicked*, Lee takes Rollins’s cock enthusiastically, performing his role as an aggressive and extremely verbal bottom, much more so than in his performance as a top in the video’s barn scene. To signal the momentous occasion, Lee is shown coming not once, but twice. The first time has Lee jerking himself off and shooting while Rollins fucks him. After jacking Rollins off, Lee jerks himself and comes again. Lee looks up and smiles at the two Ghosts above, who smile and wave approvingly down at him.

Writing about gay-for-pay actors in gay pornography, Jeffrey Escoffier observes, “Virtually every actor who makes a name for himself as a top is challenged to bottom at some point in his career” (2003, 544). Famous examples include such figures as gay-for-pay, or sexually ambiguous, performers Jeff Stryker, Ryan Idol, and Rod Barry. Escoffier notes that in order to sustain fan interest and maintain their marketability, porn actors must periodically modify their persona by enlarging their sexual repertoire. While the question of gay-for-pay is a moot point in the case of gay-identified Lee, it is notable that he decided to bottom right after his return to porn from a five-year sabbatical, suggesting that this vital addition to his sexual repertoire was as carefully orchestrated as his new edgy, buffed, tattooed image. But, unlike a white gay-for-pay actor like Rod Barry, whose decision to bottom was based solely on financial compensation (Escoffier 2003, 544), Lee’s repackaging from a total top to a versatile performer cannot be adequately understood without taking his Asianness into account. Indeed, the press around Lee’s decision to bottom invariably references his status as an Asian porn star known for being an exclusive top. For example, the credit sequence at the beginning of *Wicked* is composed of close-ups of box covers of Lee’s early Asian-niche videos, such as *Asian Persuasion 1* and *2*, and *Fortune Nookie*; the sequence establishes Lee as a porn star and links his past work as a top with this new phase as a versatile performer.

Wicked narrates Lee’s bottoming as a morality tale à la Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*. The moral dilemma for Brandon Lee is whether to persist in his porn star arrogance and egotism or to do good by sacrificing his status as a top for the betterment of the group (i.e., the success of the video production). Although *Wicked* is the porn vehicle that showcases Lee’s bottoming,



FIGURE 1.6: Brandon Lee bottoms. *Wicked* (2005).

the narrative, curiously, is not organized around the desire to get fucked or the pleasure of bottomhood. Rather, it functions here as a way of disciplining Lee's porn stardom gone awry, as a means of reining in its excesses. Lee's porn diva shenanigans are explicitly linked to his role as a top: from the first scene when he storms the set fuming because he has been replaced by another top (Everett) to the later scene when his topness is compromised after two costars give him facials. Though not exactly a sign of punishment and submission, Lee's bottoming in *Wicked* nevertheless implies that Asianness and topness are ultimately incommensurable. Relatedly, it also indicates that his unremarked and unremarkable racial position—as an assimilated (Asian) American—cannot be steadfastly maintained and stabilized. Instead of signifying strength, discretion, and confidence, Lee's brand of topness—as manifested in the narrative of *Wicked*—is marked by bitchiness, hysteria, and insecurity. Put differently, his porn stardom is coded as feminizing: Lee's top is less Jeff Stryker and more Lucy Liu. In *Wicked*, Lee's redemption, the only way he can repair his bad porn image, lies in giving up his status as a top, hitherto the defining trait of his fame.

Yet to read Lee's bottoming as a containment of Asian American masculinity is not the whole story. Lee's turn as an aggressive bottom challenges a purely ideological reading. His insistent, verbal entreaties to Rollins—"fuck me, fuck me, oh yeah"—and his raucous moans of "uh uh uh uh fuck uh,"

even if partly exaggerated and overly theatrical, encourage us to think beyond the framework of bottomhood cum Asian abjection (figure 1.6). The fact that Lee is able to maintain an erection while being fucked and to come twice in one sex scene suggests involuntary bodily responses that exceed the narrative framing of Lee's bottoming as a lesson about cooperation, teamwork, and humility.³⁹ The pleasure manifested by Lee's bottoming, whether seen as involuntary, excessive, or perhaps even faked, triggers an alternative reading. Asked in an interview about his experience bottoming for the first time onscreen, Lee replies that unlike in real life, you can always say "Cut!" when bottoming in front of the camera. He goes on to say, in real life, "I just take it," whereas on a video shoot, "I had time to get used to my partner" (Corday 2005, 20). For Lee, bottoming for a porn production is "easier" because he has more control over the process. While the logistics of pornographic performance do not override the narrative framing of Lee's bottoming in *Wicked*, they do call attention to the performance of bottomhood, and by extension, the performance of topness as well. In distinguishing his experience of bottoming on and off camera, Lee suggests that his sexual practice in real life does not necessarily correspond with, and might be counter to, the top activities he performs in videos. This potential discrepancy opens up a space for Lee's agency as a porn performer who makes a choice to add bottoming to his sexual repertoire as a strategy of extending his marketability in the industry. Further, Lee's bottoming can be read as less a fall from the top and more a way of tapping into the full range of sex acts that gay male video porn ratifies.⁴⁰ As a versatile actor who performs fiercely as a top sometimes and aggressively as a bottom at other times, Lee exploits and to a certain extent challenges the racial codes that underpin top and bottom positionings in contemporary gay video porn.

In addition to performance, another way to read Lee's bottomhood as something beside the regulation of Asian American masculinity is by considering the changed mediascape that has recently discovered a new Asian desirability in the realms of culture, including film, television, music, the Internet, and popular culture. Since his emergence in the late 1990s, Lee has made a big impression in a global gay Asian mediascape for being the first Asian top porn star in North American gay pornography. His fame is disseminated not only through his actual videos but also through the circulation of his star text across various media platforms. The first hit that comes up on a Google search for "gay Brandon Lee" takes one to a Wikipedia entry on Lee.⁴¹ The gay press readily recognizes him as a "living legend" of gay

pornography. *Unzipped*, one of the most popular American gay magazines chronicling the contemporary gay porn industry, credits Lee with “busting stereotypes [about] Asian men” and names him “porn’s reigning Asian superstud” (Corday 2005, 18–20). As part of its “Asian Invasion Issue!,” New York City’s gay glossy weekly *Next* puts a buffed and naked Lee on its cover, posed in a three-quarter view that accentuates his smooth, firm, meaty pecs and smoother, firmer, and meatier buttocks. The writer of the cover story compares Lee’s accomplishments as a gay Asian American porn star and his “aggressive total-top-ness” with what B. D. Wong did for Asian American actors with his Tony Award-winning performance in *M. Butterfly* (Angelo 2005, 12). In the same vein, the Paris-based gay magazine *Baby Boy* includes Lee in its top ten list of gay Asian icons. As the only porn actor, he rounds out the list at number ten in an international roster that includes Bruce Lee (no. 1), Takeshi Kaneshiro (no. 4), and Wang Lee Hom (no. 9). In light of these examples, I want to reassess my claims throughout the chapter that the ideal viewer of Lee’s work is (always) a gay white man.⁴² Doing so offers us a broader understanding of the ideological work behind Lee’s revised persona as a versatile Asian American porn star.

An Accented Pornography

I began this chapter by arguing that the construction of Brandon Lee as a desirable (Asian) American top porn star is established in opposition to his less-than-appealing Asian costars with their working-class status, Chinatown address, bad accents, bad hair, flat faces, small dicks, and propensity for bottomhood. It should be amply clear by now that in linking sexual dominance and desirability with porn stardom, topness, and hegemonic white American masculinity, one risks perpetuating the association of bottomhood with Asian submission, abjection, and anonymity. In addition, this essentialist and binary coding of white American/top and foreign Asian/bottom serves to foreclose any consideration of the pleasures and agency of the bottom, whether white, black, Latino, or Asian. A rethinking of the dynamics of top and bottom must acknowledge that for some gay Asian male subjects, adopting the bottom position can be an enjoyable and affirming sex act. To invoke the title of the well-known sex-positive feminist, lesbian magazine, they are perfectly happy “on their backs.” A more nuanced critique of normative racial-sexual discourses might proceed with a different aim, that is, not by flipping on top, but by interrogating the values underpinning these social-sexual positionings. It would also attempt to submit these anonymous

FOB bottom porn characters to a wholly different set of social, sexual, and aesthetic viewpoints.

Brandon Lee's conversion from a clean-cut West Hollywood twink top to an older buffed-out, heavily inked versatile performer was accompanied by a persona makeover into an egotistical diva. After the decisive *Wicked*, the porn diva persona became even more dramatically altered. In *Lights & Darks: An Interracial Spin* (dir. Doug Jeffries, 2005) and *Affirmative Blacktion: An Interracial Takeover* (dir. Doug Jeffries, 2010), Lee's star text takes on an explicitly racializing cast when he adopts "yellowface" in both videos. In the former, he is a suit-wearing proprietor of a modern-day laundromat who speaks broken English and exhibits an offensive racist suspicion of his black customers; in the latter, Lee plays a greedy, imperious heterosexual Chinese bar owner, complete with a white girlfriend and a coterie of butch, muscular white and black minions-employees who cower and jump at his every command. It would appear that as part of the project of diversifying his sexual repertoire by adding bottoming to the list, Lee's porn persona has begun, for the very first time in his career, to exploit the potentials of "Asian roles" that his deracinated American image had previously left untapped. I analyze this latest development in Lee's image in the broader framework of the deployment of sound and the voice as they pertain to Asian characters in gay video porn. The stereotypical roles of his Asian costars and Lee's own turns in various Asian stereotypes in his more recent videos create the opportunity to argue for an accented pornography, a mode of porn performance and reception that, while drawing on toxic racialized sexual roles, also allows for the envisioning and inhabiting of a different subject position vis-à-vis these Orientalist gay fantasy scenarios.

By moving the analysis away from diagnosing the ways that these FOB characters have been made abject due to their relegation to bottom status, I propose to examine the characteristic that most brands them as irredeemably foreign: their voice, or, more specifically, their bad, accented English.⁴³ It is through their accented English that Asian porn performers communicate another sexual subjectivity, one that is not less than, or lacking, in relation to the idealized white gay performers, but one that evades intelligibility within conventional pornographic image- and soundscapes. My use of "accented pornography" borrows from Hamid Naficy's powerful theorization of accented cinema. In Naficy's formulation, accented cinema refers to an artisanal and collective method of filmmaking that challenges the domi-

nant mode of cinematic production, a task accomplished “from the filmmakers’ and audiences’ deterritorialized locations.” Acknowledging that “all accents are not of equal value socially and politically,” he employs the discussion of nonnormative vocal performances to signify various forms of linguistic, social, and political marginalization (Naficy 2001, 22). In the context of gay porn, accents constitute a shorthand for depicting a character’s sexual appeal, most significantly, his masculinity quotient: a deep voice in a non-region-discernible accent that evokes butch, red-blooded, all-American manhood.⁴⁴ By contrast, the strong accent of some Asian actors—as aural evidence of their racial/ethnic, class, national, and gender alterity—indexes their exclusion from U.S. gay community membership. Consequently, I want to draw on Naficy’s argument for accented cinema’s deterritorialization to describe certain viewers’ willingness to grant the Asian FOB actors a new hearing. In contrast to some critics, I do not perceive in the FOB porn subjects’ accents a failure to speak and perform as idealized white porn stars; nor do I detect in their slow, belabored voices an intentional resistance and undermining of the mainstream gay porn soundscape, in the vein ascribed by Naficy to an accented, intercultural cinema. Instead, I seek to make room for listening to and witnessing these subjects’ authenticity-in-abjection differently, as toxic in normative terms, to be sure, but more importantly as legitimate in their own right, without justification, translation, or special accommodations. My use of “accent” refers not only to the actors’ English, but also to their voices’ scripted, soft, hesitant, effeminate quality—the grain of their voices that doesn’t carry the authoritative butch masculine tones adopted by white American (top) actors.

Numerous critics have identified the vital role that sound plays in moving-image pornography. In her landmark study of heterosexual pornographies, *Hard Core*, Linda Williams argues that the female voice (along with the female face) is used to stand for and signify female pleasure due to the fact that its true source evades visual representation. Other critics writing on gay male moving-image porn have made similar observations about the phantasmic function of the voice. For instance, Cante and Restivo (2004a, 158) point out that sound in gay male porn, such as the unsynced “improvised-in-postproduction mish-mash of moans, breathings, gasps, cries,” effectively constructs a utopian, phantasmic pornographic space. In the same vein, Cindy Patton argues that unsynced sex sounds in pornographic loops suggest that “sexual subjectivity is something like ‘tapes’ that we run” (1999, 475). She continues:

Where older porn ran its endless grunting and groaning loops, 1980s porn intersperses sex noises with phrases like “suck my big dick.” . . . The mismatch between the visuals and the word “big” reminds us that even without exotic scenes or spectacular sex acts, today’s porn is truly fantasy. Such phrases operate not as referential signs, but as verbal fetishes which compress and miniaturize a narrative of desire. When the actor asks to have his dick sucked and it happens, we are as (or more) excited to hear him ask as we are scopophilically satisfied to see him get it. (476)

The mismatch between image and sound constitutes a crucial aspect of an accented pornography. The dissonance produced by the foreign Asian accent being asked to recite a conventional American porn script generates the sexual charge in an Asian-themed video, or, to borrow Patton’s wording, the Asian actors’ poor pronunciations become “verbal fetishes.” We can appreciate the ways the phantasmic spatial dynamic gets played out in Brandon Lee’s Asian porn videos: the heavily accented English and the slow, awkward, and sometimes unintelligible delivery of lines by his Asian costars work to accentuate their limited facility with the English language. This lack of a perfect translation between the porn script and its verbal recitation paradoxically fits into the theme of the porn narrative, which is premised on the exotic foreignness of the Asian actors. In other words, their poor English authenticates and enhances the Orientalist fantasies the videos aim to achieve. Building on Cante and Restivo’s thesis concerning the link between sound and the utopian, phantasmic space of gay porn, I amend and specify how pornographic voices and vocalizations manufacture racialized sexual fantasies in these videos, especially since Asians are often deemed to be non-English speaking, incapable of speaking it correctly, or, left to their own devices, speaking in a gibberish ching-chong nonlanguage. The clash between “Asian sounds” and porn fantasy is most piercing when FOB characters are inserted into scenarios not marked as “Asian,” but those of the generic, white “phantasmic landmarks” variety, as is the case when a Chinese food delivery scenario is replaced by a pool boy scenario.

I contend that it is where the lack of fit between FOB bodies and the generic pornographic soundtrack occurs—the instance when the voice drowns out the image—that possibilities for a different sexual subjectivity begin to emerge. Breaking and entering into dominant fantasies not written by or for him, the FOB immigrant subject effectively reterritorializes, or “tape[s] over,” conventional scenarios with his own, overlapping sound-

tracks of desire. In a scene from *Asian Persuasion 2*, Tommy Lin, an aspiring porn actor, has a meeting with porn producer Rusty (Rob Lee) at the offices of Catalina Video about his audition tape. It transpires that the interview requires Tommy to demonstrate his sexual skills with Rusty right there and then. Though it animates the predictable proverbial casting couch scenario, multiple elements in the scene don't quite add up to a seamless production: unimaginative writing, bright nonnaturalistic lighting, and distracting synthesizer music. Most conspicuous is the wooden, amateurish acting, especially in the stilted, belabored delivery of lines of dialogue: Tommy with his soft, feminine voice, which is quite at odds with the young hunky ingenue type he's meant to project; and Rusty and his heavy Asian accent, idiosyncratic enunciations of syllables, and staccato pauses, as if he were reciting spoken-word poetry: "I guess you know now / why we called you in / We want you to be in / our new / Asian / VIDEO!" and "THEN! / I suggest you get over here / and show me just how bad / you really want that part!" To be sure, this awkward delivery of lines may be appreciated for its camp effect, an effect that is heightened by the actors sounding like they are giving it their best shot. At the same time, I suggest that some viewers might find the dialogue sequence sexy precisely because it is performed so poorly and with the utmost sincerity.

Following Patton's insight that the unmooring of the voice from the image track activates a different level of sexual fantasy, I suggest that these unsuccessful attempts to sound like an (Asian) American porn star point to a wholly different porno economy, what I have been calling an accented pornography. The inability to "speak sex" in standard English shows that these FOB characters don't own the space in which they are inserted;⁴⁵ yet their mispronunciations encourage us to prick up our ears and listen for other sounds. Though the scene between Tommy and Rusty (young aspiring porn actor and older porn producer) echoes that of Brandon Lee and Tenji Mito (young real estate agent and older prospective house buyer), the dynamics between the former couple differ in many ways, but most crucially, in that both of them are strongly coded as Asian immigrants in a way that Lee never was. Hence the power differentials between Tommy and Rusty are relatively smaller, but by the same token, more complicated. For instance, though Rusty initiates and orchestrates the sexual activities, he does most of the work as the sucker and fuckee; that is, his is the consummate bottom position. And yet the slow, relaxed manner in which he licks and sucks Tommy's cock and eats out Tommy's asshole, along with the joy he exhibits in getting

fucked, complicate any clear characterization of Rusty as a passive, powerless bottom. Indeed, the video privileges his bottom positioning to such an extent that Rusty is not accorded a money shot—the obligatory jacking of one’s cock to ejaculation at the end of a scene—nor does the viewer catch any glimpse of his cock at any point. The ethics of reciprocity of “I do you, you do me” is entirely absent; instead, the video wholly endorses Tommy’s top pleasure, or more precisely, Rusty’s bottom pleasure in administering to Tommy’s desires. Most tellingly, the only moment in the scene when Rusty’s performance comes across as involuntary (which is not to say that it is authentic) is when his mouth erupts into moans and Mandarin mumbles when he is being fucked by Tommy. In other words, his bottom pleasure is specified as being so intense that it makes him revert back to his “foreign tongue.” It is through porn sound that his anal pleasure is heard, registered, and validated.⁴⁶

At this point, it bears asking, what viewer would find the scene to be hot and sexy? Whose fantasy is this? A conventional ideological reading would answer that it’s hot for the white viewers who get off on depictions of the Orientalist foreignness of Asian men, as revealed in this instance by their accented voices. I contend that such a reading is impoverished because it cannot countenance fantasy scenarios not propped upon a porn literacy of the white, U.S., English-only variety, one that can only read racial difference through an exoticizing lens and hear in accented voices an inability to speak proper English. What if we consider the scene from the perspective of viewers who look and talk like Rusty and Tommy, not in their roles as naive, duped FOBS coerced into sex work, but as sexual subjects who know quite well the name of the gay porn game (figure 1.7)?

Instead of the usual focus on the Asian male as the object of somebody else’s fantasy, of the body that is acted on by another, I propose that we examine identification and desire beyond hetero- and homonormative configurations of the U.S. nation-state; such a consideration would entail a challenge to place the gay Asian male immigrant-subject at the center of the pornographic fantasy scenario. I take my cue here from David Eng’s influential call for “queer diaspora” as a new methodology for political and scholarly intervention: “If earlier Asian American cultural nationalist projects were built on the political strategy of claiming home and nation-state through the domestic and the heterosexual, a new political project of thinking about this concept in Asian American studies today would seem to center around queerness and diaspora—its rethinking of home and nation-state across



FIGURE 1.7: FOBs kissing. *Fortune Nookie* (1998).

multiple identity formations and numerous locations ‘out here’ and ‘over there’” (2001, 219). Following Eng’s lead, I urge a shift away from the identification of Asian American as the only desirable sign of enfranchisement and belonging, such as that embodied by Brandon Lee in the earlier stage of his porn career. To wit, Lee’s porn persona has diversified over the years, from American top twink to yellowface bottom chink, indicating patently that porn stardom according to a static home-nation-state and homonormative standard cannot be maintained. As Lisa Lowe reminds us, “the Asian immigrant—at odds with the cultural, racial, and linguistic forms of the nation—emerges in a site that defers and displaces the temporality of assimilation” (1996, 6). It is in the spirit of attending to an alternative national temporality that I coin the phrase “accented pornography” to account for the fantasies of the gay Asian male immigrant-subject.⁴⁷

I have suggested that the “bad accent” of the Asian actors, such as Rusty and Tommy Lin, can intimate an FOB sexual subjectivity that, while fulfilling Orientalist fantasies, might also evade them. In a similar vein, the functions of Brandon Lee’s “chinky accents” in his recent videos can be read as signifying on Asianness itself as performative. Lee’s adoption of Orientalist roles in *Lights & Darks: An Interracial Spin* and *Affirmative Blacktion: An Interracial*

Takeover exemplifies a knowing, tongue-in-cheek riff on Asian characters in gay porn. In these two videos, Lee plays characters that are explicitly coded as negative stereotypes of Asian men, connoting villainous Fu Manchu traits with a prominent dosage of dragon lady stylings thrown in for good measure. Similar to the way that his transition to bottomhood was anchored by a firm reputation as a top porn actor, what sets off Lee's enactment of the stereotype of the evil Asian businessman from his Asian costars' Orientalist parts of pool boys and male prostitutes is the viewer's awareness of Lee as an Asian American from his previous roles. Because we already know Lee doesn't actually speak with a chinky accent, a sense of self-awareness and theatricality infuses his performance and our reception of it. Yiman Wang's concept of "yellow yellowface" is clarifying here. For Wang, yellow yellowface accounts for the self-conscious strategy an Asian American actor employs in performing a toxic Asian stereotype in order to remark and ironize on it. The casting of Brandon Lee certainly accomplishes such a task.⁴⁸

The sexiness and humor of both of Lee's recent Asian videos reside in Lee's discernible delight in playing such over-the-top roles. An early sequence in *Lights & Darks* illustrates the improper pleasure of Lee's acting quite distinctly. An interracial couple, Blu Kennedy and Rick Razor (white and latino,⁴⁹ respectively), drop off their laundry at Lee's laundromat and demand aggressively that it be done by 6 p.m. Lee, dressed professionally in wire-rim glasses, black dress shirt, pink tie, and black slacks, responds obsequiously, mumbling in an accented, broken English that he always does his best to deliver their laundry on time. After the couple leaves, a white customer, Luca DiCorso, asks for his assistance. Lee responds in a curt manner that the next free machines belong to him (Lee); however, in contrast to his deferential attitude toward Kennedy and Razor, his treatment of DiCorso is brusque and bitchy. Most remarkable is that he switches from broken English to a normal voice when addressing DiCorso. Dismissing DiCorso, he claps his hands at two black customers lounging on a counter and barks, "Off! Now!" Later, as he hurries from the laundromat to make his delivery, he tells DiCorso, "Listen, if you watch the place, I'll give you fifty bucks. I don't trust those two," as he points to the two black men.

Lee's portrayal in *Lights & Darks* updates the manual labor worker as a respectable, sharply dressed professional. His chinky accent references the stereotype of the subservient Chinese laundryman aiming to serve his customers; at the same time, an underlying eroticism pervades his playacting of racialized submissiveness. The abrupt switch to standard English, along

with the subsequent domineering attitude toward DiCorso and the two black men, cue the viewer to the fact that his subservient behavior earlier was merely an act. While his groveling manner toward Kennedy and Razor doesn't get fully explained until the end of the video (as part of an elaborate s/m dungeon role-playing scene), the sudden transformation from obsequious Oriental servant to bitchy Asian queen illustrates Lee's camping along to the role written for him, his winking collaboration with it. In the same vein, the atrocious racism directed against the black characters is meant to denote a politically incorrect, unrepentant Asian villain whose moral compass is so beyond the pale as to beg credibility, thus conjuring up "a sort of Oriental drag" (Capino 2006, 215).⁵⁰

As the various iterations of an accented pornography discussed thus far have elucidated, to make the Asian American immigrant the central desiring subject of the pornographic fantasy scenario does not mean creating and prescribing more politically palatable positions for him as either a butch top, a controlling bottom, or a bland, versatile, polymorphous sexual performer. Rather, it seeks to mobilize, in a self-reflexive manner, a multiplicity of sexual scenarios (including those that cannot be recuperated for a politically progressive program, such as in *Lights & Darks*), all the while retaining and exploiting the sexual turn-on of power differentials. The precise form and content these pornographic scenarios might take should remain open ended and undefined; what is more essential is the creation of a fresh angle, a view from below that offers new ways of imagining how armpits and tongues, fingers and mouths, teeth and nipples, cocks and assholes, bodies and subjects, might caress, rub, lick, bite, swallow, push, penetrate, move, and talk to one another.

IN LIGHT OF MY foregoing discussion of Brandon Lee's vicissitudes as a conscientious American top citizen and a campy Asian bottom villain, and the multiple accents that his Asian costars articulate to interrupt the discourse of Asian abject bottomhood, let us disarticulate the conflation of bottomhood with social disempowerment. Let me amend my earlier proposition to put the immigrant-subject at the center of the pornographic scenario and specify this desiring immigrant-subject as the embarrassing, abject, repudiated FOB subject. He is both the effeminate Asian immigrant bottom performer in Brandon Lee's videos and the viewer who gets off on watching those same videos. Instead of regarding the FOB's bottom positioning as

something imposed on him by the white gay porn industry, what if we consider that the desiring FOB immigrant-subject takes pleasure in his bottomhood, a position that affords him a degree of sexual agency?⁵¹ I suggested that Lee's early Asian-niche videos already contain this bottom-line analysis. His solo jerk as an autoerotic top porn star in *Asian Persuasion 2* teaches Tommy Lin (and by extension, his gay Asian porn audience) the pleasures of top and bottom (e.g., eating ass, getting eaten; fucker, fuckee). Similarly, the sexual excitement in the scene of Lee, the brothel owner, topping Time, the sex worker, in *Fortune Nookie* is generated by the novelty of "sticky rice" eroticism, along with the problematic, and sexually exciting, power differentials that accrue between boss and worker, assimilated American and foreign Asian, big-dicked top and small-dicked bottom.

From the point of view of the FOB spectator-performer, the instabilities of Lee's topness are not only the results of the dominant culture's management of Asian masculinity; rather, they constitute a way of signaling and affirming the call of bottomhood. Lee's bottoming can also be seen as a refusal to uphold the bond between topness and masculine self-sufficiency. As a result of his confirmed status as an Asian American porn star (and all the requisite traits such a status entails), Lee's transition to bottomhood speaks differently to his gay Asian viewers. Unlike other manifestations of Asian bottomhood in gay porn, it does not read as coerced, abject, feminizing, demeaning, or as a default of Asianness, but as a complex negotiation of racial, gender, national, and economic meanings attached to this most loaded of sexual positions, in gay porn in particular and dominant culture in general. Brandon Lee's aggressive, enthusiastic, and strategic fall from the top shows that one can indeed remain an Asian American porn star that tops and bottoms. The trajectory of his porn stardom demonstrates that even in a media genre inordinately obsessed with the cock, the penetrable ass ultimately beckons. In chapter 2, we witness the seduction of bottomhood enacted in the most revered of patriarchal establishments, the American military, and exhibited in America's most cherished institution, the Hollywood silver screen.