

Asian American Model Masculinities —Younghill Kang's *East Goes West: The Making of an Oriental Yankee*

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Abstract

This essay presents a comparative racial and gender analysis of masculinity and power during the post-Depression United States in a reading of Younghill Kang's novel, *East Goes West: The Making of an Oriental Yankee*.¹ I argue that Kang's novel, primarily read as an immigrant story yields insight into the multiple racial and class formations of Asian and black men in the U.S. within the context of sexuality, power, labor, and the economy. Kang's novel shows how the dominant racial paradigm of black versus white in the U.S. depends on an Asian male subject who negotiates his racialized identity within a tripartite racial system of black, white, and Asian. This racial negotiation of Asian masculinity revolves around the figure of the early Asian foreign student who receives privileges

Received March 31, 2009; accepted June 5, 2013; last revised July 28, 2013
Proofreaders: Kuei-feng Hu, Chih-wei Wu, Chia-Chi Tseng

¹ The first edition of the novel was published in 1937 but for the purposes of this essay, I will be referencing the 1997 edition published by Kaya Press.

and favors by white elites and intellectuals. The Korean male protagonist in the novel understands how his status as the exotic Asian foreign student creates a masculine racial position between black and white men that predates but also mirrors the later formation of the Asian model minority during the U.S. civil rights era and beyond.

Key Words: masculinity, race, sexuality, model minority