A NEGLECTED QUEER PLAY HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT-Soon-Tek Oh's Tondemonai—Never Happen! (1970)

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Abstract: Soon-Tek Oh's 1970 play, Tondemonai—Never Happen! (hereinafter Tondemonai), is a strangely neglected cultural artifact. A pro- duction of East West Players, it was the first commercially-produced play to dramatize Japanese American incarceration; and yet, despite also featuring queer kinship, it remains archived and practically forgot- ten in the academy. Its performance at a discursive center of Asian American cultural production disrupts a homogenized narrative in Asian American cultural studies—that the era was beset with queerphobic cultural nationalism. The play presents an opportunity to grapple with Asian American queer cultural nationalism targeting both racial castra- tion and proto-homonationalism. After analyzing the play, I proffer a framework regarding homonationalism's long emergence in transpa- cific terms, and reinterpret Lonny Kaneko's classic 1976 short story "The Shoyu Kid" as another example of Asian American queer cultural nationalist storytelling. This article features archival stage photography of Tondemonai, which gives an impression of Asian American cultural production of the era as queerer than often presumed.

MICHAEL: You damn stupid pervert.

KOJI: Oh, ho, listen to that vicious tone. Am I refusing you a chance of bringing yourself one more step nearer to your heaven? […] MICHAEL: Why don't you try to lead a decent, normal life?

KOJI: I can't; I castrated myself. […]

MICHAEL: Who operated on you?

KOJI: You.

MICHAEL: A desperate subterfuge of excuses for being a homosexual?

KOJI: Why do I need an excuse?

MICHAEL: Because it is illegal.

KOJI: Behold the law-abiding citizen of the United States.1

In this icy exchange from Soon-Tek Oh's neglected 1970 play Tondemo- nai—Never Happen!—set circa 1960 with flashbacks to the Japanese American incarceration—protagonist Koji Murayama has just refused at the insistence of his ex-friend Michael Takeno to sign a claim for reparations from the US government.2 In a flashback scene at camp, Michael, among a group of "loyal" Nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans), restrained "disloyal" Koji, breaking his "little fingers" in an attempt to "castrate" him on behalf of the United States (see fig. 1). They terminated Koji's aspiring career as a pianist, leaving his "big fingers" intact so that he could "shoot a gun" if drafted for the US war effort.3 Michael represents the press of masculinist Nisei assimilationism upon Koji who is a Kibei—the Japan-educated Nisei, the US wartime government assumed especially prone to conflicted loyalty to Japan. Across the play, Koji acquires a capacity to reject the false assurances of the postwar inclusionary and reparationary US state, not necessarily because he is a Kibei, but as catalyzed through his experience of intracommunity violence and the loss of his family during the war. Before their above exchange, he tells Michael: "I will swallow every penny of the claim amount before your eyes," if Michael can straighten out his crooked fingers.4 Across camp flashbacks, Koji's father, brother, and mother die by seppuku (also known as hara-kiri), war wounds, and grief respectively.

Prior to turning on him in camp, Michael assisted in finding Koji's white fiancée, Jane Franks, a secretarial job at the Manzanar War Relocation Center to be closer to incarcerated Koji and his parents. Koji and Jane's interracial dyad is presented as achievable if they can relocate to the East Coast. But with Koji ineligible for relocation because he is a Kibei, and then his and his mother's "no" answers to the infamous 1943 loyalty questionnaire that results in their transfers to the Tule Lake Segregation Center, Koji's marriage to Jane crumbles. As if punishment for a being a race traitor, Jane is raped by a white sergeant

Figure 1. Koji's (played by Mako) fingers ruined by intracommunity violence. The script calls for broken fingers, but the stage direction of this image shows yubitsume (finger amputation). All selected images are cropped from high-resolution digital scans of contact sheets archived in UCLA Library Special Collections, East West Players Records, box 84, folder 10. Permission acquired from photographer Irvin Paik and East West Players.

She had her eye on during her frequent visits to Tule Lake to see Koji. The rape induces the miscarriage of their child; and while Koji is jailed after stabbing the sergeant in retaliation, Jane commits suicide.

Koji's yearslong confinement at Tule Lake includes situational homosexuality. As he recounts to his landlady and friend, Cherry Williams, a Japanese war bride—alone for "days and nights…in a solitary cell," one night, a young man was "pushed into my cell."5 In the postwar scenes, Koji, now in his early thirties, is in a fledgling, rocky relationship with a third-generation, twenty-something year old Chinese American man named Fred Chung who reminds him of that fleeting

intimacy at his lowest point after losing all his kin. Whereas Michael associates Koji's postwar queerness with continued disloyalty to self, community and na- tion, Koji chooses facetious "self-castration." He interprets Michael's insistence on acquiring his signature for the evacuation claim as an attempt to ease his own guilty conscience and advance toward an assimilationist "heaven" where the state's and community's past crimes are absolved. Angry but resigned, Koji tells Michael to "shove those papers" and thereafter leans more into his budding relationship with Fred (fig. 2).6

Tondemonai might sound melodramatic, but it is an astonishing cultural artifact made more so by academia's inattention to it. Performed for five weeks from May through June 1970 by the premier Asian American theater troupe in Los Angeles, East West Players, Tondemonai was never renewed and is largely forgotten—the script archived and unpublished—even as the play is hidden in plain sight.7 Its decades of languishing in the archive give an uncanny impression

Figure 2. Koji and Fred (played by Filipino American actor Alberto Isaac).

That its title (the Japanese word meaning "no way!", "impossible…", or "abso- lutely not!"—reflects themes that many in the Japanese American community in 1970 would rather have avoided confronting) can be used to describe the existence of the play itself. The fact that Tondemonai exists is unsurprising, as it aligns with the ideological pluralism of the late 1960s/early 1970s, including the US gay liberation movement that centered queer lives. Its queer untimeliness is more a consequence of the received narratives from late twentieth century Asian American cultural studies, and a textual disconnect between the subfields of Asian American literary and performance/theater studies.

Asian American cultural studies overcontextualized artistic production of Tondemonai's era as beset with queerphobia—postwar Asian Americans were sometimes described as more queerphobic than the rest of America. This framing likely contributed to the siloing of a queer play conceived and performed even at a discursive center. Although the field cannot be blamed for overlooking a play that did not generate much of a cultural ripple effect, Tondemonai was nevertheless eclipsed by dominant academic discourse that focused on feminist/queer critiques of Asian American cultural nationalism—the post-1960s discourse and cultural/artistic productions that sought to establish critical subjectivity grounded in Asian racial difference, contributing to the broader US multiculturalist framework.8 Asian American cultural studies homogenized cultural nationalism as heteropatriarchal, but as I will argue, Tondemonai is an Asian American queer cultural nationalist text—a genre with an uncharted genealogy. In light of what I will outline as the long emergence of the US homonational state, queerness and cultural nationalism were not as dichotomous as scholarship on the era suggests, and Tondemonai is evidence of this. As Cynthia Wu has pointed out, there is a need for Asian American cultural studies to "decenter the conversation…from the familiar schema of cultural nationalism versus feminism" so as to get a bet- ter sense of the varied ways masculinity, queerness, and nationalism function in Asian American texts.9 This observation can be extended to how the schema influenced canonization and critique.

The other main reason Tondemonai has been neglected is its form. Theatrical scripts are generally disadvantaged in the matter of being taken up critically unless they are commercially successful. As blueprints for performance, scripts often remain archived and unpublished, if not lost altogether10; and without publication, a text can only narrowly circulate in the academy. Untimely scripts fade from collective memory, even if in hindsight they appear inspired. Even successful, published plays tend to feature in fewer classrooms and scholarly manuscripts compared to perceived "formally complete" texts such as novels, short stories or films.11 As Christine Mok has observed, the "attention to the [Asian American] dramatic archive…in its singular vision, is incomplete," which

puts it somewhat at odds with Asian American literary studies whose narrative of the past presents as comparatively robust.12 As Tondemonai illustrates, the under-examined dramatic archive has the potential to disrupt literary studies' homogenizations. In her 2006 history of Asian American theater, Esther Kim Lee supplied important detail about the play, which I extend below.13 Meewon Lee, a scholar of Korean theater, included a synopsis and brief analysis of Tonde- monai in a 2009 article on Korean American playwrights, including Oh, deemed "first-generation."14 In 2013, Greg Robinson, a historian of Japanese America, resurfaced the play in his column at Nichi Bei News (then, Nichi Bei Weekly), the San Francisco-based Japanese American newspaper, thereafter writing an online encyclopedia entry for it for Densho, the Seattle-based Japanese American nonprofit organization.15 Robinson was in communication with Soon- Tek Oh with hopes to publish Tondemonai alongside others of Oh's early plays, but the passing of the esteemed Korean American actor in 2018 put a damper on the effort. At the 2015 conference for the Association of Asian American Studies, actors from Theater Mu (Saint Paul, Minnesota) performed an excerpt from Tondemonai as part of the 50th anniversary of East West Players.16 Still, on the whole, Tondemonai has not received the kind of critical attention one might expect toward the first commercially-produced play about the Japanese American incarceration that also happens to be overtly queer.17 Assuming that almost all readers of this essay have not read the play, and with the possibility of its publication unclear, I quote liberally from it below.

My aim is to further excavate Tondemonai as a buried text—a piece of "literature" with much to say about gender, sexuality and race. While I speak somewhat to the play's performance elements (set, sound, costuming, and so forth) and historically situate Tondemonai as part of the crucible of panethnic and pansexual18 early Asian American theater, my primary focus is analysis of the script and the play's relevance to discussions in Asian American literary and cultural studies. I argue that the play enables a grappling with Asian Ameri- can queer cultural nationalism with its focus on Koji's "resistant" queer Kibei masculinity vis-à-vis other characters in his life. As its critical motif, the play renders, through the life course of its bisexual/sexually-fluid19 protagonist, the incarceration and "disloyal" Tule Lake in particular as an epistemic break from the heteronormative US nation-state. Although this queerness is informed by racial castration20, the play rejects heteromasculinity as a remedy—unlike, say, Frank Chin's contemporaneous, highly-analyzed 1972 play, The Chickencoop Chinaman. Instead, Oh leans into Koji's Kibeiness—a transpacific standpoint between two empires for constructing Koji's anti-assimilationist trajectory.21 Forsaking national belonging for Koji by presenting difficulty in his attempts at kinship-building due to wartime (World War II and Cold War) violence, Koji remains in abjection22 or"dis-integration" from the racial-sexual arc of interpellation for Asian American subjects, or what Susan Koshy has called sexual naturalization.23 Koji's queerness is an intersection of gender, sexuality, race, and nationality that, by the end of the play, is presciently incompatible with even US proto-homonationalism.

On the one hand, Tondemonai accords well with Stephen Hong Sohn's for- malist analysis of queer Asian North American fiction with its development of a

survival plot and "inscrutable belongings."24 On the other, the play's performance at a center of Asian American theater and subsequent decades of obscurity draw attention to the processes of canonization and critique. In the second section, I reconsider the Japanese American narrative text positioned in the 1990s as illumi- nating racial castration—Lonny Kaneko's 1976 short story "The Shoyu Kid."25 Like Tondemonai, the story delves into the gendered ramifications of the incarceration on the Japanese American male, but deploys the trope of child molestation to do so. At the time of its canonization, interpretations of Kaneko's story were in service of critiquing white heteropatriarchy and queerphobic Asian American cultural nationalism; they did not factor in homonationalism's long emergence, which prompts reconsideration of the normative value of homosexuality in the text. So as to extend Queer/Trans Asian Americanist critique, I begin the sec- tion with a transpacific framework for conceptualizing homonationalism's rise across the twentieth century and then reinterpret "The Shoyu Kid" as another example of Asian American queer cultural nationalist storytelling.

TONDEMONAI—NEVER HAPPEN!

To make a case that Tondemonai is representative of, rather than exceptional to, early-1970s Asian American cultural production, I offer thick description of its generation, performance and reception. In the first years of East West Players after their founding in 1965, their scripts tended to render or re-render Asian stories for the local southern Californian audience.26 In 1968, the troupe received a Ford Foundation grant; and because of his recent coursework in theater management at UCLA, Soon-Tek Oh took on significant responsibility in allocating the funds.27 Oh set up an annual playwriting contest to expand the troupe's reach and seek out potential material and artists; the grant money provided financial leeway to take narrative chances with more specifically Asian American stories—the identity itself having crystallized across the 1960s. With a dearth of submissions, Oh's own play, Tondemonai, won the 1970 contest, the prize money going to the production budget while Oh himself routinely slept on the stage, practically homeless as an aspiring actor.28 When asked in 2004 by Esther Kim Lee why he chose to write a Japanese American-themed play instead of a Korean American one, Oh stated that

not-yet-knowledgeable about Korean American history, the incarceration was more dramatically accessible; and, since Nisei themselves were too unwilling to talk about it, he was in a bet- ter position as an "outsider."29 Oh's biography as an immigrant born in Mokpo, Japanese-occupied Korea, undoubtedly had bearing on his choice of an outsider protagonist that provincialized Japanese American avenues for US national be- longing. When asked by Greg Robinson in 2013 why he chose to make Koji queer, Oh stated it was merely a "dramatic choice to tell the story," "to wrestle with what it [meant] to be a man…and to be living at [that] time of our lives."30 Oh's narrative was not a problem for the pansexual troupe; after all, openly-gay Nisei actor John "Mamo" Fujioka played Koji's Issei (first generation) father, Goro.

The title of the play did not primarily reflect its explicit homosexuality, but rather Oh's sense of the Japanese American community's postwar assimilationist disengagement from the incarceration, although both taboos were intentionally tethered.31 The Japanese word tondemonai does not appear to have been Nisei/ Sansei (third generation) parlance. East West Players' house manager at the time (who also played Koji during some of the performances), Yuki Shimoda (Nisei), told a reviewer from the LA-based gay newspaper The Advocate that tondemonai means the "emasculation of a human being"—highlighting the play's theme of racial castration, but a fabrication of the word's actual definition.32 Oh's naming of the play points to his own linguistic background—Japanese was his second language, after Korean and followed by English. As for the audience response, appreciation for the panethnic dramatization of the incarceration and flouting of gendered stereotypes was interspersed with smatterings of homophobia and orientalism. The LA-based Japanese American newspaper Rafu Shimpo denounced the play's homosexuality as "sordid" while The Advocate described the play as an "Oriental mood piece as inscrutable as the Far East itself."33 Oh recalled to Robinson that some older members of the Japanese American community did not welcome the play: "they said something about me being a Korean."34 Essentially, Tondemonai was not particularly timely—not unlike John Okada's 1957 novel No-No Boy—but it was nevertheless of its time.

Tondemonai was the last play East West Players performed during their burgeoning "basement phase"—when the troupe rented out the basement of Bethany Presbyterian Church at 1629 Griffith Park Boulevard in Los Angeles. Mako (Makoto Iwamatsu), who played Koji during most of the performances, referred to the basement as the troupe's "playground"35: a metaphor for a space of experimental storytelling as the audience for Asian American theater had not yet congealed. With Tondemonai, Oh did not seek to gently educate about homosexuality, but leaned into it as titillation. The play's opening scene features a nude and nearly-nude Koji and Fred in a dark, bunker-like basement following an overnight hookup (fig. 3).

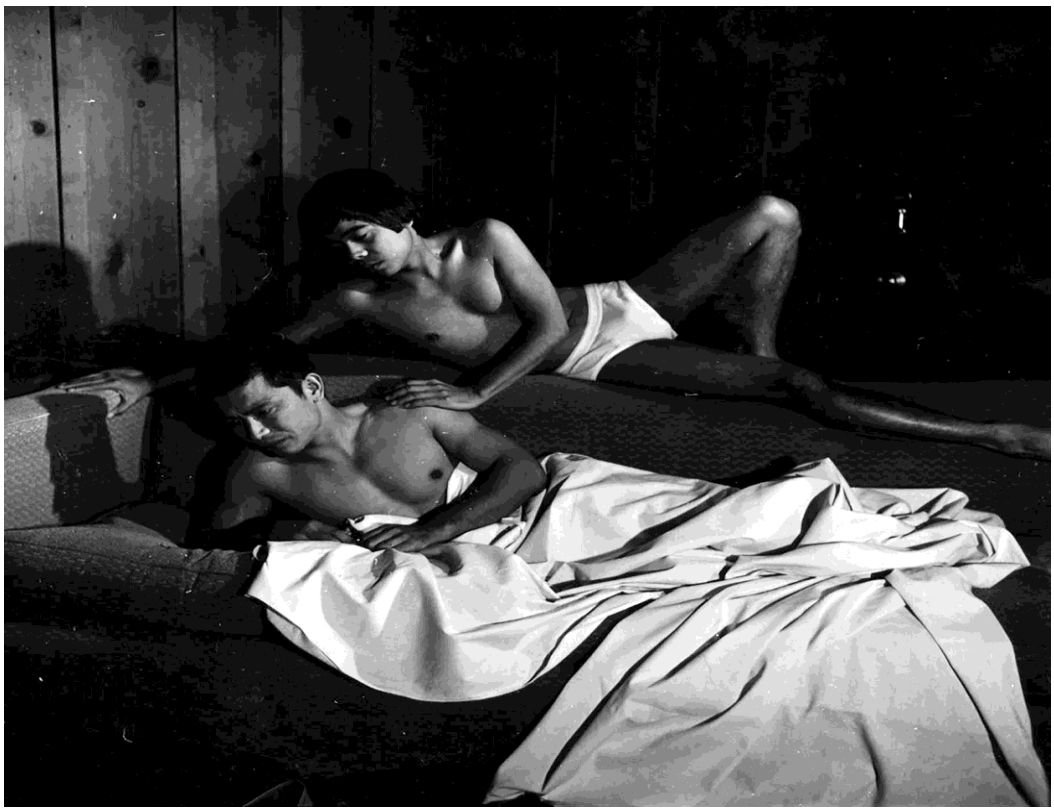

Figure 3. Tondemonai's opening scene. As is the case in this photo, the script calls for Koji to be nude and Fred to be wearing briefs, but in performance, Fred was nude and Koji in boxers.

With the play itself performed in a basement, the audience space was a voyeuristic extension of the opening set. The set resembled Koji's space of queer awakening at Tule Lake, which means his confinement by the US government and his postwar "closet" were made to phenomenologically overlap (more on this connection later).36 The scene is significant to the troupe's history, because it effectively resulted in their vacating the church. Esther Kim Lee recounts from a 1999 interview with Mako (who passed in 2006) that, during a rehearsal, when either he or Alberto Isaac who played Fred were getting "out of bed and put[ting] on his underpants in dim light," a deacon walked in, aghast.37 The church subsequently required all scripts be preapproved, but balking at potential censorship, the troupe sought a new performance space. Notably, in his communication with Robinson, Oh had a different interpretation of events. The troupe was growing yet "living in [that basement] days and nights," and so Oh did not blame the church for asking them to find another venue.38 Still, the financial restraint and disagreement about the direction of the company following their exit almost broke up East West Players; they staged no shows for the remainder of 1970 and all of 1971. For his part, Oh resigned from the company during the hiatus, burnt out from the toil of his unpaid position that put his own career aspira- tions in stasis.39 Incidentally, Frank Chin's The Chickencoop Chinaman won the 1971 playwriting contest, but with the lack of a performance space, Chin's play famously premiered at the prestigious American Place Theatre in New York City in 1972, and was not staged by East West Players until 1975.40

This material connection between Tondemonai and Chickencoop is ironic given Asian American cultural studies' hyperfocus on Chin over the following decades for theorizing the racial-sexual anxieties of the "bad" Asian American man writ large. Relative to his success in breaking the national barrier for Asian American theater, as well as his heteromasculinist framing of complicit versus resistant storytelling with the editors of the highly-influential 1974 anthology Aiiieeeee!, Chin served as a boogeyman for feminist and queer critique that advocated for narrative plurality.41 Yet, Tondemonai's neglect as contemporaneous rhetoric is evidence that Asian American cultural studies inadvertently created blind spots toward artistic production that fell outside a post-Aiiieeeee! teleology of critique—homogenization that limited a more nuanced conception of Asian American cultural nationalism. Despite model minoritization as anathema to Chin, his rhetoric was basically framed as a kind of mimicry of heteropatriarchal white- ness, with feminist and queer discourse framed as "truly" counterhegemonic. Yet, with the hindsight of analyses of femonationalism, homonationalism, and post-1970s neoliberal individualism, late twentieth-century feminist and queer interventions were hardly exempt from the telos of US nationalism and cultural nationalisms. As Jinqi Ling reminded in his 1998 Narrating Nationalisms, there are "no inherently 'oppositional' or inherently 'conservative' texts, but only texts that function in such ways in specific contexts."42

Tondemonai was not "oppositional" to "conservative" queerphobic Asian American cultural nationalism, as it predates the "cultural nationalism versus feminism/queerness" construction in the academy (note that it also predates Chickencoop). The play is simply indicative of various ideological influences on early Asian American theater, and thereby highlights the familiar disjuncture between academic discourse and cultural production. In Esther Kim Lee's framing of Soon-Tek Oh's career vis-à-vis cultural nationalism, during his stint with East West Players, Oh was not particularly interested in the Asian American Movement (unlike, say, Chin or Mako), nor building or steering Asian American community and culture, per se; he was more focused on advancing his own career as an immigrant actor, participating in Asian American theater circumstantially.

Oh had become a cultural nationalist by the 1992 Los Angeles race riots, founding in 1995 the Society of Heritage Performers that emphasized Korean American storytelling (working, too, with Black and Chicano/a youth) and which became the Lodestone Theatre Ensemble (1999–2009).43 In my framing of Tondemonai, however, Oh's intentionality in 1970 is not a prerequisite for the text to be co- gently regarded as Asian American queer cultural nationalism, since storytellers are often vessels for ideologies refracted through them—the classic Barthesian "death of the author" argument. To compare the ideological formulas of Chin and Oh, Chin's heteromascu- linist rhetoric was resistance to the aftereffect of Chinese America's bachelor societies having been made compulsorily queer.44 The 1943 lifting of Chinese exclusion re-established access to heteronormativity, but racial castration frus- tratingly perpetuated emasculation of postwar Chinese American masculinities. Conversely, Oh's Tondemonai confronts the fact that the Japanese American incarceration extended both compulsory queerness and compulsory hetero- sexuality.

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To showcase Oh's building a critically queer subject, I transition now to unpacking Koji's interactions with "white" Jane, "Japanese war bride" Cherry, and "Chinese American" Fred. Beginning with Jane, the postwar white or Black American man/Asian woman dyad was more common as a consequence of US military interventionism in Asia, but the Asian man/white woman dyad was also a familiar trope by 1970, such as featured in the 1959 film The Crimson Kimono set in LA's Little Tokyo. Critical framings of Asian American masculinity vis-à- vis white femininity often begin with Elaine Kim's 1990 essay "'Such Opposite Creatures': Men and Women in Asian American Literature" in which Kim posited that in the works of mid- to late-twentieth century Asian American male writers, when the white woman appears, she tends to serve as a foil or complement for the Asian American male protagonist's American manhood, whereas Asian American female writers tend to better disrupt male-subject/female-object relations.46 In a 2002 article, Crystal Parikh contended that, by the 1990s, Asian American male writers exhibited a "keen awareness of the contested critical histories of feminist and cultural nationalist thought" from which they reworked the intersection of whiteness with the "heteronormative logic through which

Asian American masculinity has been formulated."47 However, as I have proposed, cultural nationalism and feminist/queer discourse appear overdichotomized as part of field formation. Oh's feminist/queer use of the Asian man/white woman dyad undermines scholarly delimitations of heterosexual Asian American male writers of his era.

Jane is a naïve young woman who wants nothing other than to be with Koji (fig. 4). When questioned by Koji's mother Ume if she knows "what Kibei is," Jane devotedly answers for unknowing members of the audience: "The second generation of Japanese-Americans who grew up in Japan and also were educated for a certain period in Japan."48 With assistance from Michael to work near her betrothed, Jane is the one who urges Koji to apply for relocation so that they can build a life together. Koji's parents, Ume and Goro, coax him to follow her advice, while Jane treats their racial difference exacerbated by the incarceration as surmountable through love and resolve. When Jane questions whether Koji's feelings for her are dissipating because she is "not Japanese," Koji responds: "Jane, do you see that barbed wire fence?" She says: "No, but I see a thick wall around you."

When learning that Koji is ineligible to leave camp, Jane tenaciously reappears onstage in a wedding kimono and tsunokakushi (bridal headdress), implying that she will, in effect, become Japanese to be with him. Ume admonishes her for selfishness and silliness, stating that she and Koji plan to return to the homeland after the war to escape US anti-Japanese racism. "You are a pretty and bright young lady," Ume tells Jane. "I advise you to choose one of your own race." Jane replies: "This matter of proving one's loyalty to enjoy rights of an American citizen is nothing but a hocus-pocus.… [After] a few generations of… inter-marriage there will be no gaps where anyone can build any kind of fence." In agreement, Koji excitedly tells his mother: "There will be no Japs, no Chinks, no Kikes, no Nig— [sic]." Ume, losing patience, asks if building such a fancifully-miscegenated and racially-integrated future is why they want to marry, to which Koji says, no, but that he simply loves Jane. Changing the subject back to the incarceration, Ume observes that it is "ironic that fighting and dying for America has become more of a privilege to be sought than a duty to be performed," but Jane responds: "Yes, but I find the situation I am in is more ironic. Mrs. Murayama, in your own way you are as hysterical as the Americans who are yelling 'Jap, go home!'" Ume slaps her out of frustration (fig. 5), but then comically acquiesces to the marriage in the next beat.49

This sequence not only posits disagreement about where Koji's reproductive capacity should be directed—toward Japan or America—but also presents an Issei feminism that targets the emergent US racial-sexual regime, dominant by 1970, of miscegenation and inclusion overwriting the lived experience of the

Figure 4. Koji and Jane (played by Elizabeth Berger).

Wartime exclusion. Once the possibility emerges that Koji can be both disloyal yet also marry Jane, that is when masked Nisei, including Michael, storm onstage to break his fingers, ridiculing Jane as a "Jap-lover." Jane stops Ume from knifing herself out of protest, Ume resigning that she must live to see her "grandsons."50 However, given that the audience is already privy to Koji's postwar relationship with Fred, the entire extended flashback serves as a queer deconstruction of wartime Issei/Nisei and white American heteronorms. A common tactic of queer narration is nonlinearity that disrupts what Elizabeth Freeman has called the chrononormativity of the reproductive past.51

Figure 5. Ume (played by Shizuko Hoshi, Mako's wife) slaps Jane.Koji's further castration at Tule Lake is similarly handled. After Koji's transfer, Jane reveals herself as pregnant and, during visiting hours, she and Koji enact a pitiful farce of daily routine for a married couple, fanaticizing a future that could have been. Their dialogue shifts into Jane revealing that she now finds Koji "nauseating" and "damp." She claims she could have "endure[d] any humiliation," but now recoils at how Koji no longer behaves like the proud Japanese man she fell in love with; she sees him as "wallowing in the sweet pain of being wronged, yet…[letting himself] be fed and protected by Americans." Koji rejects the emasculating framing: "What was I supposed to do? Starve to death?" Jane admits to wanting to "be held by a normal, healthy, strong male animal who just needed a female animal," and tries to brush off a sexual encounter with a white sergeant that turned into a gang rape and miscarriage of her and Koji's child: "Pregnant? Who's pregnant? Nobody wanted that child"—America did not want a child conceived in disloyalty—but she is overwhelmed by the loss, choosing suicide.52 Meanwhile, Koji's mother also

wastes away with grief, and dies at Tule Lake. Here again, with Koji's collapsed future narrated to Fred, Oh has queerly deployed the Asian male/white female dyad not merely as obstruction to Asian American manhood, but for distilling the violence of the conflicted US-Japanese heteromasculinist reproductive regimes. Whereas Lee Edelman has argued that queer politics ought to contest the sexual/temporal norm of reproductive futur- ism (the "child," though what of the parent?) by embracing the Freudian death drive, given the way Tondemonai treats war—often conducted in the name of the child—as a spiral of racialized violence and death, the play's queer politics appear more about the drive to survive the contradiction.53

Koji's postwar queer futurity is explored through his relationship with his landlady Cherry, a Japanese war bride, who encourages Koji to date Fred to stave off isolation. Played by Chinese American actress Beulah Quo, Cherry is married to an offstage disabled (bilateral amputee) Black American veteran, which prompts further comparison of Oh's narrative choices with Frank Chin's. Takeo Rivera has characterized Chin's rhetoric as underpinned by a masculin- ist, Third Worldist "Afro-Asian superego"—an Asian American preoccupation with idealized Black masculinity as a quixotic antidote to emasculating model minoritization. Eschewing the critique of Chin as complicit with heteropatriarchy, since the resistant/complicit formulation coheres with pluralistic US nationalism, Rivera instead reads the superego as broadly informing a knotty construction of "model anti-model minority" discourse that cuts across Asian American politics of cross-racial solidarities.54 Conversely, in Tondemonai, Black American mas- culinity does not feature as resistant, but rather compromised alongside Asian American (Japanese and Chinese American) masculinities as a consequence of Afro-Asian complicity with US wartime violence. Cherry's husband sounds a gong when wanting/needing her attention. In kind, she affectionately refers to him as her "big black gorilla" with whom she has no intention to reproduce. Essentially, Cherry and her husband serve as Tondemonai's second queer dyad steeped in debility and stereotypically-pronounced racial difference. In the presence of Koji, Cherry "just want[s] to be held, held by a [fellow] Japanese—held by a man who has two arms and two legs," both of them singing together the nostalgic lyrics from the 1959 Japanese hit song "Nangoku Tosa o Atonishite" ("Farewell Tosa").55 Their queer Kibei man/Japanese war bride dyad serves to illustrate Koji's castration as an American fiction, since he remains a masculine ideal in Cherry's eyes on account of his able-bodied Japaneseness. Hence, Tondemonai might be said to feature a queer transpacific superego from which Koji's critical subjectiv- ity and masculinity are constructed. The script also calls for a Black male nurse named Bernard (see the cast list at fig. 6) to appear in the last scene when Koji reaches such a state of abjection that he needs therapeutic intervention. For easier casting given the small role, Bernard was dropped as a separate actor, played instead by Alberto Isaac who played Fred. This dual role unfortunately lead to some audience interpretations that what "never happened" was Koji and Fred's relationship, which I will turn to shortly.56

In assembling its resistant queer transpacific masculinity, Tondemonai is conspicuously buttressed by historical revisionism. As Greg Robinson enumer- ates the play's elements of dramatic license, in fact, no "no-no boys" were attacked by Nisei in the camps like Koji was; organized violence was directed at

Figure 6. The cast of characters in Tondemonai—Never Happen!

Cast of Characters

(In order of appearance)

KOJI MURAYAMA.....	Nisei (kibei), from his 20's through his early 30's.
FRED CHUNG.....	Third generation American Chinese, in his 20's.
GORO MURAYAMA.....	Issei, Koji's father; 53 in 1943.
UME MURAYAMA.....	Japanese, Koji's mother; 50 in 1943.
MICHAEL TAKENO.....	Nisei, Koji's friend.
JANE FRANKS.....	Caucasian girl. Married to Koji.
CHERRY WILLIAMS.....	Landlady, Japanese woman married to a Negro; a war-bride from Japan.
BERNARD.....	Black man in his 30's. Male nurse at a mental institute.
MASKED MEN	
KOJI'S OLDER BROTHER	

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Place of Action

Somewhere in the United States of America.

Time

Sometime in between Wars.

members of the Japanese American Citizens League perceived as government informants and referred to as inu (dogs).57 Koji's father, Goro, who in an early flashback suicides by seppuku to protest the treatment of his family and the disrespect shown him despite his WWI veteran status, is a questionable biography of mixed Japanese and American nationalisms that functions to confirm Koji's upbringing by resistant parents.58 The grief and "disloyalty" of Ume (fig. 7) that is elicited by the hospitalization and eventual death from war wounds of Koji's offstage older brother, whom Ume cannot visit while she is incarcerated, is chronologically out-of-order, since no Nisei were wounded in combat prior to the administration of the 1943 loyalty questionnaires.

Also dramatic license is present in the trope that Koji's queerness would develop during his imprisonment following a loss of all heteronormative kinship. Yet, rather than the incarceration stripping Koji of a "normative" heterosexual orientation, Koji's sexual fluidity enables exploration of him as an idealized

Figure 7. Koji and his parents Ume and Goro (played by John "Mamo" Fujioka).

critical subject given the contradiction of both compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory queerness placed upon him as a racialized subject. As mentioned, the basement where he lives resembles his solitary cell at Tule Lake. Instead of protection or isolation from heterosexism, per se, Koji's "closet" is fashioned more specifically against the press of the postwar inclusionary milieu, particu- larly the Japanese American community's insistence he move past his wartime losses. He jests that Michael initiated his castration when breaking his fingers in camp, whereas Michael presumes Koji's social detachment is due to a lifestyle of noncommittal homosexual encounters. Koji's declaration of self-castration refers more to his liminal relation to Nisei assimilationism as a Kibei who hap- pens to be queer. In other words, in the rendering of Koji as an inter-imperial, sexually-fluid subject, his masculinization is less oriented toward US national belonging than attempted construction of symbolic space beyond the ensnar- ing apparatus of postwar inclusion. Koji's homophobic exchange with Michael is what causes him to reevaluate his relationship with Fred, the younger man whose candor and "emotion 'kamikazed' into my hollowness, and almost burst it open," Koji tells Cherry.59

The Fred-Koji dyad tempts the audience with a sticky rice60 model of belonging. However, it is ultimately for showcasing Koji's persistent, resistant subjectivity. At the start of the play, on an early morning following their hookup, Koji is dismissive of Fred who frames his stoicism and bottled anger as an ideally-masculine personality. Exhibiting a Chinese American sentiment of inadequate masculinity, Fred fantasizes that Koji has the history of a "real man" akin to the celebrated 442nd Regimental Combat Team—a war-hardened Nisei veteran who Fred imagines "aim[ed his] gun at another man—sight him—bang—he drops, dead." Deflating Fred's gay "American dream" and annoyed at the younger man's fixation on militarist masculinity, Koji glibly states: "I clean horse-dung." Frustrated by Fred's prying into his past, psychoanalyzing and pigeonholing him as some virile ideal, he tells Fred to get lost, offering him money to leave as if he were a gay hustler. Shocked and offended since he had hoped they were commencing a relationship, Fred reverts to anti-Japanese sentiment: "Why you God damned filthy Jap!" and exits in a huff (fig. 8).61

Toward the end of the play, and with intimation that Fred has caught up on Koji's past through the flashbacks, they reunite. Fred admits that his idealization was born of how his own father did nothing during WWII save "dump garbage, wash dishes and take care of latrines," to which Koji responds: "Somebody has to do the work." Fred finds renewed reassurance in Koji: "I woke up during the night and saw a face lying next to me. Your face, no, I saw a face which could be mine maybe twenty or thirty years from now. A face exhausted from forever running…." Koji interrupts Fred's sticky rice sentiment, informing Fred that he

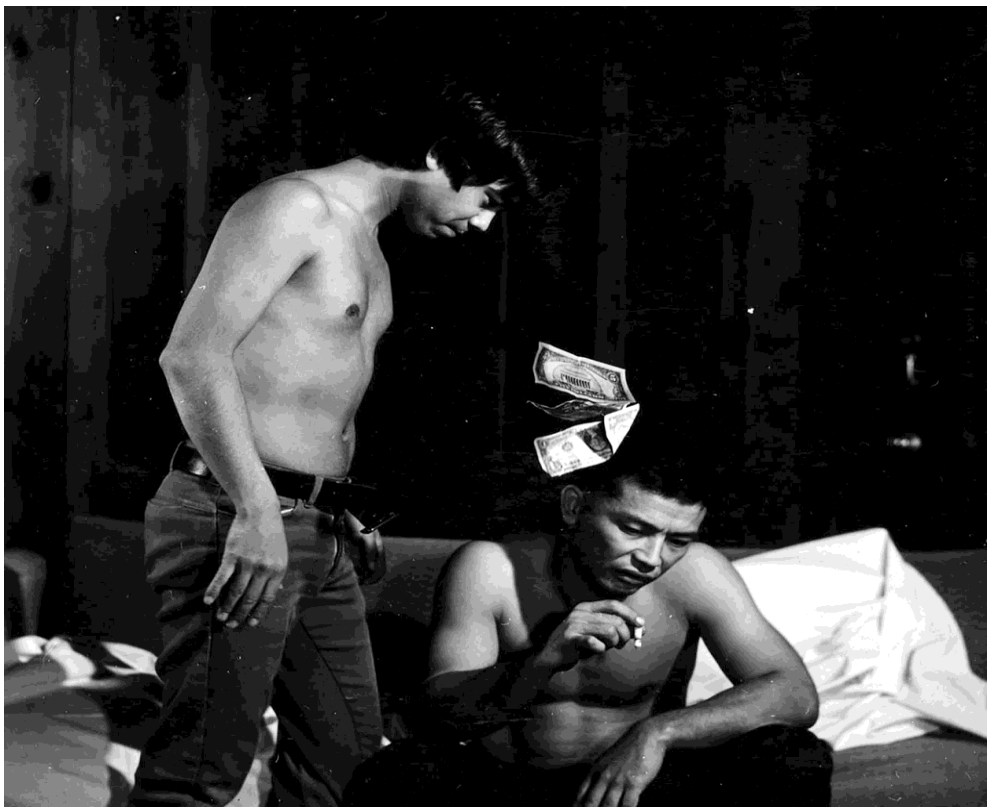

Figure 8. Fred and Koji's initial falling-out.

should be "damned glad that the country is not at war with China" since another incarceration would be probable "regardless of how sorry they [Americans] feel about it"—an observation on the tenuousness of inclusion and postwar model minoritization. Koji explains that his stony demeanor is not that of a hardened warrior, but vexation at the need to pretend he is "shame-stricken, grief-filled" no-no boy, while his eyes actually "coldly curse every shadow" as he "longed to be punished for the mistakes [he] had supposedly been making." Fred responds: "That's a damned ugly existence."

KOJI: I would love to be liked.

FRED: I never heard that a dead body ever became warm again.

KOJI: They say Jesus did.

FRED: Christ, you are not Jesus. You are a Jap who loves a Chinese boy.

KOJI: Chink.

FRED: What?

KOJI: If I'm a Jap, you're a Chink.

FRED: You are forever condemned.

KOJI: Oh, let's not be so conceited. Nobody knows I even exist. Fred, let's stop testing each other. I'm glad you came back.62

Koji's resignation that "nobody knows I even exist" suggests that he sees with Fred a quiet futurity that can circumvent abjection. But then Fred immediately asks: "Will you wait for me? I'll be enlisting on Monday," since he has recently keenly "turned himself over to the Draft Board."63

The play is unclear how long they are a couple after this point, but given that US combat troops were sent to Vietnam from 1965 onward, when Tondemonai was performed in 1970, the audience no doubt equated Fred's soldiering with the deeply unpopular war. Deploying what I would call proto-homonationalist rhetoric, Fred—basking in contentment with Koji—claims that America "makes mistakes, but it also admits them…I wouldn't mind fighting for it…I feel freer than ever," and that he is "not going to war to fight, but to defend what I care for." Koji's distant reply is "Hocus pocus," the same phrase his deceased wife Jane used to naively frame the incarceration as an anti-miscegenatist setback en route to a freer, multiculturalist American future.64 Hocus pocus is usually associated with the trickery of magicians, but it also refers to meaningless ac- tion or speech intended to divert attention from truth. For Koji, the truth is that he cannot live a lost life through Fred; he narrates that they must inevitably grow apart, perhaps due to their clashing worldviews, and that he will not wait for him.65 Thankfully, Fred is not stated to have died at war, but with the toll of the real-world conflict, some audience members perhaps assumed as much. Notable is how the end of the Fred-Koji dyad is not structured in terms of the exclusionary, homophobic trope of unviability of same-sex relationships, but rather in terms of the tendrils of the postwar inclusionary state finding their way into queer kinship and "corrupting" Fred. In drawing a through line between Koji's relationships with Jane and Fred, Oh constructs a prescient linkage of miscegenation and proto-homonationalism as progressive models of US sexual naturalization underpinned by war, which his idealized critical protagonist psy- chically cannot tolerate. Moreover, because Oh presents war as cyclical (the US-Japan War, to an alluded Vietnam War, to a conjectured Sino-US War), the play's queer politics do not align with José Esteban Muñoz' temporal formula-tion of queerness as "not yet."66 To reiterate, through its temporal shifts, the play renders queerness in terms of simply surviving/thriving in the wartime and postwar presents, a radical temporality similar to Walter Benjamin's concept of jetztzeit ("the time of now").67

To that end, Koji finds himself in a temporary stay in a psychiatric unit in a nebulous final scene. The abovementioned nurse, Bernard, informs Koji that "Mr. Williams," Cherry's husband, has arrived at the hospital to claim his "son." When Bernard questions Koji's relation to the Black man, Koji states that Cherry is a "younger daughter of my mother's brother's wife's uncle's sister." When this phrasing is questioned as referring to a relative, friend, or even a stranger, Koji cryptically replies to the lattermost: "Could be."68 Tondemonai thus concludes with the trope that Stephen Hong Song has called "inscrutable belongings" frequently appearing in queer Asian American fiction.69 Koji's adoption by the couple is a model of queer kinship grounded in loss and debility that the inclu-sionary state can never repair.

TONDEMONAI AND "THE SHOYU KID": CONFIGURING US HOMONATIONALISM'S LONG EMERGENCE

Tondemonai's queer cultural nationalism in 1970 elicits reconsideration of 1990s Queer Asian Americanist critique that targeted cultural nationalism homogenized as queerphobic. In this section, I proffer a framework for conceptualizing Asian American cultural nationalism as coeval with what I have referred to above as proto-homonationalism. As Jasbir Puar's work has made clear, homonationalism became dominant in the United States by the early 2010s when LGBTQ rights became "human rights" across liberal international discourse, such as at the United Nations, in the context of the War on Terror.70 The character Fred in Tondemonai provokes conceiving American homonationalism as emergent vis-à-vis the hopes and calls for national belonging by the gay liberation movement in the context of the Vietnam War. Notably, US antisodomy statutes were not struck down nationally until Lawrence v. Texas (2003), but individual states began lifting theirs in the 1960s and 70s.

Asian/American queer cultural (inter)nationalism(s) conjure queer futurities of dislodged white and Asian heteronormativity, and are often conceptually linked to the gradual displacement of white dominance in the liberal international order. A function of homonationalism has been to counteract the critical impact of such politics, whereby both compulsory heterosexuality and the compulsory queerness of racialized others are effectively diffused by a more streamlined lib- eral individualism even as the reproductive imperative against otherness remains. When fused with model minoritization, US homonationalism positions the "out" or "visible" queer Asian American as "more American" than the Asian American whose sexuality is unspecified71; in periods less subjected to perilization, queer and trans Asian Americanness is made to exemplify liberal individualist progress versus a "backwards Orient" and "horde" of Asian reproductive futurity. Thus, Queer/Trans Asian Americanist critique should target not only white and Asian heteropatriarchy, cisgendering and appended homonationalism, but also the protracted deployment of liberal individualism. Necessary for such critique is greater consideration of homonationalism's long emergence.

The liberal individualist roots of homonationalism as they intersect with East-West racial difference predate the postwar period. In his 2001 Racial Castration, David Eng outlined a discursive structure of racialized queer disavowal in the early twentieth century, citing Sigmund Freud's juxtaposition of homosexuality with primitivity. Freud located queerness in the development of every human child with his theory of innate bisexuality, but coded it in adulthood as lapsed or awry development, which correlated with nineteenth-century European ethnographic accounts of the "pervasive" nonheteronormativity and "gender-blending" among "uncivilized" nonwhite peoples.72 However, like Asian American cultural studies' overcontextualization of cultural nationalism as queerphobic, Eng's outline also overstates its case. Lacking is how prewar western social scientific discourse actually did not associate East Asian sexualities with primitivity, but more in terms of having one foot in a queer premodernity (such as the same-sex sexuality of Japan's Edo-period samurai) and the other foot in a heteronormativized modernity ("opened" Japan as rapidly modernizing).

A perilous mix of barbarian and civilized virtues exposed the "over-civilized" West to degeneration.73 In line with the construction of the Yellow Peril, western anxieties about remaining at the forefront of modernity included some contestation of heteronormativity as a stratagem for maintaining civilizational fitness given the perceived queer- ness of a rising East, especially among thinkers in Germany's late nineteenth-/ early twentieth-century homosexual movement (the Scramble for Africa as the colonial backdrop largely ignored by the newly-framed sexual minorities seeking national belonging). Leading sexologists like Magnus Hirschfeld leaned into individuality, stressing that modern states should be reflexive toward hu- man difference or else risk forfeiting their dominant status in the face of social scientific truth.74 In accordance with the liberal individualism derived from the Enlightenment, sodomy had already been decriminalized in the 1804 Napoleonic Code; Freud actually agreed with Hirschfeld that all European polities should lift their antisodomy statutes for the sake of the freedom of the individual, even if they disagreed on the matter of homosexuality's normality. In other words, racial-sexual exclusion for cementing white heteronormativity was not the whole equation, because rationales for relative inclusion were articulated in liberal individualist terms long before their democratically-approved codifications, such as in postwar US immigration law and the gradual lifting of antisodomy statutes.75 Asian masculinities were not precisely castrated, because white male selfhood sought psychic restitution through configuring "other, queer men" in perceived-individuating societies as mirrors to evaluate, rather than outright dismiss, contested terms of civilizational progress.

Such mirroring by midcentury included the US state's queer attachment to the Japanese American citizen-soldier whose loyalty was assumed to prove via contradictory colorblind rationalism that Japan's propaganda about an American drive to reassert white supremacy over Asia was erroneous, and that the Asia-Pacific War was a "good war" that would help foster postracial social justice.76 This narrative was especially needed for legitimizing America's anticommunist violence in Korea and Southeast Asia during postwar decolonization. Having lived through the Korean War and like many during the Vietnam War, Soon-Tek Oh was well-aware of the duplicity of postwar US liberal pluralism. He wrote between the title page and the character list of Tondemonai: "Individual rights and human dignity are increasingly and rampantly trampled upon under the flag of 'social justice' all over the world. This is a story of a young man who is 'suddenly' told that he is free after a decade of confinement." Tondemonai's setting is vaguely stated as "Somewhere in the United States of America…Sometime in between Wars" (see fig. 6 above), indicating that the play's racial and gendered dynamics, including its prefiguring of homonationalism, were intentionally connected with US interventionism in Asia.

America's 1952 Immigration Act that lifted Japanese and Korean exclusion retained "perversity" as a disqualifier amid the anticommunist and homophobic Lavender Scare.77 Usually this history is enfolded into accounts of the maintenance of white heteropatriarchy during the early Cold War, but it can also be read in terms of proto-homonationalism. The United States could not effect its neocolonial aims in Asia without dominative symbiosis with Japan, an "other man." Japan's acquiescence to indefinite extension of the post-1952 alliance has, after 1972, included the joint ("male-male") occupation of Okinawa from which the Korean and Vietnam Wars were conducted.78 With liberal individualism as an ideological base, American homonationalism was poised to surface once the prematurely-presumed "last other man" (the Soviet Union) contesting the US- led liberal international order was vanquished. Indeed, the 1990 Immigration Act lifted "perversity" as a disqualifier. Both the Cold War's bipolarity and what Naoki Sakai has called the transpacific complicity79 of the US-Japan entanglement for neoliberalism's advance, facilitated homonationalism's (and queer liberalism's) arrival—a queer spin on the heteronormative "Pacific marriage" metaphor used by feminist scholars from the 1980s to 2000s to describe the postwar US-Japan or Nichibei relation.80 Today, the United States and China attempt to construct a similarly-structured queer racial capitalist arrangement for liberalism's dura- bility, or what Shana Ye calls "queer Chimerica."81 But homosexual panic qua anxiety toward otherness (that is, fear of "rape" by the other man82) endures in balance-of-power militarism, the resurgence of ethnonationalism, Sinophobia, and convulsions to, or even end of, the US-led postwar liberal international order.

With homonationalism's long emergence foregrounded, I now reinterpret the short story canonized in the 1990s for its instruction on the clash of wartime white American and Japanese/American masculinities, Lonny Kaneko's "The Shoyu Kid." Now considered a classic of Queer Asian American literature, the story is about incarcerated Nisei boys who are highly enculturated by white heteronormativity, shown by their consumption of icons such as John Wayne, the discarding of their Japanese given names for whitened nicknames, and self-instruction on heteromasculinity. The only Japanese man in the camp, the Minidoka Relocation Center, is a bumbling, elderly Issei who, as David Palumbo-Liu described in his 1999 book Asian/American, is a "former figure of authority and power, now dissembled, fragmented, and ultimately impotent."83 Palumbo-Liu followed Sau-Ling Wong's 1993 reading—the boys bully the Shoyu Kid who is engaged in transactional homosexuality with a white, redheaded guard, because the kid "assents to the feminization of the Japanese American male by the dominant culture…rewarded with the symbol of America (Hershey's chocolate) in exchange for confirming its symbolic ordering of his/their body."84 Palumbo-Liu argued that the boys, in asserting their own heteromasculinity, "fantasiz[e] themselves as empowered others. But they can never actually breach the other's symbolic order and thus must retreat into being interpellated as that order has predetermined."85 By favoring a heteronormative ordering of masculinized whiteness and feminized Japaneseness, Palumbo-Liu contradicted the element of supplementarity in his own "Asian/American" formulation; he does not explain why the boys' subjectivities would be predetermined rather than, at most, overdetermined by

Whiteness. In his Racial Castration, David Eng made a similar dichotomizing move, albeit altering feminization to queerifica- tion: "[T]he heterosexual stability of the patriotic white American icon emerges only in contrast to the resolute linking of queerness with Japaneseness. In this manner, normative masculine self-representation constitutively depends upon the sexual 'perversion' and pathologizing of the racialized masculine subject."86 By structuring whiteness as that against which all else is queered and abject, these readings obscure the above-outlined psychic negotiation whiteness has historically had with queerified racial otherness for the purposes of generat- ing dominative symbiosis, or what might be called a model sexual modernity underpinned by the sanctity of the liberal individual, which cuts across both hetero- and homonational state formations. Consequently, the readings gloss over Kaneko's only portrayal of "real-world" white masculinity—the male camp guard taking sexual advantage of a male child. How can such a character signify "heteronormative" white masculinity against which Japanese American masculinity is "queered?" In fact, Kaneko's text would seem to plainly portray perilous white perversion. This gap between text and critique I interpret in terms that Jack Halberstam has described as the tendency of late twentieth-century queer critique to fashion homosexuality entirely as abjection given historical state-sanctioned violence toward queer people, an outlook that has contributed to a reduction of the "multiplicity of gay history and simplif[ication of] the function of homosexuality."87

The disjoint can be assuaged by recontexualizing "The Shoyu Kid" as presenting, via the figure of the perverted camp guard, a kind of correspondence between homosexuality and the US wartime state. As Eng-Beng Lim has pointed out, the white man/Asian boy dyad was "both everywhere and nowhere" across the twentieth century due to white paternalism and homophobia.88 The camp guard's behavior is publicly illicit, but hardly privately abject as far as the mid-century US state was concerned in its gross management of racial difference. The homosexuality in the text represents, to cite Chandan Reddy's formulation, "the nontransparent within the transparent vision produced by military rationality and instrumentality."89 Subjected to the state's unseen rationality—namely, a drive to disavow/incorporate otherness at a pace the US state could manage against the threat of Japan's parallel liberal-pluralist trajectory—the Nisei boys lose their innocence bound up in their mimicking of white heteronormativity as a false image of power. By the end of the story, one of the boys offers a singular rumination that hones in on a newly-recognized "normativity" of the white camp guard: "Jeez…I thought the guy was just taking a leak behind the garage. Goddam queers. Jezus, everyone's queer" (my emphasis).90 "Everyone" names the otherness they had presumed a fountainhead of heteromasculinity, but now realize is nothing of the sort. Like Koji's dilemma in Tondemonai, the boys seek to create a sense of safety beyond an all-encompassing, queerly-inclined US state. In a new reading that refocuses on the Shoyu Kid's abjection, Chris Eng has suggested that while Kaneko's story "masquerade[d] as a text that advocates…an antiqueer respectability politics," it, in fact, "teased readers to take a paranoid approach" as readers follow the boys' uncovering of the truth about the kid's abjection that extends to themselves. Accordingly, the story's queerness can be regarded as "a reparative force for mending the injuries" of the incarceration.91

I agree with Eng's assessment, and further suggest that, when placed alongside Tondemonai's politics, "The Shoyu Kid" can be regarded as another example of 1970s Asian American queer cultural nationalism in an era of US proto-homona- tionalism. With its critical pronouncement that "everyone's queer," the story depicts the Japanese American incarceration as a site of forced queer relational- ity and a workshop for a yet-to-become homonational US administrative state. The incarceration's contradictions triggered attempted production of symbolic space, including Kaneko's own storytelling, beyond violent exclusion/inclusion.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In his correspondence with Greg Robinson, Soon-Tek Oh recounted that "no one" contacted him about Tondemonai in the decades following its production. The play became, in his words, "forgotten in one of the turns of the side paths of my unfocused and somewhat lost and wandering journeys of my youth." It reflected Oh's "'puzzled' days…about the conscience of American publics and… Japanese Americans of the time."92 In its current archival form, Tondemonai elicits what Vincent Schleitwiler has referred to, in reference to the 2024 anthology The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration, as a "decanonical" effect.93 The play's neglected existence raises a specter of what other texts have been overlooked along the course of the will to institutionality, teleology of canonization, and presentism of critique. Because Oh's play had barely been taken up by the academy, my main goal here has been to rectify this by recasting Tondemonai from queer ephemera to a gem of cultural and critical significance.

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I thank Vincent Schleitwiler for alerting me to Tondemonai with a PDF copy of the play while I was dissertating. I thank Greg Robinson for our discussions of the play and for his generosity, including sharing his communications with Soon-Tek Oh about Tondemonai. Thanks also goes to photographer Irvin Paik, as well as Andy Lowe, Gavin Pak, and Aaron Heinsman at East West Players; Molly Haigh at UCLA Library Special Collections; Andrew Leong for commenting on an early draft; Chris Eng for our Zoom chat; and the two anonymous reviewers for their encouraging feedback.

NOTES

1. Soon-Tek Oh, "Tondemonai—Never Happen!" (unpublished theatrical script, 1970), 42–43. Archived in UCLA Library Special Collections, East West Players Records, box 1, folder 3.
2. The play is alluding to the 1956 amendment that sought to settle all claims outstand- ing for the 1948 Japanese American Evacuation Claims Act that provided minimal compensation for property loss. 1970s and 80s Nisei/Sansei and allied activism would later secure the more substantive reparations of the 1988 Civil Liberties Act.

3. Oh, “Tondemonai,” 40.
4. Oh, 42.
5. Oh, 46.
6. Oh, 42.
7. By hidden in plain sight, I mean that Tondemonai appears with a blurb on the East West Players’ “1970s” history webpage, accessed April 20, 2024, https://www.eastwest-players.org/about-us/production-history-and-archive/production-history-1970s.
8. For analysis of the idealized critical subject in Asian American literary studies, see Christopher Lee, The Semblance of Identity: Aesthetic Mediation in Asian American Literature (Stanford University Press, 2012).
9. Cynthia Wu, Sticky Rice: A Politics of Intraracial Desire (Temple University Press, 2018), 16.
10. Some plays are closet dramas meant to be read rather than acted.
11. Admittedly, my inclusion of stage photography reinforces the stereotype that scripts are formally incomplete. But the images not only provide visual evidence, but have an affective quality that insists they see the light of day outside the archive.
12. Christine Mok, “Re/collecting Asian American Performance,” in Asian American Literature in Transition, 1965–1996, ed. Asha Nadkarni and Cathy Schlund-Vials, (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 145.
13. Esther Kim Lee, A History of Asian American Theatre (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 46–47.
14. Meewon Lee 이미원, “한국계 미국 대표 극작가와 그 작품세계” [The Representative Korean American Playwrights and their Plays], 한국연극학 Journal of Korean Theater Studies Association 37 (2009): 5–64. Tondemonai is at 20–21.
15. Greg Robinson, “The Great Unknown and the Unknown Great: Early Play Took an Unflinching Look at the Trauma of the Wartime Incarceration,” Nichi Bei News, May 30, 2013, accessed April 20, 2024, https://www.nichibei.org/2013/05/the- great-unknown-and-the-unknown-great-early-play-took-an-unflinching-look-at- the-trauma-of-the-wartime-incarceration/; “Tondemonai-Never Happen! (play),” Densho Encyclopedia, 2017, accessed April 20, 2024, https://encyclopedia.densho. org/Tondemonai-Never Happen! (play). See also Greg Robinson and Jonathan van Harmelen, The Unknown Great: Stories of Japanese Americans at the Margins of History (University of Washington Press, 2023), chap. 4.
16. Dan Bacalzo, “50 Years and More of Asian American Theater,” Asian American Performance Site, WordPress, April 9, 2015, accessed November 20, 2024, https:// danbacalzo.wordpress.com/2015/04/09/50-years-and-more-of-asian-american- theater/.
17. The only other analysis of Tondemonai I could find is Ana Jimenez-Moreno, “Illegal Citizen: The Japanese-American Internment Camp in Soon-Teck Oh’s Tondemo- nai—Never Happen,” in Queer as Camp: Essays on Summer, Style, and

Sexuality, ed. Kenneth Kidd and Derritt Mason (Fordham University Press, 2019, 157–73).

18. The word "pansexual" is usually used for describing individuals who can experience sexual attraction regardless of gender. Here I use it comparatively with "panethnic": to describe a sexually-diverse group.
19. Over the course of the play's diagesis of about fifteen years, Koji presents as primar- ily heterosexual and then primarily homosexual, which coheres with psychological studies on sexual fluidity. See Lisa Diamond, Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire (Harvard University Press, 2008).
20. See David Eng, Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America (Duke Uni- versity Press, 2001).
21. See Eiichiro Azuma, Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America (Oxford University Press, 2005).
22. For abjection in Asian American performance/theater studies, see Karen Shimakawa, National Abjection: The Asian American Body on Stage (Duke University Press, 2003). For queer abjection in Asian American cultural texts, see Chris Eng, Extravagant Camp: The Queer Abjection of Asian America (NYU Press, 2025).
23. Susan Koshy, Sexual Naturalization: Asian Americans and Miscegenation (Stanford University Press, 2005).
24. Steven Hong Sohn, Inscrutable Belongings: Queer Asian North American Fiction (Stan- ford University Press, 2018), 8, describes queer Asian American storytelling as often displaying a "measure of vibrancy" in characters who resist abjection (or a survival plot), as well as a "'constitutive outside' to traditional constructs such as the nuclear family and the heterosexual, monogamous marriage" (or inscrutable belongings).
25. Lonny Kaneko, "The Shoyu Kid," in The Big Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Chinese Ameri- can and Japanese American Literature, ed. Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Inada, and Shawn Wong (Meridian, 1991), 304–13, originally published in Amerasia Journal 3, no. 2 (1976): 1–9.
26. Josephine Lee, "East West Players and Asian American Theatre: A Retrospective,"Theatre Survey 57, no. 2 (May 2016): 240.
27. Esther Kim Lee, "Transnational Legitimization of an Actor: The Life and Career of Soon-Tek Oh," Modern Drama 48, no. 2 (2005): 382.
28. Soon-Tek Oh and Greg Robinson, email communications, 2013.
29. Lee, "Transnational Legitimization of an Actor," 400n33.
30. Oh and Robinson, email communications, 2013.
31. Oh and Robinson, email communications, 2013.
32. Darby Summers, "'Tondemonai': a Unique Theatre Experience," The Advocate, July 22–August 4, 1970, 12.
33. Summers, "'Tondemonai'"; Ellen Endo Kayano, "Tondemonai has Surprises," Rafu Shimpo, May 29, 1970.
34. Oh and Robinson, email communications, 2013.
35. Lee, A History of Asian American Theatre, 44.

36. Jimenez-Moreno, “Illegal Citizen,” 161.
37. Lee, “Transnational Legitimization of an Actor,” 400n34.
38. Oh and Robinson, email communications, 2013.
39. Lee, “Transnational Legitimization of an Actor,” 381.
40. Lee, A History of Asian American Theatre, 53.
41. See, e.g., Elaine Kim, “‘Such Opposite Creatures’: Men and Women in Asian American Literature,” Michigan Quarterly Review 29 (1990): 68–93; Jinqi Ling, “Identity Crisis and Gender Politics: Reappropriating Asian American Masculinity,” in An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature, ed. King-Kok Cheung (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 312–37; Josephine Lee, “The Chinaman’s Unmanly Grief,” in Perform- ing Asian America (Temple University Press, 1997), 61–88; David Eng, “Out Here and Over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies,” Social Text no. 52/53 (1997): 31–52; Daniel Y. Kim, “The Strange Love of Frank Chin,” in Q&A: Queer in Asian America, ed. David Eng and Alice Hom (Temple University Press, 1998), 270–303; Daniel Y. Kim, Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow: Ralph Ellison, Frank Chin, and the Literary Politics of Identity (Stanford University Press, 2005); King-Kok Cheung, Chinese American Literature without Borders: Gender, Genre, Form (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), chap. 2.
42. Jinqi Ling, Narrating Nationalisms: Ideology and Form in Asian American Literature(Oxford University Press, 1998), 18.
43. Lee, “Transnational Legitimization of an Actor,” 388–89, 401–402n44.
44. Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, “Asian American History and Racialized Compulsory Deviance,” Journal of Women’s History 15, no. 3 (2003), 59, observed that Adrienne Rich’s 1980 concept of compulsory heterosexuality failed to recognize how “racialized groups experience both compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory sexual deviance.”
45. See Tina Takemoto, “Looking for Jiro Onuma: A Queer Meditation on the Incarcera- tion of Japanese Americans during World War II,” GLQ 20, no. 3 (2014): 246.
46. Kim, “‘Such Opposite Creatures,’” 70.
47. Crystal Parikh, “‘The Most Outrageous Masquerade’: Queering Asian American Masculinity,” Modern Fiction Studies 48, no. 4 (2002): 863.
48. Oh, “Tondemonai,” 34.
49. Oh, 35–37.
50. Oh, 39–40.
51. Elizabeth Freeman, Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories (Duke University Press, 2010). See Sohn, Inscrutable Belongings, 60–63, for this observation as pertain- ing to Asian American queer storytelling.
52. Oh, “Tondemonai,” 50–51.
53. Lee Edelman, No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive (Duke University Press, 2004).

54. Takeo Rivera, Model Minority Masochism: Performing the Cultural Politics of Asian American Masculinity (Oxford University Press, 2022), 45–51.

55. Oh, "Tondemonai," 28–30. "Nangoku Tosa o Atonishite," with lyrics and music by Takemasa Eisaku, was performed most famously by Peggy Hayama in 1959. The original 1930s version expressed the homesickness of Japanese soldiers from Tosa (in Kōchi Prefecture) stationed in Manchuria during the Second Sino-Japanese War, while the 1959 version reflected the homesickness of the shūdan shūshoku ("en-masse employment") generation—youth who migrated from rural areas during Japan's postwar economic boom. See "Nangoku Tosa o Atonishite, Kashi no Imi, Yosakoi-bushi" 南国土佐を後にして・歌詞の意味・よさこい節 [The meaning of the lyrics of "Farewell Tosa," Kōchi-based dance and folk music], Sekai no Minyō, Dōyō『世界の民謡・童謡』 [Worldfolksong.com], n.d., accessed April 20, 2024, https://www.worldfolksong.com/songbook/japan/minyo/nangoku-tosa.html. In Tondemonai, the song evokes homesickness for Japan itself. I date the postwar scenes circa 1960 due to Oh's inclusion of this song. For an audio recording, see Pegii Hayama – Topic, Nangoku Tosa wo Ato ni Shite, YouTube video, 4:00, posted Nov 14, 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0CsmdB2jso.

56. Summers, "'Tondemonai.'"

57. Robinson, "Tondemonai-Never Happen! (play)." See Brian Masaru Hiyashi, "Informants'inu,'" Densho Encyclopedia, 2020, accessed April 20, 2024, https://encyclopedia. densho.org/Informants_/_"inu".

58. Notably, a few months after Tondemonai's performance, the queer Japanese novelist Mishima Yukio would famously commit seppuku in November 1970.

59. Oh, "Tondemonai," 45, 52.

60. "Sticky rice" is queer slang referring to ethnically Asian males primarily attracted to other Asian males, sometimes also used for female-female relations. Here I use the term similarly to Wu, Sticky Rice, as a politics of intra-Asian homosocial-to- homosexual intimacies, such as found in Asian American fiction.

61. Oh, "Tondemonai," 5–11.

62. Oh, 54–56.

63. Oh.

64. Oh, 57, 60.

65. Oh, 61.

66. José Esteban Muñoz, Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity (NYU Press, 2009). Sohn, Inscrutable Belongings, 21–22, attempts to bridge the Edelman-Muñoz debate (queer pessimism versus optimism concerning the figure of the child) through the figure of the "protoqueer" child who must navigate the world into adulthood. But given that Koji is a sexually-fluid subject (see note 19) whose queerness manifests in adulthood, Tondemonai presents an opportunity to challenge linear assumptions regarding queerness and the child/adult binary.

67. For Walter Benjamin, jetztzeit or "the time of now" is distinguished from the ho- mogenous empty time of capital and modern linear progress. As Rahul Rao,

Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality (Oxford University Press, 2020), 16–18, has observed, western queer theorizing tends to presume a global heterotemporality that subsumes times and places in which queerness "was/is" already.

68. Oh, "Tondemonai," 65–66.

69. Sohn, Inscrutable Belongings, 8.

70. Jasbir Puar, Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times (Duke University Press, 2007).

71. Mika Semrow, Linda Zou, Shuyang Liu, and Sapna Cheryan, "Gay Asian Americans Are Seen as More American Than Asian Americans Who Are Presumed Straight," Social Psychological and Personality Science 11, no. 3 (2020): 336–44.

72. Eng, Racial Castration, 6–9.

73. See Amy Sueyoshi, Discriminating Sex: White Leisure and the Making of the American Oriental (University of Illinois Press, 2018), ch. 5, for the early twentieth-century US West Coast's fashioning of white masculinity between "civility and virility" as weighed against a rising Japan and perceived degenerated China.

74. See Heike Bauer, The Hirschfeld Archives: Violence, Death and Modern Queer Culture (Temple University Press, 2017). In particular, the sexologist Benedict Friedländer, "Seven Propositions (1908)," in Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany, ed. Harry Oosterhuis and Hubert Kennedy (Harrington Park Press, 1991), 219–220, formulated that a preponderance of homosexuals among the "great men of history" resulted from their nature that forced them to sin against custom; so, if permitted to individuate, such men disproportionately drove civilizational progress, whereas the homophobia impairing their self-actualization imperiled the West given the rise of a perceived more queer-tolerant East. "The continuing misunderstanding of these truths," Friedländer wrote, "must harm the entire white race to the benefit of the yellow. Behind the 40 million Japanese stand 400 million Chinese."

75. For Asian/American "inclusion" prior to its reflection in US immigration law, see Lon Kurashige, Two Faces of Exclusion: The Untold History of Anti-Asian Racism in the United States (University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

76. For the argument that liberal pluralism emerged in the transpacific competition between the United States and Japan, see Takashi Fujitani, Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II (University of California Press, 2011).

77. See Siobhan Somerville, "Sexual Aliens and the Racialized State: A Queer Reading of the 1952 U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act," in Queer Migrations, ed. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 71–91; and Naoko Shibusawa, "The Lavender Scare and Empire: Rethinking Cold War Antigay Politics,"Diplomatic History 36, no. 4 (2012): 723–52.

78. For the homoerotics of the Cold War as viewed from Okinawa, see Ikuo Shinjō, "The Political Formation of the Homoerotics and the Cold War: The Battle of Gazes at and from Okinawa," trans. Nitta Keiko, in The Trans-pacific Imagination: Rethinking Boundary, Culture and Society, ed. Naoki Sakai and Hyon Joo Yoo (World Scientific, 2012), 97–105.

79. Naoki Sakai, "Trans-pacific Studies and the US-Japan Complicity," in The Trans-pacific Imagination: Rethinking Boundary, Culture and Society, ed. Naoki Sakai and Hyon Joo Yoo (World Scientific, 2012), 279–315.

80. As Naferti Tadiar, Fantasy-Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Con- sequences for the New World Order (Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 39–42, recounts the metaphor, America was "father," Japan "mother," with their "children" (the Asian Tiger economies) "midwifed" by Australia. See also Naoko Shibusawa, America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy (Harvard University Press, 2006). What I am suggesting instead is a homosociality of the two non/white em- pires—a longstanding queering of empire that curbs the tension of heteronormative racial capitalism in service of liberalism's expanse.

81. Shana Ye, Queer Chimerica: A Speculative Auto/Ethnography of the Cool Child (Uni- versity of Michigan Press, 2024), 12, writes that the US and China, despite outward rivalry, have long "work[ed] in accordance to…accelerate the movement of capital and labor exploitation through sustaining the racialization of the communist world as 'illiberal' and 'unfree' [from the US' vantage] and the internalization of 'catching up' and 'transitioning' [from China's]."

82. In critiquing the usual heterosexualization of colonial modernity, Hema Chari, "Co- lonial Fantasies and Postcolonial Identities: Elaboration of Postcolonial Masculinity and Homoerotic Desire," in Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections, ed. John Hawley (SUNY Press, 2001), 279, reminds the reader how the colonial enterprise features the subjugation of men by men such that empire's "predominant trope…is [actually] that of male rape."

83. David Palumbo-Liu, Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier (Stanford University Press, 1999), 135.

84. Palumbo-Liu, 136; Sau-Ling Wong, Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance (Princeton University Press, 1993), 47–50, 99–102.

85. David Palumbo-Liu, "The Minority Self as Other: Problematics of Representation in Asian-American Literature," Cultural Critique 28 (1994): 96.

86. Eng, Racial Castration, 136.

87. Jack Halberstam, The Queer Art of Failure (Duke University Press, 2011), 171. Of course, David Eng's 2010 book The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy (Duke University Press, 2010) took stock of homonationalism.

88. Eng-Beng Lim, Brown Boys and Rice Queens: Spellbinding Performance in the Asias(NYU Press, 2013), 8.

89. Chandan Reddy, Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality and the US State (Duke Uni- versity Press, 2011), 233.

90. Kaneko, "The Shoyu Kid," 312.

91. Eng, Extravagant Camp, 74.

92. Oh and Robinson, email communications, 2013.

93. Vincent Schleitwiler, "The Non-Alien in the Struggle for Memory, or, Anthology for and against Canonization," Association for Asian American Studies annual conference, Seattle, WA, April