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Proud to be an FOB*

It's morning in New York City, and at the same time, it's exactly the opposite from where I grew up. I am a gay Asian immigrant, and it is quite difficult adjusting in a foreign country. Being a minority within a minority, I find that there are no role models for me. I look up pages of XY, OUT, Genre, and The Advocate, and all I see are articles suited for the "gay white male." I further browse the magazine sections in the hopes of finding a magazine or even an article in a magazine suited for me. I see something which has an Asian cover. I quickly grab it and look in the pages thoroughly. Oops, it had some nude pictures of Asians. Funny though that the front cover wrote, "Presenting a Positive Image of Asian Men."

I immigrated in the US with my family in 1997. That was three years ago. During those years, I learned a lot. It seems that being gay and Asian in America, one has to uphold his self-respect in two fronts. The first is being Asian. Now contrary to beliefs, Asians are also discriminated. I could still remember the number of times, I was called "Ching" in school for having slanty eyes. One terrifying event also was when I was walking down 14th Street when an old man started harassing me. He just started shouting that I should go back to my country. When I tell this to my friends, they quickly dismiss it as "Ugggh, only in New York."

The second front is being gay. Now even in the Philippines where I grew up, I suffered many teasings about my homosexual tendencies. I studied in an exclusive Catholic school for boys. Day after day, my classmates would gang up on me, teasing me for my "girlish manners." But I found solace through my friends. They were also gay, and they also suffered the constant teasings that I underwent. But the turning point in my youth was when I came out of the closet when I was thirteen. Hard to believe, I told my parents. It took them a while, but eventually, they accepted me. But here in America, everything is different. It is true that the teasings stopped. But it also seems that I am not included in the gay community. Apathy is just as bad as hate. I know that there are some gay Asian organizations here, but it appears that most of these organizations are for the "east-west friendship." I find nothing wrong with this, but where are the political gay Asians that lobby for gay Asian empowerment? Where are the gay Asian youths that meet at least once a week to share stories, bond and simply get together?

I am what people would call an "FOB" - fresh off boat. I am a gay Asian immigrant, and not knowing anyone in

Ryan Pesigan

Reyes was born and raised in Manila, Philippines. He took his BA in History from the University of the Philippines in 1998. He is currently taking continuing courses in New York University. He plans to take his Masteral soon. He is a Community Leader for Geocities WestHollywood. He has a [personal web site](#) there. He currently lives in New Jersey.



a foreign country is extremely terrifying. You're being introduced to a new culture that you know nothing about. Here, they have terms like rice queen, potato queen, sticky rice, and banana. Gay culture insists that I am rice, and my boyfriend should be potato. My skin should be smooth, brown and hairless, and his should resemble that of a Wonder Bread. Now if I go against this, I am labeled as sticky rice and condemned as going against the natural way. I am introduced to films such as M. Butterfly and The Wedding Banquet wherein Asians are introduced with their respective white American partner. I am further introduced to literature such as Norman Wong's Cultural Revolution and Ricardo Ramos' Flipping where gay Asians strictly desire white men. There is also the independent films like Tony Ayres' China Dolls and Raymond Yeung's Yellow Fever where again Asians limit themselves to white men. Where are my role models??!!

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Now, I have been in America for three years already. I'm still here and I still am the naive Asian boy that people refer as an FOB. But I ask you, "Where and who are the Asian Americans that I should exemplify?" Hmm, I guess I should only look to myself as my role model. If what I have seen here in America is the norm for Asian Americans, let me be the first to tell you - No thank you, I'm proud to be an FOB!

*FOB - fresh off the boat