

## Wing Tek Lum

### GOLDEN LOTUSES

“We never saw them before, so we cut them off.” - in Honda Katsuichi, *The Nanjing Massacre*

On the road next to a little bridge  
A cone-shaped pile, knee-high  
with a single small foot at the top,  
a very small foot as if a child's  
and yet up close  
it is wrinkled, gnarled, atrophied  
the four small toes curled underneath  
growing back into the meat of the sole,  
only the big toe remaining exposed,  
an acute point  
like the shape of a baker's icing bag  
or the prow of a small, slim boat, except or the arch  
which is raised, or rather buckled  
into an unnatural ridge  
where the length of the foot was broken  
over the length of a lifetime,  
the baby toe underneath  
nearly touching the heel  
itself callused,  
the shape of a fat mallet.

There are other feet,  
some equally bare and shriveled,  
others still in their shoes,  
gaudily embroidered, even under the soles,  
images of peonies and ducks in satin stitch,  
appliques of pink grapes,  
a blue brocade of butterflies and chrysanthemums,  
multicolored waves and tendrils,  
a leaping fish with heavy silver couching.

The mound is stacked with care.  
It is made from dozens of feet,  
presumably all in pairs,  
severed at the ankles or low shins,  
encrusted now with blood,  
exotic, once bound, but now freed,  
now nowhere to run.

*Wing Tek Lum is a Honolulu businessman and poet. The poems in this teacher's note were originally published in his collection of poetry, The Nanjing Massacre: Poems (Bamboo Ridge Press, 2012).*

1. “Golden Lotus” refers to the custom of Chinese foot binding, practiced on girls from the upper classes in imperial times, a sign that they would never do manual labor. In Europe and the United States 100 years ago, what was another painful – if not so extreme – female body ritual?
2. In Communist China, the reaction against classist and sexist adornment practices changed radically. How?
3. The Geneva Convention of 1949 prohibits violence to civilians in wartime, including “murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture,” however these still persist. Give one example.