



# KING OF THE YEEES

Student Subscription Series Study Guide  
Spring 2017

# KING OF THE YEEES

by LAUREN YEE

directed by JOSHUA KAHAN BRODY

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# Representation Matters

An Introduction to the Study Guide

by ELIZABETH RICE



Production Photo by Liz Lauren

Ever since I saw the workshop production of *King of the Yees* during the Goodman's New Stages Festival last year, I have been excited. Thinking about, talking about, and working on anything *King of the Yees* related feels like a jolt of electricity and I want nothing but to share this work with everyone around me. Why could a hero's journey through San Francisco's Chinatown be so electrifying? Because what feels like for the first time in my life, I get to see my story on stage. I'm mixed. My mother is a Taiwanese-Chinese American, while Dad grew up on the southwest side of Chicago in Summit, IL. My paternal grandmother was Polish and spoke Polish to her Polish neighbors but never to her kids. In the first half of the 20th century, Poles were looked down upon in society, and my grandmother didn't want to disadvantage her kids. So, my dad and his siblings never learned their "mother tongue." When my father married

my mother, he supported my mother's wish that my younger brother and I would attend Chinese school to learn Mandarin and build a community around our Chinese heritage.

In *King of the Yees*, I get to see my community and my history represented on stage. So many dads I encountered have similar mannerisms of Larry Yee. I grew up watching Jet Li play Wong Fei Hong. I see echoes of the trips to Chinatown where my mom would barter with the proprietors of the souvenir shops. I remember when I danced as a little lion for Chinatown's Chinese New Year parade. The first I got to see a face changer when Cirque Shanghai was at Navy Pier. I even experience my modern day, where I see the actors discuss the tribulations around getting work as an Asian actor.

Currently, there is a lot of discussion around the lack of or demeaning representation of

Asian-American characters and artists in Hollywood. (Think Tilda Swinton as the Ancient One in *Dr. Strange*, Scarlett Johansson as Major in *Ghost in the Shell*, or Matt Damon's "white savior-ism" in *The Great Wall*.) Works like *King of the Yees* and from playwrights like Lauren Yee laude the stories of Asian-Americans, that we exist in the American diaspora, but with a specificity and uniqueness that honors both our Asian, and here specifically Chinese ancestors, but also our new American dreams. Audiences may see a world unknown, close but so far away, similar to how Lauren feels at the beginning of the play. Or like me, they may see the familiarity of one's home. Whether it be in the specific culture on stage, the place of Chinatown, or the mere relationship one has with their parents, *King of the Yees* shows us the true breadth and singularity of the American identity.

# Meet the Playwright: A Conversation with Lauren Yee

by TANYA PALMER  
Originally Printed in OnStage



Playwright Lauren Yee.

*In a recent conversation with the Goodman's Director of New Play Development Tanya Palmer, Lauren Yee talks about what inspired her play King of the Yees, and what it's like to write herself into a story that is, as she describes, "only kind of true — just like the stories your father once told you as a child."*

**Tanya Palmer:** What inspired King of the Yees?

**Lauren Yee:** Before anything else, I had the title and knew the play would be about my dad, Larry Yee, who is a larger than life character. But there are also many aspects of my childhood outside of San Francisco's Chinatown—feeling like a part of Chinatown, but also feeling like an outsider—that I think are interesting and have never been represented on stage. I began my research in 2014, visiting my father in San Francisco and conducting interviews, and pieces of the play started emerg-

ing. A few months later, just as I was sitting down to figure out how my dad's story fit into the play, California State Senator Leland Yee, whom my father knew and had volunteered for—and who had officiated my wedding—was arrested on charges of bribery, along with Raymond "Shrimp Boy" Chow, a Hong Kong-born felon with ties to a San Francisco Chinatown street gang and an organized crime syndicate. I was on the phone with my husband and he said, "You know this is going to become the play." I replied, "No, obviously not. This is ridiculous; it couldn't possibly be the play." But that day became the impetus of what makes this play happen. Then, in the summer of 2014, my father and I traveled to China together.

**TP:** Was that your first time you visiting the country?

**LY:** It was my second trip—but it was the first, and probably only, trip I'll ever take to the place where his

parents are from. I couldn't have possibly done it without him. That trip was successful based on all the things that are explored in the play about family connections, and how the knowledge resting inside one specific person is so hard to pass on or transfer to the next generation. The only way we knew where to find his father's village—it's not on a map, you can't just Google it—was that my father spoke the language. Our taxi driver knew where to go based on my father's description that it "had a big building and used to grow rats." There are so many things about the trip that are echoed in the play, about this connection to where you're from and being part of the next generation. And just how much your parents know.

**TP:** Can you speak a bit about the Yee Fung Toy and your father's relationship to that organization, which also plays a central role in the play?

**LY:** Growing up, I never understood what the Yee Fung Toy was, or why people were a part of it; all I knew was that they threw dinners at Chinese New Year and gave out money at Christmas. But my grandfather was a member, and when he passed away, my father joined as a way to be closer to his father, learn about his life and be around his friends. My grandfather's death was probably the beginning of my father's sense of a civic or community life. That's when he started working on Leland Yee's political campaigns, engaging in San Francisco's Chinese community, and his involvement in the Yee Fung Toy was part of that. He picked me up from school once and said, "We're going to go help a cousin." We drove to Leland Yee's campaign office; he was running for City Supervisor for the first time, and that was the beginning of my father's community political career.

**TP:** You and your father are characters in the play. Did you feel a responsibility for these characters to closely resemble your actual selves, and is there a separation between the real Lauren and Larry Yee and your fictional creations?

**LY:** In the beginning of the writing process, I thought that King of the Yees would be loosely inspired by my father, but not an exact mirror reflection. I thought it would be too hard to explain what the Yee Fung Toy is, and what my father does. I thought I'd come up with a much more dramatic version of what's going on. So in early drafts, everything was heavily fictionalized and there were people who were like us but not us. But the further I got, the more I felt that, in order to portray all the idiosyncratic aspects of Chinatown and my father's

life, there had to be a character named "Larry Yee" and a character named "Lauren Yee." Even though they have our names, I could separate the characters from real life; while the play starts in a realistic place, as you get deeper into Act I, the play suddenly explodes in all these different directions. I don't think you can watch the play and think you've watched some kind of docudrama; it's more of a hero's quest. So that freed me up from having to be incredibly accurate.

**TP:** You mentioned you felt like an outsider in San Francisco's Chinatown. Has the process of writing this play had any impact on your relationship to that place now?

**LY:** Growing up, the biggest thing dividing me from Chinatown was the language barrier. I'm American-born and never went to Chinese school. My parents were born in America, and didn't really speak the language at home. My experience as an Asian American was not growing up in an all-white neighborhood feeling like I was an outsider because I was Chinese. A lot of my classmates were born in Hong Kong or were the children of immigrants. For me, that was the bigger divide; I kind of represented American culture while my other classmates represented this foreign outsider part of San Francisco. So, for me, Chinatown was this dirty, crowded, noisy place where I didn't speak the language, where I didn't—for the most part—eat the food. I never really enjoyed the Yee Fung Toy dinners. I never enjoyed being in Chinatown. I didn't feel part of it.

With this play, I've been able to

explore not only my self-consciousness in my own community, but it's also shed a light on how that is a universal experience. In my research, I traveled to several different Yee Fung Toy branches across the country. In each branch, there was a guy like my dad, around 60 years old and American-born. When I asked why they joined the Yee Fung Toy, each said the same thing: they never intended to join, but somebody from the previous generation told them if they didn't this organization would die out. So, in a way it's this club of Yees filled with people who never wanted to be there in the first place, who felt out of place and uncertain but eventually decided, "Ok well, if it's got to be someone, I guess it's got to be me." This play explores those feelings of inauthenticity and inadequacy. With every new generation, there is a feeling of being unworthy and being unprepared to take up the cultural mantle.

I can research all I want, I can listen to all my father's stories and there are still so many things I don't know: about the family history, his life, his father's life, his mother's life. And this play embraces that inadequacy. That I, Lauren Yee, am actually trying to tell the story of Chinatown and the Yees, there is just so much stuff for me, the actors, designers and director to cover. We're going to mess something up, we're going to miss something and we're going to not quite know how to tell it right. But at the same time it's really lovely to try in spite of all that, you know?

# King of the Yees: A Cultural Glossary

by ELIZABETH RICE

*In King of the Yees, Lauren Yee traverses San Francisco's Chinatown reconnecting with her roots. As a biracial child, both my parents impressed upon me the importance of learning about my Chinese heritage. Many references are made to Chinese culture in the play that maybe foreign to Western audiences. Here you can learn more about the world in King of the Yees.*

## **Acupuncturist**

For a better understanding of traditional Chinese medicine, please check out "Health as Balance: An Overview of Traditional Chinese Medicine." Chinese medicine is rooted in the balance of a person's "chi" or energy. Sickness often occurs when a person's chi is unbalanced. An acupuncturist inserts thin needles at specific points on a person's energy meridians to

relieve or draw chi to balance it.

## **Bai**

Bai can mean the act of worshipping or the altar one worships at. Chinese people revere the elders and ancestors long after they are dead. It is customary in traditional households to find an altar dedicated to either a specific deity and/or deceased family members, especially if the family member is buried far away. Similar to the Dia de los Muertos ofrendas, a bai consists of food and drink. Oranges and whiskey are traditional. Worshipers will pray to their deity or ancestors by lighting incense in front of the altar. For larger remembrance ceremonies, paper money and objects may be burnt so they dead have comforts and currency in the afterlife.

## **Cantonese vs. Mandarin**

There are over eight distinct languages spoken in China. The official language of the country is Mandarin, while Cantonese is highly used in the Southern provinces of China. The Yees speak a dialect of Cantonese known as Taishanese. While initially more Cantonese speakers immigrated to the U.S., today you can hear both Cantonese and Mandarin spoken in Chinatowns all over the U.S.

## **Erhu Player**

Erhu is a two stringed instrument, often featured in traditional Chinese music. It is played with a bow, like a violin, however, unlike a violin, the body of the instrument is placed on the lap versus the shoulder.



*A quartet playing a traditional Chinese melody, "Jasmine Flower" The erhu comes in at 1:05.*

### **Family Associations**

King of the Yees takes place at the Yee Fung Toy Family Association in San Francisco. To learn more about family associations, read "Chinese American Family Associations on page 12.

### **Family Names/Surnames**

Unlike in Western culture, names are comprised surnames first, then individual names. Thus, Mark Jones would read as Jones Mark. Your surname marks what family you are part of. In addition and contrary to Western culture, heterosexual females don't often change their surname after marriage.

### **Fortune Cookies**

Contrary to popular belief, fortune cookies do not have Chinese origin. There are conflicting accounts of whether their invention came from Japan or the U.S. However, because of their long associations with Chinese restaurants, they have been adopted into Chinese-American culture. You shouldn't expect a fortune cookie at the end of your meal in China or Taiwan.

### **Gong**

Gongs are large medal disks used as instruments in both celebratory and religious ceremonies in Chinese culture.

### **Herbalist**

For a better understanding of traditional Chinese medicine, please check out "Health as Balance: An Overview of Traditional Chinese Medicine" on page 19. Chinese medicine is rooted in the balance of a person's "chi" or energy. Sickness often occurs when a person's chi is unbalanced. Natural herbs often are used medicinally or to support Western medicines.

An herbalist may help diagnose ailments and prescribe which herbs to use or like a pharmacist, may prepare a doctor's specified concoction for a patient.

### **Haggling**

Although department stores, chain stores, groceries, malls and boutiques currently proliferate through China's city centers, street markets and night markets are still utilized for food and goods. Unlike the U.S., where stores have a set price, markets allow buyers to interact with the direct seller. Haggling is an art form that, when mastered, helps you get the best items for the best price.

### **Homonyms in Chinese**

#### **Language**

Both Mandarin and Cantonese are tonal languages. A word sound can have between 5 – 6 tones, depending on which language and dialect you use. Tones change the meaning of the word and how it is written. The word for mom and horse sound similar, but have different tones and meanings. In King of the Yees, Larry and Jenny Pang debate the meaning of "tong", does it mean business or gang?

### **Lion Dance**

The Chinese Lion Dance is a traditional dance, where one to two people don a lion costume and mimic the animal's motions. This dance is often featured at Chinese New Year and other large celebrations. Lions bring luck and protection. Often, people pay and thank performers by feeding them lucky red envelopes.

### **Paper Names and The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882**

The mid 19th century found many Chinese people immigrating to the

American West to find fortune in the California Gold Rush. As gold became harder to find, Chinese immigrants took low paid jobs as laborers and at laundries. During the post-Civil War economic downturn, jobs were scarce. Americans, especially Californians, blamed the Chinese for taking jobs and causing turmoil in cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles. The U.S. government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 which prohibited Chinese laborers from entering the U.S. and also did not allow Chinese people to become U.S. citizens. Later acts also prevented Chinese people from re-entering the U.S. if they left. As it was increasingly difficult for Chinese people to prove they weren't laborers, many Chinese entered the country under "paper names," claiming that they were the daughters or sons of Chinese people already living in the U.S. Thus, many descendants found that their actual surname and their legal name to be different. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was not repealed until 1943, when China was an ally against the Japanese during WWII.

### **Red**

Red is considered lucky in Chinese culture. You will often see it used in clothing and decoration, especially for holidays and important events.

### **Red Egg and Ginger Party and Lai See (Red Envelope)**

A red egg and ginger party is often held one month after the birth of a baby. This party introduces the new child to the family and friends. The mother is often reintroduced, as well, after spending her "sitting month"



*Sichuan Face Changer explaining and demonstrating the craft.*

indoors. This is the month right after childbirth where traditionally it is believed that the mother is still too tired and weak to go outside. Babies are often gifted lai see, or lucky red envelopes, filled with money or gold to bring luck and prosperity to their life. Red eggs are served to guests, symbolizing luck and birth, while pickled ginger symbolizes balance and health, especially after childbirth.

### **Riddles**

With such complex written and spoken languages, it's no wonder that riddles are a favorite pastime amongst Chinese people. Riddles often are used as a drinking game or as contests at celebrations. Answers to riddles are often plays on words or homonyms.

### **Shanghai**

Shanghai is the largest city in China, with a population of 24 million. As of 2014, it is the most populous

city center in the world. Because of its close proximity to the coast and the Yangtze River, Shanghai was a primary trading city for Westerners looking to trade with China during the 19th century. It played a significant role in the Opium Wars.

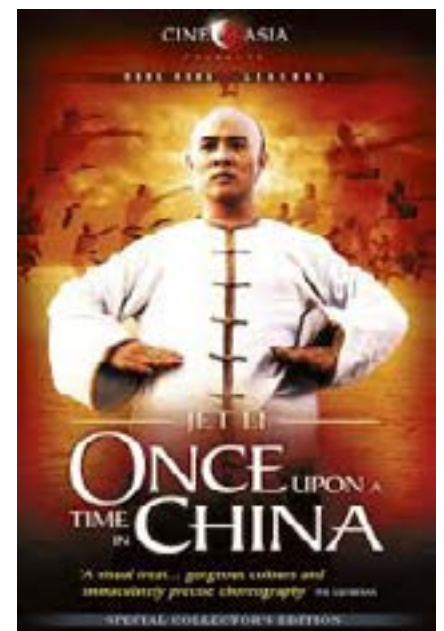
### **Sichuan Face Changer**

Face changing is a Chinese dramatic art rooted in the Sichuan opera. Through sleight of hand, the performer changes his masks in a blink of an eye. Masks are based on characters in Chinese opera.

### **Wong Fei Hung and Once Upon A Time In China**

Wong Fei Hung was a physician and martial artist who lived during the end of the Qing dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China. He is a folk hero and the main subject of

multiple martial arts films and tv shows. Most notably is the Once Upon A Time In China series, where he is portrayed by Jet Li.



*Poster for Once Upon a Time in China. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*



# Finding Yourself: King of the Yees and Joseph Campbell's "The Hero's Journey"

by RACHEL WEINBERG  
Originally Printed in OnStage

In *King of the Yees*, the character "Lauren Yee" struggles to relate to her Chinese heritage and her father's role within the traditional Yee Fung Toy Family Association. This process of self-discovery becomes a metaphorical adventure: when her father mysteriously disappears, Lauren must take a mystical journey through Chinatown to find him. Lauren's path hews closely to scholar Joseph Campbell's outline of "the hero's journey," a sequence that occurs in stories throughout the world and across various periods of history. As Campbell explains in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*,

this journey follows a three-act formula: separation/departure (the hero sets off on the journey); initiation (the hero faces trials); and return (the hero emerges triumphant and with new knowledge of self or to be imparted on others). Campbell added that the standard path of this journey follows the same stages as a rite of passage, and he refers to the three stages as "the nuclear unit of the monomyth." These stages can be further broken down into seventeen sub-stages, some of which we see in *King of the Yees*. Ultimately, the

motif becomes significant in the play because, through her transformational immersion into her Chinese roots, Lauren arrives at a new understanding of herself, her background and her relationship with her father—a purpose certainly aligned with Campbell's notion of a hero's journey.

For more information about Joseph Campbell's theory of The Hero's Journey, [click here](#) to read "The Mythology Teacher's" full breakdown, with examples from popular mythological and science fiction examples.



Above: Melissa Canciller and Rammel Chan in the 2015 New Stages developmental production of *King of the Yees*. Photos by Liz Lauren.

# Meta-Theater and Breaking the Fourth Wall in *King of the Yees*

## What is Meta-Theater?

*By Denver Center for the Performing Arts for their production of WELL by Lisa Kron, 2009*

Actress Kate Levy explains meta-theatricality while Dramaturg Doug Langworthy, Marketing Director Melissa Marano, and Artistic Director Kent Thompson discuss what the term means to audiences. *King of the Yees* is meta-theatrical because the characters are aware that they are putting on a show for an audience; it is, in a way, a play within a play.



### What is the Fourth Wall?

*By Theatre Development Fund*

[Click here](#) for The Theatre Development Fund's explanation of the imaginary division between the audience and actors on stage: the fourth wall.

### Discussion Question

How do meta-theater and breaking the 4th wall differ? How does breaking the 4th wall in a meta-theatrical show affect the storytelling?

## 25 Classic Moments When Movies Broke the Fourth Wall

*By MATT SINGER, film critic for Screen Crush | Introduction by BRIGITTE WHITTMER*

In *King of the Yees*, characters break the imaginary fourth wall and directly address the audience. In one moment, Larry Yee explains to the audience what a Lion Dance does with a cabbage, and Lauren assumes that the audience might not be too interested in seeing this happen. However, Larry, the Erhu Player, and the Lion Dance are excited to share this and urge the audience to agree. In this instance, the characters break the fourth wall, involve the audience in the action and create suspenseful excitement for what's to come. Many movies and TV shows use this same storytelling technique in order to confide in the audience, reflect on what's going on in the show, and more. [This article](#) lists 25 moments in American cinema when movies have broken the fourth wall, and film critic Matt Singer explains how they function in each movie.

# History of Chinese Americans & Chicago's Chinatown

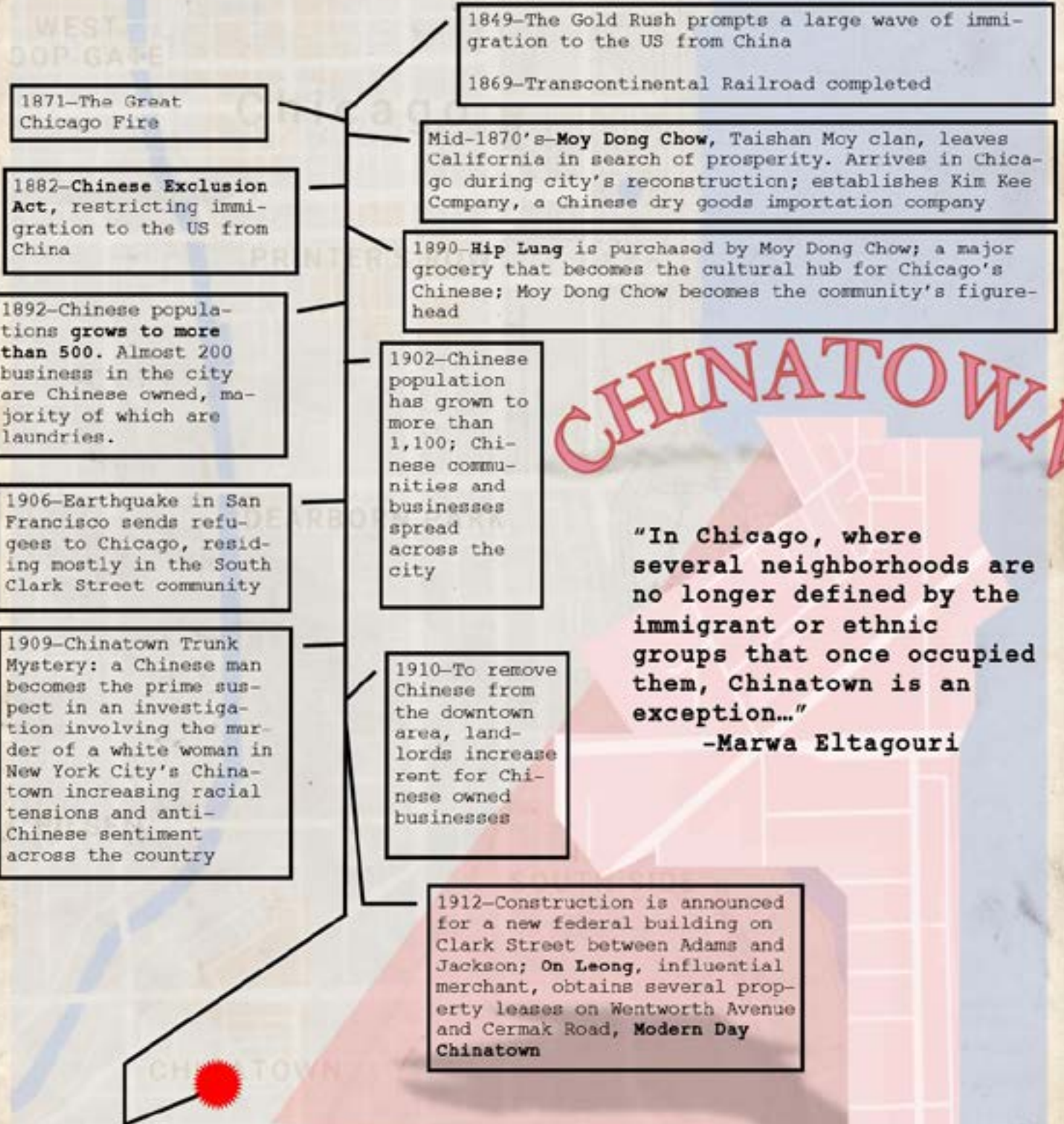
introduction by ANNA GELMAN | infographic by JORGE SILVA

Since the early 1800's, Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans have had a huge impact on the growth and culture of The United States of America. [Click here](#) for PBS's "Becoming American" timeline, which details the history of Chinese Americans and immigration from 1800-2000.



NEW EAST SIDE

# MAKING CHICAGO'S CHINATOWN



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# Chinese American Family Associations

by DANI WIEDER



2014 Spring Banquet at the Yee Fung Toy in San Francisco. Courtesy of YeeFungToyUSA.org

## History of Family

### Organizations

Chinese American family associations, like the one that *King of the Yeets* takes place in, are part of a storied tradition beginning in China. Family organizations (or kongsì, meaning “company”) were a staple of life in China. The organizations originate from a common ancestor who is drawn upon for both the organization’s name and also its value system. There is a board of elders who help to settle disputes in the community, a kind of private court. The organizations strive to provide scholarships to young members, offer grants to individuals in times of need, and keep detailed records of all the births, deaths, and marriage of members.

In the 19th century conditions were worsening in China. After the Anglo-Chinese war (1839-42), the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64), deteriorating agricultural conditions, in addition to political corruption, the wealth of the American Gold Rush and the jobs working on the Transcontinental Railroad seemed incredibly alluring. At first, it was mostly men who came to the United States to participate. These first immigrants formed mutual aid societies for newcomers, which evolved into family associations. At the time, having a community center was essential to preserve the Cantonese language (the dialect spoken by most of these immigrants), ensure economic stability, and protect one another from social ostracism and oppression. They also allowed these immigrant communities to have a

structure for leadership outside of the U.S. government, allowing decisions to be made and problems to be solved without involving prejudiced, English-speaking bureaucrats. This created pockets of native-Chinese speakers in urban centers, ostensibly the beginnings of Chinatowns. The passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act, however, brought immigration to a halt in 1882.

By the time the act was repealed in 1942, the Chinese had joined the U.S. as an ally against the Japanese. Anti-Chinese sentiments were diminishing; Chinese Americans had proven valuable to the economy by filling niches in the labor market, as well as exhibiting what Americans considered an entrepreneurial spirit. The War Brides Act of 1945 and the Fian-

cée Act of 1946 allowed Chinese wives and fiancés of American military vets admission to the country as well. These new laws, in addition to the 1949 victory of the Communist leader Mao Zedong, led to a second wave of Chinese immigration. However, many of these newcomers spoke Mandarin, not Cantonese. Furthermore, Chinese individuals were no longer in need of as much protection from the racism that initially plagued their communities. At this point, many had achieved substantial financial success. No longer fully reliant on Chinatowns, many chose to settle in suburbs or other parts of urban centers. Unfortunately, this meant an end to many of the crucial cultural institutions of Chinatown, such as the famous I-Hotel in San Francisco.

As Chinatowns experienced dissipation, the neighborhoods became run down and crime be-

gan to increase. Thus, while there was a new acceptance of Chinese-Americans, there remained skepticism towards Chinese youth. The younger Chinese became objects of violence, and police began to stereotype them, creating alarm. Inspired by the Black Panthers and Chinese communism, these younger Chinese populations began to form political movements and social organizations to support their communities. The 60's and 70's meant a new political voice for Chinatown and active assertion in American politics. The Chinese Community Development Center, The Chinese for Affirmative Action, The Chinese Newcomers Services Center, The On Lok Senior Services, The Self Help for the Elderly, and The Wu Yee Children's Services are just a few of the social organizations established in San Francisco during this time. Chinatown, including its family associations, experienced a widening in scope with this new interest in American politics.

Family organizations still thrive in Chinatown; as of 1992, over 127,000 Chinese Americans in San Francisco were members of one of the 80 associations there. All of the community building activities continue, as does the emphasis on education and scholarships. However, this growth has brought difficulties along with new economic and social power. As family organizations have come to have an increasing stake in the business world and local elections, they have become somewhat de-personalized. Where disputes used to be settled civilly, law suits now frequently trouble family organizations. It used to be the case that the only encounters the organizations would have with the law was when one of their members got in trouble with the U.S. government. In these cases, they could provide interpreters and even legal aid for the person in question. Recently, organizations have grown so much financially, that some of their problems have become too complicated for the elder board to solve. For example, mishandling of the organizations' finances is not uncommon and is beyond the powers of the organization to settle amicably. There have been instances of officials within the organization borrowing money for private business ventures, for example.

### The Yee Family

The Yee Fung Toy in San Francisco was the first branch of Yees family association in the country, established in 1886. It initially served to connect Yees, as well as to pay tribute to the common ancestor, Reverend Yee Chung-Sheung. Fung Toy, meaning "elegant demeanor," comes from a line of poetry by one of Chung-Sheung's contemporaries, again calling back to the fam-



*Courtesy of YeeFunToyUSA.org*

ily's origins. This group purchased the Waverly Place location, where the organization still resides. Since that time, however, the Yee Fung Toy has expanded to fourteen different cities, and now has over 10,000 members around the country. Branches are still forming; the D.C. chapter only became official three years ago. Their activities still include making contacts amongst members, organizing community events, giving out scholarships, and doing community service.

### **The Purpose of Family Organizations Now?**

As Chinese-Americans become increasingly assimilated (and welcome in America), the social organizations no longer need to help bridge the gap between cultures. Family organizations have

transitioned from connecting its members to American culture to reconnecting with Chinese heritage. They are no longer a survival necessity, but that does not mean they are obsolete. For many, family associations serve to keep ties with ancient traditions alive and to connect with others who identify with and want to maintain a connection to both cultures.

Many Chinatowns have taken on this mentality as well, working towards restoring the neighborhood and paying homage to their Chinese roots. For example, in 2005 San Francisco installed replicas of original street lamps in its Chinatown. There is a visible commitment to restoration and preservation of the architecture and aesthetics of Chinatowns. Chicago's Chinatown is actually

growing. Nearly 10% of the population of Chicago's Chinatown has immigrated to the U.S. in the last 3 years (as of 2016), and the Chinese community is thriving. The neighborhood is expanding to match this influx: the city opened a 2 million dollar library branch there this fall, which offers English classes, community spaces, and special collections on the Chinese in America. In these respects, Chinatowns are both memorials to what they once were - a celebration of Chinese survival - and also thriving, nurturing, modern neighborhoods, constantly innovating and expanding.



*2014 Spring Banquet at the Yee Fung Toy in San Francisco. Courtesy of YeeFungToyUSA.org*

# My Kind of (China)Town: A Strong Community Built on Strong Family Ties

by LINDA YU

Originally Printed in OnStage

*Ms. Yu holds the distinction of being Chicago's first Asian American broadcast journalist, retiring in 2016 after 34 years as an anchor for ABC-7. She reported extensively from China three times during her career. She co-founded the Chicago Chapter of the Asian American Journalists Association and earned five Chicago Emmy Awards.*

## "I-HOTEL"

Those six letters jumped out at me while reading Lauren Yee's funny, provocative play, *King of the Yees*. Seeing that name brought me back to the days when I was a fledging reporter in San Francisco, where the play is set—and served as a reminder of how, over the course of the past century, America's Chinatowns have nurtured generations who have, in turn, strengthened their larger community, our cities.

I clearly remember that day in 1977 when the I-Hotel eviction began, coupled by a massive demonstration by 3,000 protestors; it marked one of the first times television stations interrupted regularly scheduled programming to follow a live event. The old hotel housed many now-elderly men who had immigrated from the Philippines and China for work—but were never able to marry, because Asian women were prohibited from entering the United States. Over the course of nine very emotional years, activists championed the tenants' battle to preserve affordable housing in a part of the city where redevelopment and land were becoming increasingly valuable to corporate

ventures. The I-Hotel's location on the edge of San Francisco's Chinatown drew me into the people and causes within Chinatown itself.

I had arrived in the U.S. before the age of five. Although my Chinese wasn't fluent, having some knowledge of the language helped me develop an understanding of the perspective of these residents. Prior to this event, Chinatown had simply meant food and family to me—where I went for dim sum, where I could order soup like the kind my mother used to make when I was sick. I didn't think it odd that most of the big, round tables sat families of 10 to 15. And while tourists liked to take pictures of the whole roasted ducks and chickens hanging in a storefront window, to me it was just a delicious way to shop.

Like other ethnic groups that came to the U.S., the Chinese formed neighborhoods where they had familiar food, markets and places where family gathered. I learned how strong family associations (such as the Yees family association depicted in *King of the Yees*) developed to counter the discrimination—and sometimes violent racism—faced by Chinese laborers who immigrated to help build the intercontinental railroad. I marveled at the ways they put family first. Family associations had a foundation of people with the same Chinese last name, shared ancestors; they were the social engine of Chinatown, and often the financial support. When a member wanted to open a business, a loan

might be arranged and advice and introductions were available. There might also be help to buy a home and educate children. Chinese people also often extended that sense of family to those who came from the same province in China. Many times, I would identify myself to a new Chinese acquaintance by the province in which my father was born; if the person was from that same province, I would be immediately embraced as "cousin!" The founding of Chicago's Chinatown has a direct connection to San Francisco's Chinatown. West Coast Chinese had suffered from acts of discrimination before and after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 banned all Chinese immigration. "Yellow Peril" spread with fears that the Chinese were taking jobs away from Americans. As violence against the Chinese increased, a man named T.C. Moy set out for the Midwest, where he had heard locals were a bit more open-minded, and established the first Chicago Chinatown at Clark and Van Buren. (The Moys remain a powerhouse Chinatown family today!)

Mr. Moy was soon joined by others, and they thrived, perhaps in part because of the neighborhood's vicinity to the First Ward—the seat of political power in Chicago, and home to a favorite saloon of Aldermen Michael "Hinky Dink" Kenna and "Bathhouse John" Coughlin. If you needed a job or a political favor, you went to Hinky Dink and Bathhouse John. The Chinese



opened businesses right in the neighborhood and became familiar, recognizable faces, with one upscale Chinese restaurant often welcoming politicians as well as Chicago society to learn about the “exotic” Chinese food. This helped bridge the cultural gap and protect immigrants from discrimination. As the Loop became cost prohibitive, On Leong, the Chinatown Association, decided in 1912 to move Chinatown to its current location at 22nd and Cermak Streets.

Shortly after I arrived in Chicago in 1979, I ventured to Chinatown for a story. A Chinese immigrant had fallen ill at her restaurant job and was rushed to a hospital; as she could not speak English, she was unable to tell anyone that her young son was alone in their apartment. It was days before

the community organization, the Chinese American Service League (CASL), was contacted and their counselors stepped in. In covering that story, I began to learn about the ways the Chicago Chinatown community and the family associations rallied behind this woman and her child, and I soon became involved (and remain involved today) with organizations like CASL and Asian Human Services. Last year, a Chicago Tribune article reported that “Chicago’s Chinatown is booming, even as others across the U.S. fade”—highlighting plans for a new library, boathouse, public park, road improvement and a possible new high school in the area. Gentrification has diminished the populations of Chinatowns in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia and New York City. The opposite has happened here: since 2000, the population

of Chicago’s Chinatown has increased by 24%, spreading into nearby communities. Immigrants coming to Chicago are choosing to settle in Chinatown, not the suburbs.

I know you will enjoy “Lauren Yee’s” journey through San Francisco’s Chinatown as she discovers a greater understanding of her own heritage and family association in King of the Yees. While my Yu family does not have an association in Chicago’s Chinatown, I still find my way back to help wherever and whenever I can. I am an immigrant, and those strong family and cultural values made me who I am today.

And the food is pretty good, too.



*Chicago's Chinatown. Courtesy of Chicag-Chinatown.info*

# Levels of Language, Learning, and Cultural Learning for Each Generation of Chinese Americans

by DANI WIEDER

How much Chinese would Lauren know? Why doesn't Lauren speak Chinese if her dad does?

The first generation of Chinese immigrants in the mid-1800's spoke primarily Cantonese, and lived in Cantonese-speaking communities as a result. This first generation of Chinese-Americans cared deeply about the survival of Cantonese as the language of their families and by the 1850's had already established many Chinese schools. These language schools were meant to be attended in addition to American schools. Children born to these immigrants attended English school during the day and Chinese school on weekends or after school.

This system was embraced by second generation children, and many that followed. Between 1920-1930, about 200 Chinese schools were established in San Francisco alone. However, the complete immersion in both cultures led to what scholar Benson Tong calls, "differentiation and absorption." On the one hand, Chinese-American children were being pressured to assimilate to American life, and on the other hand, being taught to retain the values, practices, and language of Chinese culture. This feeling of being split or of living in two worlds marks many individuals' experiences of being Chinese-American, and artists and writers, including Lauren Yee,

have explored this friction in their work.

Having knowledge of both cultures, however, allowed the second generation children to become cultural liaisons of sorts for their parents. Chinese-American children were often responsible for things like taking their parents and grandparents to the bank, teaching them how to do taxes, and translating in stores. Additionally, Chinese-American parents often put great pressure on their children to do well in school so that they could prove their value as American citizens; first generation immigrants had, in most cases, experienced prejudice and racism and wanted their kids to be able to prove they belonged.

These pressures to care for the family and to excel have, in some cases, pushed third, fourth, and fifth (etc.) generation children away from the cultural institutions their parents and grandparents helped found. Since Chinese is no longer a necessary skill for their survival in America, Chinese-American children have more agency in the level of language and cultural learning that they undertake. Reasons for learning or not learning Chinese are diverse and personal. Some want a deeper connection to the country their family comes from, whereas others don't identify with being Chinese and want to just engage with American culture. Some students have reported feeling inadequate in their Chinese classes because other students expect them to be better than

they are, whereas others want to live in younger Chinese-American communities like the fusion neighborhood of the 626 in Los Angeles. Like Chinese family organizations, language learning for Chinese Americans has transitioned from being a survival skill to a means of experiencing one's heritage.

Additionally, Cantonese is no longer taught in schools, and has instead been replaced by Mandarin. So for Lauren, it would be almost impossible for her to have a formal education in the dialect of Chinese that her father speaks (a kind of Cantonese called Toisan). And even if she were to be put in Chinese school, she most likely had the freedom while growing up to choose sports or theater instead as her extra-curricular activities. Without a particularly strong tie to China or the Chinese-speaking community in San Francisco, Lauren doesn't feel like it is particularly important to be proficient in the language at the beginning of the play.

# Shrimp Boy: Small Stature, Big Crimes

by NEENA ARNDT

Originally Printed in Onstage



*Daniel Smith in the 2015 New Stages developmental production of King of the Yees. Photos by Liz Lauren.*

When Kwok Cheung Chow was a smaller-than-average child growing up in Hong Kong, his grandmother nicknamed him Ha Jai, or Shrimp Boy: a name you will hear throughout *King of the Yees*. She could not have guessed that her diminutive grandson would grow up to be one of San Francisco's most notorious mobsters—or that he would continue to use the moniker she bestowed on him as he navigated a life of crime, infamy, repentance and relapse.

After immigrating to the United States in 1976 at the age of 16, Shrimp Boy attended high school in San Francisco for one month, then dropped out and joined the Hop Sing Tong, a gang in that city's Chinatown. He quickly gained status among criminals, engaging in such diverse unlawful activities as racketeering, illegal gun sales, prostitution, drugs, money laundering and conspiracy to deal stolen

property. At age 18, he was convicted of robbery and spent seven years in prison. The next two decades saw Shrimp Boy imprisoned and released again and again, all the while maintaining his reputation as one of San Francisco's most tough and wily criminals. In 2003, Shrimp Boy testified against a former boss in exchange for a reduced sentence; he was released. He ostensibly began to assimilate into a life he'd never known: he spoke to youth groups about the dangers of joining a gang, and planned field trips for his girlfriend's school age daughter and her classmates.

In 2014, Shrimp Boy's period of normalcy ended when he was arrested during an FBI raid in an investigation into the corruption of California state senator Leland Yee. His legal troubles continued as he was prosecuted on 162

counts, including many for money laundering, and one for murder. On August 4, 2016, he was found guilty on all counts and sentenced to two life terms in prison.

For news articles about Shrimp Boy, look below.

[LA TIMES: Shrimp Boy Gets Life in Prison](#)

[SFGate: Raymond "Shrimp Boy" Chow Insists He's Innocent](#)

[SFExaminer: 5 Associates of Raymond "Shrimp Boy" Chow Plead Guilty to Reduced Charges](#)

# Health As Balance: An Overview of Traditional Chinese Medicine

by KELLY REED

Originally Printed in the Study Guide for *The White Snake*

Viewed through the lens of Western medicine, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) would be considered overly simplistic, based on outdated theories about the human body and too imprecise to be effective. Pushing aside the Americanized, appropriated images of Eastern medicine we encounter most frequently, we see that the practices of TCM really come from established traditions which originated long before people in Europe—the birthplace of Western medicine—began making advances in the field.

The ideas behind TCM therapies (herbal medicine, acupuncture, massage, exercise and food therapy) came about during the Shang dynasty in the 14th-11th centuries BCE. TCM is a practical

realm of knowledge, meaning it was developed through the practice—the careful observation and trial and error—of healers over the course of 5,000 years. Comparing Western medical practice to that of TCM highlights key differences in how the two societies define health and possible areas for growth in both definitions.

To start, Western and Eastern traditions are based on two very different methods of reasoning. Western medical knowledge stands on a foundation of deductive reasoning: methodical experimentation based on the scientific method, proving each and every detail before coming to a conclusion. When investigating the unknown, Western tradition moves from micro to macro: treating an individual's

disease on a cellular, microscopic level and isolating the treatment to the specific diseased areas. Health is defined as an absence of disease; if there is no disease and no abnormal symptoms exhibited, a person is healthy.

Traditional Chinese medicine utilizes inductive reasoning, looking less for undeniable proof of an answer and more for signs and patterns pointing towards that answer. TCM practitioners move from macro to micro, viewing each system as a microcosm of an even greater system. In this view, a human being is to his or her environment what a cell is to that human's body. Health is the balance between each individual unit (in this example, the human or the cell) and their environment. All environments have

	<b>Medical Tradition</b>	
	<b>Western</b>	<b>Eastern</b>
<b>Type of Reasoning</b>	Deductive	Inductive
<b>Ideology</b>	Micro to macro	Macro to micro
<b>Definition of Health</b>	Absence of disease	Balance between patient & environment
<b>Method of Treatment</b>	Changing the patient's or the disease's environment (i.e. antibiotics, sterilization)	Strengthening patient to adapt to his or her environment
<b>Role of Doctor</b>	Strategically eliminating disease from a specific area of the body using methodical, often chemical treatments	Strengthening internal defensive & adaptive abilities of patient; promoting balance

*Information in chart supplied by Julia J. Tsuei from Eastern and Western Approaches to Medicine. Western Journal of Medicine, June 1978.*

ways of threatening the health of a human, and it is the task of the healer to strengthen a person's inner resources to withstand these threats and promote balance between the two. This principle of balance is represented in the symbol of the yin-yang.

Yin-yang represents the two abstract and complementary aspects of everything in the universe. Yin is the inward, hidden, intuitive energy of the world, associated with water, the moon and the feminine. Yang is the outward, unconcealed, logic-oriented energy of the world, associated with the sun, fire and the masculine. It is important to note that these energies' association with the masculine and the feminine does not mean they are exclusive to men or women, or that the energies even have a gender in the first place. Instead, each phenomenon in the universe is made up of equal parts yin and yang, "female" and "male" energies. In traditional Chinese medicine, maintaining this balance is key to a person's health.

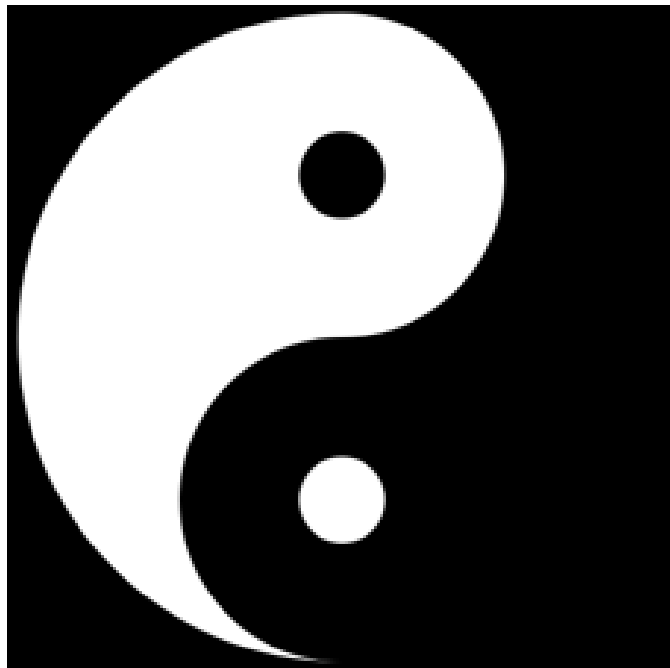
The methods of treatment used by Eastern and Western schools of medicine only accentuate the differences between the two. In Western medicine, treating a patient is all about changing the environment which is causing them harm. A cancerous tumor is attacked with a series of chemotherapy treatments, an infection is treated with antibiotics and medical equipment undergoes strict sterilization procedures. In Eastern medicine, treating a patient is about strengthening that patient's ability to thrive within his or her environment, and against any harmful circumstances. A patient with cancer or an

infection would receive treatment to bolster his or her body's ability to fight the disease independently. Medical tools would not need to be 100% germ free because realistically no one is ever in an environment void of germs. Therefore, it is important for a body to be strong enough to cope with the unsterile environments it inhabits.

Although traditional Chinese medicine possesses 5,000 years of wisdom, all the advances in modern Western knowledge would surely make this ancient tradition obsolete, right? What does TCM have that Western medicine has not already surpassed? From a traditionally Western point of view, TCM is quack medicine, exemplifying what the practice of medicine used to be like before our modern scientific advances. However, TCM understands something that Western medicine continues to grapple with: The importance of working with the forces we humans do not yet understand, unmeasurable and just outside our realm of comprehension. It views a person as a whole being and the universe as a vast

field of systems within systems. Each small part is a microcosm of the greater whole. Thus, it recognizes the importance of spirituality in health practice, and the practice of healing as a spiritual endeavor itself. Its integrity does not depend on controlling every aspect of a scenario or measuring out every detail. Instead, it pushes with the unmeasurables, acknowledging them as the workings of a greater system of which we are all a part.

In this way, TCM is a valuable perspective for Western medical practitioners. Western society has certainly made great strides in science and medicine, but it would be ignorant to claim that our methods offer the only real solutions to illness and disease. Similarly, it might be unwise to use TCM exclusively without infusing it with the lessons learned by the medical community through careful experimentation. Just like the yin-yang, it's all about balance.



*Yang (left) and Yin (right), image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

# Diversity & Asian American Actors

by ELIZABETH RICE

It is a rarity to see five Asian actors in any American theater or film piece short of *The Joy Luck Club*. However, in *King of the Yees*, playwright Lauren Yee speaks her truth and delves into her understanding and disconnect of her Chinese heritage and her relationship with her home Chinatown. More and more, we see Asian-American artists push back against the stereotype laid out for them by Hollywood, the whitewashing of Asian characters in prominent movies, and the flat out cultural appropriation instigated by pop culture. Below are a few articles that further dive into the Asian artists fight to reclaim and rebuild their identity in media. What do you think? Is there claim justify? Do you see aspects of your identity represented or overtaken by the media? How would you fight back?

[“Asian Actors are Fighting for Visibility. They will not be ignored.” By Amanda Hess, The New York Times](#)

[#RepresentationDoesn’tMatter: A Spoken Word Poem by Jason Chu and Alex Luu](#)

[Where the Fierce Asians At? By David Yi, Mashable.com](#)

[“For the First Time Ever, An Asian-American Has Been Cast In a Classic Tennessee Williams Role” By Maureen Lenker, LA Weekly](#)



# THEATER ETIQUETTE

## What Should I Wear?

For a lot of people, going to the theater is a special event, and they like to dress up for it.

**Remember:** even though you are on a field trip you should dress according to your school's dress code. The Goodman is air conditioned, so bring a sweater or extra layer in case you get cold.

## What if I need to leave the theatre during the show?

Only if it is an **emergency**. Otherwise, it's very disrespectful. Make sure to use restrooms before the show, or wait until intermission.

**Be respectful** to the artists on stage, and to your fellow audience members. No talking during the performance, no feet on seats, and no kicking. No use of phones or electronic devices – the glow from the screen is distracting to your fellow audience members and the actors (and yes, they can see it)!

## How should I respond to what's going on on the stage?

Honestly but appropriately. Theatre is very different from watching a movie at home. Always remember that you are in a room full of people who are there to watch the performance. They can hear your responses just as well as you can hear theirs. Most importantly, the actors can hear and see you. They will appreciate any appropriate feedback but might be offended if it is inappropriate. Whether you enjoy the play or not, you owe respect to the actors.

Please remember: **no smoking, and no eating or drinking** while inside the theater.





### **What to do before the show:**

When you arrive at the Goodman, you will be given a ticket and asked to sit. It is a good idea to arrive at least 15-20 minutes before the performance. If you are late, often you will not be allowed to enter the show until after intermission. Once your group is called, an usher will lead you to your seats and hand you a program. Please promptly sit where you have been assigned. Remember that the show needs to begin on time and everyone needs to be seated.

### **What to do during Intermission:**

Most plays have a 15 minute intermission. This gives you time to stretch your legs, use the restroom, get some water, and discuss the play with your friends. We do ask that you remain on the floor where your seat is – there are restrooms on both levels. When intermission is over, the lights in the lobby will flash several times. That is your cue to get back to your seat, because the performance is about to begin!

### **What to do after the show:**

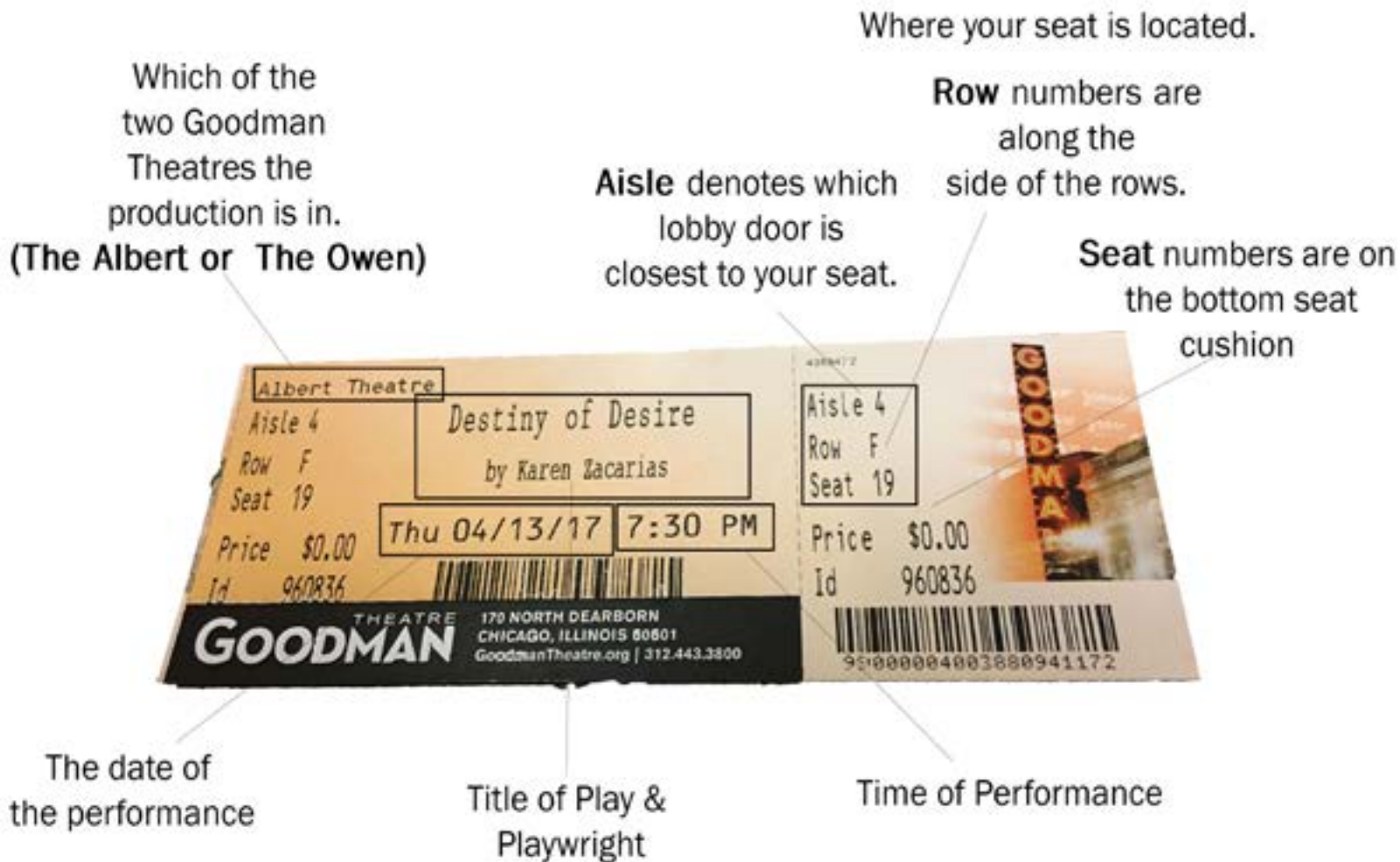
There will be a post-show discussion immediately following the performance. Members of the cast will come out on stage and answer your questions. Feel free to ask anything that's on your mind about the show, but please remember to be respectful.



# READING YOUR TICKET

As a patron of the theatre, it is important to know how to read your ticket and find your seat. Generally, seats for all performances in the Goodman's Albert Theatre are assigned seating, so be sure to know how to be able to find your seat. When you come with your school, you will be ushered to a section where you and your fellow students can sit and enjoy the play together.

Below is an explanation of how to read your ticket, and all of the information that you can get from your ticket. If you have any problems, ask an usher for help. They're here for you!



**GOODMAN** THEATRE