

LP² STUDY GROUP PROPOSAL FOR FALL 2022

AWARD-WINNING ASIAN AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHTS

Coordinator: Susan Sabatino and Dolores Walker

Class members will find themselves immersed in the beauty, drama, humor and pathos of contemporary Asian American plays by: Pulitzer Prize winning David Henry Hwang (*M. Butterfly, Yellow Face, Flower Drum Song*); Legacy Award winning Philip Kan Gotanda (*Sisters Matsumoto, Yankee Dawg You Die*); Signature Playwright in Residence Lauren Yee (*Cambodian Rock Band, Great Leap*) and others. We begin with an overview of Asian American Theatre and its performers. Through assigned plays, we explore the trajectory of the Asian American experience from the 1800s to today. Through an analysis of the plays, class members develop knowledge of a wide variety of theatrical forms and techniques and examine universal issues of identity, invisibility, assimilation as well as historical issues of exclusion and oppression.

Susan Sabatino was an instructor at the Professional Performing Arts School for 25 years, where she taught Humanities and Theater History. She has coordinated three study groups for LP²: Bertolt Brecht; Race, Complex Conversations and Systemic Inequalities. Susan is currently chairperson of the Diversity Committee. She is coordinating this Study Group in honor of her late husband, Dean Kaoru Koga.

Dolores Walker has had productions at La Mama, Lincoln Center's Bruno Walter Auditorium, and other theatres. Her co-authored play, *Recess* (at LaMama), was made into a film that won the Atlanta Film Festival. Dolores has coordinated HUAC: Playwrights and Filmmakers, Contemporary American Women Playwrights and Prize-winning Black Playwrights. Both Dolores and Susan are former members of Actors Equity Association.

Type of Study Group: Presentation, video, discussion

Readings and other Materials/Online Services:

Note: While most scripts can be ordered directly from the publishers, Drama Book Shop has agreed to order a sufficient supply once we know the number of class members. Drama Book Shop 212-944-0595 is located at 266 W. 39th St. NYC (www.dramabookshop.com)

Please order scripts listed by ISBN number, using the correct number, as scenes from some scripts may be read aloud.

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The Chinese Lady by Lloyd Suh, available from Dramatists Play Service, (www.dramatists.com) \$11.00

Yellow Face by David Henry Hwang, Dramatists Play Service; video available on YouTube; also available online in two week free trial <https://www.perlego.com/book/729655/yellow-face-tcg-edition-pdf>. If you wish to buy the script: Dramatists Play Service, (www.dramatists.com) \$11.00

Sisters Matsumoto by Philip Kan Gotanda - (*script to be made available via pdf*) A few scenes will be read in class - Do not use the audio recording

Yankee Dawg You Die by Philip Kan Gotanda, Dramatists Play Service (www.dramatists.com) \$11.00

Caught by Christopher Chen, Dramatists Play Service (www.dramatists.com) \$11.00

M. Butterfly by David Henry Hwang, 1988, ISBN 978-0-822-207- 122 Dramatists Play Service (www.dramatists.com) \$11.00 ; not the 2017 revised version

The Great Leap by Lauren Yee, ISBN 99780573707285 Samuel French Acting Edition (www.concordtheatricals.com) \$9.95

Cambodian Rock Band by Lauren Yee, ISBN 9780573707247 Samuel French Acting Edition (www.concordtheatricals.com) \$9.95; available online (https://canvas.umn.edu/courses/192086/assignments/1514911?module_item_id=5072715) in downloadable PDF.

Flower Drum Song (2002 revised revival): Book by David Henry Hwang, ISBN 9781559362221 (2022) Theatre Communications Group (www.tcg.org) \$12.95 (Will be made available at Drama Books) OR also available online in two week free trial (<https://www.concordtheatricals.com/s/44887/rodgers-hammersteins-flower-drum-song-hwang-version>)

WEEK 1

TOPIC: The History of Asian American Theater in America and the issues

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of representation of Asian characters in American theater and film

READING:

<https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/guest-making-lsquothe-mikadorsquo-without-asian-stereotypes/>

QUESTIONS:

What year did Asian American theaters begin in this country? Were there specific dramatic themes emphasized in the early theatres? And later? What has been the sociological and psychological effect of having white actors play Asian roles (starting in 1757), on both the Asian community and the non-Asian community? Can and should “classics” like the Mikado be adjusted to eliminate stereotyping and white-casting?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: *The Chinese Lady* by Lloyd Suh

READING/VIEWING: In addition to the play:

Afrong Moy, the First Chinese Woman in American

<https://lithub.com/the-life-of-afong-moy-the-first-chinese-woman-in-america/>

“Here's how pop culture has perpetuated harmful stereotypes of Asian women”

<https://www.today.com/popculture/here-s-how-pop-culture-has-perpetuated-harmful-stereotypes-asian-t213676>

Video: A scene from the play:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4IT2CQ7UiM>

QUESTIONS:

What did you learn about Chinese history in the US that you did not know? Find three statements that Afong or Atung made, or situations she is in, which resonate with you, either as a woman, or as an immigrant. Where and why? How does the audience play a character in *The Chinese Lady*?

WEEK 3

TOPIC: *Yellow Face* by David Henry Hwang

READING/VIEWING: Read the play. Watch the Zoom-adapted version online.

Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kriv9cyn9Hc>

Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=yellow+face+huang

Read: "The Battle of 'Miss Saigon': Yellowface, Art and Opportunity"

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/theater/the-battle-of-miss-saigon-yellowface-art-and-opportunity.html>

QUESTIONS:

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There are two valid sides to the argument as to who *should* play Asian characters. Where are you in this argument and why? Please explain how the dialogue on p.16 between Hwang and his father demonstrates generational differences. Hwang makes his character, DWH, the most foolish character in this satire. Is this an effective choice in making his points?

WEEK 4

TOPIC: *Sisters Matsumoto* by Philip Kan Gotanda

READING: Read the play.

QUESTIONS:

What are some of the ghosts haunting each of the sisters? Are there generational differences? How are the roles of Hideo, Bola and Henry differentiated? A few critics have compared this play to *Cherry Orchard*. Do you see any similarity?

WEEK 5

TOPIC: *Yankee Dawg You Die* by Philip Kan Gotanda

READING: Read the play.

QUESTIONS:

What are the themes in *Yankee Dawg*? Are the characters fully delineated? What makes *Yankee Dawg* a play and not an essay?

WEEK 6: *Caught* by Christopher Chen

WEEK 7 and WEEK 8: *M. Butterfly* by David Henry Hwang

WEEK 9: *The Great Leap* by Lauren Yee

WEEK 10: *Cambodian Rock Song* by Lauren Yee

WEEK 11: *Flower Drum Song - Revised 2002 Version - Book* by Hwang

WEEK 12: TBD