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THE CHINESE LADY

BY
LLOYD SUH

DIRECTED BY
WYNNE CHAN

IN REPERTORY
APRIL 19 - MAY 12

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ARTISTIC NOTE

By offering A. R. Gurney's *Love Letters* (1988) and Lloyd Suh's *The Chinese Lady* (2018) in tandem, *The Pear* brings together two one-act, two-character plays, each covering a lifetime. In both, an unconventional woman brings what director Wynne Chan calls "joy and disruption" to the life of a more disciplined man, as the confidence and exuberance of youth are followed by hard-won knowledge. And in both plays, prejudices and social constraints affect much of the action. Serious as those problems are, the characters' clear-eyed views of a limiting world are enlivened by their often comic and ironic awareness of their situations.

Gurney conceived *Love Letters* as a short novel but discovered that he had actually written a play. Many actors, famous and not, have taken on its two roles, Andy and Melissa, often as part of a rapidly changing cast. At *The Pear*, each on-stage couple is also a couple in real life, but they do not necessarily correspond in gender, race, age, or otherwise to the characters they are playing. As a result, we are kept aware that we are seeing a performance. Yet in a sense, letters themselves are performances—presentations and representations of something other than themselves.

Andy and Melissa were born into wealthy WASP families in 1930 and are trained from childhood to follow the customs of a rigid society, and while Andy conforms, Melissa rebels. He values his stable family, while she feels that she has "no family" because hers is dysfunctional. Her rebellion may be a reason that Andy is attracted to her, but it is also a source of his worries about her. Without a support system, she is a "lost princess" he would like to rescue, but rescue comes at a cost.

Lloyd Suh has said that he wrote *The Chinese Lady* in "a different cultural moment" than today, but, if anything, it is more relevant now than six years ago, because the Covid epidemic and other events have intensified anti-Asian American and Pacific Island (AAPI) prejudices in the United States. The play begins with a true historical situation, the presence of Afong Moy on a stage in New York in 1834. She was the first Chinese woman to arrive in the United States, coming at a time when the aesthetic attraction of chinoiserie lingered and Chinese immigration was not yet seen as a threat, but also when Asians were often believed to be radically different from Caucasians.

As Suh says, the play is not "a recreation of history" but a play about today, so Afong and her interpreter, Atung, speak contemporary English, and the actors represent rather than embody them. That is, we always know that we are being shown an interpretation of events rather than a recreation of her show—which itself, as Afong says, takes place in a room "unlike any room in China" and is inhabited by a lady "unlike any lady to ever live." It too is an imagined construction, not an image of literal truth. The way she and the initially mysterious Atung react to their situations and to events in America pushes us into examining our own feelings more than those of her 1834 audience. Whether we are AAPI ourselves or not, we will certainly be moved by Afong's and Atung's emotions, insights, and desires.

Different as these two plays may seem at first, both ask us to examine America's past cultural prejudices and constraints but, more immediately, those of today as well.

—Susan Petit



ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Lloyd Suh (b. 1975) was born in Detroit to South Korean immigrants and grew up in a suburb of Indianapolis, where there were few Asian Americans or Pacific Islanders. He earned a B.A. from Indiana University with a major in English. Suh moved to New York to study under playwright Romulus Linney and earned an M.F.A. from the New School for Social Research. He has taught at Columbia and Hunter, and is currently a lecturer in theatre at Princeton.

Once in New York, Suh was able to explore an AAPI identity from which he had felt isolated, and he began to write plays concerning AAPI/Caucasian relations. *The Heart Sellers* (2023), which TheatreWorks is including in its next season, takes its title from the 1965 Hart-Celler Act. This legislation allowed Asians (including Suh's parents) to come to America after decades of laws prohibited immigration from Asian and some other countries. Suh's most recent play, *The Far Country* (2024), a Pulitzer finalist, is currently on stage at Berkeley Rep. It was inspired by the ways in which many Chinese managed to come here in spite of the Chinese Exclusion Act, and the difficulties they faced doing so. Suh has received a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Horton Foote Prize and was a winner of the 1923 Steinberg Playwright Awards. He lives in New Jersey with his wife Jeanie and their three young children.

Co-world premiere presented at Barrington Stage
(Julianne Boyd, Artistic Director; Branden Huldeen, Artistic Producer),
Pittsfield, MA, July 2018

Commissioned by and co-world premiere presented by Ma-Yi Theater
Company
(Ralph B. Peña, Artistic Director)
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Set Designer

Louis Stone-Collonge 石麟侶

Lighting Designer

Sonya Wong 黃至敏

History & Cultural

Consultant

Patrick Chew 趙錦洋

Producer

Sinjin Jones 琮森權

SHOW RUNTIME

90 minutes

with a 5 minute

drink service

Cast

Eiko Moon-Yamamoto 山本英子 ... AFONG*

Joann Wu 吳加欣 ... AFONG*

Joseph Alvarado 區讚祖 ... ATUNG

Daniel Cai 蔡天逸 ... ATUNG (U/S)

*The role of AFONG will alternate.

Performance Schedule

Eiko Moon-Yamamoto will be performing
on **4/20, 4/25, 4/28, 5/4 & 5/12.**

Joann Wu will be performing
on **4/21, 4/27, 5/5, 5/9 & 5/11.**

Thank you to Clara Hsu, Tony Cardoza, and Patrick Chew for loaning us set, props, and exhibition pieces for *The Chinese Lady*.

Thank you to Rebs Chan and Berkeley Rep for sharing their research with us on Chinese American Immigration from Lloyd Suh's *The Far Country*.

Events in Chinese American History



1898: U.S. v. Wong Kim Ark

In a landmark decision, the Supreme Court upholds birthright citizenship of Wong Kim Ark despite the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited Chinese immigrants from becoming naturalized citizens. This set an important precedent, granting automatic citizenship for all future U.S. born Chinese descendants.



1910 - 1940: Angel Island

During the height of the Chinese Exclusion Act, over 250,000 Chinese immigrants were processed at Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, where they were detained and interrogated for months or years under harsh conditions. Though sometimes referred to as the “Ellis Island of the West”, the mostly European immigrants to New York were treated courteously and often processed in a matter of hours.



1937: Anna May Wong stars in Daughters of Shanghai

Anna May Wong becomes the first Chinese American actress to gain Hollywood and international fame, and stars in the first American film to portray Asian women in a non-stereotypical light.



1943: Chinese Exclusion Act Repealed

After 82 years of legalized discrimination, a new influx of immigrants revitalized the mostly male Chinese American population. Though this did not guarantee widespread societal acceptance, it transformed the Chinese American community into one filled with families and children.



1982: Killing of Vincent Chin

On the night before his wedding, Vincent Chin was beaten to death by two auto workers in Detroit who thought he was Japanese. Though Vincent Chin was Chinese, the anti-Japanese resentment at the time made no distinction between different Asian descents.

Special Events at The Pear

Sunday, April 21

“The Real Afong Moy” post-show presentation by historical and cultural consultant, Patrick Chew.

Sunday, April 28

AAPI Matinee with snacks to follow.

Saturday, May 4

Post-show AAPI Industry Mixer.

Sunday, May 5

Post-show panel discussion featuring Asian American Playwrights.

May is Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.

Join us in recognizing the contributions and influence of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islander Americans to the history, culture, and achievements of the United States.

CAST



Joseph Alvarado 區讚祖 (ATUNG) is honored to be among the phenomenal cast and crew of *The Chinese Lady*, his first production with The Pear Theatre. He has performed on stages throughout the Bay Area and most recently appeared as 'Beau' and 'Mr. Upson' in *Mame* (42nd Street Moon). Some of his most cherished experiences include playing 'Resten' in *The Language Archive* (Masquers Playhouse), 'Jack' in *Aunt Jack* (New Conservatory Theatre Center), 'Chin' in *Flower Drum Song* (Palo Alto Players), 'Jacob' in *La Cage aux Folles* (Bay Area Musicals) and 'Bobby' in *Company* (City College of San Francisco). He was born, raised and is still living in San Francisco and shares his home with his 18-year old cat, Malcolm.



Daniel Cai 蔡天逸 (U/S: ATUNG) is in constant pursuit of theatre that is experimental in form and rejects simple resolutions. He is unreasonably excited by workshop rehearsals, ensemble movement, and scene transitions. Informed by his hyphenated identities, he cares deeply about representation and filling in incomplete narratives. When not making art, he makes self-driving cars at Waymo. Previously, he graduated from Stanford University where he found his family away from home with the Asian American Theatre Project, serving on the Board for two years and as Artistic Director for one. Selected credits include: *Caught* by Christopher Chen (director), *The Good Person of Szechwan* by Bertolt Brecht (assistant director), and *Durango* by Julia Cho (technical director). Daniel is equal parts thrilled and humbled to be making his Bay Area theatre debut and wishes to thank the Pear for this opportunity!

CAST



Eiko Moon-Yamamoto 山本英子 (AFONG) is a multi-hyphenate artist born in Tokyo with roots in Seoul and Hawaii. Recent credits: *Sleeping Beauty* (Presidio Theatre), *Cymbeline* (San Francisco Shakespeare Festival), *Clue*, *Follies* (San Francisco Playhouse), *Into the Woods* (Mountain Play), *Disenchanted!* (3Below), and the world premiere of *Downtown Crossing* (Company One), and M'Lynn in *Steel Magnolias* (Sierra Repertory). They've performed in workshops/ readings at The Pear, Magic Theatre, Playwrights Foundation, Crowded Fire, ZSpace, Marin Shakespeare, PlayGround, and The Ground Floor at Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Upcoming: *Bright Star* (42nd Street Moon) and *The Truer History of the Chan Family* (film). Eiko is a proud member of SAG-AFTRA and Ring of Keys. eiko@eikoyamamoto.com | [@eikoyh](#)



Joann Wu 吳加欣 (AFONG) is grateful to make her Pear Theatre debut in this poignant story. She is a bay area local, investigating medical treatments by day and exploring our common human experiences through theater by night. Her favorite roles are Ms. Qian/Prosecutor Li in *Chinglish* (SF Playhouse, u/s) and Meibo in *The Butterfly Lovers of Gold Mountain* (California Revels) where she conjured Monkey King from classic novel *Journey to the West*, and elements of Cantonese Opera that she listened to with her grandparents as a child. Other credits include Margot in *Legally Blonde* (Foothill Music Theater), Melanie in *Toxic* (City Lights Theatre Company), and Ambrosia Jekyll in *Chemical Imbalance* (San Leandro Players). *The Chinese Lady* pushes many different boundaries for Joann, and she hopes this "short" journey is just as rewarding for you!

PRODUCTION TEAM

Wynne Chan 陳嘉盈 (Director) is a Hong Kong-American director and performer. She is thrilled to return to The Pear to direct these two beautiful shows. She was last seen on The Pear stage as Aphrodite, Apollo & others in *Metamorphoses*. Favorite credits: Directing *Tell Me on a Sunday* by Andrew Lloyd Webber (SDC Productions), associate directing *Chinglish* by David Henry Hwang (San Francisco Playhouse), directing *The Language Archive* by Julia Cho (Masquers Playhouse), and performing in *Assassins* by Stephen Sondheim (Hillbarn Theatre). As a director, her goal is to tell more Asian and Asian American stories. Later this year, she will be directing *She Kills Monsters* by Qui Nguyen (Plethos Productions) and *Dragonbeard* by Clara Hsu, the first original Cantonese play in the Bay Area. See what she's up to at wynnechan.info or follow her on Instagram: [wynne.chan](https://www.instagram.com/wynne.chan).

Daniel Cai 蔡天逸 (Assistant Director) is in constant pursuit of theatre that is experimental in form and rejects simple resolutions. He is unreasonably excited by workshop rehearsals, ensemble movement, and scene transitions. Informed by his hyphenated identities, he cares deeply about representation and filling in incomplete narratives. When not making art, he makes self-driving cars at Waymo. Previously, he graduated from Stanford University where he found his family away from home with the Asian American Theatre Project, serving on the Board for two years and as Artistic Director for one. Selected credits include: *Caught* by Christopher Chen (director), *The Good Person of Szechwan* by Bertolt Brecht (assistant director), and *Durango* by Julia Cho (technical director). Daniel is equal parts thrilled and humbled to be making his Bay Area theatre debut and wishes to thank the Pear for this opportunity!

Sonya Wong 黃至敏 (Lighting Designer) is a lighting designer and actor based in the Bay Area. She graduated from UC Irvine with honors in lighting design & technology and a minor in linguistics. She is excited to be working with The Pear again after having designed *The Piano Teacher* and *Three Tall Women* in 2022. Other lighting design credits include *The Madwoman of Chailot*, *The Macbeth Project*, *Two Sisters and a Piano*, and *Agnes of God*. In her free time, Sonya enjoys casual gaming, reading, and playing badminton. Website: www.sonya-wong.com

Sharon Peng 彭逸娟 (Costume Designer) Y. Sharon Peng is pleased to be collaborating with the artists of *The Chinese Lady* at The Pear. Past productions in this genre include *Allegiance* (Costume & Hair Designer, Palo Alto Players), *Tiger Style!* (Costume Designer, Cinnabar Theatre), *The Great Leap* (Costume & FX Makeup Designer, Perseverance Theatre), *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Wig & Makeup Foreperson, San Francisco Opera), and *The Man in the High Castle* (additional makeup artist, Amazon Prime). For more regarding the immigration of Chinese-Americans in the era of the Chinese Exclusion Act, see Silicon Valley Shakespeare's production of *The Comedy of Errors* this summer (Props Designer). Sharon is a member of IATSE Local 706 Hair & Makeup Union. Visit ysharonpeng.net to see work across two decades.

PRODUCTION TEAM

Patrick Chew 趙錦洋 (Historical and Cultural Consultant) is delighted to be working with Pear Theatre for the first time on *The Chinese Lady*. He has previously coached/consulted for: San Jose Stage Company, Masquers Playhouse, San Francisco Playhouse, Jungle Theater, ACT, Ten Thousand Things Theater, Palo Alto Players, Contra Costa Civic Theater, and Jay Kuo Productions. He has degrees in Linguistics and East Asian Languages (Chinese, Altaic Languages) from UC Berkeley, and has been written up for his hyperpolyglossia by Michael Erard (author of *Babel no more*). Patrick's day-job is normally in tech, focusing on internationalization and localization.

Howard Ho 何維德 (Composer & Original Compositions) is a playwright, composer and sound designer. This is his Pear Theatre debut. Other Bay Area credits include *Tiger Style* (TheatreWorks), *My Home on the Moon* (SF Playhouse), *The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin* (SF Playhouse, SF Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle nomination), *The Santaland Diaries* (TheatreWorks), and *The Crucible* (Los Altos Stage). Ho has also sound designed at Center Theatre Group, East West Players, Deaf West, Perseverance Theatre, Playwrights' Arena, Native Voices and Company of Angels among many others. As a playwright, his play *Reset* was produced at Moving Arts in 2023 and was an O'Neill finalist and a Bay Area Playwrights Semifinalist. His Youtube channel (youtube.com/HowardHoMusic) dissects musicals and has over 120,000 subscribers and was recognized by Lin-Manuel Miranda. He holds degrees from UCLA and USC. Instagram: @howardwho

Kelly Weber Barraza 衛連凱 (Stage & Production Manager) has been happily working at The Pear since 2014 and became their resident Stage Manager in 2020. Some of her favorite Pear productions include: *Noises Off*, *Fairfield*, *Eight Nights*, *What You Will*, *Uncle Vanya*, *August: Osage County*, and *Taking Steps*. Other favorite works are: *The Bridges of Madison County* (South Bay Musical Theatre), *Yellow Face* (Los Altos Stage Company), *Bright Star* (Palo Alto Players), *The Oskar Education Tour* (TheatreWorks), and working with ""The Misfit of Magic"", Ed Alonzo of ""Saved By the Bell"" fame. Kelly is always grateful for the love and support of her theatre widowed husband, Michael, and their fur babies: Sopaipilla, Houdini, and Baxter.

Louis Stone-Collonge 石麟侶 (Set Designer and Technical Director) has been involved in local theatre on and off since 1979 when he would tag along with his father building sets with Montalvo Players in the Carriage House Theatre at Montalvo. He is founder of The Audacity Performing Arts Project serving Title 1 schools in the South Bay since 2012 with arts education and performing arts programming. In addition to working at Audacity and The Pear, Louis currently serves as technical theatre coach at Cupertino High School and technical theatre advisor at Stratford High School. He holds a degree in Religious Studies from San Jose State University, he has been sober for 12 years and we dare you to ask him about why he likes Michel Foucault or why he likes Gramsci's take on hegemony. Louis shares his chaotic and charmed existence with his beloved wife and life partner, Michelle, their daughter, Caitlin, and two ridiculous Italian Greyhounds.

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