



# *Tiger Style!* DRAMATURGY

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# MODEL MINORITY

Written by Michelle N. Huang, Cultural Consultant



Christopher Thomas Pow and Aurora Adachi-Winter in *Tiger Style!* Photo by Liz Lauren

The term “model minority” is commonly understood as referring to Asian Americans who have attained a high degree of educational and professional success in comparison to other races or immigrant groups. (1) The concept traces back to white sociologist William Petersen’s 1966 New York Times article “Success story: Japanese American style,” (2) which discusses Japanese American achievement in the years after internment. Petersen and many other writers of his time both explicitly and implicitly used Asian Americans as a “wedge” group to malign Black Americans, who at the time were seeking enfranchisement through the Civil Rights Movement.

Another important and overlooked context for the transformation of Asian Americans from yellow peril to model minority is the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Commonly referred to as the 1965 Immigration Act, this law reversed years of anti-Asian immigration policy by 1) lifting previous geographical restrictions; and 2) prioritizing professionals and scientists deemed highly-skilled, as well as immediate family members of immigrants already in the United States. (3) The implementation of these changes has since produced a domestic population of educated Asian American immigrants with a higher percentage of college graduates compared to both their country of origin and the United States—for example, 4% of people living in China have college degrees, but approximately 51% of Chinese emigrants to the U.S. do. (4) (An important exception to this immigration pattern in the latter half of the twentieth century is refugees of the Vietnam War.) Despite frequently misattribution to Asian cultural values and even genetics, it is important to remember that any “truth” of the model minority must take into account the broader history of racial discrimination and immigration policies in the United States.

# TIGER PARENTING

Written by Michelle N. Huang, Cultural Consultant



Aurora Adachi-Winter, Rammel Chan, Deanna Myers, and Christopher Thomas Pow in "Tiger Style!"  
Photo by Liz Lauren

Thrust into the national spotlight in 2011 by a Wall Street Journal excerpt from Yale law professor Amy Chua's memoir "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother", (1) the stereotype of tiger parenting is commonly understood as exacting high expectations and achievement from children through harsh or strict methods that some view as "tough love" and others view as cruel. Chua writes, "the Chinese believe that the best way to protect their children is by preparing them for the future, letting them see what they're capable of, and arming them with skills, work habits, and inner confidence that no one can ever take away," before gleefully recounting how she ruled her daughters with an iron fist, refused any grade less than an A, forbade sleepovers and dating, and forced them to practice piano and violin for hours on end. (2) This authoritarian parenting style is associated most strongly with Chinese (and Chinese American) families, as opposed to other ethnic groups. However, psychology studies have found that not only is tiger parenting not a common parenting profile among Chinese Americans, the best developmental outcomes for children of all racial and ethnic groups comes from supportive parenting. (3) In fact, authoritarian attitudes to parenting can lead to the achievement/adjustment paradox, whereby high levels of academic success are not accompanied by gains in mental health. (4) For Asian Americans specifically, the internalization of narrow notions of success and failure can lead to young people who don't perform at an elite level feeling like "bad Asians." Finally, the trope's outsized popularity with white Americans is often used to reinforce the idea that racism can be overcome through family values and individual hard work. (5)

# SHENZHEN, CHINA

Written by Jeremy Pesigan



Christopher Thomas Pow and Aurora Adachi-Winter in Tiger Style! Photo by Liz Lauren

Shenzhen is a city in the Southern China, bordering Hong Kong. The city has grown from a population of 350,000 people to 17.5 million since being designated as the first “special economic zone” in 1980. In order to attract more foreign investment to the country, the paramount leader of China, Deng Xiaoping, launched the Open and Reform Policy in 1979. As part of the policy, foreign companies receive special tax benefits and preferential treatment in special economic zones. Some of those benefits include reduced income tax, duty-free exports, and lowered import tariffs.

The high-tech industry, including manufacturing, makes up a third of Shenzhen’s GDP. Some of the most well-known companies that produce in Shenzhen are Huawei, the world’s largest telecommunications manufacturer; Tencent, a highly valued Internet giant; DJI (Da Jiang), a drone manufacturer; Oppo, a consumer electronics company; Ping An, a global insurance and financial technology company; and most infamously, Foxconn, which manufactures electronics.

Foxconn is a Taiwanese owned company and the largest private employer in China, producing electronics for BlackBerry, iPad, iPhone, iPod, Kindle, Nintendo, Nokia, Sony, Google Pixel, Dell, and Hewlett-Packard. They have a campus in Longhua Town, Shenzhen that contains factories, a grocery store, swimming pools, a bank, restaurants, a bookstore, a



Christopher Thomas Pow and Aurora Adachi-Winter in "Tiger Style!" Photo by Liz Lauren

hospital, its own television network, and dormitories for workers. It is sometimes referred to as Foxconn City. The campus gained notoriety in 2010 after a series of suicide attempts due to the difficult working conditions. Many workers work up to 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. Though overtime hours are regulated by law, many workers reported that companies do not follow the rules and workers work up to triple the overtime limit of 36 hours a month.

Though mainstream definitions of satire include the notion of critiquing a universal “human nature,” "Tiger Style!" works through a specifically “Asian American” experience. (I mark “Asian American” here initially in quotes because while the term originates from student activism in Berkeley in 1968, the term has since become a less political, more demographic descriptor).

In telling the story of Albert and Jennifer Chen, Lew plays upon the tropes of Asian American narratives. The characters have “model minority” achievements spurned in part by a strict upbringing, playing out intergenerational conflict with their parents when they experience interpersonal failures. The conflict is in part attributed to the oversimplified notion of differences between the “East” and “West,” the “Eastern” values of their parents against the “Western” values of their peers. Importantly in this piece, the “return” to the motherland is a reversal of most Asian American narratives, which focus on immigration to the United States. Albert, Jennifer, and the other characters of the play are often aware of their participation in stereotypes or plot devices, evidenced by popular culture references to Amy Tan, "Crazy Rich Asians," and "To All The Boys I've Loved Before." In satirizing the stereotypes of Asian America, Lew creates a journey of self-discovery for the two siblings that pits their abstract notions of identity against the material realities they encounter along the way.

# TIMELINE OF CHINESE IMMIGRATION IN AMERICA

- 1838** • Following the discovery of gold in California, a large wave of Chinese people immigrate to the West Coast.
- 1858** • California legally prohibits Chinese and “Mongolian” immigration. After the Gold Rush ended in 1855, California government officials were likely concerned about the population of Chinese immigrants who now worked as farm, industrial, or railroad laborers.
- 1882** • Congress passes the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which halts Chinese laborer immigration for 10 years and denies Chinese people from becoming naturalized U.S. citizens. This is the first time a piece of legislation banned the immigration of a specific race or ethnicity.
- 1892** • The Geary Act extends the Chinese Exclusion Act for another 10 years and requires all Chinese residents to carry permits.
- 1904** • Congress makes the Chinese Exclusion Act indefinite. Law enforcement officials arrest 250 allegedly illegal Chinese immigrants without search warrants.
- 1906** • An earthquake destroys all immigration records in San Francisco. This opens the opportunity for a new surge of Chinese immigrants. These “paper sons” could now claim with the loss of official records that they were U.S. citizens and had the right to bring family members to America. The U.S. government creates the Bureau of Immigration.
- 1924** • The Asian Exclusion Act, which is part of the Immigration Act of 1924, excludes all Asian laborer immigrants from entering into the United States. The U.S. Border Patrol is created, as an agency under the Department of Labor, to regulate Chinese immigration to the United States across the U.S.-Mexico border.
- 1943** • Congress repeals all Chinese exclusion laws, grants Chinese the right to become naturalized citizens, and allows 105 Chinese to immigrate to the US each year. China and the United States become World War II allies against Japan. The U.S. Army drafts over 20 percent of Chinese men living in the United States.
- 1952** • The Walter-McCarran Immigration and Naturalization Act revokes the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924. A small number of Asians are also allowed to immigrate to the United States and are given citizenship status.
- 1953** • The Refugee Relief Act offers unlimited immigrant visas to Chinese refugees.
- 1965** • A new immigration act effectively removes racial bias from America's immigration laws.
- 1970-2000** • Chicago saw a rise in Chinese population during the 1970's, with communities forming in Chinatown and around Argyle Street on the city's north side. During the 1980s and 1990s, social organizations formed to provide support services to these communities like counseling, training, and education.
- 2016** • Irvine became the largest city in the continental United States, with Asian Americans making up the largest racial/ethnic group. 45.7% of the city's 272,694 residents are Asian American and about one third of those residents are Chinese American.

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