



NAATCO'S *HENRY VI*, *Shakespeare's Trilogy in Two Parts*



Qui Nguyen's *Vietgone*



Lincoln Center's revival of *The King and I*

ASIAN AMERICANS IN THEATRE: ART AND ACTIVISM

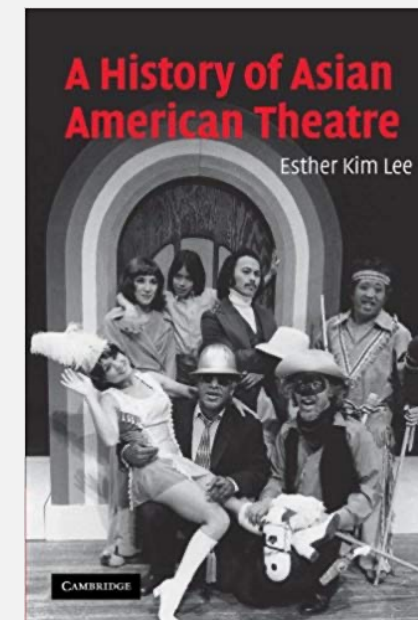
A series of three panel discussions
co-presented by the Barnard Theatre Department and
Asia Society's Performing Arts Department

Curated by Marina Chan

Fall 2018-Spring 2019

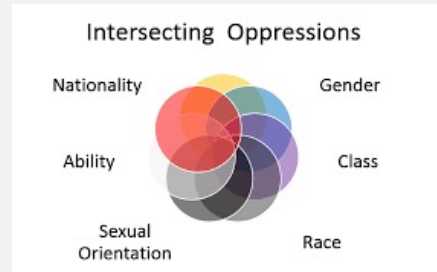
MY ROLE AS DRAMATURG

- A dramaturg is curious, a dramaturg asks questions
- This isn't a theatrical production but a series of panels, so how exactly am I a dramaturg?
 - Part of the work of a dramaturg can be arts education:
 - Establishing relationships between arts institutions, individual artists, educators and the community
 - Creating educational programs, planning and leading seminars and symposia
- By curating this educational series, my role has very much been that of a dramaturg, in a variety of forms
 - The obvious, by heading the series:
 - Integral to the artistic, pre-production and production processes and “performances” (panels)
 - Serving as creative diplomat who liaise with all those involved
 - Research and Development Dramaturgy
 - Production Dramaturgy
- Think of it metaphorically, just for fun: “Asian American theatre” is my body of research from which I'm building a “working script”; each panel is a “show”; the panelists and moderators are the “actors”

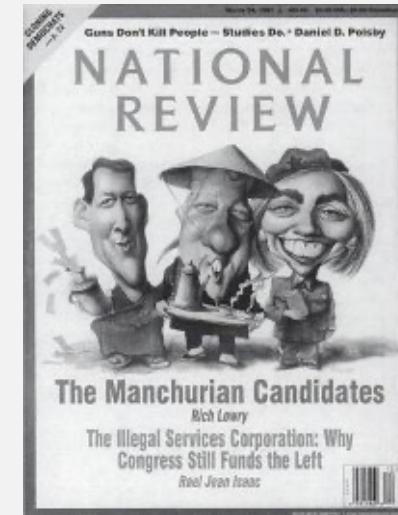


RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT DRAMATURGY

- Preliminary research
- Proposal to Asia Society
- Expanding our vision, deepening my research and creating my version of a dramaturg's protocol, casebook or pre-production study
- List of major questions, key words/buzz phrases/big issues
 - Power inequities, racist ideology, racial and cultural homogeneity, psycho-cultural perception of the menace from the East (the Yellow Peril), European and American orientalism (the exoticization, feminization and infantilization of Asia), cultural appropriation and usurpation (colonial, in its very essence)
 - Analytical frameworks: social stratification, intersectionality, social formation theory, racial formation theory
 - Psychoanalytical frameworks: racial melancholia and racial dissociation
- An essential part of my dramaturgical research was historical, to help me better understand the present and why there are lingering problems.
- What exactly are the practices in theater and film today that continue to impede Asian Americans?



"The Yellow Terror in all His Glory" (1899)



1997 illustrated cover of the National Review, with President Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton and Vice President Al Gore in stereotypical Oriental garb with caricatured features, buck teeth and slanted eyes.



Orientalism moved waves, starting with fascination with the Middle East and India, and by the end of the 19th Century exemplified by the story of the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, *The Mikado* (1885)



"Uncle Sam kicks out the 'Chinaman'" — US political cartoon (c. 1886) referring to the Chinese Exclusion Act and created to promote the "Magic Washer," which its manufacturers hoped would displace Chinese laundry operators.

EXAMPLES OF YELLOWFACE AND WHITEWASHING, FROM THE 1930S TO THE PRESENT

[Yellowface and
Whitewashing in
Hollywood video](#)



Tilda Swinton as the Ancient One in *Doctor Strange* (2016)



Scarlett Johansson as Major Mira Killian (changed from Major Motoko Kusanagi) in *Ghost in the Shell* (2017)



Sidney Toler as Charlie Chan (22 films made btw 1938 and 1946)



Yul Brynner as King of Siam in *The King and I* (original 1951 Broadway production and 1956 film)



2010 production of *The Mikado* at Symphony Space



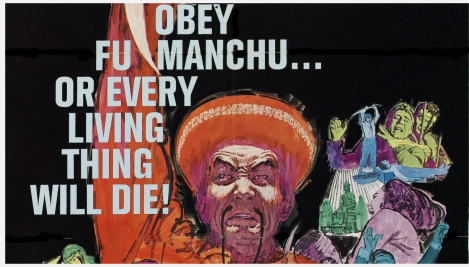
Luise Rainer as O-Lan in *The Good Earth* (1937) – Anna May Wong was passed up for this role bc of the Hays Code anti-miscegenation rules



Emma Stone as Allison Ng in *Aloha* (2015)

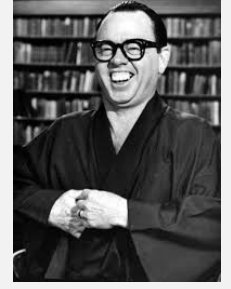


Jonathan Pryce as the French-Vietnamese Engineer in *Miss Saigon* on the West End (1989) and Broadway (1991)



LAYERING ON KAREN SHIMAKAWA'S ABJECTION THEORY

(TO UNDERSTAND WHY THESE ASIAN STEREOTYPES ARE ALL OVER THE PLACE)



Pollutant stereotype (threatening): the Yellow Peril = demonized, cunning, aggressive, sexually threatening

- male = Fu Manchu, Kung Fu bad guy, Commie bad guy, portending the oriental rape of the white woman, signifying a spiritual damnation for the woman and, at the larger level, white society
- female = Dragon Lady, Asian seductress, prostitute, highly exoticized and fetishized, an opportunistic sexual being or predatory gold digger



John Wayne as Genghis Khan in *The Conqueror* (1956)



Miyoshi Umeki as Lotus Blossom Mei Li in *Flower Drum Song* (1961 film)

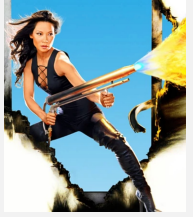


Peter Lorre as Mr. Moto in *Mr. Moto Takes a Chance* (1938)

Nonthreatening stereotype: perpetuates such supposed East Asian characteristics as: male = unemotional, stoic, inscrutable; female = tradition-bound, submissive, servile, demure

- male = Charlie Chan, created in direct response to Fu Manchu to create a positive depiction of Asians; while Chan is an overall positive depiction, he unfortunately perpetuated the effeminized/emasculated/asexual Asian male stereotype, as well as the "incapacity to speak idiomatic English" stereotype (bc of Chan's singsong fortune-cookie English); geek, comic sidekick
- female = Lotus Blossom, China doll, Geisha

Anna May Wong in *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931)



Lucy Liu in *Charlie's Angels* (2000)

Coolie stereotype: to keep Chinese laborers in low-paying unskilled jobs



Christopher Lee as Fu Manchu (five Fu Manchu movies, 1960s)



Katherine Hepburn in *Dragon Seed* (1944)



Gook stereotype: an offensive term for Asians originating during the Korean War and popularized during the Vietnam War (rice hat, slanted eyes, buck teeth)



Breakfast at Tiffany's (1961)

AND ALSO STARRING MICKEY ROONEY as "Mr. Yunioshi"

Model minority myth: originating in the 1950s as a representation of the successful assimilation of Asians, contrasted with the less successful assimilation of Blacks and Hispanics; this myth has silenced instances of racism and oppression that Asian American communities face



Marlon Brando in *Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956)



"In a Chinatown Opium Den"

Deviant stereotype: a response to the movement of Asians from common labor to household servants, laundrymen, operators of opium dens and the importation of women for prostitution



Martial artist stereotype (name an Asian actor – I can guess your answer: Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan)



Rob Schneider in *I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry* (2007)



2016 Academy Awards, Chris Rock made the kids the butt of a model minority racist joke



Pinkerton and Ciocio-san in *Madama Butterfly*



Chris and Kim in *Miss Saigon*



Lieutenant Cable and Liat in *South Pacific*

MORE RESEARCH DRAMATURGY

- List of the practices in theater and film today that continue to impede Asian Americans:
 - Yellowface, white-washing, lingering ethnic stereotypes perpetuating how we're typecast and pigeonholed, tokenism, white savior/the Hollywood Samaritan, other tropes (e.g. the white-savior romance between a "white knight" and "Lotus Blossom"), the same problematic shows produced over and over
 - Erasure of AA, a persistent sense of "otherness," not seen as being part of the fabric of the American story, but instead the background of other people's stories, the exotic set dressing
 - Mainstream casts for safe, recognizable tropes; old tired myth that AA talent is a gamble and doesn't bring in ratings; straight white people are universal, anyone else is niche
- Historical policies in the entertainment industry (such as the Hays Code of the 1930s, which lasted for three decades) have left behind racist legacies
- The heteronormative gaze structures masculine/feminine, white/nonwhite relations as metaphors for national and racial hierarchies of power:
 - **"white = male/masculine = American" vs. "Asian = female/feminine = not-American"**
- Other possible issues that are more artistic than sociopolitical



The Great Wall (with Matt Damon as the white savior)



#StarringConstanceWu

LISTS OF ASIAN AMERICAN THEATER COMPANIES, CONSORTIUMS ETC.



#StarringJohnCho

Consortiums/coalitions/national projects

Consortium of Asian American Theaters & Artists (CAATA) (NYC)
National Asian American Theater Conference and Festival (ConFest)

Arts in a Changing America (ArtChangeUS) (based at CalArts, Santa Clarita; Roberta Uno)

Asian American Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC) (has taken on the responsibility of organizing forums for the artistic community to discuss minority representation in NY theater, garnering statistics for each theater season; has hosted symposia and roundtable discussions as well) (NYC)

Asian American Arts Alliance (NYC)

Asian Pacific American Media Coalition (APAMC) (CA, I believe) (co-chairs Daniel Mayeda and Priscilla Ouchida)

Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA) (LA) (Guy Aoki = Founding President) (one of the member organizations of the APAMC)

Film and production companies

Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) (San Fran) Stephen Gong)

Asian American Film Lab (“Film Lab”) (Brooklyn)

Asian CineVision (NY) and its marquee program, the **Asian American International Film Festival (AAIFF)**

Wong Fu Productions (independent digital production company founded in 2003; on YouTube) (Philip Wang = co-founder, executive producer, director)

3AD Production Company (LA) (Daniel Dae Kim)

Theater companies

Ma-Yi Theatre Company (NYC)

National Asian American Theater Company (NAATCO) (NYC)

Ping Chong + Company

Second Generation (2g) (NYC)

Pan Asian Repertory Theatre (NYC)

National Asian Artists Project (NAAP) (NYC) (Baayork Lee, Steven Eng [voice, speech and text at Tisch], Nina Zoie Lam = co-founders) (like NAATCO, but for musicals)

Asian American Arts Alliance (NYC)

East West Players (LA)

Artists at Play (LA)

Silk Road Rising (Chicago)

Mu Performing Arts (Minneapolis)

Asian American Theater Company (San Fran)

Qui Nguyen’s **Vampire Cowboys** (downtown NYC)

Websites, social media, blogs, hashtag campaigns

Asian-nation.org (an authoritative, one-stop information resource and sociological exploration of the historical, demographic, political and cultural issues that make up today’s diverse AA community) (C.N. Le)

yellow-face.com

racebending.com

bananawriters.com

Keith Chow’s **The Nerds of Color** (blog about superheroes, sci-fi, fantasy and video games that’s not afraid to look at nerd/geek fandom with a culturally critical eye)

Angry Asian Man (internet blog founded in 2001 by Phil Yu; the blog focuses on AA news, media and politics)

#WhitewashedOut Movement, #OscarsSoWhite

#StarringJohnCho, #StarringConstanceWu

Others

Asian American Writers’ Workshop (AAWW)

(national not-for-profit organization devoted to the creating, publishing, developing and disseminating of creative writing by Asian Americans)

Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS)

Museums in NYC

Asian/Pacific/American Institute at NYU Museum of Chinese in America

RepresentAsian Conference (2012) (held by the Asian American Performers Action Coalition)

May is **Asian/Pacific Heritage Month**
HuffPost Asian Voices

Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC) = an affiliation of five organizations that work together to provide programs and services to the AAPI community nationwide

Working list of Asian American playwrights, actors, directors, founders of companies, writers etc.

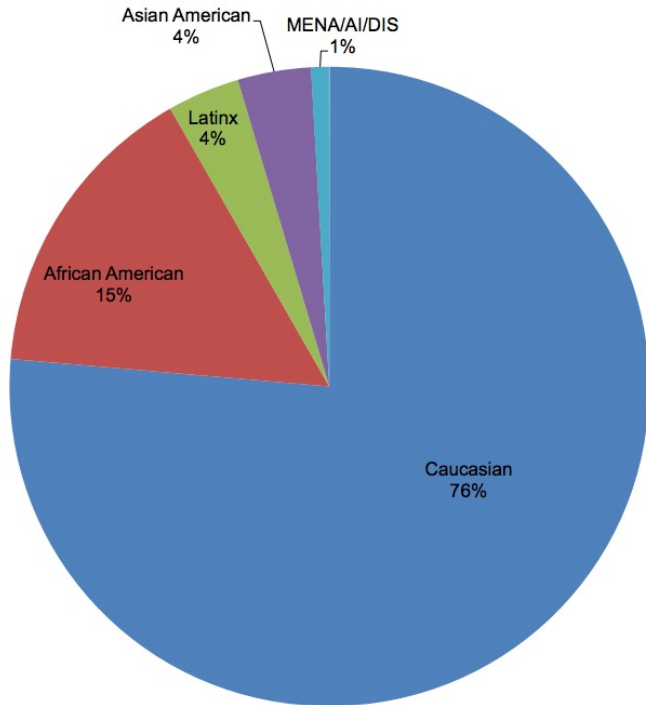
List of scholars/professors in Asian American Studies, Asian American performance, intercultural performance, critical race theory and/or queer theory

AAPAC'S REPORT: NYC THEATER STATISTICS: 2006-07 TO 2015-16 SEASONS, CASTING BREAKDOWN BY ETHNICITY

Demographics for New York City, US 2010 Census:

Caucasian: 44.0%
 Black/African American: 25.5%
 Hispanic/Latino: 28.6%
 Asian: 12.7%
 Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander: 0.1%
 American Indian and Alaska Native: 0.7%
 Two or more races: 4.0%

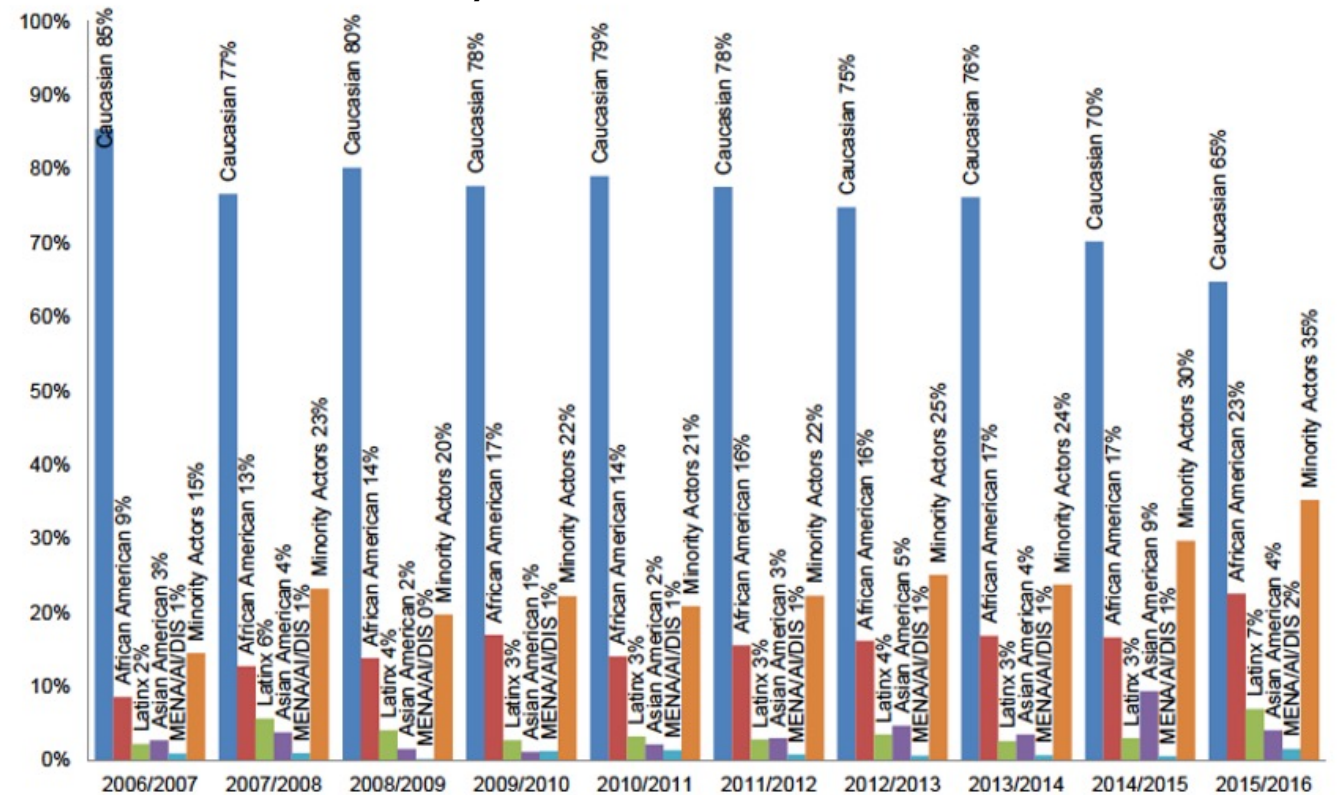
CASTING BREAKDOWN BY ETHNICITY, 10-YEAR COMBINED (2006-07 TO 2015-16 SEASONS)



Looking at the averages over the last 10 years for which we have data, 76% of all roles were filled by Caucasian actors, 15% by African Americans, 4% by Latinxs and 4% by Asian Americans. Middle Eastern/ North African, American Indian and Disabled actors together amounted to just 1% of all roles.

The 10-year NYC industry average from 2006-16 for the hiring of Asian Americans stands at **3.7%**.

Broadway and Non-Profit, Year to Year

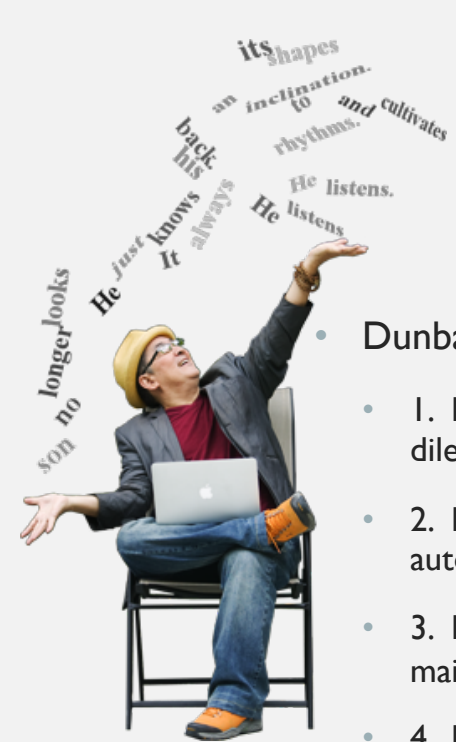


CLASS DISCUSSION: GOTANDA AND NAATCO ESSAYS, (TO HELP TRANSITION TO MY DEVELOPMENT DRAMATURGY)



NAATCO'S
HENRY VI

- Dunbar essay: “From Ethnic to Mainstream Theater: Negotiating ‘Asian American’ in the Plays of Philip Kan Gotanda”
 - 1. Dunbar discusses a system of false/mistaken metonymics. What does she mean by this? How does this help illuminate the various dilemmas that Asian American playwrights face?
 - 2. How can a writer move past the confines of this metonymical identity system? What issues might arise from claiming aesthetic autonomy? (What about from the opposite, insisting on one’s ethnic uniqueness?)
 - 3. How does Gotanda push the limits of the Asian American genre? How does he back up his dismissal of the idea that entry to the mainstream must cancel one’s ethnicity?
 - 4. How would you describe Gotanda’s approach and what do you feel works about it?
- Brenner essay: “Playing Jewish at the National Asian American Theatre Company”
 - 1. What are the drawbacks/flaws of colorblind casting in American theatre? How does it further complicate the question as to who has the right to represent another?
 - 2. Why does Brenner describe NAATCO’s productions as “racial plays”? How do these racial plays and NAATCO’s concept of an all Asian American cast go beyond colorblind casting, emphasizing its flaws?
 - 3. What is the effect of Asians playing Jewish characters? Of one minority playing another?
 - 4. What are your thoughts about NAATCO’s very specific approach, primarily Western repertory with all Asian American casts? How do you think you’d respond to a NAATCO show? Do you think their carefully thought-out intentions would clearly come across?
- What parallels do you see between Gotanda’s and NAATCO’s approaches?
- Do you have other ideas for dealing with the kinds of dilemmas and contradictions that come with having a hyphenated identity? What about for improving the overall situation regarding Asian American representation in general?



Philip Kan Gotanda

[NAATCO](#)
[video](#)

THE 2018 PRODUCTIONS AND FILMS I SAW, ILLUSTRATING VARIOUS APPROACHES, VARIOUS SOLUTIONS



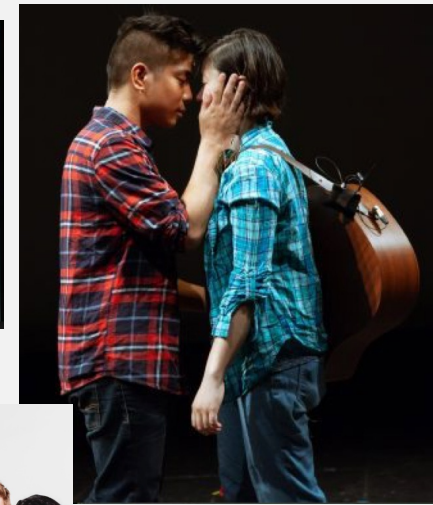
Lauren Yee's *The Great Leap*, with BD Wong



Toshiki Okada's *Time's Journey Through a Room*



Pillowtalk (at CAATA)



Interstate (at NYMF 2018)



With John Cho



Young Jean Lee's *Straight White Men*



Pan Asian Rep's *Acquittal*



893 | *Ya-ku-za* (at CAATA)



Pixar short Domee Shi's *Bao*



With Sandra Oh



Qui Nguyen's *Vietgone*



Yeting He's *Where Is My Maple Town*



NAATCO'S *Henry VI*



Lloyd Suh's *The Chinese Lady*



Don Nguyen's *Hello, From the Children of Planet Earth*

DEVELOPMENT DRAMATURGY: CONCEPTUALIZING THE OVERALL SERIES AND “CASTING” THE FIRST PANEL

- Whittling down my first draft organization of our panels – more or less kept the arc of “past,” “present,” “future,” though I had to switch a few things around
- Finalizing the “cast” of our first panel: **Tisa Chang, Mia Katigbak, Ralph B. Peña;** moderated by **Cheryl Ikemiya**
- Although the three companies share the same goals of creating a space for the development and expression of Asian American theater, increasing visibility and dispelling stereotypes, their approaches are intrinsically different:
 - Pan Asian Rep emphasizes works that draw upon Asian performing arts traditions and Asian American cultural heritage to mainstream a type of “intercultural theatre”
 - Ma-Yi simply requires that their plays be written by Asian Americans, regardless of inclusion or lack of Asian or Asian American themes/characters
 - NAATCO produces primarily Western repertory, realized by all Asian American casts
- How has each consequently challenged the status quo, how have things improved as a result and, most importantly, what still needs to be done?



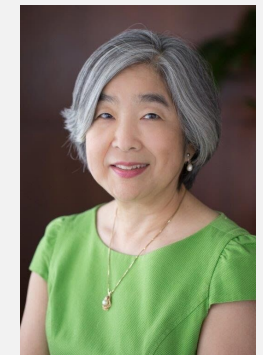
Tisa Chang



Mia Katigbak



Ralph B. Peña



Cheryl Ikemiya

PRODUCTION DRAMATURGY: HOW

- Top down vs. bottom up approach – a combination of both, each one informing the other
- Email writing! A TON of it!
 - The perfect blend = confidence in my vision + why they'd be perfect on the panel + what about their work they could discuss + ensuring flexibility
 - Show clearly that you know and care about their work! How do they fit into the larger web? What about your project would interest them most and make them want to participate?
- Problem solving, patience, listening and adaptability are key to being a dramaturg! Also, verbal communication *and* emotional awareness.
- Fun anecdote: just by chance I discovered the Pan Asian Rep, Ma-Yi and NAATCO offices right next to each other!
- I found several email addresses online (some I got through using their company's "contact form" first). Others, I had to be e-connected with. Still others, I met in person first, like at CAATA...



General Matilda B. Cartwright
in *Guys and Dolls*



Sorceress



Sorceress
In *Once Upon a Mattress*



Tin-Gal (Tin Man)
in *The Wiz*



Me with others at CAATA!

CAATA



Consortium of Asian American Theaters & Artists

6th National Asian American Theater ConFest,
Chicago, August 2018: “Revolutionary Acts”

- Preliminary planning and emailing allowed me to make the most of my time there.
- This brought to life my development dramaturgy and research!
- Diverse and eclectic community → solidarity and cohesion



David Henry Hwang and Jamil Khoury



From L to R: Laura Penn, May Adrales, Chay Yew, Tim Dang, Mei Ann Teo, Jess McLeod

TITLING OUR SERIES AND PRODUCING THE FIRST PANEL

- Titling our series “Asian Americans in Theatre: Art and Activism”
- Helping to produce the first panel, “Asian American Theatre: Three Approaches”
 - publicity and audience outreach (poster, publicity email, listserv), acting as liaison, logistics, finalizing the panel’s setup, program notes, introduction
- Finalizing the overall goals of our series

Organization Name	Contact at Organization
Asian American Arts Alliance	Trina Estavillo, Programs and Communications Assistant, email: testavillo@aaartsalliance.org
Asian/Pacific/American Institute at NYU	apa.institute@nyu.edu
Ping Chong + Company	Amy Zhang, Communications and Program Associate: amy@pingchong.org
Second Generation (2g)	info@2g.org
Asian American Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC)	No email, just a contact form on their website: http://www.aapacny.org/contact-us.html
National Asian Artists Project (NAAP)	No email, just a contact form on their website: https://www.naaproject.org/contact-us
Consortium of Asian American Theaters & Artists (CAATA)	No email, just a contact form on their website: https://caata.net/contact/
Asian American Film Lab (Film Lab)	info@film-lab.org
Asian CineVision	info@asiancinevision.org
Columbia University Asian American Alliance	aaa@columbia.edu
Columbia University Liga Filipina	su.liga@gmail.com
Columbia University Chinese Students Club	csc@columbia.edu
Columbia University Performing Arts League (CUPAL)	cupal@columbia.edu
Arts Initiative at Columbia University	artsinitiative@columbia.edu
NYU Tisch Drama	rich.drama@nyu.edu
Hunter College Department of Theatre	Nanda Kalimotoo, Administrative Assistant: nkalimoo@hunter.cuny.edu
The New School College of Performing Arts	performingarts@newschool.edu
Bard College, Theater and Performance Program	theater@bard.edu
Fordham University Theatre Program	Carla Jackson, Theatre Program Administrator: carla.fordham@gmail.com
Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA)	info@mocanyc.org
Asian American Writers' Workshop (AAWW)	desk@aaaw.org
Asian Cultural Council (ACC)	acc@accny.org
Coalition of Asian Pacific Americans (CAPA)	No email, just a contact form on their website: http://capaonline.org/Contacts/
Families with Children from China NY	admin@fccny.org
La MaMa	web@lamama.org
The Play Company (PlayCo)	Benno Orlinsky, Outreach Coordinator: borlinsky@playco.org
WP Theater (formerly known as Women's Project Theater)	info@womensproject.org
BAM	info@bam.org
National Black Theatre (the Artistic Director might participate in our third panel)	info@nationalblacktheatre.org
Musical Theatre Factory (the new Producing Artistic Director is Asian; Marina will also share our publicity materials with her directly)	info@mtf.nyc
A.R.T./New York Theatres	info@art-newyork.org
New York Theatre Workshop (NYTW)	info@nytw.org
New York Live Arts	info@newyorlivearts.org
The Rubin Museum of Art	maria.rubin@museumofart.com
Japan Society	No email, just a contact form on their website: https://www.japansociety.org/page/contact_us

Creating our listserv

Our publicity poster



Ma-Yi's KPOP

ASIAN AMERICAN THEATRE: THREE APPROACHES

A panel discussion

moderated by **CHERYL IKEMIYA**, former Senior Program Officer for the Arts at the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation

with **TISA CHANG** (BC '63) Founder and Artistic Producing Director of Pan Asian Repertory Theatre

MIA KATIGBAK (BC '76, GSAS '96) Co-Founder and Artistic Producing Director of the National Asian American Theatre Company (NAATCO)

RALPH B. PEÑA Co-Founder and Producing Artistic Director of Ma-Yi Theatre Company

MONDAY 10/22 | 6 PM

MINOR LATHAM PLAYHOUSE | 118 MILBANK HALL | BARNARD CAMPUS
FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC | NO RESERVATIONS NECESSARY

This is the first of three panels in the 2018-19 series
ASIAN AMERICANS IN THEATRE: ART AND ACTIVISM curated by Marina Chan (CC '17).

Sponsored by The Department of Theatre, Barnard College, Stages of Inquiry and Asia Society, Performing Arts Department
For further information, please contact Coretta Grant cgrant@barnard.edu

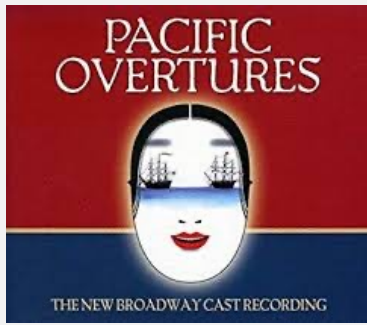


NAATCO'S *Awake and Sing!* (with Mia Katigbak)



Pan Asian Rep's *Acquittal*





DEVELOPMENT DRAMATURGY FOR THE SECOND PANEL (AT ASIA SOCIETY)

- Panelists **David Henry Hwang** and **Bartlett Sher** (TBD); moderated by **Karen Shimakawa**
- David Henry Hwang's *Soft Power* and his love-hate relationship with *The King and I* – Bartlett Sher's impressive revival of which inspired Hwang to write *Soft Power* – will serve as the basis on which to focus on arguably outdated, problematic Golden Age etc. musicals to examine issues of yellowface, cultural appropriation and Asian stereotypes still prevalent today. The panel will use musical theater and such currently controversial musicals as a lens through which to examine the continuing issues that Asian Americans in entertainment (and beyond) face and will segue into addressing how to improve the status quo, work in which both Hwang and Sher are veterans.



South Pacific, Bloody Mary with all the GIs



Allegiance, with Lea Salonga and George Takei



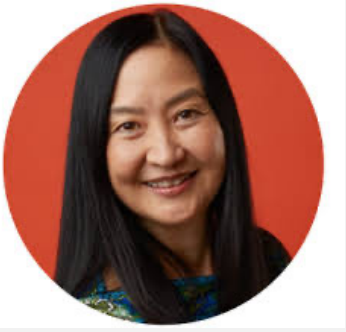
The Mikado



The King and I

DEVELOPMENT DRAMATURGY FOR THE THIRD PANEL (AT BARNARD)

- Panelists **Roberta Uno**, **Mia Yoo** (TBD) and **Young Jean Lee** (TBD); moderated by **Jonathan McCrory** (TBD)
- The panel will focus on American theatre “moving forward” in today’s reality of shifting demographics and globalization, from the viewpoints of three Asian American theatre artists – Roberta Uno, Mia Yoo and Young Jean Lee – discussing collaboration, aesthetic choices, vision and activism as work stretching beyond the confines of "Asian American" and creating cultural intersections.
- If this panel were to go forward, many fascinating parallels would manifest.
- Hopefully the second and third panels will shape up accordingly, but if not, we’ll figure it out! Remember: problem solving, patience, listening and adaptability!



Roberta Uno, veteran activist/community organizer



Mia Yoo, Artistic Director of La MaMa



Playwright Young Jean Lee in her *We're Gonna Die*

ARTS IN A CHANGING AMERICA
caL ARTS
ART CHANGE US

Roberta Uno's ArtChangeUS



La MaMa accepts the Regional Theatre Award at the 2018 Tony Awards



Young Jean Lee's *Straight White Men* on Broadway