

TRYING
TO FIND
CHINATOWN

THE
SELECTED
PLAYS

DAVID HENRY
HWANG

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The Selected Plays

David Henry Hwang

THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

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The House of Sleeping Beauties is adapted from a short story by Yasunari Kawabata, 1961. The biblical quotes within Act II, Scene One, of *The Voyage* are from Ecclesiasticus 43:26, Luke 10:23, Zechariah 9:10 and Isaiah 49:23, respectively; Act II, Scene Two's translations and nautical terms are from Samuel Eliot Morrison's *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, 1942.

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FOB

(1980)

For the warriors of my family

Production History

FOB received its premiere at the Stanford Asian American Theatre Project (Nancy Takahashi, Producer) in Palo Alto, California, on March 2, 1979. It was directed by David Henry Hwang; the assistant director was Randall Tong; the set design was by George Prince; the costume design was by Kathy Ko and the lighting design was by Roger Tang. The cast was as follows:

DALE	Loren Fong
GRACE	Hope Nakamura
STEVE	David Pating

The play was then developed at the Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference (Lloyd Richards, Artistic Director) in Waterford, Connecticut, in July 1979. It was directed by Robert Alan Ackerman. The cast was as follows:

DALE	Calvin Jung
GRACE	Ginny Yang
STEVE	Ernest Abuba

FOB opened at The Joseph Papp Public Theater/New York Shakespeare Festival (Joseph Papp, Producer), in New York City on June 8, 1980. It was directed by Mako; the assistant director was David Oyama; the set design was by Akira Yoshimura and James E. Mayo; the costume design was by Susan Hum; the lighting design was by Victor En Yu Tan; the choreography was by John Lone; the music was by Lucia Hwong; and the stage manager was Ruth Kreshka. There were also two onstage stage managers, Willy Corpus and Tzi Ma, as well as an onstage musician, Lucia Hwong, in this production. The cast was as follows:

DALE
GRACE
STEVE

Calvin Jung
Ginny Yang
John Lone

Characters

DALE, a second-generation American of Chinese descent, early twenties.

GRACE, Dale's cousin, a first-generation Chinese-American, early twenties.

STEVE, Grace's friend, a Chinese newcomer, early twenties.

Place

The back room of a small Chinese restaurant in Torrance, California.

Time

1980.

ACT I, *Scene One*: late afternoon.

Scene Two: a few minutes later.

ACT II: after dinner.

Definitions

chong you bing is a type of Chinese pancake, a Northern Chinese appetizer often made with dough and scallions, with a consistency similar to that of pita bread.

da dao and *mao* are two swords, the traditional weapons of Gwan Gung and Fa Mu Lan, respectively.

Gung Gung means "grandfather."

Mei Guo means "beautiful country" and is a Chinese term for America.



Playwright's Note

The roots of *FOB* are thoroughly American. The play began when a sketch I was writing about a limousine trip through Westwood, California, was invaded by two figures from American literature: Fa Mu Lan, the girl who takes her father's place in battle, from Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, and Gwan Gung, the god of fighters and writers, from Frank Chin's *Gee, Pop!*

These books testify to the existence of an Asian-American literary tradition. Japanese-Americans, for instance, wrote plays in American concentration camps during World War II. Earlier, with the emergence of the railroads, came regular performances of Cantonese operas featuring Gwan Gung, the adopted god of Chinese America.

Prologue

Lights up on a blackboard. Dale enters, dressed in preppie clothes. The blackboard is the type which can flip around so both sides can be used. Dale lectures like a university professor, using the board to illustrate his points.

DALE: F-O-B. Fresh Off the Boat. FOB. What words can you think of that characterize the FOB? Clumsy, ugly, greasy FOB. Loud, stupid, four-eyed FOB. Big feet. Horny. Like Lenny in *Of Mice and Men*. Very good. A literary reference. High-water pants. Floods, to be exact. Someone you wouldn't want your sister to marry. If you are a sister, someone you wouldn't want to marry. That assumes we're talking about boy FOBs, of course. But girl FOBs aren't really as . . . FOBish. Boy FOBs are the worst, the . . . pits. They are the sworn enemies of all ABC—oh, that's "American-Born Chinese"—of all ABC girls. Before an ABC girl will be seen on a Friday night with a boy FOB in Westwood, she would rather burn off her face.

(He flips around the board. On the other side is written: "1. Where to Find FOBs. 2. How to Spot a FOB.")

FOBs can be found in great numbers almost anywhere you happen to be, but there are some locations where they cluster in particularly large swarms. Community colleges, Chinese club discos, Asian sororities, Asian fraternities, Oriental churches, shopping malls and, of course, Bee Gee concerts. How can you spot a FOB? Look out! If you can't answer that, you might be one.

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(He flips back the board, reviews) F-O-B. Fresh Off the Boat. FOB. Clumsy, ugly, greasy FOB. Loud, stupid, four-eyed FOB. Big feet. Horny. Like Lenny in *Of Mice and Men*. Floods. Like Lenny in *Of Mice and Men*. F-O-B. Fresh Off the Boat. FOB.

(Lights fade to black. We hear American pop music, preferably funk, rhythm and blues, or disco.)

ACT I

Scene One

Late afternoon. The back room of a small Chinese restaurant in Torrance, California. Single table, with a tablecloth; various chairs, supplies. One door leads outside, a back exit; another leads to the kitchen. Lights up on Grace, at the table. The music is coming from a small radio. On the table is a small, partially wrapped box and a huge blob of discarded Scotch tape. As Grace tries to wrap the box, we see what has been happening: the tape she's using is stuck in the dispenser; so, in order to pull it out, she must tug so hard that an unusable quantity of tape is dispensed. Steve enters from the back door, unnoticed by Grace. He stands, waiting to catch her eye, tries to speak, but his voice is drowned out by the music. He is dressed in a stylish summer outfit.

GRACE: Aaaai-ya!

STEVE: Hey!

(No response; he turns off the music.)

GRACE: Huh? Look. Out of tape.

STEVE *(In Chinese)*: Yeah.

GRACE: One whole roll. You know how much of it got on here? Look. That much. That's all.

STEVE *(In Chinese)*: Yeah. Do you serve *chong you bing* today?

GRACE *(Picking up box)*: Could've skipped the wrapping paper, just covered it with tape.

STEVE *(In Chinese)*: Excuse me!

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GRACE: Yeah? (*Pause*) You wouldn't have any on you, would ya?

STEVE (*Speaking English from now onward*): Sorry? No. I don't have *bing*. I want to buy *bing*.

GRACE: Not *bing*! Tape. Have you got any tape?

STEVE: Tape? Of course I don't have tape.

GRACE: Just checking.

STEVE: Do you have any *bing*?

(*Pause.*)

GRACE: Look, we're closed 'til five . . .

STEVE: Idiot girl.

GRACE: Why don't you take a menu?

STEVE: I want you to tell me!

(*Pause.*)

GRACE (*Ignoring Steve*): Working in a Chinese restaurant, you learn to deal with obnoxious customers.

STEVE: Hey! You!

GRACE: If the customer's Chinese, you insult them by giving forks.

STEVE: I said I want you to tell me!

GRACE: If the customer's Anglo, you starve them by not giving forks.

STEVE: You serve *bing* or not?

GRACE: But it's always easy just to dump whatever happens to be in your hands at the moment.

(*She sticks the tape blob on Steve's face.*)

STEVE: I suggest you answer my question at once!

GRACE: And I suggest you grab a menu and start doing things for yourself. Look, I'll get you one, even. How's that?

STEVE: I want it from your mouth!

GRACE: Sorry. We don't keep 'em there.

STEVE: If I say they are there, they are there. (*He grabs her box*)

GRACE: What—what're you doing? Give that back to me!

(They parry around the table.)

STEVE: Aaaah! Now it's different, isn't it? Now you're listening to me.

GRACE: 'Scuse me, but you really are an asshole, you know that? Who do you think you are?

STEVE: What are you asking me? Who I am?

GRACE: Yes. You take it easy with that, hear?

STEVE: You ask who *I* am?

GRACE: One more second and I'm gonna call the cops.

STEVE: Very well, I will tell you.

(She picks up the phone. He slams it down.)

I said, I'll tell you.

GRACE: If this is how you go around meeting people, I think it's pretty screwed.

STEVE: Silence! I am Gwan Gung! God of warriors, writers and prostitutes!

(Pause.)

GRACE: Bullshit!

STEVE: What?

GRACE: Bullshit! Bull-shit! You are not Gwan Gung. And gimme back my box.

STEVE: I am Gwan Gung. Perhaps we should see what you have in here.

GRACE: Don't open that! *(Beat)* You don't look like Gwan Gung. Gwan Gung is a warrior.

STEVE: I am a warrior!

GRACE: Yeah? Why are you so scrawny, then? You wouldn't last a day in battle.

STEVE: My credit! Many a larger man has been humiliated by the strength in one of my size.

GRACE: Tell me, then. Tell me, if you are Gwan Gung. Tell me of your battles. Of one battle. Of Gwan Gung's favorite battle.

STEVE: Very well. Here is a living memory: one day, Gwan Gung woke up and saw the ring of fire around the sun and decided, "This is a good day to slay villagers." So he got up, washed himself and looked over a map of the Three Kingdoms to decide where first to go. For those were days of rebellion and falling empires, so opportunity to slay was abundant. But planned slaughter required an order and restraint which soon became tedious. So Gwan Gung decided a change was in order. He called for his tailor, who he asked to make a beautiful blindfold of layered silk, fine enough to be weightless, yet thick enough to blind the wearer completely. The tailor complied, and soon produced a perfect piece of red silk, exactly suited to Gwan Gung's demands. In gratitude, Gwan Gung stayed the tailor's execution sentence. He then put on his blindfold, pulled out his sword, and began passing over the land, swiping at whatever got in his path. You see, Gwan Gung figured there was so much revenge and so much evil in those days that he could slay at random and still stand a good chance of fulfilling justice. This worked very well until his sword, in its blind fury, hit upon an old and irritable atom bomb.

(Grace catches Steve, takes back the box.)

GRACE: Ha! Some Gwan Gung you are! Some warrior you are! You can't even protect a tiny box from the grasp of a woman! How could you have shielded your big head in battle?

STEVE: Shield! Shield! I still go to battle!

GRACE: Only your head goes to battle, 'cause only your head is Gwan Gung.

(Pause.)

STEVE: You made me think of you as a quiet listener. A good trick. What is your name?