Alliance Theatre at the Woodruff

Student Matinee Series

Tiger Style!

By Mike Lew

Study Guide

Mike Lew and Moritz von Stuelpnagel

Synopsis

Albert and Jennifer Chen were at the pinnacle of academic achievement, but they find adult life difficult and unfulfilling. Albert's been passed up for promotion and Jennifer's been dumped by her loser boyfriend. The siblings decide that it's their parent's fault that they are not wildly successful in their twenties. Albert and Jennifer drive to their parents' house to lay their failures at their mom and dad's feet. However, mom and dad won't have it. Failing to have a satisfying cathartic experience with their parents, Albert and Jen decide to "go full Western." Albert confronts his boss about not receiving the promotion, but ends up getting fired. Jennifer visits a therapist to fast-track her break up recovery, only to find out that therapy doesn't work in fast forward. Still searching for meaning, they decide to return to China and "go full Eastern." In the first few moments after they arrive, they lose their passports and all of their money. However, the Chinese Government takes them in, provides them with jobs, an apartment and a matchmaker for Jennifer. Long lost Cousin Chen warns the siblings not the cross the government, or they will be sorry. On his first day as a computer hacker, Albert is ordered by General Tso to shut down the power grids of three American cities. Albert refuses, and is put in jail. Jennifer discovers that the matchmaker does not take into account any "soft data" elements of matchmaking like personality or personal preferences. She attempts to delete her profile from the government database and is arrested. While in jail, a Party official visits them and tells them to play "the most beautiful possible sonata" and he will release them. They play. He isn't impressed. He sentences them to a prison camp. Cousin Chen breaks

Albert and Jen out and gives them fake passports to leave China. Albert and Jen escape China, reunite with their parents, and realize maybe their lives aren't so bad after all.

Playwright

MIKE LEW. Plays include *Teenage Dick - Vaguely from Richard III* (Public Theater, Florida Studio Theater, and Playwrights Foundation workshops; Lark and Ma-Yi readings), *Bike America* (Alliance world premiere, Ma-Yi production; Juilliard, Lark, Kennedy Center, and Playwrights Foundation workshops), *microcrisis* (Ma-Yi, InterAct, and Next Act productions), *Stockton* (AracaWorks and EST workshops), *People's Park* (Victory Gardens workshop), *Tenure* (24 Hour Plays on Broadway), *In Paris You will Find Many Baguettes…* (Humana), *Roanoke* (Humana), and *Moustache Guys*. His plays are published by Sam French and Playscripts. He is the youngest member of the Dramatists Guild Council, a Tony voter, and recipient of the Kendeda Graduate Playwriting Award and the Lanford Wilson, Helen Merrill, and Heideman awards. He is co-director of Ma-Yi Writers Lab, the largest collective of Asian-American playwrights in the country. Training: Juilliard, Yale. mikelew.com.

Director

Moritz von Stuelpnagel is thrilled to return to the Alliance Theatre, where he last directed *Bike America*, also by Mike Lew. His Broadway debut, *Hand to God* by Robert Askins, is currently running at the Booth Theatre where it received 5 Tony Award nominations, including Best Play and Best Director. Other recent work includes *Verité* by Nick Jones (Lincoln Center Theatre/LCT3), *Trevor* by Nick Jones (Lesser America), *Love Song of the Albanian Sous Chef* by Robert Askins (Ensemble Studio Theater), *Mel & El: Show & Tell* (Ars Nova), *The Roosevelt Cousins Thoroughly Sauced* by Mike Lew (Ensemble Studio Theatre), *Spacebar* by Michael Mitnick (Studio 42), and *My Base and Scurvy Heart* by Adam Szymkowicz (Studio 42). Moritz is the Artistic Director of Studio 42, NYC's producer of "unproducible" plays. Upcoming projects include Nick Jones' *Important Hats of the Twentieth Century* at Manhattan Theatre Club in association with Studio 42. www.moritzvs.com

Actors

Francis Jue (*Tzi Chuan, Melvin, Dad, General Lee*) is ecstatic to be making his Alliance debut. Broadway: *Pacific Overtures, Thoroughly Modern Millie, M. Butterfly.* Other favorites include: *Yellow Face* (Obie and Lucille Lortel Awards), *Miss Saigon* (Elliot Norton Award), *In the Next Room, or the vibrator play* (ariZoni Award), *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* (Drama-Logue Award), *Cabaret* (Bay Area Critics Circle Award), *Red* (Philly Award) and *Paper Dolls* at London's Tricycle Theatre. Film/TV: *Joyful Noise, Madam Secretary*, *Law & Order: SVU*, *Good Wife*. For Dad.

Emily Kuroda *(Mom)* has performed at South Coast Rep (*Fast Company*, *Our Town*, *Ballad of Yachiyo, Dogeaters* (PPF), Kirk Douglas, Mark Taper Forum, New York's Public, La Jolla Playhouse, Seattle Rep, Singapore Repertory, Berkeley Repertory, Doolittle, Huntington (Boston), Los Angeles Theater Center, Zephyr, LA Women's Shakespeare Company, and the Los Angeles Shakespeare Festival. TV & Film include: *Sequestered* (Lead), *Under One Roof*, Mrs. Kim in *Gilmore Girls*, Margaret Cho's mother in *Drop Dead Diva*, *About Love* (Emmy nominated), RED and the upcoming JUSTICE ANGEL. Awards: 5 Dramalogue, Garland, L.A. Ovation award nomination, Playwrights Arena and EWP Awards, and Entertainment Today Best Actress Award for *Winter People*

Ruibo Qian (Jennifer): New York and Regional credits include: *Water by the Spoonful (*Old Globe Theatre*), Henry IV, Part 1 (*Pearl Theatre Company*), You For Me For You (*Woolly Mammoth Theatre*)* and *The Tempest* (Continuum Company). Television and film credits include "Broad City" *(*Comedy Central*)*, "Mozart in the Jungle" *(*Amazon*),* "Jessica Jones" (Netflix), and the upcoming film *Manchester By The Sea.* Ruibo holds an MFA from the NYU Graduate Acting Program and a BFA from Boston University's College of Fine Arts. www.ruibogian.com

Jon Norman Schneider (Albert) is thrilled to be making his Alliance debut. New York credits include: *Awake & Sing!* (NAATCO/The Public), *The Oldest Boy* (Lincoln Center Theater), *City Of* (Playwrights Realm), *The Architecture of Becoming* (Women's Project), *A Map of Virtue* (13P), *Queens Boulevard* (Signature), *Durango* (The Public), among others. International and regional: London's Tricycle Theatre, Old Globe, Goodman, McCarter, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Barrington Stage, Magic, Long Wharf, and The Kennedy Center. Film/TV: *The Girl in the Book, The Normals, The Rebound*, HBO's *Angel Rodriguez*, "Violet," "Veep," "The Electric Company," "30 Rock," and "Law & Order: Criminal Intent."

Bobby Labartino (*Russ The Bus*/*Ensemble*) is excited to return to the Alliance Theatre! Previous Alliance credits include *In Love and Warcraft*, *Eurydice* (US). Regional credits include George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life* (Colorado Shakespeare), Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* and Orlando in *As You Like It* (TPHF). He's also worked locally at Actor's Express, Georgia Shakespeare, Aurora Theatre, Stage Door Players, and 7 Stages. Bobby would like to thank his parents for their unwavering love and support.

Characters

Albert Chen – Asian, late 20s to early 30s.
Jennifer Chen – Asian, 30s, Albert's sister
Russ the Buss –Albert's lazy co-worker
Dad & Mom – Asian, 40s to 60s
Reggie –Jennifer's boyfriend who installs sound systems
Melvin –Albert's boss
Tzi Chaun - Party member
General Tso – Chinese General and Albert's boss while he's in China
Therapist
Cousin Chen - Albert and Jennifer's cousin who lives in China
Matchmaker

<u>Unfamiliar Words and Phrases from *Tiger Style*</u>
In Order of Appearance

Wu Tang Clan "Ain't Nuthin' to F' Wit" – An American hip hop group from New York City. "Ain't Nuthin' to F' Wit" was on their 1993 debut album "Enter the Wu-Tang." The first two words of the song are, "Tiger style."

Tiger Style – Amy Chua launched the phrase "*Tiger Mother*" into our cultural lexicon in 2011 to describe a harsh, demanding style of parenting Chua identified as being especially common among parents of Chinese ancestry.

Reiterate – say something again or a number of times, typically for emphasis or clarity

Racial Profiling – the use of race or ethnicity as grounds for suspecting someone of having committed an offense

Ludicrous - so foolish, unreasonable, or out of place as to be amusing; ridiculous

Ultimatum – a final demand or statement of terms, the rejection of which will result in retaliation or a breakdown in relations

Bonnaroo – a four-day, multi-stage camping festival held on a 700-acre farm in Manchester, Tennessee

Oncologist – a doctor who specializes in the treatment of cancer

Lamprey – an eel-like aquatic jawless vertebrate that has a sucker mouth with horny teeth and a rasping tongue. The adult is often parasitic, attaching itself to other fish and sucking their blood

Hierarchical – arranged in order of rank

Achilles in the *Iliad* – The *Iliad* is an ancient Greek epic poem traditionally attributed to Homer. It details the battles between King Agamemnon and Achilles.

Eminem in *Eight Mile* – *Eight Mile* is a movie about a young white rapper emerging in a genre dominated by African Americans. The movie stars Eminem.

Nepotistic – favoritism granted to relatives

Meritocracy – the holding of power by people selected on the basis of their ability

Zen – a Japanese school of Mahayana Buddhism emphasizing the value of meditation and intuition

Fetal – aka fetal position; denoting a posture characteristic of a fetus, with the back curved forward and the limbs folded in front of the body

Modicum – a small quantity of a particular thing, especially something considered desirable or valuable

Market Inefficiencies – price and/or rate of return distortion on a financial market that seems to contradict the efficient-market hypothesis

Arbitrage – the simultaneous buying and selling of securities, currency, or commodities in different markets or in derivative forms in order to take advantage of differing prices for the same asset

Amy Tan – An American writer whose works explore mother-daughter relationships and the Chinese-American experience

Margaret Cho – An American comedian best known for her stand-up routines, through which she critiques social and political problems, especially those pertaining to race and sexuality

Metronome – a device used by musicians that marks time at a selected rate by giving a regular tick

Stoicism – the endurance of pain or hardship without a display of feelings and without complaint

Equanimity – mental calmness, composure, and evenness of temper, especially in a difficult situation

Ulcer – an open sore on an external or internal surface of the body, caused by a break in the skin or mucous membrane that fails to heal

"the cream will rise to the top" – an idiom that means a good person or idea cannot go unnoticed for long, just as cream poured in coffee or tea eventually rises to the top

Lactose intolerant – unable to digest dairy or dairy products

San Marino – a city in Los Angeles County, California; more than 33% of the population is Chinese

Mapo doufu – a popular Chinese dish from China's Sichuan province. It consists of tofu set in a spicy chili and bean-based sauce

Bok choy – Chinese cabbage of a variety with smooth-edged tapering leaves

UCLA – University of California, Los Angeles

Bordeaux – a red, white, or rosé wine from the district of Bordeaux

Bigot – a person who is intolerant toward those holding different opinions

Ipso Facto – a Latin phrase meaning by that very fact or act

Gestapo – the official secret police of Nazi Germany and German-occupied Europe

Deferential – respectful

RomCom – (in movies or television) a romantic comedy

Browbeat – intimidate (someone), typically into doing something, with stern or abusive words

Mollycoddle – treat (someone) very indulgently or protectively

Angel Island – an island in San Francisco Bay that housed an Immigration Station from 1910 to 1940 that processed approximately 1 million Asian immigrants

Catharsis – the process of releasing, and thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions

Saddam Hussein – Fifth President of Iraq who was seen as a figurehead of the country's military conflicts with Iran and the United States

Bonnie and Clyde – American outlaws and robbers from the Dallas area who traveled the central United States with their gang during the Great Depression

Phobias – an extreme or irrational fear of or aversion to something

Traumas - a deeply distressing or disturbing experience

Transference – the redirection to a substitute, usually a therapist, of emotions that were originally felt in childhood

Freud – Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist, now known as the father of psychoanalysis

Fallacy – a mistaken belief, especially one based on unsound argument

EQ – Emotional Intelligence; the ability to read other people's signals and react appropriately to them

"DJ Yella" – An American DJ and music producer who was a member of the World Class Wreckin' Cru; in the context of the play it is used as a pejorative

"Dong Wang" – Wang Dong was on the FBI's most wanted list for committing computer fraud

Trope – a figurative or metaphorical use of a word or expression

Back-to-Africa Movement – also known as the Colonization movement or Black Zionism, originated in the United States in the 19th century. It encouraged those of African descent to return to the African homelands of their ancestors

Primordial – (especially of a state or quality) basic and fundamental

Phonemes – any of the perceptually distinct units of sound in a specified language that distinguish one word from another, for example *p*, *b*, *d*, and *t* in the English words *pad*, *pat*, *bad*, and *bat*

Expats – aka Expatriate; a person who lives outside their native country

Sun Tzu – a Chinese military general, strategist, and philosopher who lived in the Spring and Autumn period of ancient China; wrote *Art of War*

Chiang-Kai *Shrek* – Chiang Kai-shek was a Chinese political and military leader who served as the leader of the Republic of China between 1928 and 1975. The character's error is probably purposeful.

The Party – refers to the Communist Party of China

Diaspora – specifically refers to Jews living outside of Israel; Tzi Chuan is using it in reference to Chinese people living outside of China.

Commercial conglomerate – a combination of two or more corporations engaged in entirely different businesses that fall under one corporate group

Shenzhen Special Economic Zone – established in May 1980, is the first special economic zone in the People's Republic of China; specific laws were passed in this area to encourage economic growth

Zai jian – Bye, bye

Mickey Rooney – An American actor of film, television, Broadway, radio and vaudeville

Melamine – a white crystalline compound made by heating Cyanamid and used in making plastics

Degeneracy – an immoral or corrupt person

Don Cheadle – An American actor who's generally considered attractive

Coldplay – a British rock band formed in 1996

Iterate – perform or utter repeatedly

Betrothed – engaged

Court-martial – a judicial court for trying members of the armed services accused of offenses against military law

Seditionist – one who engages in or promotes the interests of sedition. Typically, sedition is considered a subversive act, and the overt acts that may be prosecutable under sedition laws vary from one legal code to another

Orpheus – a legendary musician, poet, and prophet who sang his way into the Underworld to retrieve his true love

Indiana Jones Holy Grail – *Indian Jones and the Last Crusade* is a 1989 American adventure film directed by Steven Spielberg. The climactic scene involves the protagonist's choice of which cup was the Holy Grail.

Pentatonic Scale – a musical scale or mode with five notes per octave

Heptatonic Scale – a seven note scale

Mary Janes – a flat, round-toed shoe for women and girls, with a single strap across the top

Ira Glass – an American public radio personality and the host and producer of the radio and television show "This American Life"

Articles about Mike Lew and Tiger Style Parenting

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Plays and Novels about Immigration

FOB by David Henry Hwang **–** is a 1980 Obie Award-winning play that depicts the contrasts and conflicts between established Asian Americans and "fresh off the boat" (FOB) immigrants.

American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang- a graphic novel that is the story of a second-generation child of immigrants named Jin Wang, who has moved from San Francisco's Chinatown to a mostly white suburb and struggles to find his place.

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan – two generations of Chinese-American women struggle against maintaining footholds in tradition and new cultural protocols.

The Jungle by Upton Sinclair – a novel that highlights the marginalized state of immigrants

Mona in the Promised Land by Gish Jen – a Chinese-American girl makes the controversial decision to convert to Judaism in an incredible novel about the heavy social constructs behind ethnicity and religion

Native Speaker by Chang-Rae Lee – Protagonist Henry Park, a Korean immigrant, wants to find his place in America, but he finds the language and cultural barriers incredibly difficult to maneuver.

No-No Boy by John Okada – this novel follows the victims of the internment of Japanese immigrants and their families during World War II

***Tiger Style* in the Classroom**

Pre Show Questions:

1. Who is responsible for a child's success? The parent? The child? The teacher? Someone else?
2. What is the most important thing that a parent can do for his or her child?
3. How would you define "a good job"? What qualifications would you need to be hired for that job?
4. How do you define success? How can it be achieved? By what age should you reach your definition of success?

Post Show Questions:

1. Should Albert have been promoted over Russ? Was Albert's reaction to losing the promotion appropriate? What other strategies could he have employed?
2. Why did Cousin Chen sacrifice herself for Albert and Jennifer? Was her sacrifice necessary? Why or why not?
3. What is "Tiger Parenting"? Do you think this style of parenting leads to success for the child?
4. What is magical realism? Would this label apply to *Tiger Style*? Support your response with evidence from the play.

Creative Writing Prompts:

1. Write about a time when you and your parents had a disagreement. How did you resolve it?
2. Write a short story about what Jennifer or Albert will do now that they are home.