

Notes from the Dramaturg

Imagine yourself soaring through the air, swimming with the clouds and floating above the amazing geological creations below. Freedom flows through you as you gaze below at the breath-taking spectacle of California's shimmering Mt. San Antonio. Your journey thrills you as you fly north, following the crags and peaks of California's Coastal Range Mountains. Or are those marvels actually China's Five Sacred Mountain Peaks, declared sacred by Han Emperor Wu Di in the 2nd century BC? The dazzling heights of these mountains, as well as the pure water cascading through their grooves, offer you a sense of the royal and the heavenly as you swoop playfully above. For all the many historical, geographical, and cultural differences between the United States and China, when you're in flight a mile above, both countries lavish you with air that is amazingly fresh and views that inspire the imagination. The joys of your physical flight – and your mental flights-of-fancy – are exhilarating!

But the weight of life on the ground invades your flying spirit and pulls you back to reality: your heedless passion in free flight over valleys and peaks *freezes* once the prospect of falling comes to mind – with the terror of death following shortly behind. Leaving behind liberty in the air above China and the U.S., you land with a thud amidst agonizing constrictions in both countries. Whether trapped in China's poor rural areas through government restrictions on internal migration, or limited in the United States by poverty or social barriers, the deep yearnings for freedom of individuals in both countries are often tempered by the need for security, and by the paralyzing nature of fear. On the ground in the U.S., you notice an increasing nervousness all around you about the rising power of your Asian friend: from this worried perspective, the brilliant red of China's mountains at sunset looks threatening, and the nuclear fusion powering the sun over China burns far too hot. Defensive actions become imperative. Self-preservation must be achieved *at all costs* – even though you fret that the personal and economic price may someday be too high.

In the interpersonal realm, as well as the geopolitical world, such fears and reactions shape our choices – sometimes motivating us to work at cross-purposes, building friendships and creating enemies at the same time, in the same people. Playwright Rolin Jones brings these contradictions of self-actualization to the stage in this story of a Chinese-American adoptee named Jennifer, offering us insight into the push-pull dynamic we experience in both our own families and in our broader global family.

Thank you for joining us for this exploration of the dilemmas of connection and (self-) protection in *The Intelligent Design of Jenny Chow*.