

Ancient Chinese secret

Actor-writer Sherwin wins with script

By Kitty Hopper

Guanxi" is a Chinese term for "the right connections" and attorney/businessman/actor/screenwriter Robert A. Sherwin seems to have it down pat.

Take his acting career. When a friend's Chinese wife mentioned that a Chinese soap opera for American Asia Television was auditioning for actors, Sherwin signed up. "The journey of 1,000 miles begins with one phone call," he says with a grin.

It wasn't as though Sherwin hadn't been on a set before. He had worked 14 days as Lara Flynn Boyle's limo driver in "Baby's Day Out" ("Almost every scene is on the cutting room floor somewhere.") and spent another three days running next to Michael Keaton through Olive Park in "Touch and Go." He also appears in commercials.

The director, Peter Sun, accepted his headshot and wanted to put him on tape. But still, "I didn't do that good on the audition," he admits, "but I knew the director liked me."

When Sherman got home that night, he went through the phone book and found Act I. He immediately called and took private classes with instructor Nancy Sheeber, where he "got comfortable" and "battled-tested."

The part Sherwin did land was the American love interest for the two female leads, both beautiful Chinese women, in the Chinese drama, "The New World." The 50-minute episodes told the story of Chinese students coming to America and Chicago, 'the new world.' A joint venture of Chicago Chinese Communications and China Central Television, it ran on primetime and was seen by 1.2 billion people.

"All my scenes were shot in English, but then dubbed into Chinese before

they were shown." The show was taped in Chicago for five months.

By now an old China hand, he co-anchored with Margaret Rattenburg 85 episodes of "China in Change," which ran for two years in Los Angeles and Chicago.

Besides acting, Sherwin writes screenplays and was one of this year's top three finalists in the Illinois / Chicago Script Writing Competition.

He started writing when he had time on his hands. "I had just finished a job with a big corporation that had taken a lot of time. And it's not like you can just go out and pick up clients. I had to get my name out there." Based on his legal and business experiences, Sherwin felt he had great plots and set out to turn them into movie scripts.

His script, "Chicago Jam," is "Miami Vice" set in Chicago, about a cop who uses a mobster's girlfriend to get to him, but the cop falls in love with her.

When the script was returned the first year with readers' comments about the unsatisfactory ending, Sherwin felt he needed a collaborator, but didn't know where to find one.

Help came from his habit of talking to cab drivers. He gave his card to driver-screenwriter Lee Anthony Smith, and their collaboration created one of this year's winners. The prize is having the script shopped among the L.A. studios by the film offices.

Sherwin likens script submissions to auditioning for a part. "They say you get one part for every 52 rejections. If you can't handle rejection, you are in the wrong business."

Robert A. Sherwin is represented by Arlene Wilson. His office is located at 350 W. Hubbard St.; phone, 312/822-0833.★



Actor Robert Sherwin hit it big on a Chinese soap opera.