

Afong Moy

In examining the stories of the Chinese in America, Afong Moy's journey stands as a fascinating glimpse into the foundations of that history. Moy was a symbol of China within the United States, illuminating the minds of America's burgeoning middle class, affording them with a perspective of China, which was constructed through coming to terms with China's legitimacy as a world power, and its standing as a source prime traditional heritage.¹ China stood as a leader at the forefront of the new industrial world, and this was evident in what it provided Americans with, which was numerous goods and services, rooted in Chinese culture.² Afong Moy is a representation of the racial and social journey that persisted in the beginning of the Chinese immigrant populations introduction to the United States. Although Moy did not represent the Chinese in terms of immigrants that came as traditional laborers in search of work and opportunity, she, in a sense, represented the physical form of the Chinese female body, and was a tool for commerce. Moy's affluence, ethnical background, and the fact that she was a female propelled her forth into becoming a sensation within the United States, especially in regards to her feet, which stood as a prime physical attribute that was obsessed over by the public.³ Moy captured the attention of and captivated the Americans, whether the attention she garnered was negative or positive, but to fully understand her plight, we must further examine what she came to represent in her entirety.⁴

The identity of minorities in the United States, which includes the Chinese in America, is

¹ Carpenter & Yoon, 2014

² Ibid.

³ Haddad, 2011

⁴ Ibid.

heavily shaped through the interactions and conflicts that have arisen between these groups and the caucasian majority⁵, Moy can be examined in this regard. Afong Moy stood as a centerpiece of this interaction, providing a viable marker upon which the progression of American thought in regards to the Chinese, and China, can be traced. Moy's story also embodied the social relations between China and the United States at its conception, the relationship that was at play during the 1800s.⁶ Afong Moy's story allows us the ability to gauge the climate of that relationship while shedding light on the dynamics of it through a multitude of different cultural barometers, such as the platforms that covered her story, and the people that engaged in her cultural pageantry.⁷

Moy's body was broken down into a spectacle, like other minorities before her, she was readily displayed to the public as just that, not a human, but a collection of body parts.⁸ Moy was measured in every way possible, she was reduced to a mere product to drive sales, creating intrigue through the representation of the "other".⁹ Moy stood as the first point of contact for many Americans, and thus came to be recognized as the standard by which Chinese women were regarded.

Afong Moy represented the growing development of the idea of "race" in the United States, which had become a budding field upon where new research and associated sciences were being invested in, and developed.¹⁰ Moy in this regard was studied, her physical attributes were placed on the same scale as her racially separate counterparts.¹¹ 19 Moy was a difficult symbol to

⁵ Carpenter & Yoon, 2014

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Carpenter & Yoon, 2014

place in terms of understanding her contribution to the idea of race in the United States.¹²

Moy, through her physical characteristics, was distinguished as less than as compared to her racial counterparts, as designed through the idea of race, however, she also stood for opulence, by means of the greater body of Chinese luxury and trade.¹³ Moy undertook two dual ideas, one wrapped in the prestige, supported by China's power and influence, while the other was centered on a notion of barbarity, wrapped in the novelty of a staged performance.¹⁴ Moy meant different things to different people, but no matter what she made an impression as the first of her kind.

These articles are representative of Afong Moy's reported time in the United States, giving a glimpse into how her presence was captured in the American news:

These reports were both published on Afong Moy in the New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette on November 24th, 1834. These articles are centered on providing a description of Moy, which includes her age, height, the size of her feet, cultural garb, the general nature of her personal history, and her purpose in the United States.

- **Headline/ [Chinese Lady; Afong Moy; Canton; Washington; Park Place; Chinese; English]; Article Type/ News/Opinion New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette (Concord, New Hampshire) • 11-24-1834 • Page [3]**

- **The Chinese Lady; Article Type/ News/Opinion New Hampshire Patriot and State**

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Gazette (Concord, New Hampshire) • 11-24-1834 • Page [3]

This was a report published on Afong Moy in the Connecticut Courant on April, 7 1838. In this report Moy was said to have been discarded by her previous benefactor and manager after the completion of her tour through the United States. She was described as being in a destitute state, and to have been awaiting the opportunity to return back to China.

- **Headline/ Afong Moy; Article Type/ News/Opinion Connecticut Courant, published as The Connecticut Courant (Hartford, Connecticut) • 04-07-1838 • Page [3]**

This report published in The Floridian on April 14th, 1838 furthers the claim that Moy had been discarded by her benefactor and manager, and was living in poverty.

- **Headline/ [Afong Moy; Chinese; New York; New Jersey]; Article Type/ News/Opinion Floridian and Advocate, published as The Floridian (Tallahassee, Florida) • 04-14-1838 • Page [3]**

In this report, published in The Daily Picayune on April 25,1838 the allegations of Moy being discarded by her benefactor and manger are disputed. In this regard it is claimed that any thought of such allegations being spread should be consider as rumor, and a threat of legal action stands to be levied against those who continue to report such claims.

- **Headline/ [Singular; Chinese curiosity; Miss Afong Moy; Picayune; Prosecute]; Article**

Type/ News/Opinion Times-Picayune, published as The Daily Picayune. (New Orleans, Louisiana) • 04-25-1838 • Page [3]

References

Carpenter, C. , & Yoon, K. (2014). Rethinking alternative contact in native american and chinese encounters: Juxtaposition in nineteenth-century us newspapers. *College Literature*, 41(1), 7-42.

Haddad, J. (2011). The chinese lady and china for the ladies: Race, gender, and public exhibition in jacksonian america. *Chinese America : History and Perspectives*, 5-19,75.