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TimeLine Theatre Company  
BACKSTORY: YOUR GUIDE TO TIMELINE PRODUCTIONS

Chicago Premiere  
THE CHINESE LADY  
By Lloyd Suh  
Directed by Helen Young

时间线剧场 (TimeLine Theatre Company)  
背后的故事：观剧指南

《来自中国的女人》  
芝加哥首演  
编剧：Lloyd Suh  
导演：Helen Young

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A Message: From TimeLine Artistic Director PJ Powers

Dear Friends,

Welcome back for the final production of TimeLine's 25th Anniversary season—the Chicago premiere of *The Chinese Lady*.

As longtime fans of playwright Lloyd Suh and director Helen Young, we proudly featured this play in our TimePieces play reading series in January 2020, and based on its tremendous resonance that night, we soon announced it would be included in our 2020-21 season.

That season never came to be, and as we've waited to bring this story to the stage, we've witnessed the disturbing rise in racist attacks and harassment targeted at the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community across our country and in Chicago.

The insight of Lloyd's play has only become more urgent.

In a story that spans decades, we meet a teenaged Afong Moy in 1834, reportedly the first Chinese woman to come to the United States—not by her choosing, but brought here as a sideshow to promote the sale of imported Chinese goods. For 25 cents, curious spectators paid to observe Afong—the Chinese Lady—purportedly to learn about her culture, but more as enticement for purchasing decorative objects from her native land.

Taken around the country for years and put on display by P.T. Barnum, she lived under a continual white gaze. In a country of immigrants, she still was billed and regarded as an exotic other.

Beyond 1850, there are no more historical records of Afong, and part of the beauty of Lloyd's play is that he not only gives a voice to this notable yet forgotten figure, but he imagines how her life, wit, and point of view might inform assumptions, perceptions and realities about Asian American culture then and now.

Produced on the heels of TimeLine's world premiere production of Relentless, this play continues a conversation about glossed-over periods and peoples—stories that deserve and demand both examination and introspection, so that we can improve our understanding of our country's history and provoke us to further contemplate what it means to be an American today.

I'm delighted to have you join us to cap off our silver anniversary season, rounding out a year replete with so many twists and turns and precarious moments of uncertainty. We're grateful for the unwavering support, financial investment, and belief in the importance of TimeLine's mission that have provided fuel for us to return to the stage.

As we look toward a new season and a return to our current home on Wellington Avenue, I couldn't be more hopeful about what lies ahead.

On page 11 of this Backstory, I encourage you to read more about TimeLine's extraordinary new Executive Director, Mica Cole. I'm ecstatic to partner with and learn from such a visionary leader who will raise the bar for what TimeLine is and can become. I've admired Mica for years, and she lights up any room she enters. Her warmth, generous spirit, compassion, depth of listening, and sense of humor infuse all who engage with her.

Working together with TimeLine's Company, Board, Staff—and with you—Mica and I look forward to guiding TimeLine into a new chapter, embracing our role as artistic and civic leaders, furthering TimeLine's commitment to being an antiracist, equitable, and inclusive organization, and leading us into our new home in Uptown.

We're so glad you're with us.

PJ

来自时间线剧场 (TimeLine Theatre Company) 艺术总监的一封信

亲爱的朋友们，

欢迎来到时间线剧场 (TimeLine Theatre Company) 第二十五季的最后公演：《来自中国的女人》的芝加哥首演！作为编剧Lloyd Suh和导演Helen Young的长期支持者，我们非常高

兴能将这部剧搬上舞台。基于这部剧在2020年的一月的“时光机(TimePieces)剧本朗读会”中引发的热烈反响，我们不久就宣布：在剧场的2020-2021季度呈现《来自中国的女人》。

很可惜，那一整季的演出都未曾实现。而正当我们期待着这个故事能在舞台与大家见面时，我们见证了在芝加哥和全美各处肆虐的、令人惊心的、一系列针对亚裔群体的种族袭击与伤害。

在这一刻，编剧Lloyd Suh的洞见变得愈发重要。

在这一个跨越数十年的故事中，我们在1834年遇见少女时期的阿芳妹 (Afong Moy 音译)。据传，她是历史上第一个来到美国的中国女性。不过，她的到来并不是基于她的个人选择，而是一场营销的把戏。她之所以被带来美国，是为了帮助推销从中国进口的商品。以25美分的价格，任何好奇的观众就可以前来观摩阿芳，这位来自中国的女人。这场表演，以文化学习为名，其实是吸引大家购买来自阿芳妹祖国的装饰陈列品。

数年间，她被带到美国各地表演，尔后被带去巴纳姆的美国博物馆展览。她持续地生活在白人的凝视中。在一个移民的国家中，她始终被视作为异国的他者。

在1850年以后，我们再也没有任何关于阿芳的历史资料。而本剧的魅力就在于，编剧不仅给予了阿芳这一位值得铭记却被忘记的人物一个独特的声音，他还通过想象阿芳的人生、她的巧思、她的视角，来描摹两个世纪以来美国社会中存在的对于亚裔社群的臆测、想象和现实。

本剧紧跟在**时间线剧场** (TimeLine Theatre Company) 的《Relentless》的全球首演之后，持续引导着我们去关注那些容易被历史遗忘的时期和人们：这些故事值得也需要我们的关注和内省。只有这样，我们才可以进一步理解我们国家的历史，以期进一步反思：在今天，做一个美国人究竟意味着什么。

我很高兴能与你们一同，为我们25周年画上句号，来结束这一起起伏伏、充斥着变数的一年。我们十分感谢大家始终如一的支持、投入、尤其是大家对于我们**时间线剧团** (TimeLine Theatre Company) 核心价值观的信任：是你们，为我们助力加油。

我们期待着即将到来的新演出季，期待着明年能够回归在惠灵顿大道，回到我们剧场目前的大本营所在。在这一刻，我比任何时候都要对未来充满希望。

我好高兴，你们和我们在一起。

PJ

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A Note: From Director Helen Young

Nathaniel and Francis Carnes brought Afong Moy to the United States by herself in 1834 when she was only 14 years old.

Being the first Chinese woman in America, she had no one to commiserate with, nor is there record of her being connected to any Chinese community in her lifetime. Once she arrived, she probably had no real agency in the selection of what represented “The Chinese Lady, Afong Moy.” At least for her most impressionable years, the Carnes chose her clothes, where she lived, and what adorned her rooms.

I wondered how a 14-year-old girl with no ties to a Chinese family or community, chaperoned in this country by white Americans, could hang on to her Chinese-ness. She might very reasonably have taken on more and more American-ness as time went on. And in Lloyd Suh’s re-imagining of what such a life may have to share with an audience, I was struck that her life essentially grafted into an American one, burdened with American injustices, infused with deep Chinese roots.

Afong's extraordinary American life generated a legacy that reaches across time, impacting even today’s Asian American experiences. And as such, we need to remember her singular life as one in a colorful quilt of diverse American stories, each worthy of inspection. If we do, it can illumine how we got here and help us “see” where we may want to go next.

一条来自导演的讯息

在1834年，当商人内森尼儿·卡内与弗兰斯·卡内(Nathaniel and Francis Carnes)将阿芳妹带到美国来时，她只有十四岁。

作为在美国生活的第一个中国女性，她的境况恐怕无人能解。目前也没有任何证据显示她这一生中，有任何机会与任何在美国生活的华裔社群联系。一旦她踏足美国的土地，她就不再拥有任何主权，甚至不能够决定自己被代表成为的“来自中国的女人，阿芳妹”是什么模样。哪怕是在她最为风光的那些年，是卡内兄弟为她挑选衣服、选择住处、装点房间。

我忍不住想，一个与中国家人和华裔社群丧失联系的14岁女孩，要怎样在白人主导的美国社会中，在时间流逝中保留自己的中国性呢。编剧Lloyd Suh，通过此剧，试图着想象并重现阿芳的生活。而在他与观众们传达的欣喜之中，最吸引我的是阿芳如何在她深植于中国的根中注入了美国的元素：她是如何漂移到美国的土地上，又是如何受累于美国境内的种种不平等。

阿芳不同寻常的美国生活为我们提供了一份历史的遗产：她的故事，哪怕是对于当代的华裔美国生活来说，也是意义深远。因此，我们需要铭记，她的独特人生也是五彩缤纷的美国故事中必不可少的一个篇章。她值得我们瞩目。只有这样，我们才能理解过去，才能更好地“看见”未来我们应当去向何方。

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## The Timeline: Early Chinese Immigrants in America

1784 The Empress of China becomes the first American ship to travel the trade route to China.

1784-1812 American ships make 400 voyages to China, bringing back a small number of Chinese men who are merchants or hired crew members.

1834 Afong Moy becomes reportedly the first Chinese woman to ever come to America.

1842 China loses the Opium War to Britain. The economic hardship following the war will lead to an increasing number of Chinese fleeing from their hometowns to the U.S.

1848 Maria Seise, the first known Chinese woman immigrant to America, arrives. Seise is brought to the United States as one of the servants of Charles V. Gillespie, an enterprising New York trader.

In this same year, the Gold Rush Era begins. The promise of gold brings waves of Chinese men to the U.S. At this time, the population of Chinese women in the U.S. is much smaller; they are mostly prostitutes who are imported to the predominantly male California as indentured servants.

1855 As the California Gold Rush comes to an early conclusion, Chinese men turn to work in the mining counties of Tuolumne, Amador, Sacramento, and Nevada.

1862 The construction of the Transcontinental Railroad starts. A large number of Chinese migrants will help build the railroads—from 1863 to 1869 alone, approximately 15,000 Chinese workers participate. Despite being assigned to more grueling labor than their white counterparts, the Chinese are paid less and given worse accommodation.

1860s-80s Railroad work brings the Chinese to nearly every region under development in America. Thousands of laborers leave California for work in the Pacific Northwest, the Southwest, and the South, in fishing, farming, factories—any manufacturers that need workers. Many workers save their earnings and initiate small businesses.

Meanwhile, the number of Chinese prostitutes decreases drastically as many prostitutes marry Chinese laborers, merchants, grocers, and restaurant owners.

1868 China lifts its ancient ban on emigration to foreign countries.

1871 The Chinese Massacre, as it will become known, takes place on a cool October afternoon in Los Angeles. The mass lynching is fueled by propaganda that Chinese Americans are “barbarians taking jobs away from whites.”

During the massacre, 19 Chinese people—10 percent of L.A.'s Chinese population—are murdered, and Chinatown is looted for cash and valuables worth an estimated \$40,000.

1875 The Page Act of 1875 effectively prevents Chinese women from immigrating to the United States. In the early 1870s, there are roughly 78 Chinese women per 1,000 Chinese men in the U.S. After the law's passage, that number will drop to 48 women per 1,000 men.

1882 In what widely will be considered the country's first major immigration policy, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 bans Chinese laborers from immigrating to the United States and effectively ends all Chinese migration to the U.S. Born out of thinly veiled xenophobia and paranoia over Chinese people stealing jobs, the Act also prevents Chinese migrants already in the U.S. from being granted citizenship, banishing them to the legal status of "resident aliens."

1882-1892 Massacres of Chinese miners continue to happen throughout the U.S., including the Rock Springs Massacre (1885) and The Snake River Massacre (1887). These racial tensions have been long brewing: Many white miners blame their poor working conditions on the influx of Chinese miners, who are willing to work under worse conditions for less money.

1892 The Chinese Exclusion Act is renewed.

1902 The Chinese Exclusion Act is made permanent.

1943 When China becomes an ally of the U.S. against Japan during World War II, the Chinese Exclusion Act is repealed by the 1943 Magnuson Act.

## 早期美国华人移民编年史

1784 美国第一艘中国商运船只“中国皇后号”登陆中国。

1784-1812 在这一时期，与中国通商的美国船只往来达400轮次。通过这些商运船只，有一小批男性中国商人和雇佣船工被带至美国。

1834 在历史记载里，第一位来到美国的中国女性，阿芳妹，抵达美国。

1842 随着中国在鸦片战争中溃败，战后的经济萧条导致愈来愈多的中国人背井离乡，远赴美国。

1848 玛丽亚·瑟斯 ( Maria Seise ) 是目前已知的第一位移民美国的中国女性。她是作为纽约商人查尔斯·吉勒斯皮 ( Charles V. Gillespie ) 的佣人之一抵达旧金山的。

同年,加州淘金热引领着数批华人前往美国。这一时期,美国的中国女性人数要比男性人数要少得多。她们大多是签下契约,被送至以男性为主的加利福尼亚州的性工作者。

1855 随着加州淘金热早早结束,华人劳工们旋即前往图奥勒米,阿马多,萨克拉门托,和内华达的矿厂谋生。

1862 贯穿美国东西海岸的洲际铁路破土动工。这条铁路与成千上万的华人密不可分:从1863到1869,仅仅六年间,将近15000华人劳工投入了这项建设工程。纵然华工们负责的工作部分更加危险繁重,他们的薪水和待遇却远远不如白人工人。

1860-80年代 铁路工程将华人带至了全美各地的发展中区域。上千华工离开加州,前往美国西北,西南,以及南部地区,成为当地渔业,农业,和工业的劳工。许多华人以劳动积蓄创办起小型企业。同时,随着许多中国女性与华人劳工,商人,杂货商贩,以及餐厅老板结婚成家,在美生活的华人女性中性工作者的比例急剧下降。

1868 中国政府撤销了长久以来限制国民移民的禁令。

1871 在一个凉爽的十月下午,后世所称的“洛杉矶华人大屠杀”爆发。此次大规模种族仇杀事件的起因是,当时在美国四处流传着对于华人的仇视言论:华人们被丑化为“抢走白人工作的野蛮人。”

在这次屠杀事件中,有19名华人丧生——这一数字是当时洛杉矶华人人口的10%。与此同时,中国城也被洗劫一空,遭受的现金和财产损失将近40000美元。

1875 《1875年佩琦法案》(1875 Page Act)禁止了中国女性移民美国。1870年代初期,美国每1000名华人男性大约对应78名华人女性。该法案通过后,这一比例降至了每1000名男性对应48名女性。

1882 《1882排华法案》颁布。这一法案被广泛认定为,美国历史上第一部针对特定族群的移民法。法案限制了华人劳工前往美国,全面禁止了中国移民。该法案还禁止了美国境内的中国移民获得公民身份,将他们的合法地位限制为“外籍居民”,明明白白地显示出当时美国境内的仇外情绪和对华人占领工作市场的危机感。

1882-1892 美国各地针对中国矿工的种族屠杀持续发生:这其中包括石泉城大屠杀(1885)和地狱峡谷大屠杀(1887)。此中的种族矛盾积蓄已久:许多白人矿工将他们恶劣的工作条件归咎于中国工人的涌入,尤其是因为后者愿意接受更糟糕的薪酬和待遇。

1892 美国政府续签《排华法案》。

1902 美国政府宣布:《排华法案》将永久实施。

1943 由于中国在第二次世界大战期间成为与美国共同对抗日本的盟友，《马格努森法案》在1943年取代了《排华法案》。

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### The Chinese Lady: Afong Moy

With her hands tightly clasped across her stomach, Afong Moy sits center stage in a room filled with Chinese goods—paintings, lanterns, and teapots. When we look at her in the 1835 lithographic print entitled “The Chinese Lady,” she silently gazes back at us. Who was Afong Moy in history?

On October 17, 1834, when Nathaniel and Francis Carne’s stock-in-trade cargo ship Washington sailed into New York Harbor full of tea and fancy Chinese goods, a special passenger received special mention in the New York Daily Advertiser: “The ship Washington, Capt. Obear has brought out a beautiful Chinese Lady, called Julia Foochee ching-chang king, daughter of Hong wang-tzang tzee king. As she will see all who are disposed to pay twenty-five cents. She will no doubt have many admirers.”

Her lengthy name in the ads combined a series of appellations that sounded “oriental,” along with an English forename Julia, as well as an honorific title “king.” The next day, however, on the manifest records of the ship, our royal and oriental lady was suddenly renamed as “auphmoy.” The only name spelled in lowercase in this list of passengers, “auphmoy” reads like a series of letters randomly strung together, just like a noise. “Auphmoy” was listed as a servant of Captain Obear’s wife.

Then, two weeks later, on November 6, our Chinese Lady adopted a simpler new name, “Afong Moy.” Well, with the English spellings, it is impossible to reconstruct this name in Chinese characters. But, given its sound, “Afong Moy” was likely only a generic Chinese women’s nickname: The character for “Moy” could be a family name, but is more likely just a diminutive suffix that means “little sister” or “girl,” whereas the use of “A” as the first syllable indicates that the name is an informal address.

Yes, we can call her Afong Moy, as she was mostly known by this name during her life in the United States, but we must remember: The real name and the real life of Afong Moy is forever lost in history. Who was Afong Moy? What family was she from? All of these questions surrounding her identities are left unanswered. Rather, her life story was pinned down to imagined and generalized Chinese-ness, a foreign other, the Chinese Lady.

As we look for traces of her by flipping through prints and newspapers from 19th century America, we realize that Afong Moy is someone who only lived in the others’ gaze—we have no



access to her own writings, or anything in her own words. Rather, we can only read her through poems written after seeing her; imagine her through drawings of her in the ads. We can only piece together a shadow image of Afong Moy through historical records that are mediated by a third party who tells her stories for her.

Our play *The Chinese Lady* seeks to break her 200-year-long silence, and imagine her with a voice of her own. Here, playwright Lloyd Suh brilliantly imagines her as a lively and witty spirit, affording us a chance to look at her as a real person with thoughts, ideas, humor, and emotions.

来自中国的女人：阿芳妹

她的双手紧握着，拘谨地放置在双腿之上。在屋子中央，她静静地坐着，身旁围绕着不少书画、灯笼、还有茶具。通过这张来自1835年、名为“来自中国的女人”的印刷品中，我们得以能够一睹阿芳妹的样貌。与此同时，她，也悄悄地看向我们。在历史之中，阿芳妹，究竟是谁呢？

1834年10月17日，当运货商船“华盛顿号”满载着茶叶和其他花哨的中国商品，登陆纽约港口时，一位特别的乘客在当日的《纽约每日快讯》中获得了特别的关注：“‘华盛顿号’的船长为我们带来了一位美丽的中国女性：名为Julia Foochee ching-chang king（音译：朱莉亚·福奇·清冲王）。她是Hong wang-tzang tzee king（音译：洪王藏子王）之女。任何能拿出25美分的人都可以一见她的样貌。想必，她一定会有不少追随者。”

她冗长的姓名犹如一副拼贴画作：前有英语名字“朱莉亚”，附以一连串听起来好似东方的字符，最后再冠以尊称“王”。不过，仅仅一天之后，在货船的旅客名单中，这位来自东方的皇家女士便改名叫做“auphmoy”（音译：阿福妹）。这个名字并未大写，在名单上一连串的西洋名字中间，好像是一个由几个随机选择的字母串联而成的异常噪音。在名单上，“阿福妹”被列为船长妻子的仆人。

紧接着，在两周之后的11月6日，这位来自中国的女人又获得了一个新的名字：Afong Moy（音译：阿芳妹）。仅仅通过英语拼写，我们已无法得知她名字确切的汉字书写。不过，由英语发音推测，Afong Moy大概指向这一颇为普遍的广东地区女性小名：阿芳妹。Moy一词有可能是姓氏“梅”，不过更有可能是昵称“妹”。

我们当然可以用Afong Moy这个名字来称呼她，毕竟这是她在美生活期间为世人所知的名字。不过，我们不应该忘记：她真正的名字和真实的人生已经消失在历史中。她是谁？她来自什么样的家庭？哪怕是有关她身世的基本信息，我们也无从得知。很遗憾，她的人生故事，终究是作为他者，停留在人们对于中国扁平的想象之中。

当我们在19世纪的报纸和印刷品中翻找阿芳妹的痕迹时，我们会发现她始终生活在他人的凝视之中——我们没有任何她所说原话的记录，更加没有任何她亲笔书写的材料。我们只能通过别人为她书写的诗歌想象她，或是通过零零散散的广告绘画来猜测她的模样。好可惜，我们只能以他人书写的二手材料去拼凑出阿芳妹的影子图像。

不过，我们的剧本《来自中国的女人》意欲打破她长达200年的沉寂，去想象她曾拥有过的独特声音。在编剧Lloyd Suh细腻的笔触之下，一个富有活力又颇有才情的个体诞生了。藉由此，我们第一次，真正有机会看到一个丰满的阿芳妹的形象：她幽默风趣，情感充沛，富有所思也富有所想。

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The Context: Objectifying China: From the early 19th century to present day

On November 12, 1834, New Yorker Philip Hone wrote down his impression of Afong Moy in his diary: “Her appearance is exactly the same as the figures on tea chests—a large head, small features and a countenance devoid of expression.”

Through the eyes of Hone, Afong Moy was seen as nothing more than a two-dimensional image on a tea chest. The Chinese body was objectified to a mere façade, “a countenance devoid of expression.”

In fact, most Americans in the early 19th century encountered China not through human interactions, but through Chinese imports: china ware, fans, lacquer, and wallpaper. Images of Chinese on tea crates, as well as statues of Chinese, were particularly popular in tea stores. As we see in Hone’s example, the association of the Chinese body with a flat and static image was, at times, projected onto a living human body.

Intriguingly, the objectification of the Chinese body, and broadly of the Asian body, remains an issue in current-day America. Anne Anlin Cheng, in her seminal work “Ornamentalism: A Feminist Theory for the Yellow Woman,” argues that Asiatic femininity is often “constructed through fabrics, ornaments, and skins that never enjoyed the fantasy of organicity; one populated by nonsubjects who endure as ornamental appendages.” Drawing on the Metropolitan Museum’s 2015 exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass,” as well as the story of Afong Moy, Cheng calls our attention to the persisting racial reduction of Asian flesh to ornament:

“This sumptuous collection rehearses for the twenty-first-century audience the basic tenets of nineteenth-century Orientalism: that opulence and sensuality are the signature components of Asiatic character; that Asia is always ancient, excessive, feminine, available, and decadent; that material consumption promises cultural possession; that there is no room in the Orientalist imagination for national, ethnic, or historical specificities. Most of all, the show reminds us that China (conflated throughout the show with Asia at large) equals ornament.”

– Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentalism: A Feminist Theory for the Yellow Woman*”

历史背景：物化中国——从19世纪早期到当今美国

1834年11月12日，纽约客Philip Hone（音译：菲利普·霍恩）在他的日记中写下他对于阿芳妹的印象：“她长得就和茶叶盒上的小人画像一模一样——一个巨大的头，极小的五官之间毫无表情。”

在霍恩的眼中，阿芳妹被视作一个茶叶盒上简单的二维图像：这位来自中国的女人就这样被物化成为一个“毫无表情”的空壳。

在19世纪早期，大部分美国人都无法通过真实生活中的人际交往来认识中国。相反，他们通过装饰物件了解这个东方国度：扇面、漆器、器物等等一系列中国外销商品是他们唯一能够窥探到中国文化的窗口。在这一时期，茶盒上的中国小人画像，还有中国小人雕像都是茶叶商店里的常见装饰。正如同我们在霍恩的例子中见到的那样，有时候，对于中国的扁平刻画也会被投射在真实的亚洲身体之上。

事实上，直至今日，对于中国身体乃至亚洲身体的物化也依然存在。学者程安林（Anne Anlin Cheng）在她开创性的作品“装饰主义：写给亚裔女性的女权理论”中，她论述亚裔女性往往“被建构在服装、纹样、饰品等表面之上，而不会被想象成有机的个体；她们不被赋予主体性，而停留于装饰性的表面。”在程安林的书中，她以阿芳妹的故事与2015年大都会博物馆的展览“镜面之下的中国”为例，引导我们去关注亚裔身体是如何在历史和现在中被剥离了肌体，想象成装饰的表面：

“这个奢华的展览为21世纪的观众们再次温习了19世纪东方主义的基本要义：眼花缭乱的观感体验标志着亚洲的主要特性；亚洲是古代的、丰余的、女性的、唾手可得的、颓废落后的；物质上的消费意味着文化上的侵占；在东方主义的想象力，容不下任何有关国家、民族、或是历史时期的具体讨论。最重要的，这个展览提醒着我们，在当今社会，中国（乃至整个亚洲）也依然被与装饰划上等号。”

—程安林，“装饰主义：写给亚裔女性的女权理论”

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The Context: Cultural Exchange vs. Chinese Curiosities

In the play *The Chinese Lady*, Afong Moy exhibits a passion for cultural exchange, which explains her reasons behind coming to the United States.

During the late 18th and early 19th century in China, the foreign trade—albeit limited to only one port that was located in Canton, Afong Moy’s hometown—brought about lots of fascinating cultural exchange. From the extant import/export goods produced and traded in the southern port of Canton, we can still observe some “exchange of ideas and practices around the globe,” to use Afong Moy’s words. To name a few exciting transcultural fusions from that time: export

china teapots adorned with American eagles, local paintings that adopted a Western perspectival method, and European glass mirrors framed in traditional wooden frames.

Seen in this light, the “hopeful exchange around the globe” that Afong Moy wished to see was already happening, albeit rather implicitly, in her hometown Canton (present-day Guangdong Province). But Afong Moy’s merchant managers, despite being a part of the transnational exchange of things and ideas, deliberately left out the cultural exchange component in their publicity of the Chinese curiosities, as their business was dependent upon the image of a pure and absolute Chinese culture.

### 历史背景：文化交流与猎奇中国

在《来自中国的女人》这一剧本中，阿芳妹对于文化交流有着极大热情，而因此远渡来到美国。

在鸦片战争以前的清朝，中国的对外贸易是仅限于阿芳妹的家乡广东地区的。不过，哪怕仅有一个运输港口，这一贸易关卡也带来了许多卓有意义的文化交流。目前传世的艺术品中也有不少当时从广东南部港口出入口的贸易商品—这些商品，用阿芳妹的话说，留有着不少“充满希望的文化和工艺的交流”的痕迹：在这一时期，我们能够看到有装饰有美国雄鹰图案的中国瓷器，也有运用了西方焦点透视法绘制的中国画，还有装裱在传统中国木框中的欧洲玻璃镜。

这样看来，阿芳妹期待看到的“充满希望的文化和公益的交流”已经借由她的家乡广东地区，潜移默化地发生了。不过，对于阿芳妹的商人经理们来说，哪怕他们身处于“文化和工艺的交流”的网络之中，他们仍然刻意地剔除了这些文化的交流，转而塑造出一个纯粹和绝对的中国文化，借由人们对于中国的猎奇心理赢取利益。

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### Not Translated Yet

The Interview: Playwright Lloyd Suh

As rehearsals were gearing up for *The Chinese Lady*, dramaturg Yiwen Wu (YW) posed a few questions to New York-based playwright Lloyd Suh (LS) about the reverence he has for Afong Moy, the value of interrogating social constructs, and how he thinks about his connections with a broader cultural conversation.

(YW) What first attracted you to the story of Afong Moy?

(LS) I was doing research on a different play—a play that was about, in many ways, the history of stereotyping—when I came across Afong Moy and her story. It just stuck with me. I wasn't even thinking about a potential play at the time, it was just something that I wanted to know about personally, and try to find out as much as I could.

It resonated with me on the level of conversations I've had with other peers in the performing arts around the performance of ourselves, really. What does it signify when I do this? What do people see when I do this? What is the perception, and what are the ways in which I don't even know how I'm communicating something when I'm on stage or going through life? The more I started thinking about that, the more I started thinking about how it might be a play, because of the performative nature of it. That's where it all began.

(YW) Could you tell us a little bit more about the resonance you felt with Afong Moy?

(LS) My initial impulse was the performative aspect, but then it changed. As I was going through it, there was a point where I felt like, oh, I don't know how to end this. I don't know if this play has an ending, because the history of Afong Moy was lost to us. She disappeared, she was forgotten, she was discarded. But I had begun to revere her, to see her as a very important part of American history, of history in general, world history, human history. I didn't want to be in a position of making stuff up, so I put it away for a little while.

But Afong Moy continued to haunt me. I sat with the question of, why was she forgotten? And then I started to think about the reasons she was forgotten being still with us today.

(YW) What are your thoughts on the term, Asian American?

(LS) My relationship with that term is evolving, and it changes. I'm totally self-aware of the fact that it is a social construct, but I also think that lots of social constructs are valuable.

I'm a playwright. I deal in fiction. I'm interested in social constructs. I'm maybe more interested in the things we socially construct than the things that are naturally constructed, or whatever. Like, how do you define American? What does it mean to say you're an American? Where is there solidarity? I'm interested in that both as a citizen and as a writer. I'm interested in where is there solidarity and where is solidarity possible, and how does that affect our day-to-day life? How does that affect our citizenship?

I think as citizens, we strive to identify the ways in which we have solidarity with other Americans. And in that, Asian American is useful insofar as it allows us to consider the ways we have a different kind of solidarity.

(YW) What are some of your biggest artistic influences?

(LS) Here in New York, I've been part of an extended community. Early in my writing life, I felt like part of a community of other Asian American playwrights. Over the past 10 years, it became just a wide diversity of playwrights from all over the world. It's given me this feeling that my work is in conversation with a broader ecology of writing. I'm not just writing purely out of my own impulse, in my own ego, but I'm part of a larger cultural, global conversation of what we're trying to express as an art, but also what we're trying to express as just a collection of voices.

I worked for 10 years in new play development, and I was able to develop really lasting relationships with hundreds of other writers, and a lot of them are some of my closest friends. I think about how my work is in conversation with theirs and how our work collectively is in conversation with a broader cultural conversation that's happening politically, globally, all that.

(YW) In an interview in 2019, you said that this play is about empathy and how valuable it can be to strive for understanding. Since then, has the key message changed?

(LS) I'll be honest, I haven't thought about it in those terms. As I think about it now, I would frame it a little differently. I would say that what I'm really interested in is, what does it mean to be an American? There's something that urgent about it.

It feels like at this moment, this country is really seriously reckoning over our history. I think it's still true what I said before, but what's going on in the world right now makes me feel like there's something a little more urgent on the table right now, that it goes deeper, or is becoming more specific, somehow.

I genuinely think Afong Moy is an important figure in human history. As we reckon with what it is to be an American living in this time, we have to reckon with the ways in which history erased her, but also just add her in general to our understanding of history.

(YW) Do you have upcoming projects we should keep an eye out for?

(LS) I have a few other plays. The biggest one is called *Exclusion*, on the legacy of the Chinese Exclusion Act and in particular, the experience of migrants who were detained on Angel Island. Another play, *The Heart Sellers*, is rooted in more contemporary history—the 1970s around the legacy of the immigration reform Hart-Celler Act. That play, which focuses on two recent immigrants, one from South Korea and one from the Philippines, as they attempt to find unexpected solidarity with each other in a small American city, will be at Milwaukee Rep in the early spring of 2023.

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#### BACKSTORY: THE CREDITS

Dramaturgy & Research by Yiwon Wu, Alisa Boland and Wenke Huang

Written by Yiwon Wu, Alisa Boland and Wenke Huang, with contributions by PJ Powers, Helen Young, Chelsea Smith, and Lara Goetsch

Editing and Graphic Design by Lara Goetsch

The Chinese Lady promotional image design by Michal Janicki  
Backstory is published to accompany each production during the season

Our Mission: TimeLine Theatre presents stories inspired by history that connect with today's social and political issues. Our collaborative artistic team produces provocative theatre and educational programs that engage, entertain and enlighten.

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### OPTIONAL FOR TRANSLATION:

Backstage: Introducing TimeLine's new Executive Director: Mica Cole

On April 20, TimeLine announced that we are welcoming Mica Cole as our new Executive Director!

A Chicago native raised on the South Side, Mica brings nearly two decades of experience as an arts administrator and changemaker. She previously served for eight seasons as the Repertory Producer at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and in Chicago as Executive Director of Free Street Theater and Director of Education and Engagement at Writers Theatre, among numerous other leadership achievements.

Mica's appointment is part of a planned leadership expansion for our company, as former Managing Director Elizabeth K. Auman takes on the new role of Director of New Home Development, focusing on managing TimeLine's new home development project in Uptown. Everyone at TimeLine is beyond thrilled that Mica has chosen to join the company at this transformative time, and we want everyone to get to know her better!

Please check out some of Mica's responses in a conversation with Director of Major Gifts Chelsea Smith below, then visit [timelinetheatre.com/blog](http://timelinetheatre.com/blog) to read an extended version of this interview plus more details about TimeLine's leadership expansion.

Chelsea Smith (CS): Your new role as Executive Director is actually not your first time working with TimeLine. You appeared on stage in 2008 in *Weekend* by Gore Vidal. Can you recall what that experience was like?

Mica Cole (MC): *Weekend* was the perfect beginning to my relationship with TimeLine. It was a smart 1960s political comedy about race—precisely the type of work that I was drawn to. The dramaturgy of the play was fascinating and the conversations it spurred were, well, timely to say the least. President Obama was leading in most polls and yet we were all quite uncertain about whether or not this country was ready to elect a Black man as President of the United States. Just weeks after *Weekend* closed, I was standing in Grant Park watching President-elect Barack

Obama deliver his acceptance speech. My first experience working with TimeLine is forever tied to that life-changing and history-making moment.

(CS) Wow, what a fascinating correlation and a truly remarkable moment! Another correlation is the fact that you attended the same school as TimeLine's founders —The Theatre School at DePaul University. What does that connection mean to you?

(MC) It's kind of romantic, isn't it? I remember everyone talking about TimeLine when I was at The Theatre School—they were these cool kids who started a theatre company and everyone wanted to audition for them.

When you grow up in Chicago theatre, the idea of starting a company is romanticized. You're told that only a brave few actually have what it takes to do it, and they did.

We weren't at TTS at the same time, but we walked the same halls and had many of the same professors, so we're part of a similar era. For me that creates this deep sense of belonging and a sense of pride in the work at TimeLine.

(CS) You've worked extensively across the country and for many years at Oregon Shakespeare Festival. What led you back to Chicago?

(MC) Honestly, it just felt like it was time for me to come home. I missed the vibrancy of the city, the art, the food, the people, the practical Midwestern sensibilities. Most importantly, I missed my Mom. I'd like to think that the universe conspired to bring me home so I could find my way back to TimeLine. I feel like we should go with that.

(CS) We're happy, and grateful, that you answered that calling! So, why were you interested in the Executive Director role at TimeLine?

(MC) I was incredibly impressed with how much the company has grown over the past decade. Not just in terms of size and scale but also the depth and reach of its mission. From the expansion of the company of artists, to the creation of TimeLine South, to the new home in Uptown—all of these developments represent a bold expression of the company's commitment to everyone's history. And I think that's exactly the kind of unequivocal dedication to core values that this social moment demands.

(CS) You're stepping in at an auspicious moment. We're emerging from a pandemic, celebrating a 25th Anniversary, and moving toward a new home in Uptown. What's your vision for TimeLine over these next few years?

(MC) This moment is a true testament to the thoughtful stewardship that precedes me. My hope is to build upon this solid foundation with the same steadfast commitment to sustainable growth that has gotten us here. We're expanding that commitment to ensure that we grow in ways that are also equitable.



As we continue to move through the phases of opening a new space in a new community, my hope is that we'll use this opportunity to ask defining questions about this next chapter of TimeLine's history. This promising and exciting moment is unfolding against a backdrop of profound social reckoning and dissatisfaction with systemic and structural inequalities. I'm curious about what we've learned about who we are and what decisions we've made or have yet to make about the kind of civic and cultural organization we aspire to be. And how will those decisions shape our approach to moving into a new community? These conversations have already started and they will continue to evolve as we sharpen our analysis and awareness of our role as a civic organization.

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#### OPTIONAL FOR TRANSLATION:

The New Home: A welcoming gathering place for theatre, education, and community engagement

IT'S TIME: THE CAMPAIGN FOR TIMELINE'S NEW HOME

Creating a new cultural asset for Chicago, in Uptown.

Laying the foundation for TimeLine's next era.

Even a pandemic can't deter TimeLine's progress toward establishing the first home of our own. Located at 5035 N. Broadway Avenue (near the corner of Broadway and Argyle) in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood, we're creating a space to grow and innovate. It's time to uplift everything that you love about TimeLine while supporting new artistic possibilities. Read more about our new home in The Chinese Lady program book or via the webpage below!

To learn more about ways you can support, please contact Chelsea Smith, Director of Major Gifts, at [chelsea@timelinetheatre.com](mailto:chelsea@timelinetheatre.com) or 773.281.8463 x16.

[TIMELINETHEATRE.COM/ITS-TIME](https://TIMELINETHEATRE.COM/ITS-TIME)