



[Email this citation](#)

[Introduction](#)

[1. Xanadu](#)

[2. Romantic](#)

[Domesticity](#)

[3. The China](#)

[Effect](#)

[4. China in](#)

[Miniature](#)

[5. Floating](#)

[Ethnology](#)

[China to New](#)

[York](#)

[Early Reception](#)

[China](#)

[Downgraded](#)

[Barnumization](#)

[Date in Court](#)

[Boston to](#)

[London](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[6. God's China](#)

[7. Fruits of](#)

[Diplomacy](#)

[8. Bayard](#)

[Taylor's Asia](#)

[9. Exposition of](#)

[1876](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Bibliography](#)

5. A Floating Ethnology: The Strange Voyage of the Chinese Junk *Keying*

1

If the Cantonese crew members on board the Chinese junk *Keying* felt cooped up, they had good reason. Since departing Hong Kong in December 1846 and sailing all the way to New York via the Cape of Good Hope, they had worked, eaten, and slept on this 160-foot-long boat. When they initially signed on, the British captain had assured them that the junk was headed only as far as the island of Java. And after they discovered the deception, he exercised brute force to keep them with the craft. But whereas the surrounding ocean and a coercive captain had once kept them from leaving the junk, now crowds of New Yorkers did. As one of the top attractions of the summer, the *Keying* drew droves of curious people who were eager to board it and meet the crew. For the latter, these visitors could be exhausting as well as annoying—especially the children who repeatedly tugged on their dangling queues.

Tired of being an exhibit, several members of the crew decided to stretch their legs and see the sights of Gotham. On August 2, 1847, they disembarked and headed into the city. Of course, being Chinese in a predominantly white city, they were unable to blend into the crowds and so continued to be an exhibit even while taking time off. The crew members eventually arrived at the exhibition space of Afong Moy, the Chinese Lady. Originally brought to New York by China traders as part of an ingenious marketing ploy, Moy had long since become a fixture in the city's diverse landscape of popular amusements. Now, in a most peculiar encounter, she found herself face to face with the latest Chinese act. According to the *New York Herald*, the existence of the Chinese lady "astonished" the crew members, who had previously believed that "they were the only 'natives' in the country." In its usual playful style, the newspaper expressed the opinion that the crew should behave "in a sociable way" by inviting "their fair countrywoman" to their junk to "talk over old times." ¹

Of course, we can never know what words the two parties actually exchanged during this meeting. However, at least symbolically, the encounter occurred at an important juncture, where the end of one era was rubbing up against the beginning of another. To most who saw her, Afong Moy stood for a China that was remote and mysterious, effectively sealed off from the curious gaze of foreigners. Indeed, the heyday of her exhibition took place before the Opium War (1839–42), when foreigners were prohibited from penetrating China's interior. In addition, her alleged status as a lady from the upper crust further enhanced this aura of mystery because Chinese men of affluence were known to sequester their wives and daughters from the public. Since these ladies seldom ventured onto the streets, even Americans who lived in China could not claim to have ever witnessed a Chinese lady. And so the exhibition of Afong Moy proved irresistible to Americans, because it seemed to grant them access to a doubly forbidden sight: Afong Moy was a woman secluded from society inside a country sealed off from the world.

If Moy symbolized a closed China, the *Keying* signified China's openness in the wake of the Opium War. During that conflict, England's naval superiority forced China to accede to demands for greater access to Chinese markets. In the ensuing Treaty of Nanjing (1842), China conceded to England the right to trade in four ports in addition to Canton: Ningbo, Shanghai, Xiamen, and Fuzhou. Indeed, the *Keying* seemed to reflect this new power arrangement, for here was a Chinese crew manning a Chinese vessel that was owned and commanded by a British captain. Even the junk's name carried symbolic importance in that it was named for Qiying (*Keying*), the internationally famous Chinese statesman responsible for negotiating the Treaty of Nanjing.

5

For many Americans, the reconfiguration of China's relationship to England triggered a concomitant repositioning of their own attitudes toward China. When Afong Moy first appeared in New York in 1834, most people were too enamored with China's elegant mystery to make disparaging remarks. Here visitors appear not to have preached to her, mocked her customs and appearance, or harshly criticized her country of origin. Although some disapproved of footbinding, most people mainly passed their allotted time in her company relishing the cultural difference that she represented and admiring the silky world of Oriental luxury in which she was snugly ensconced.

But by the time the *Keying* arrived, China had already fallen several notches in the estimation of most Americans. Many, though, instead of merely devaluing Chinese civilization in the wake of the Opium War, increasingly spoke of China with an air of condescension and mockery. In fact, a new and unflattering construction of the Chinese emerged in this period, the entire purpose of which was to generate laughter. First, Chinese males became effeminate fops, who dressed in motley silk costumes and sported ridiculously long fingernails. Second, the Chinese enjoyed a diet that consisted of rats, mice, dogs, and cats. Third, they were heathens who worshipped strange deities and regularly bowed down before gaudy idols. Fourth, their officials were pompous buffoons who proudly adhered to their own customs and beliefs despite unmistakable evidence the rest of the world had passed them by. And finally, they were opium addicts who were comically pathetic in their inability to resist the poppy and the pipe. Like Cathay, this construction of China and the Chinese was more grounded in fantasy than in fact. Unlike its picturesque predecessor, though, it lacked innocence and charm. It was a cruel Cathay.

In sum, the people whom Dunn had admired had now become a race of clowns who entertained the rest of the world with their ludicrous appearance, their absurd arrogance, and their grotesque habits. The perceptive British captain quickly sensed this shift in the public's view of China. And thinking of his junk more as a business venture than as an educational tool, he applied a profit-centered calculus to all decisions regarding the exhibition of *Keying*. In the end, he chose to reinforce the patronizing views of his customers in order to reap the financial rewards.

From China to New York

With the onset of the Opium War in 1839, interest in China surged in the United States, and it would remain at a high level well into the 1850s. In playhouses in the major eastern cities, a spate of new theatrical productions appeared that were designed to capitalize on the collective turn of Americans to the Far East. The scripts of these plays have not survived, but their titles offer testimony to the fascination Americans held for China: *Yankees in China*; or, *A Union of the Flags* (1840), *The Enchanted Chinese*; or, *A Fete at Peking* (1841), *Bohea-Man's Gal* (1845), *Celestial Empire*; or, *The Yankee in China* (1846), *Mose in China* (1849), *Female Guard*; or, *Bloomers in China* (1851), *The Lamp-lighter of the Pagoda*; or, *The Chinaman's Revenge* (1854).² In addition, the Ravel family, a theatrical troupe from France, arrived in 1852 to perform *Kim-Ka!*, a pantomime about a French balloonist who descends on China and ends up marrying the emperor's daughter.³ White Europeans and Americans almost certainly wrote, produced, and acted in all of the above productions, but there was at least one Chinese genuine stage act during this period: The Tong Hook Theatrical Troupe of Shanghai treated people in San Francisco and New York to authentic Chinese opera in 1852 and 1853.⁴

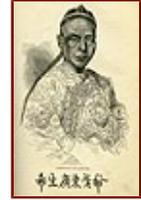
The most intriguing China-centered event, however, took place not on a stage but on the deck of a sailing craft. Aware that one could make money by feeding the current fascination with China, an anonymous American conceived of the idea of somehow acquiring a Chinese junk, manning it with a Chinese crew, and loading its lower compartment with curiosities and then sailing for the United States. In 1846, this individual apparently went so far as either to build a junk based on models of the real thing or to purchase one.⁵ If he chose the latter course, the transaction would not have been extremely difficult. In 1842, junks that for centuries had monopolized the transport of goods and passengers along the China coast began to face competition from European vessels. The latter, being better armed and faster than the pirate ships that menaced the area, forced many of the junks out of business.⁶ And so an individual with financial means could probably convince a junk owner easily enough to quit the coastal shipping business and sell his vessel.

10

After going so far as to purchase the *Keying*, the American for unknown reasons abandoned the entire scheme later in 1846 and sold it for \$75,000 to Charles Kellett, a British captain who had recently surveyed the Chinese coast in order to create charts that could facilitate navigation.⁷ Intending to sail the junk to London for exhibition purposes, Kellett proceeded to stock it with Chinese objects, creating in effect a floating museum. He also hired twenty European sailors and selected a man named Revett to be his chief mate, since the latter seemed to possess the desired trait of loyalty.

Most important, he secured a Chinese crew of about forty men by offering to pay them eight dollars for each month of service. Although they would perform various duties on the vessel, Kellett mainly intended them to be a part of the show once the *Keying* arrived in London. In finding these men, he did not have to look hard, since junk hands, who were already poor, desperately needed work now that European competition had left many junks idle. ⁸ To add color and prestige to the *Keying*, Kellett signed on a low-ranking mandarin, Hsing ([fig. 5.1](#)), as well as a Chinese artist, Sam-sing. Chinese law forbade any junk to leave Chinese waters, but Kellett bribed the right officials and set sail for Hong Kong, now a British possession.

At this point, sources conflict as to whether the Chinese crew understood the true nature of the voyage. In Kellett's own version of the story, contained in a later letter to Queen Victoria, the crew knew all along that the ultimate destination was London. While Kellett admitted that he never informed the Chinese crew members of this information personally, he claimed they must have known because, for several weeks prior to departure, the junk was harbored in Hong Kong, where the entire English-speaking community was aware of the nature of the voyage. The Chinese did not speak English, but Kellett claimed that they came into frequent contact with his bilingual Chinese stewards who would have apprised them of the junk's true purpose. The Chinese understood the itinerary, Kellett insisted, and had not objected. ⁹



However, in the much more likely version, Kellett comes across as a duplicitous man willing to say anything to ensure the success of his moneymaking venture. Suspecting that the Chinese would not voluntarily sail to London, Kellett deliberately told them the falsehood that the junk was on a simple trading mission and bound only as far as the island of Java. Although the vessel itself would be continuing on to another port after Java, he assured the Chinese that they were not obligated to proceed any further. The actual contract, while containing nothing about Java (that much was imparted to the crew orally), did stipulate that the sailors were required to work for Kellett for eight months. At the expiration of that period, any sailor who chose to leave the junk became free to do so, and Kellett was obligated to arrange for his passage to Canton and defray the cost. Believing themselves to be embarking on an eight-month journey that would take them only as far as Java, the Chinese willingly signed their contracts. The junk departed Hong Kong on December 6, 1846. ¹⁰

It was at Java that the Chinese crew members first realized that Kellett had not been entirely truthful about his intentions. After the *Keying* reached the island in late January, a Malaysian boat came out to meet the junk in the harbor. Oblivious to their whereabouts, the Chinese crew members were astonished to learn that they were in Java. How was it possible, they asked themselves, that in less than two months they had already arrived at a destination they were supposed to have needed eight months to reach? And equally troubling, why was it that their captain had neglected to apprise them of their true location? Their astonishment soon darkened to fear when, without warning, the junk began to leave the harbor. As Java shrank on the horizon, the Chinese looked out on the vast expanses of water before them, feeling grave uncertainty about what lay ahead. They now understood the nature of their predicament: They were in the power of untrustworthy men who did not have their best interests in mind.

15

After departing Java in late January, the *Keying* entered the Indian Ocean, which would require approximately two months to cross. It was here that the junk received the first major test of its seaworthiness, a test that temporarily shifted attention away from simmering conflict. On March 22, the junk began to sail right into a massive squall. The Chinese watched as lightning illuminated the nighttime sky and winds and waves battered the vessel. Although designed only for short trading missions up and down rivers and along China's coast, the junk succeeded in weathering the storm and eventually passed into calmer waters. On March 30, the craft successfully rounded the southern tip of Africa at the Cape of Good Hope and headed into the Atlantic Ocean.

Kellett next guided the *Keying* to the island of St. Helena, a small British possession off the western coast of Africa, and arrived there on April 17. The junk remained there six days, during which time Kellett replenished stores of provisions, had repairs made to the damages wrought by the storm, and allowed local visitors to see the junk, meet the crew, and inspect the many Chinese objects below deck. Throngs of curious people boarded the vessel, and Kellett

presumably charged admission. The *Keying's* stay in St. Helena would not remain peaceful for long.

An atmosphere of fear and distrust had hung over the junk ever since its departure from Java, but it was here, in St. Helena, that tensions rose to the surface. Many of the Chinese started to grow restive. The more unruly they became, the more Kellett feared they would imperil his ambitious business venture. To add to the captain's worries, some members of the European crew were also becoming disgruntled. Fearing a mutiny, Kellett began to treat the Chinese sailors as coolies rather than as what they truly were—free men temporarily in his hire. ¹¹ He instructed the men who remained loyal to him to force the Chinese to work and beat them into submission, using ropes as whips. Chief Mate Revett was apparently the most brutal in coercing labor. Next, at Kellett's request, the island's police magistrate boarded the vessel and, wielding a gun, threatened to shoot the crew members if their insubordination continued. As the junk departed St. Helena, one Chinese sailor, hoping to escape the lash and perhaps preferring death to captivity, jumped overboard. He was caught and taken back onto the junk. As the *Keying* sailed out into the Atlantic Ocean, it was a segregated vessel. On one end, Kellett and his faithful sat with pistols, ever vigilant of any activity going on at the other end, which was occupied by the Chinese.

As the journey proceeded, problems continued to mount for Kellett. In addition to the lingering threat of mutiny, provisions were running low again. Reluctantly, he abandoned the idea of sailing directly to London and headed to the port of New York instead. ¹² Although Kellett must have been disappointed, the revised itinerary did afford certain financial benefits. Americans, he knew, would come in droves to see an authentic Chinese junk and crew and, most important of all, they would bring their wallets. Kellett decided to exhibit the *Keying* for several months on the East Coast of the United States before departing for London, where he planned to arrive well before the commencement of the Crystal Palace Exposition of 1851. ¹³

Early Reception in New York

When the *Keying* arrived in New York harbor on July 9, 1847, it became an immediate spectacle. Before Kellett allowed guests onboard, steamboats headed to Staten Island and filled with thousands of passengers passed near the junk, "such was the anxiety of the people to catch a glimpse of the strange 'craft.'" ¹⁴ Unaware of the greed, mendacity, and violence that had brought the *Keying* to their city, New Yorkers turned out in large numbers to inspect this picturesque vessel (figs. [5.2](#) and [5.3](#)). Walt Whitman, who was interested in the great diversity of human experience, of course went out to see it. ¹⁵ To many Americans, it seemed like an emissary from an enchanted land, the China of their imaginations. Brewster Maverick, a young boy living in the city, saw the junk in precisely this context. Chronically ill, he typically used his diary to track his various ailments or record the mundane happenings of each passing day. However, starting with the entry for July 10, his tone abruptly changed as he reported the arrival of the *Keying*.

20



For an imaginative child, the Chinese junk could not have been more magical or mysterious. Maverick would even ascend to a lofty perch and peer at it through a spyglass. Moored side by side with New York's tall merchant vessels, the Chinese junk seemed wonderfully out of place, and Maverick and others must have enjoyed juxtaposing the drab and quotidian world of commerce with this colorful envoy from Cathay. Of course, any contrast

between enchantment and business was merely an illusion because money was clearly the driving force that had propelled the *Keying* to America. In fact, Kellett was able to profit from Brewster Maverick's curiosity; the young boy purchased a ticket and, after returning home, elatedly reported to his diary that he "Shook hands with Chinese." ¹⁶



The junk provided Maverick with a temporary escape from his own life, allowing him to pass a couple of pleasurable hours inside a floating Chinese world. Indeed, according to the *Herald*, it was the *Keying's* ability to elicit this sensation of virtual travel in visitors that made it a remarkable attraction:

We question if one of ten thousand of our readers will ever visit China. . . . They are not aware, perhaps, that they have an opportunity now of learning as much as they could do by taking a trip to the Celestial Empire. Yet it is a fact. By visiting the junk now in our harbor, they can see every thing of interest appertaining to that people. They will be on board of a ship constructed by Chinese shipwrights—they will be in the presence of Chinese idols—they can converse with Chinamen—in fine, they can see all that they could see in the great city of Pekin or Canton . . . an opportunity they never had before, and, in all probability, never will have again. ¹⁷

Much like the earlier press coverage devoted to Dunn's museum, the *Herald* also stressed the educational value of the junk, asserting that "one hour's stay on board of her will give a better insight into Chinese manners and customs than can be learned in a library of books." ¹⁸ As indicated above, the junk did carry a small museum below deck; the collection included musical instruments, scrolls, idols, toys, lanterns, shoes, costumes, paintings, and porcelain (fig. 5.4). ¹⁹ And clearly some visitors did treat a visit to the junk as an educational opportunity. A man named A. C. Van Epps, for instance, accosted Sam-sing to inquire about silk production in China. He left quite pleased, stating that the artist was "entirely familiar with the production of silk in his native country." ²⁰



Like Van Epps, Orson Squire Fowler also saw the junk as a tremendous opportunity to learn about the Chinese. Yet he fervently believed that the *Keying* could supply a specific kind of knowledge that one could not find in "a library of books." Fowler was America's most famous phrenologist and, as such, he thought he could best comprehend the Chinese character by feeling and measuring the contours of a Chinese head. As far as he was concerned, the skull—more than books, museums, or even a visit to China—was what could yield accurate ethnographic information. "The architecture and implements of this ship are well worth seeing," he tellingly wrote, "but the MEN in attendance far more so." ²¹

25

The new "science" of phrenology (discussed in the previous chapter) had been founded by Franz Joseph Gall in Vienna in the late eighteenth century and popularized by his protégé, Joseph Spurzheim, throughout the Western world. After introducing it in England, Spurzheim traveled to New York in 1832, where many prominent Americans greeted him with open arms. He probably would have enjoyed success in the United States had he not fallen ill and died just as his American tour was getting underway. The job of spreading phrenology through the United States ultimately devolved to his disciple, George Combe. After arriving in 1838, Combe commenced a tour of major cities that included Philadelphia, where he visited Dunn's Chinese Museum and almost certainly met with Fowler. His lectures were well attended, but it was mainly to upper-class Americans and intellectuals that Combe appealed. ²²

The popularization of phrenology was well served by the evangelical fervor and entrepreneurial instincts of Orson Fowler. Unlike his European colleagues, Fowler added almost nothing of theoretical value to the field. Instead, his genius was in understanding how to convert esoteric European theories into a comprehensible set of principles with practical applications for ordinary men and women. He parlayed this single insight into an entire industry. Through his efforts, phrenology achieved mass appeal and exerted a pervasive influence over antebellum American culture. In Manhattan, with the assistance of his brother and sister, Lorenzo and Charlotte, he opened the Phrenological Cabinet and filled it with skulls, skeletons, and busts to attract visitors. Although a visit to the Cabinet was free, little else was: Fowler offered character readings for a fee, churned out a monthly magazine, *The American Phrenological Journal*, published a small library of self-help books, and sold phrenological kits complete with lecture notes, charts, busts, and skulls—all that the aspiring traveling practitioner needed to launch his own head-reading business. ²³

While Fowler peddled easy answers to life's impossible questions, he was not a deceitful charlatan exploiting the hopes and ignorance of his customers through the sale of a spurious product. His belief in the validity of phrenology's claims was sincere, and he sought out opportunities to use his expertise to describe the nature of the different races of humankind with whom Americans were increasingly coming into contact in this seafaring age. He had previously conducted skull readings

of Chang and Eng, the Siamese Twins, and in 1848, in the pages of his magazine, he enthusiastically announced the donation by a sea captain of a set of authentic Chinese skulls. [24](#)

With the arrival of the *Keying*, Fowler relished this chance to examine the heads of living Chinese and report his findings:

The interest taken by the Editor in specimens of humanity from the other side of the globe, amounts almost to a passion. The reason is this: They exhibit human nature in phases differing materially from those usually seen, and these diversified aspects of the MAN are peculiarly interesting and instructive to close students to this last and greatest work of God. Hence, words can but poorly portray [sic] the pleasure and instruction I experienced in visiting the CHINESE JUNK and its occupants.

30

Before touching a single head, Fowler noted the Chinese custom of sitting on haunches instead of on chairs, a practice that he viewed as simian in nature: it "evinces a state of civilization quite inferior to our own," he wrote, and bordered on "monkeyism." But the judging of mannerisms was not his forte, and Fowler quickly moved on to his area of expertise. Observing the numerous paintings that adorned the interior of the junk, he selected Sam-sing as his first subject and applied his fingers to the painter's cranium. Although noting that the overall size of the brain was small, Fowler reported mostly positive traits. The "cerebral organization," for example, was quite strong and superior to that found in the other Chinese heads he inspected that same day. [25](#)

Of course, not everyone placed their faith in the kind of analysis Fowler was performing. Indeed, as popular as phrenology was, it attracted its share of detractors. One vocal critic was Caleb Cushing, a congressman from Massachusetts who had led the U.S. diplomatic mission to China in 1843 (discussed in chapter 7). In 1839, Cushing wrote a lengthy article in which he denounced phrenology as "one of the delusions of science" and systematically debunked its claims. Just as astrologers drew "maps of the heavens" in order to link the cosmos to the "future fortunes of men," so too did phrenologists "with their maps of the brain" attempt to predict behavior. According to Cushing, phrenology originated in the hubris of humankind. It "perverted desire of men" to "lift the veil in which nature covers so many of her operations" and gain "authority over the mysterious and unknown" against the will of the supreme deity. In other words, phrenologists were inspired by the desire to know the world, the same desire that motivated the more respectable men of science but, instead of seeking knowledge along the legitimate channels of painstaking scientific research, they looked to the occult for instant explanations to creation's most vexing mysteries. [26](#)

China Downgraded

While Fowler's methods were grounded in theories now discredited, he clearly did understand the *Keying* as a locus for instruction, though not of the conventional sort. However, many other visitors viewed the junk mostly as an opportunity to mock the Chinese in a playful but condescending manner. Given this behavior, the reception of the junk in New York stands in stark contrast to that given to Dunn's museum nine years earlier. Of course, one can account for some of the differences by drawing a distinction between the entertainment scene in Philadelphia and that in New York. After all, the citizens of the latter, conditioned by P. T. Barnum to view all popular exhibitions with irreverence, might have been predisposed to see an exhibit like the *Keying* in this manner. However, other evidence suggests that the times had changed and that a new attitude toward China, far from being a New York phenomenon, pervaded the entire nation in the 1840s.

When the American missionary Samuel Wells Williams returned to the United States in 1845, he noticed a change in the air. When Williams first departed for China in 1833, he left from a country that, although lacking in information about China, was still enchanted by it. The accounts of Jesuit missionaries, the fabulous tales of the *Arabian Nights*, and the idyllic images on commodities all worked in concord to instill in the national consciousness the idea that China was different, intriguing, and wonderful. On returning stateside, he was astonished to observe that it had suffered a precipitous decline in the public's opinion. A people who had been the object of admiration had, in the interim, become the target of ridicule. China was now "the object of a

laugh or the subject of a pun." In particular, Williams was bothered by a derogatory poem that, to his annoyance, people seemed fond of repeating in his presence:

Mandarins with yellow buttons, handing you conserves of snails;
Smart young men about Canton in Nankeen tights and peacocks' tails.
With many rare and dreadful dainties, kitten cutlets, puppy pies;
Birds nest soup which (so convenient!) every bush around supplies. 27

35

The demeaning verses, Williams believed, epitomized this disturbing new attitude toward China. Americans now laughed at the Chinese for being comically foppish and effeminate in appearance and for adhering to a diet that was bizarre and "grotesque." Williams was not alone in observing the stark transformation of American views. In 1849, Osmond Tiffany, who had recently returned from China and now observed and decried what Williams did, the rampant mockery of Chinese people: "Their manners, their habits, language, dress, and sentiments, have all been made the butt of witless ridicule too long." 28

Neither Williams nor Tiffany indicate how or when this tone of condescension first infected the public discourse, but certainly reaction to the Opium War played a decisive role. For many Americans, China's humiliating defeat cast the vanquished nation in a new light. 29 But other nations had lost wars without becoming the objects of derision. Why was China different? In 1842, Thomas Smyth, a Presbyterian minister in Charleston, South Carolina, explained why China suddenly elicited chuckles rather than respect. "We are very unwilling to believe that a whole people exist only to be laughed at," he wrote, "yet how is it, that the greatest nation upon earth, in point of numbers, is the only one which history exhibits in an aspect purely ludicrous?" Smyth had never visited China and was not an authority on it. His nonexpert status lends to his testimony a certain force, qualifying him to articulate, in a way that Samuel Wells Williams could not, the popular thinking on China. 30

In Smyth's view, China demonstrated an excessive affinity for highfalutin pomp, ridiculous ceremonies, and gratuitous formalities, all of which served only to provoke laughter since they were conducted with an air of high seriousness. "Their most solemn acts of government, of legislation, of negotiation, and of war," he wrote "are comic, and, in many cases, farcical. It is impossible to read them without a smile." That the "Chinaman" proceeded with all of this "grave buffoonery" utterly "unconscious of his own absurdity" only added to the humor. In addition, Smyth faulted the Chinese for being haughty, supercilious, and self-superior in refusing to entertain the notion that the rest of the world could think or make anything of value. "In every national and individual act," Smyth observed, "they seem to say, We are the people and wisdom shall die with us." Considering themselves to be the "centre of the universe," the Chinese deigned to allow "the savage English and Americans" to leave their "howling wilderness" and "clamour at Canton for tea." This same cultural arrogance loomed behind the kowtow, a strictly enforced ritual of Chinese protocol that required foreign emissaries to fall to their knees and hands before the emperor. 31

By themselves, this excessive pride and fondness for pageantry were not cause for ridicule. But to many, the ease with which British gunboats dispatched the Chinese navy during the Opium War was eye-opening. The war delivered a revelation tantamount to Dorothy's as she appears before the Wizard inside the Emerald City of Oz. After the stentorian voice and pyrotechnical display of the Wizard cow Dorothy and her friends, they shudder in fear before his terrifying image. When Toto pulls down a nearby curtain, however, Dorothy finds herself staring not at an awe-inspiring power but an ordinary man operating a special-effects mechanism. Similarly, in Smyth's view, the British victory tore down China's grandiose façade, exposing China's true weakness for all the world to see. And yet, despite the overwhelming evidence of their own impotence and futility, the Chinese failed to adopt even a measure of humility and instead persisted in believing the illusion of their own power. "Every junk that puts out from the coast is to destroy the British fleet," Smyth wrote, "and when it fails, they are as confident as ever that the next will be successful." 32

To illustrate the sudden and dramatic shift in public attitudes toward China, Smyth asked his readers to participate in a small experiment. Allow your "imagination," he said, to "conjure up" before you "some familiar form from the Chinese Museum" of Nathan Dunn. Although the exhibits had inspired respect for China before the war, Smyth assured readers that, under the present circumstances, "they will find it much more difficult to keep their countenances"—that is, to refrain

from either smirking or laughing outright. In sum, Americans still looked on China as an object of fascination; however, for many the majestic front had crumbled just like China's coastal forts when faced with barrages of British cannon fire. [33](#)

40

The Barnumization of China

Unlike visitors to Dunn's museum, those who boarded the *Keying* treated it like an exhibit in P. T. Barnum's American Museum. They enjoyed the junk for its amusement value and scrutinized it to determine whether it truly was what it purported to be, a craft that had sailed all the way from China. In fact, according to a widely spread rumor, the *Keying* was not of Chinese origin at all but rather another hoax perpetrated by the master of humbug himself. According to this story, Barnum had secretly ordered the construction of a Chinese-looking craft on Long Island and then arranged for it to sail triumphantly into New York harbor as if it had come all the way from China. Although factually groundless, the rumor linking the *Keying* to Barnum did carry a symbolic truth. Unlike Dunn and more like Barnum, Captain Kellett concerned himself less with informing visitors and more with reaping the financial rewards of entertaining them. And unlike Dunn's audience, many of the *Keying*'s visitors construed the junk less as an organ for instruction and more as a spectacle. In short, the Chinese junk ushered in a new stage in the exhibition of Chinese culture in America—the Barnumization of China. Ironically, the great showman had not played a role in the process. [34](#)

Interestingly, although the Chinese junk became an object of ridicule, it did possess all the components for a genuine educational exhibition. The vessel was authentic; the collection of artifacts, if properly explained, could have provided an object lesson in Chinese customs, handicrafts, and daily life; Hsing, the mandarin, was studying English and so could have explained aspects of Chinese culture; and Sam-sing, the artist, could have provided demonstrations of Chinese painting. [35](#) But on arriving, Captain Kellett lent his acutely sensitive ear to the prejudices and cravings of the New York public. And like Samuel Wells Williams, he noted the change in the American view of China, and he realized that a floating version of Dunn's museum was not in his economic interests. He opted instead to assemble his components into an event that appealed to the basest desires of New Yorkers so as to reap the financial rewards.

This rather cynical view of Kellett's motives is based on the coverage of the *Keying* in James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald*. Almost daily, the paper fed its readers brief news items that depicted the Chinese as a comically absurd people who blindly adhered to bizarre and grotesque customs. Although these stories are ostensibly attributed to some anonymous journalist rather than Kellett, one has good reason to believe that the British captain wrote most of the content himself. First, almost every issue of the *Herald* carried a story even though it is highly unlikely that every day the paper assigned a reporter to report the latest events on the junk. Since reporters were not this expendable, the daily news items must have come from another source. Second, in exchange for the purchases of advertising space, some New York newspapers, including the *Herald*, often permitted entertainers to promote their events in the paper with tantalizing news items composed in their own hand. Through this mutually beneficial quid pro quo, advertisements could dissemble as legitimate news in the paper. Indeed, P. T. Barnum may have been the first to develop this symbiotic relationship with the press; he knew that people were more likely to visit an attraction if they viewed it as a sensation that was constantly generating news. [36](#)

Typically, the writer for the *Herald* (most likely Kellett) would inject false but amusing material into a news story that may have had a factual component, creating a news item that was an unreliable hybrid of fact and fiction. Stereotypes mingled with the truth to the extent that, from any given story, we cannot determine precisely what happened. For example, the paper reported that two Chinese crew members were seen admiring an American woman—that is, until they spied her feet. They "suddenly turned away, shaking their heads." [37](#) Whereas this story could provoke a chuckle because all Americans (especially after Afong Moy's prolonged exhibition) were familiar with the Chinese custom of footbinding, another depended on the reader's familiarity with images of Chinese people disseminated through advertising for tea: "We saw one of our Chinese friends in Broadway on Saturday last—under one arm a small tea chest, a pair of Chinese sandals on his feet, his long hair done up in a flowing pigtail hanging behind him." [38](#) A third story toyed with the stereotype that the Chinese rigidly adhered to their own customs: "The Chinamen of the Junk are rapidly adopting the manners and customs of our citizens. They use knives and forks at

their meals instead of chopsticks, but they are very awkward with them. They smoke cigars from morning till night." ³⁹ The Chinese were known for stubbornly resisting change, and readers could enjoy laughing at crew members' clumsy attempt to adopt Western customs.

The paper also inserted opium smoking into as many news items as it could. These stories playfully depicted it as something funny—yet another colorful habit that made the Chinese amusing. For instance, one story described the collective dreams of the Chinese crew during an opium-induced sleep: "In the dreams of opium land, they had fancied that they were still in the land of Mandarins and Hanging Gardens, and that they were being attacked by the ferocious outside barbarians, and reduced to powder as fine as their best gunpowder tea. Happily, however, they found that it was only a dream." ⁴⁰ In addition to making light of the Opium War, the story also purported that the Chinese were addicts. Were the crew members addicted to opium? If we look only at the *Herald*, it is impossible to know for sure, as the paper demonstrated a penchant for mixing hard facts with absurd fantasies. For example, on August 31, it reported that Hsing, the mandarin, "cannot give up his opium, which he indulges in to excess." ⁴¹ Yet this statement contradicted a news item printed just three days earlier: "If you want to see opium smoking, visit the junk. All except the mandarin indulge." ⁴²

45

The truth appears to be somewhere in the middle. Samuel Wells Williams, who spoke Cantonese and visited the junk in August, discovered that one of the Chinese was smoking opium. That crew member, according to Williams, had not brought the drug from China but rather had obtained it from a shop in New York. Interestingly, Williams registered his surprise not at the opium usage itself (he had, after all, lived in China and witnessed its effects) but rather at the failure of Kellett to take measures to stop it. Here it is important to note that Williams was under no delusions regarding the morality of Captain Kellett; by this time, the missionary had already registered his disapproval of the deception perpetrated by the latter. Williams simply reasoned that Kellett was an unscrupulous businessman who, as such, might have been expected to better protect his investment from dissipation and even premature death: "I had supposed that the English captain who had deceived the men to get them here would not suffer them to destroy themselves." Employing this logic, the missionary guessed that Kellett had probably tried to restrain the Chinese opium user but had failed because the Chinese "will of course do what they please with their own money." ⁴³

But Williams was wrong. What he failed to take into consideration was the potential role opium played in Kellett's profit-centered calculus. Kellett had apparently realized that he could enhance the junk's appeal, and thus sell more tickets, if the Chinese would behave in accordance with popular stereotypes. And so, far from discouraging the opium usage, Kellett chose instead to exploit it for gain. He turned a tragic habit into an attraction that New Yorkers could learn about in the pages of the *Herald*. Although the ravages of opium on Chinese society was a serious issue that merited the American public's attention, Kellett's presentation encouraged audiences to do little more than laugh at the addicts. Whereas Nathan Dunn had, through his museum, crusaded against the opium trade and placed the burden of moral culpability squarely on the shoulders of Europeans and Americans who trafficked in the drug, Kellett opted instead to de-problematize the issue by de-historicizing it. In his presentation both on the junk itself and then in the pages of the *Herald*, the British traders utterly vanish from sight, leaving behind for public scrutiny only the Chinese and their vice. The implied message was that opium addiction was the logical extension of the dissolute Chinese character and that it provided yet another clear example that this race was not fit for the modern world. ⁴⁴

While at least one member of the Chinese crew probably did smoke opium, sometimes the true behavior of the Chinese did not, much to Kellett's disappointment, conveniently conform to the popular stereotypes. In such cases, the captain simply coaxed, cajoled, or fooled the Chinese into going through the motions before audiences. Indeed, for visitors, part of the entertainment onboard the junk ultimately came from watching Chinese crew members participate in farcical tableaux vivantes that presented a grotesque versions of Chinese customs. For example, the *Herald* explained that meals onboard the junk were of interest to spectators because one could enjoy watching the Chinese eat with chopsticks. To add a sensational element to the spectacle, the *Herald* claimed rodents were on the menu: "The Chinese . . . dispose of their mice and rats quicker than we do of our meals." At mealtimes, curious spectators undoubtedly gathered around the Chinese crew members, convinced that rats were being consumed. The Chinese crew members did not eat rats and were probably oblivious to the *Herald's* assertion that they did; in this way, they were the unwitting participants in performances meant to demean their own

culture. [45](#)

In addition to opium smoking and rat eating, strange pagan ceremonies also intrigued visitors, and Kellett was more than willing to gratify them with staged demonstrations of Chinese idol worship. "The citizens of New York will have an opportunity today of witnessing Chinese idol worship," the *Herald* announced, "with all its concomitants of kneeling, sacrificing, and offering of gifts." To maximize attendance, the paper warned that an "opportunity like this, will, in all probability, never be again presented to our citizens." [46](#) After the ceremonies were completed, the paper declared them "the most amusing and interesting spectacle we ever beheld," and then immediately announced, quite conveniently, that Captain Kellett has "induced the natives . . . to repeat them." [47](#) Interestingly, during the long voyage from China, the Chinese crew members had practiced their religion until their captain had pressured them to desist; at that time, Kellett had probably viewed idol worship as an offensive heathen practice that needed to be eradicated from the culture. Yet once in New York, he awoke to the moneymaking potential of such exercises in "idol worship" and reversed course—now enthusiastically organizing the very ceremonies he had earlier sought to suppress. [48](#)

A Scuffle, an Arrest, and a Date in Court

In August 1847, the Chinese had grown tired of performing burlesque versions of their own customs and rituals. They also knew that they were contractually obligated to remain with Kellett for a period of only eight months, which had now expired. In an attempt to secure greater control over their lives, a group of Chinese decided to seek out Kellett to discuss both their return passage to Canton and lingering financial matters. Since the junk continued to rake in profits, Kellett of course had no intention of living up to his end of the agreement. When the group tried to confront him, Kellett therefore promptly took evasive measures. The Chinese followed him into one room of the junk, only to discover that he had already slipped out through another door. Unable to accost the elusive captain, they next approached Chief Mate Revett to present their complaints. When he also deliberately sought to avoid them, the Chinese tried to constrain him physically, and an altercation ensued. Kellett quickly alerted the police, who boarded the junk, arrested seven Chinese, and incarcerated them on the charge of assault. [49](#)

50

The *Herald*, locked into a mode of reporting wherein facts were mingled with stereotypes, at first reported an erroneous version of the incident. According to the story, Kellett had merely attempted to pay the Chinese their salaries when, "under the effects of opium," they "turned their combined force against the captain." Though preposterous, this version of events might have seemed plausible to readers who had for weeks been reading reports about the debauched Chinese crew's addiction to opium. [50](#) If Kellett had been using the *Herald* to generate publicity for his attraction, however, at this juncture he had begun to lose control. For now that the events swirling around the *Keying* were headed to court, the newspaper could no longer print Kellett's version as legitimate news and instead assigned a court reporter to handle coverage. The intervention of the Chinese crew had the effect not only of disrupting Kellett's storytelling ability but also of putting forward a competing version of the Chinese character: Rather than being passive and tractable opium smokers who were the comical representatives of a failing race, they became active fighters who rebelled against wrongful treatment and abuses of power.

As court proceedings commenced, the Chinese were officially charged with having assaulted Chief Mate Revett. As for their defense, they were quite fortunate in that they received legal representation from W. Daniel Lord, a prominent New York attorney, who apparently took the case as pro bono work. Of course, to present the defense's side of the story, Lord hoped to rely on two sources: the spoken testimony of the detained Chinese crew members, who spoke Cantonese, and the contracts they had signed in Hong Kong, which were written in Chinese. This posed an immediate problem for the court, since no ordinary citizen of New York—indeed, very few people on earth—understood both Chinese and English well. Fortunately, two such people were residing in New York at the time.

One was Samuel Wells Williams, the missionary enjoying a temporary residence in the city. Williams possessed the conviction that the Chinese crew had been wronged, and he was eager to help the court resolve the matter in a manner favorable to them. "I hope these men will . . . find their way back to their native land soon, for they consider themselves to have been very badly

used," Williams wrote. "The Chinese are easy people to get along with when they feel pretty sure of honorable treatment." ⁵¹ Williams could speak and write Chinese fairly well, and so he would be able to provide the court with reasonably good English translations of both the written contracts and the verbal complaints of the crew. To aid him in this endeavor, he enlisted the aid of his friend, Lin-King-Chew, a Chinese Christian living in New York. Williams held Lin in high regard for "his beauty, his vanity, his linguistic powers, & his respect for the fair." He also admired Lin's courage for handling his extreme minority status in the city. "He seems to manage for himself bravely in going about the city," Williams noted, "and contrives to make himself understood among people, as well as attract no small share of attention." ⁵²

On September 3, 1847, Williams and Lin entered a courtroom that the former described as "crowded with spectators." The judge began by preparing the Chinese for the worst, informing them that the court might very well order them back to the junk. They responded with an outpouring of heartfelt emotions. After the proceedings were underway, Kellett's strategy became clear. He hoped to put blinders on the court by keeping it focused on the physical scuffle between himself and the Chinese, all the while keeping it ignorant of the long string of abuses that had begun back in China. Toward this end, both Kellett and Revett, on taking the stand, tried to avoid offering any testimony that did not relate directly to the recent squabble. They were thwarted in this effort, however, by Daniel Lord. According to Williams, the lawyer's cross-examinations "made them enter into details respecting the whole treatment," not just those pertaining to recent events in New York. More damaging still, Lord "pulled their testimony to shreds" and even "made them contradict themselves."

With the credibility of Kellett and Revett in shambles, the court was prepared to hear the other side of the story. Here Lord's arguments, the translations of Williams and Lin, and the testimony of the Chinese crew all combined to effect a full disclosure of Kellett's egregious behavior: the lies he told the Chinese to convince them to sign onto the junk's voyage, the brutal treatment he inflicted on them once at sea, and his refusal to honor his contractual obligation to pay for their return trip to China. ⁵³ In the end, the court discharged the Chinese, issued Kellett a stern reprimand, and ordered him to abide by the contract. Any member of the Chinese crew, if he so desired, was now free to return to China at Kellett's expense. ⁵⁴

55

Out of a group of forty Chinese crew members, twenty-six elected to return to Canton. Yet the matter was not completely resolved, since Kellett insisted on contesting the ruling. In the meantime, he refused to part with the large sum required to convey twenty-six men to China, offering only to give them twenty dollars in addition to their wages. Since he had refused to follow the court's order, his junk was temporarily seized by the United States marshal of the New York district. According to Williams, Kellett and the junk's non-Chinese sailors were not able to garner any sympathy from the public as they awaited a final verdict. They were all "low-looking people," Williams wrote, "who treated the men [Chinese] most barbarously." "If they lose soundly for their refusal to do what is right, nobody will sympathize with them, in as much as it is generally believed that the receipts have been over \$20,000, and that the number of visitors has exceeded a hundred thousand." ⁵⁵

As the twenty-six crew members awaited the final resolution of their case, they stayed in the New York Sailor's Home and were looked after by Lin and several American missionaries who had taken an interest in their predicament. Samuel Wells Williams worried that, if the matter did not resolve itself soon, the onset of winter could prove difficult for these men from Southern China who lacked winter clothes. To pass their time, the Chinese worked on making a wooden model of a Chinese junk.

When at last the court ordered Kellett to pay for the return trips, the twenty-six Chinese crew members were elated by the prospect of finally heading home. They first visited Lord to present him with the model junk as a token of their appreciation. Next they went to Williams, to express their gratitude to him as well. He gave them a tour of his home and explained the various objects in his possession. Close to the day of their departure, he offered speculation as to whether this group of poor and uneducated junk hands had learned anything from their strange but remarkable journey to the West: "Most of them are so ignorant that they will not, I fear, derive much benefit from their visit to this country, though they will appreciate the kindness which has been shown them in securing their return home." On October 6, 1847, the Chinese embarked for Canton on board the Candace. ⁵⁶

Unfortunately, Kellett's treachery in New York may not have ended at this point. Almost immediately following the departure of the Candace, Lin was arrested, charged with stealing camera parts, and imprisoned. Aghast by the imprisonment of his friend, Williams suspected foul play. Kellett, he believed, was working behind the scenes to publicly humiliate Lin. Angered by Lin's interference with the Chinese crew, Kellett had arranged, purely out of vindictiveness, for a friend to make false charges. The plaintiff was thus little more than "the tool of the captain of the junk." The charges apparently had their desired effect. Although Lin proclaimed his innocence and was bailed out the following day, the newspapers provided coverage of his travails. Afraid that "everybody will point at him as a thief," he decided to stay home and wait for the story to blow over. [57](#)

From New York to Boston to London

As for Captain Kellett, he headed north to Boston with his junk, the English sailors in his employ, and the remainder of his Chinese crew, which numbered about fourteen. Despite the relatively short distance involved, the trip required more than two months because Kellett made frequent stops at the various coastal towns of New England. The junk met with genuine interest in some towns but with only a tepid reception in others. In Newport, for example, it did "not appear to have excited too much curiosity, and the number of visitors is said to be small." Similarly, another town reported that it "does not appear to excite much attention." [58](#)

60

As the junk at last made its approach to Boston by sailing up the Charles River, an unforeseen problem at the Warren Drawbridge extended Kellett's recent run of bad luck. Whereas the drawbridge spanned a distance of exactly 30 feet, the junk's width measured 30 feet, 4 inches. With a mere 4 inches preventing its passage, the "strange and clumsy specimen of marine architecture," as one newspaper called it, floated helplessly beside the bridge. At this point, Kellett descried a disturbing new development that was every showman's worst fear. Crowds of several thousand people began gathering on the riverbanks for the purpose of watching the helpless Chinese junk free of charge. Seeing his potential for profits dwindle with each passing hour, he took the junk to the Boston side of the river, established this location as the permanent venue, and began to sell tickets. [59](#)

The junk received visitors in the Boston area for about three months before Kellett decided to set sail for London. On February 17, 1848, the wealthy China trader Robert Bennet Forbes, generously hitched the junk to his steamship and towed it sixty miles out to sea. [60](#) After arriving in London, Kellett, eager to vent his frustrations with America, wrote a letter to Queen Victoria, blaming the United States for all his problems. Greatly "incensed" that this "wonder of wonders" was British and not American property, the Americans, Kellett claimed, had endeavored to sabotage the entire venture. Kellett went on to accuse Samuel Wells Williams on this count, although he did not single out Williams by name. American missionaries, Kellett claimed, "were employed to disseminate malevolent ideas among the Chinese," including the preposterous lie that "they could never survive the severity of the North American winter," all in an effort to convince them to abandon the junk.

In Kellett's account, the missionaries were even behind the court case in which the Chinese falsely claimed to have been misled in Hong Kong. The junk's crew, he wrote, had known all along that England was to be the final destination. It is hardly surprising that Kellett would suspect Williams of plotting against him. After all, had Kellett not seen this man onboard the junk conversing with the Chinese in their own tongue? And had not Williams reappeared in court to translate for the Chinese crew? Regardless of whether Kellett believed his own tale of missionary skullduggery, his next charge was pure slander. In an amazingly brazen indictment, he claimed American missionaries had distributed opium among the Chinese! With this letter to Queen Victoria, Kellett probably hoped to arouse the sympathy of the English public and generate free publicity for his spectacle. [61](#)

In London, Kellett had to contend with Nathan Dunn, even though Dunn had been dead for four years and the magnificent collection had left the British capital in 1846 to tour the provinces. [62](#) The Chinese Museum and its proprietor had left such a positive imprint in the memories of Londoners that any successor would inevitably find his attraction drawn into a comparison. This

posed a real problem for Kellett, as surely he knew he would lose in such a contest. Dunn's collection exceeded in size and quality what was carried by his junk; and although the junk's Chinese crew was a major selling point, Dunn had also found authentic Chinese people willing to circulate through the museum in London. Yet Kellett was not one to take defeat easily, and in the visitor's guide to the *Keying* we can see his shrewd handling of the specter of Dunn:

Not very long since, there was exhibited, near Hyde Park, a most interesting and valuable collection of Chinese curiosities. These, however, were things which could be put into packing cases, and transported, with comparative facility, from one part of the world to another: the difficulty of bringing them to England depended more upon the proprietors' means than upon anything else. Not so with the acquisition of the Junk: the money was the least part of the matter. [63](#)

65

Quite cleverly, Kellett deflected attention away from the contents of the two attractions and toward their respective narratives. This was a brilliant move because it allowed Kellett to transform all of the accidents and mishaps he had encountered inside of China, on the high seas, or in America into positive attributes. The same incidents that once had vexed him now contributed to an amazing tale of adventure, danger, and, ultimately, triumph.

In the visitor's guide, Kellett provided readers with an epic account of the junk's exodus from China and its subsequent voyages to the United States and London. Casting himself as the hero, he portrayed himself as a man of "skill, perseverance and courage," qualities that enabled him to execute the "daring scheme" of sailing a Chinese junk to the Western world. Kellett's narrative covered his covert purchase of the junk in China, the bribery that allowed him to circumvent Chinese surveillance, the storms encountered at sea, and the threat of mutiny posed by the Chinese crew. Kellett and his men clearly faced many "obstacles," but they "persevered," and in the end "success crowned their efforts." In contrast, the story behind the formation of the Chinese Museum, summed up as wealthy man first buys and then ships Chinese objects, seemed prosaic in comparison. [64](#) Regardless of how successful he was in his efforts to minimize Dunn's achievement, Kellett could not have been pleased when, after its tour of the provinces, Dunn's collection returned to London in 1851, in time to capitalize on the crowds of people flowing into the city to experience the Crystal Palace. Adding to Kellett's worries, a new attraction had joined forces with Dunn's collection—a beautiful Chinese lady and her entire retinue. [65](#) This group was sure to provoke more curiosity than the *Keying's* small contingent of Chinese sailors. [66](#)

Still, the junk appears to have enjoyed considerable success in London for at least a short while. The playwright James Robertson Planché, who had earlier spoofed Dunn's Chinese collection, included the *Keying* in a comic play. [67](#) The junk also aroused the curiosity of Charles Dickens, who found it enchanting and thought-provoking. The Chinese junk, he wrote, possessed the magical power to make the ugliness of the city vanish: "In half a score of minutes, the tiles and chimney-pots, backs of squalid houses, frowsy pieces of waste ground, narrow courts and streets, swamps, ditches, masts of ships, gardens of duckweed . . . whirl away in a flying dream, and nothing is left but China." Using the *Arabian Nights* as his frame of reference, Dickens ascribed to the Chinese sailors a belief in magical charms: "As Aladdin's palace was transported hither and thither by the rubbing of a lamp, so the crew of Chinamen . . . devoutly believed that their good ship would turn up, quite safe, at the desired port, if they only tied red rags enough upon the mast." For Dickens, the visit to the junk prompted a meditation on his own culture. He wondered whether the British, though supposedly an enlightened people of "progress," also engaged in their own forms of superstitions that, though cloaked in the respectability of Christianity, were actually comparable to the red rags of Chinese sailors. [68](#)

Conclusion

That New England newspapers did not devote much attention to the Chinese junk suggests it did not enjoy as much popularity there as it had in New York. If true, several factors could explain this lukewarm reception. In addition to the debacle at the bridge, the defections of most of the Chinese crew members greatly diminished the exoticism of the vessel. Whereas New Yorkers saw a Chinese junk manned by a Chinese crew, Bostonians met with an enigmatic floating chimera—a predominately white crew guiding a Chinese craft. But perhaps most important, in New York the

Chinese junk provided the city with its first major Chinese spectacle (if we do not count Afong Moy). Boston, however, in 1847 had only recently enjoyed a splendid Chinese museum that possessed a vast and rich collection of artifacts (chapter 7). The assortment of oddities below the deck of the junk must have seemed paltry in comparison.

Notes:

Note 1: *New York Herald* (3 August 1847). The meeting was somewhat fortuitous, for, had the crew members waited a few more weeks, Moy would have departed for Boston. *New York Herald* (3 September 1847). The *Herald* advised parents to instruct their children not to play with the queues (19 August 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 2: Bohea is a kind of Chinese tea. Walter J. Meserve, *Heralds of Promise: The Drama of the American People during the Age of Jackson, 1829–1849* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 90, 93, 156, 170; and Arthur Herman Wilson, *A History of the Philadelphia Theatre, 1835–1855* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1935), 554, 559, 572, 575, 618, 670. [Back.](#)

Note 3: Dave Williams, ed., *The Chinese Other, 1850–1912: An Anthology of Plays* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1997), 1. [Back.](#)

Note 4: *Alta California* (20 October 1852). Ronald Riddle, "The Cantonese Opera: A Chapter in Chinese-American History," in Chinese Historical Society of America, *The Life, Influence, and the Role of the Chinese in the United States, 1776–1960: Proceedings, Papers of the National Conference Held at the University of San Francisco, July 10, 11, 12, 1975* (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1976), 41–42. According to John Kuo Wei Tchen, who chronicled the financial difficulties of the troupe, corrupt business managers cheated the performers out of their money before abandoning them, leaving them stranded and penniless. John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776–1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 63–71. [Back.](#)

Note 5: "Novel Speculation," *The Farmers' Cabinet* (11 February 1847). "The Chinese Junk," *The Farmer's Cabinet* (26 August 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 6: Linda Cooke Johnson, *Shanghai: From Market Town to Treaty Port, 1074–1858* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 273–75; Frederic Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839–1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 100–1. [Back.](#)

Note 7: *Chinese Repository* (February 1847), 84–86. [Back.](#)

Note 8: *Boston Daily Advertiser* (2 November 1847). According to Samuel Wells Williams and Henrietta Shuck, the first female missionary to China, the men who worked on junks typically came from the lower economic classes. In fact, missionaries at one time believed that the discontent of junk men might render them open to a new religion. Henrietta Shuck, *Scenes in China; or, Sketches of the Country, Religion, and Customs of the Chinese* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1853), 130; and Frederick Wells Williams, *The Life and Letters of Samuel Wells Williams, LL.D., Missionary, Diplomatist, Sinologue* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1889), 80. [Back.](#)

Note 9: For a description of the American's original plan, see the *Boston Daily Advertiser* (2 November 1847). For the price of the junk, see the *Niles National Register* (7 August 1847). Kellett's letter, which first appeared in the *London Morning Chronicle*, is reprinted in Holden's *Dollar Magazine* (April 1848), 252. [Back.](#)

Note 10: *The Chinese Repository* (December 1846), 624. [Back.](#)

Note 11: In the nineteenth century, coolie labor occupied a middle ground between slavery and indentured servitude. Although a coolie, unlike a slave, was not owned and did receive wages, he did not enter voluntarily into his often lengthy term of manual labor but was instead coerced or deceived into doing so. [Back.](#)

Note 12: Kellett did not explain why New York was easier to reach than London, but the direction of oceanic currents probably factored into his decision making. [Back.](#)

Note 13: Most of the account of the *Keying's* journey uses information compiled from two sources. First, Samuel Wells Williams, the missionary who served as interpreter for the Chinese crew members during their court hearing, described Kellett's deception and brutality in his private correspondence. See his letter to Sarah Walworth, 4 September 1847, box 1, series 1, Samuel Wells Williams Family Papers, Manuscript Collections, Yale University Library. Hereafter, this collection will be cited as SWWFP. Second, the catalog for the junk's engagement in London provided further background and relevant dates. *A Description of the Royal Chinese Junk, "Keying"* (London: J. Such, 1848), 6–9. Other helpful sources include *New York Herald* (4 September 1847); and "The Chinese Junk, 'Keying,'" *Illustrated London News* (1 April 1848). For accounts by historians, see John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 64–68; and Arthur Bonner, *Alas! What Brought Thee Hither? The Chinese in New York, 1800–1950* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), 2–3. [Back.](#)

Note 14: "The Chinese Junk *Keying*," *Pittsfield Herald* (22 July 1847). This article originally appeared in the *New York Herald*. [Back.](#)

Note 15: Paul Zweig, *Walt Whitman: The Making of the Poet* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 58–59. [Back.](#)

Note 16: Brewster Maverick Pocket Diary, entries for 10, 12, 15, and 16 July 1847. New-York Historical Society, Manuscript Division. [Back.](#)

Note 17: *New York Herald* (10 August 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 18: *New York Herald* (21 July 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 19: The catalog, *A Description of the Royal Chinese Junk, "Keying,"* contains a list of the items displayed. [Back.](#)

Note 20: A. C. Van Epps, "Silk and the Silk Culture," *De Bow's Commercial Review of the South and West* (April 1848), 332. [Back.](#)

Note 21: Orson Fowler, "The Chinese Junk," *American Phrenological Journal* 9 (1847): 328. [Back.](#)

Note 22: John Davies, *Phrenology: Fad and Science: A Nineteenth-Century Crusade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 3–21. [Back.](#)

Note 23: *The American Phrenological Journal* eventually achieved a circulation of 50,000. Davies, 33–62. [Back.](#)

Note 24: Orson Fowler, "The Phrenological Character of Chan and Eng, the Siamese Twins, with a Likeness," *American Phrenological Journal* 8 (1846), 316–17. "Chinese Skulls," *American Phrenological Journal* 10 (1848), 260. [Back.](#)

Note 25: "I examined carefully the head of their ship's painter, many specimens of whose art decorated the main cabin. It was twenty-one inches around Individuality and Philoprogenitiveness. It was high at the crown. Firmness, Approbativeness, and Veneration predominated, and Adhesiveness and Parental Love were amply developed, as were Perceptiveness and Language; yet Causality was small, and the brain, as a whole, considerably under size, though the temperament was excellent. Constructiveness and Imitation were large, and Ideality was full. Individuality, Eventuality, Form, Size, Locality, Order, and Color were also large, and the cerebral organization quite superior to that of the rest of the crew." Orson Fowler, "The Chinese Junk," *American Phrenological Journal* 9 (1847): 328. [Back.](#)

Note 26: Caleb Cushing, "Delusions of Science," *National Magazine and Republican* (March, 1839), 245, 254. [Back.](#)

Note 27: Frederick Wells Williams, 144–46. Samuel Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom: A Survey of the Geography, Government, Education, Social Life, Arts, Religion, &c., of the Chinese Empire and Its Inhabitants* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1848), 1:xiii–xvi. This poem apparently enjoyed a wide circulation. A Dr. Scott (whose first name is not given) cited it in his "Lecture on the Chinese Empire," delivered in New Orleans before the Mechanic's Institute, 26 January 1854. New York Public Library. The poem is also quoted in an adventure novel set in

China. Harry W. French, *Our Boys in China: The Thrilling Story of Two Young Americans, Scott and Paul Clayton Wrecked in the China Sea, on Their Return from India, with Their Strange Adventures in China* (New York: Charles Dillingham, 1883), 45. [Back.](#)

Note 28: Osmond Tiffany Jr., *The Canton Chinese; or, The American's Sojourn in the Celestial Empire* (Boston: James Munroe, 1849), 266. [Back.](#)

Note 29: According to Stuart Creighton Miller, China received national attention for the first time during the Opium War because the conflict coincided with the rise of the penny press. And since these widely read newspapers portrayed China's military efforts as futile and its leadership as pompous, many Americans grew to be more critical of Chinese culture. *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 83-84. [Back.](#)

Note 30: Smyth wrote his detailed description of current views toward China to set up an analogy with the Episcopal Church. He likened the pomp and ceremony of that denomination to the Chinese empire. Thomas Smyth, "The Prelactical Doctrine of Apostolical Succession Examined," *Princeton Review* (January 1842), 139-41. [Back.](#)

Note 31: Smyth, 139-41. [Back.](#)

Note 32: Ibid.. [Back.](#)

Note 33: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 34: The rumor regarding Barnum apparently traveled north to Boston, where the *Boston Herald* published it before it was refuted by two other papers, the *Boston Courier* (25 November 1847) and the *Boston Daily Advertiser* (2 November 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 35: Hsing's English ability is noted in the London catalog *A Description of the Royal Chinese Junk*, "Keying," 10. [Back.](#)

Note 36: Barnum enjoyed this relationship with several newspapers. A. H. Saxon, *P. T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 74-75. Frederic Hudson, the *Herald's* managing editor, viewed the advertisement as a form of news and the advertiser as a kind of reporter since he provided "a picture of the metropolis" (Hudson, *Journalism in the United States, from 1690 to 1872* [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1872], 286). [Back.](#)

Note 37: *New York Herald* (18 August 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 38: *New York Herald* (17 August 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 39: *New York Herald* (31 August 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 40: *New York Herald* (24 July 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 41: *New York Herald* (31 August 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 42: *New York Herald* (28 August 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 43: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 19 August 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 44: Though the opium smoking observed by Williams was possibly a performance, it was far more likely to have been genuine for two reasons. First, Williams had seen opium smoking first hand in China and was less apt to be fooled by an insincere show. Second, he spoke Cantonese and, therefore, could speak with the Chinese crew members to ascertain the truth. [Back.](#)

Note 45: *New York Herald* (11 August 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 46: *New York Herald* (28 July 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 47: *New York Herald* (4 August 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 48: *A Description of the Royal Chinese Junk*, "Keying," 6. [Back.](#)

Note 49: *New York Herald* (4 September 1847) [Back.](#)

Note 50: *New York Herald* (31 August 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 51: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 31 August 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 52: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 4 September 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 53: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 4 September 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 54: *New York Herald* (4 September 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 55: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 13 September 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. "Chinese Junk," *Farmers' Cabinet* (7 October 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 56: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letters, 29 September and 6 October 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. "Sailing of the Chinese Sailors, Belonging to the Cochin China Junk," *The American Magazine* (13 November 1847), 726–27. [Back.](#)

Note 57: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letters, 11 October and 18 October 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 58: *Boston Daily Advertiser* (13, 17, and 18 November 1847); *Boston Courier* (30 October and 1 November 1847); *Farmers' Cabinet* (4 November 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 59: *Boston Daily Advertiser* (23 November 1847); *Boston Courier* (23 November 1847); *Boston Post* (23 November 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 60: *A Description of the Royal Chinese Junk, "Keying,"* 7. [Back.](#)

Note 61: Kellett's letter, which first appeared in the *London Morning Chronicle*, is copied in Holden's *Dollar Magazine* (April 1848), 252. [Back.](#)

Note 62: Nathan Dunn's collection commenced its tour of the provinces in the autumn of 1846. "The Chinese Collection," *London Times* (26 October 1846). [Back.](#)

Note 63: *A Description of the Royal Chinese Junk, "Keying,"* 5. [Back.](#)

Note 64: *Ibid.*, 6–10. [Back.](#)

Note 65: *Illustrated London News* (10 May 1851). P. T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs; or, Forty Years' Recollections* (Hartford: J. B. Burr, 1870), 366. *London Times* (26 October 1846). [Back.](#)

Note 66: Hsing apparently enjoyed the opening ceremony at the Crystal Palace. According to one correspondent's report, Hsing stood with other foreign dignitaries during the event. As the choir performed the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's *Messiah*, the mandarin became suddenly overcome with emotion. He made his way through the "ambassadors, courtiers, and all the distinguished circle which surrounded the throne" and, on reaching the queen, "saluted" her. His gesture was "most graciously acknowledged." "Hon. Mr. Plunkett's Letters from Europe," *Piitsfield Sun* (22 May 1851). [Back.](#)

Note 67: Part of the drama takes place on the junk. The captain, who is Chinese, not British, sails the junk into a giant sea serpent that he has mistaken for an island. "The King of the Peacocks," *The Extravanzas of J. R. Planché, Esq.*, ed. T. F. Dillon Crocker and Stephen Tucker (London: Samuel French, 1879), 3:263–308. [Back.](#)

Note 68: John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1928), 487–89. The practice of tying red rags to parts of the boat is explained in the visitor's guide, which Dickens appears to have read. *A Description of the Royal Chinese Junk, "Keying,"* 6. [Back.](#)

[The Romance of China: Excursions to China in U.S. Culture: 1776-1876](#)