
Sui Sin Far: True ‘Westerner’?

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Abstract

Sui Sin Far, best known for her short story collection *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Stories* (1912), crossed numerous racial and geographic boundaries in her lifetime. Born in England in 1865 to a British father and a Chinese mother, Far lived most of her life in Canada and the United States; she is now commonly regarded as the first major “Chinese American” author. To earn enough money to support herself, Sui Sin Far learned to expertly navigate numerous non-geographical boundaries, including various newspaper and magazine editors’ and readers’ expectations of what constituted “Chinese” and “American” character and culture. In the paper I propose presenting at the SSAWW conference in Bordeaux, I will focus on one of those sites of negotiation: the pages of *The Westerner* magazine, published in the Seattle area during the first years of the twentieth century. Between 1904 and 1909, *Westerner* editor Edgar Hampton published a total of seven short stories, one travel narrative, one lengthy non-fiction article, and one letter to the editor by Sui Sin Far, a number of which have never been known to – or written about by – scholars (although Mary Chapman’s archival work, paralleling my own, will likely soon change this situation). In the paper I would like to present to SSAWW, I will not only examine how the texts of the works she published in *The Westerner* negotiated the expectations this periodical’s readers likely had of “Chinese” people’s “difference,” but also how various other materials in the magazine indicate Sui Sin Far’s acceptance as a true “Westerner.” I will argue that unlike the way she and her works were treated as othered “curios” in most other American periodicals, *The Westerner*’s editor and readers treated Sui Sin Far and the people she represented much more respectfully, as part of a new, more culturally heterogeneous West.

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