



Photo credit: Corky Lee

FROM SPIKES TO SPINDLES

"The work of veteran filmmaker Christine Choy has often been concerned with revising our commonly and uncritically held views, most often with hard-hitting footage that simply marvels." - All Movie Guide

Directed by Christine Choy
Produced by Third World Newsreel
1976, 50 minutes
English and Chinese with English Subtitles

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THIRD WORLD NEWSREEL

Third World Newsreel, originally established as the Newsreel in 1967/68, is celebrating 50 years of producing, distribution and training in progressive media, emphasizing work by and about people of color and social justice issues. We're proud to be able to screen our historic film FROM SPIKES TO SPINDLES for the ACV New York Asian American International Film Festival – which is celebrating its 40th Anniversary!

FROM SPIKES TO SPINDLES

This raw, gutsy portrait of New York's Chinatown captures the early days of an emerging consciousness in the community. We see a Chinatown rarely depicted, a vibrant community whose young and old join forces to protest police brutality and hostile real estate developers. With bold strokes, it paints an overview of the community and its history, from the early laborers driving spikes into the transcontinental railroad to the garment workers of today.

"FROM SPIKES TO SPINDLES uses a conventional mixture of narration, archival footage, talking heads, and candid on-the-street footage to bear witness to the complexity of the Chinese-American past and present and to polemicize for broader ethnic representation in American life. FROM SPIKES TO SPINDLES established Choy as a significant force in the development of an Asian-American cinema."

- Scott MacDonald, A Critical Cinema 3: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers



CHRISTINE CHOY

Christine Choy has produced and directed about seventy works in various forms, receiving over sixty international awards. Among them are numerous fellowships such as the John Simon Guggenheim, the Rockefeller, and the Asian Cultural Council, as well as an Academy Award Nomination for the documentary film, "Who Killed Vincent Chen?". A professor at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, Choy was a founding member of Third World Newsreel. From Spikes to Spindles was her second film with this progressive media organization, and the first film to explore the history and conditions of NYC's Chinatown.

Christine Choy and the making of *From Spikes To Spindles* Excerpt from Yamagata Newsreel, 2003

Christine Choy joined the Newsreel in 1971, which later became Third World Newsreel. Newsreel, as she described it, “an in-your-face, agit-prop filmmakers' collective that emerged out of the turbulence of the 1960s, was one of the American New Left's most potent consciousness-raising tools, a veritable Celluloid Vanguard that its cadres hoped would usher in a brave new world of people's democracy.”

“I was brought up in Shanghai, People's Republic of China, but as an expatriate. My father was a Korean freedom fighter who ended up there temporarily during the Japanese occupation of his homeland. Several years earlier, in 1969, I'd arrived as a teenager in the world's most advanced capitalist society, eager to begin my studies at an American university during a period when the very system was under siege. By 1971, after years of anti-war agitation and community organizing, I and many of my peers had no ideology or direction, nothing but the burning desire to change America from top to bottom, to free all political prisoners, to damn the rich and uphold the poor. Newsreel at that particular moment in time was going to be my vehicle for putting thought into action.”

By 1973, Newsreel had transformed into Third World Newsreel, and Choy was one of its founding members. This transformed group, applied, for the first time, to the New York State Council of the Arts – and was funded to make 4 films for \$10,000. (inconceivable now)

Choy: “Thus was born *From Spikes to Spindles*, which I did in cooperation with Tsui Hark, the Spielberg of Hong Kong. This film acknowledged the oft-repressed story of Chinese immigrants - the men who migrated to the West in the 1860s to build the railroad, and the women who in 1974 were toiling in garment sweatshops of America's Chinatowns from coast to coast. This was a landmark film: an agit-prop documentary shot in color. Even so, I realized my own narrow perspective in thinking that Asian America was composed only of Chinese and Japanese immigrants. I was naive enough to ignore the contributions of Filipinos, Koreans, and Pacific Islanders who were also pioneers of the Asian American experience. I was shy. I didn't think my people's story was worthy. We, after all, were indentured servants, scholars, entrepreneurs, a notch above the Blacks who were victims of the slave system.”