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Gotanda's newest play 'I Dream of Chang and Eng' staged at Berkeley

March 10, 2011 by [Nichi Bei Weekly Staff](#)

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BERKELEY, Calif. — Philip Kan Gotanda, the Bay Area's leading Asian American playwright, collaborates with UC Berkeley's Department of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies in a unique partnership to develop and produce "I Dream of Chang and Eng," a journey through the incredible lives of Chang and Eng Bunker — the original Siamese Twins. The play will be directed by Peter Glazer, professor and chair of TDPS.

Arguably the first Asian American superstars, Chang and Eng were born in Siam and spent their early lives as a touring "freak" exhibition. Charismatic and canny, they bought out their contract and toured themselves around the world, advising the king of Siam and carousing with the English aristocracy before settling down on a Southern plantation, marrying sisters and fathering 21 children between them.

Gotanda's script illuminates the Bunker brothers' extraordinary saga, showing their keen business sense, indomitable spirit, and the touching relationship between the two brothers, making "I Dream of Chang and Eng" a powerful and moving portrait.

Gotanda, who has wanted to write "I Dream of Chang and Eng" for 20 years, began developing the work at UC Berkeley during the fall of 2010, with a grant from the Creative Work Fund.

"Philip has given our department the incredible opportunity to premiere this piece with students," Glazer said. "We couldn't be more excited to bring his spectacular vision to the stage for the first time."

The production is part of a new teaching and play development model the department has committed to, having tested the process through associations with key Bay Area artists such as Joe Goode, Sean San José and Erika Chong Shuch, as well as Glazer himself. The model allows the artist to both write and teach in a supportive and diverse atmosphere, with access to leading scholars (including professors across fields from history to disability studies), other Bay Area professionals, and the fresh voices of the UC's students.

"One of the main reasons I chose to develop this piece at Berkeley is that I'm able to do things that I might not get the opportunity to do elsewhere," says Gotanda, noting the play's cast of 19 and lavish sets and costumes, designed by established Bay Area professionals Kent Dorsey and Lydia Tanji, respectively. "I Dream of Chang and Eng" is a big play in every conceivable way. Understandably, regional theaters would shy away from working on a new play with a cast of nineteen actors and big set pieces. This university allows me access to large number of talented student actors, so I can produce the play that's in my head."

That opportunity to work with Berkeley students was another big attraction for Gotanda.

"Here, I am allowed to play with young, hungry, talented minds. I'm invigorated, challenged, and I am given a fresh perspective on my work."

In addition to designers Dorsey and Tanji, the production team also includes choreographer Erika Chong Shuch and composer/sound designer Alexander Kort, reflecting the department's commitment to collaborate with Bay Area artists. UC Berkeley's own David K.H. Elliott will design the lighting.

The collaboration is made possible with a grant from the Creative Work Fund of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation and the Walter and Elise Haas Fund.

"I Dream of Chang and Eng" runs weekends through Sunday, March 13. Performance times are as follows: March 11, 12 at 8 p.m.; March 13 at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$15 — general admission, \$10 — students/seniors, UC faculty/staff. Group discounts for 10 or more, \$7 — students/seniors, \$10 — general admission. To purchase tickets, visit tdps.berkeley.edu or order over the phone on Fridays between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. by calling (510) 642-8827.

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