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The Formation of Race and Disability in
Philip Kan Gotanda's *I Dream of Chang and Eng*

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Abstract

Philip Kan Gotanda's *I Dream of Chang and Eng* (2011) is a fictional imagining of the lives of the conjoined Siamese twins Chang and Eng who lived in the United States in the nineteenth century (1811-1874). The play dramatizes the twins' ascent from monstrosity to social acceptance. Gotanda draws on the transformation of the twins' status from the exotic poor aliens to the naturalized Americans who own plantations and black slaves and are married to white women at a time in which naturalization of ethnic immigrants was prohibited and interracial marriage was a taboo. This study utilizes Michael Omi and Howard Winant's racial formation theory and a disability studies framework to analyze Gotanda's play, proposing that the mutation of the image of Chang and Eng and the redefinition of their disability provide early examples of America's paradoxical treatment of race and body to serve cultural, national, and political tendencies. The intersection between race and disability in the case of Chang and Eng questions, disturbs, and alters racial and body hierarchies, and confirms that both race and disability are social constructs that take different shapes and meanings in different socio-political contexts.

Keywords: Asian-American theatre, Philip Kan Gotanda, *I Dream of Chang and Eng*, disability, race, racial formation theory.

Philip Kan Gotanda's *I Dream of Chang and Eng* (2011) is a semi-biographical play that delves into the lives of the historically famous Siamese twins Chang and Eng. The twins were born with their bodies connected at the chest by a fleshy ligature, and due to the rarity of their medical condition and their fame in nineteenth-century freak shows, they

lent the term “Siamese twins” to describe all such cases of conjoined brothers. The play dramatizes Chang and Eng’s freakish lives and their ascent from monstrosity to social acceptance and fame. Gotanda follows the transformation of the twins’ status from the exotic poor aliens to the naturalized Americans who own plantations and slaves and are married to white women at a time in which naturalization of ethnic immigrants was prohibited and interracial marriage was a taboo. This study draws on Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s racial formation theory and a disability studies framework to analyze Gotanda’s play, proposing that the mutation of the image of Chang and Eng and the redefinition of their disability provide early examples of America’s paradoxical treatment of race and body to serve cultural, national, and political tendencies. The study argues that both race and disability are social constructs that take different shapes and meanings in different socio-political contexts. The analysis starts by addressing the history of the play’s production and critical reception. It proceeds then to juxtapose Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory and its intersection with disability studies. Finally, the essay examines Gotanda’s portrayal of the complexities of treating Chang and Eng’s racial and body difference in antebellum and postbellum America.

Gotanda is an Asian-American playwright, musician, director, and performer. His theatre tackles a range of thematic and aesthetic styles. He wrote on the Asian-American identity, diaspora, interracial marriage, love, history and politics. Gotanda worked on a variety of artistic forms including plays, musicals, operas, dance and films. He received many honors in recognition of his contribution to American theatre, such as the Guggenheim Award, the National Arts Club Award, the Pew Charitable Trust Award, the Lila Wallace Award, and the Golden Gate Award. *I Dream of Chang and Eng* was Gotanda’s long-awaited project. He says: “I’ve been trying to write this play for 25 years. Finally I let go of everything – fact, fiction, documentation, history – and wrote. this [sic] is what came out” (qtd. in Bullock). The play had its first production on the Zellerbach Playhouse at the University of California, Berkeley, in March 2011. The production was part of a model developed by the Department of Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies at UC Berkeley to have

playwrights teaching and developing plays in collaboration with students, professors, and major artists in the Bay area. Gotanda declares that he chose UC Berkeley for the debut of his play because of the large number of actors and the elaborate scenery and costumes required for the production that could not be afforded at a regional theatre. He remarks:

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 '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. (qtd. in Bei)

Theatre reviewer Charles Jarrett notes that the play includes thirty characters and thirteen actors who make 123 costume changes which would make the play "a project far too risky financially for a community or regional theater to mount." Jarrett expounds that the Zellerbach production of the play was sometimes perplexing, especially in the first act which was "at times confusing, at least until you grasped the story development path, and it moved with less energy than it required." Despite this confusion, Jarrett finds *I Dream of Chang and Eng* "a play with great promise" considering it was still in development on the UC Berkeley stage. Thematically, Jarrett reads the play as "a poignant story of the love and frustration of two men who learned that they were not freaks, but men who were 'very special,' and yet, at the same time they were men who were very normal, with normal hopes, dreams and desires!" The *Berkeley Daily Planet* reviewer Ken Bullock finds the production confusing as well. He writes: "The play sprawls, both across the stage, and in time. at [sic] three hours' length, Chang and Eng fascinates, but loses focus, which is crystallized by the brothers themselves."

The play had its second production in 2012 at the Mainstage Theatre, Department of Theater and Dance, the University of California, Santa Cruz, where it was directed by Gina Marie Hayes. Wallace Baine, reviewing the Mainstage Theatre production for the *Sana Cruz Sentinel*, quotes Hayes as saying: "It's really a magical-realism retelling of their story.... We abstract it, pulling back a bit from narrative storytelling to get

at the emotional core.” The UC Santa Cruz production was more an impressionistic reading of the Bunker’s lives, dreams and sexuality than a historical account of their lives (Baine). Although Gotanda was still developing the play on the UC Santa Cruz Mainstage, theatre reviewer Katie Hughes McKee expresses her satisfaction at the production saying: “you will not believe that when you see it. It is a fully-mounted, creatively imagined, stunningly choreographed and costumed production, right up there with any I have seen in my 20-plus years as a ticket-holder at ACT.” In 2017, the play was performed at the Robert Cohen Theatre at the University of California, Irvine, and directed by Ricardo Rocha. *OC Weekly* reviewer Aimee Murillo, commenting on the UCI production, contends that Chang and Eng’s story gives an example of human persistence and determination: “This production dramatizes the brothers’ ascent to fame and power despite the myriad obstacles thrown their way, illuminating a forgotten case study of human perseverance.” Kevin Chang Barnum refers to many flaws in the play, especially the paucity of an interesting plot; yet he states that the main contribution of the play is casting light on race and otherness in nineteenth-century America. He adds: “For whatever flaws it may have, ‘I Dream of Chang and Eng’ does succeed in contributing to the dialogue on otherness in America. The play paints a complex portrait of the lives of two such ‘others,’ and shows how they transcend their labels, each one an individual, even if Chang and Eng cannot exist separately.”

Barnum is one of the very few reviewers who read the play within the context of racism and otherness in the United States. The present study expands this reading of the twins’ lives and locates the story of Chang and Eng within a broader context of ethnicity and disability in nineteenth-century America. The study claims that Chang and Eng are prototypes of Asian-American otherness. The paradoxical positions occupied by the twins reflect the contradictory stereotypes used to identify Asian Americans; i.e., the pollutants, the deviants, the hard workers and the exotic. More significantly, the mutation of the Siamese twins’ social position as both disabled alien immigrants and successful Americans raises questions about the artificiality of race and disability formation when they intersect with politics and socio-cultural factors.

To set the stage for examining this convergence of race, disability, and cultural politics in *I Dream of Chang and Eng*, it is useful first to give an account of the racial formation theory and its relationship to disability studies. The racial formation theory was developed by Michael Omi and Howard Winant in the first edition of their book *Racial Formation in the United States* (1986). Omi and Winant developed their theory in two further editions of the same book in 1994 and 2015. They trace the formation of race in the United States starting from the second half of the twentieth century to the twenty-first century, arguing that race is socially constructed and is connected to economic, cultural, social and political forces. Omi and Winant ascertain that race is “an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle” (123). They propose a new definition of race which stresses its arbitrariness and connection to socio-political representation: “*race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies*” (123, emphasis in the original). Omi and Winant’s definition of race concurs with the contention of a group of international anthropologies and sociologists who gathered in 1949 under the umbrella of UNESCO and concluded that “‘race’ is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth” (“The Race Question” 8). In disability studies, a social model of disability is defined as “a relationship between people with impairment and a disabling society” and is distinguished from the common medical model which views disability as an “individual deficit” (Shakespeare 198). In discussing the intersection between race and disability, many scholars deal with the deployment of disability as a metaphor for racism and of racism as a metaphor for disability. In Disability Studies, ableism is considered in parallel to other forms of social oppression including “hetero/sexism and racism” (Goodley 9). Jennifer C. James and Cynthia Wu emphasize in their article “Race, Ethnicity, Disability, and Literature: Intersections and Interventions” the paramountcy of “understanding how disability has always been racialized, gendered, and classed and how racial, gender, and class difference have been conceived of as ‘disability’” (8). Leonard Kriegel draws an analogy between the plight of the cripples and the racism practiced against blacks in his article “Uncle Tom and Tiny Tim:

Some Reflections on the Cripple as Negro” (1969). He finds in the black man a model of disability. For Kriegel, Uncle Tom, a stereotype of a loyal slave, and Tiny Tim, a famous Victorian-fiction disabled figure, are “brothers under the skin” (414). Both are social outcasts pigeonholed by a society of whites and abled people who exclusively reserve the right to define and stigmatize blackness and disability. Christopher M. Bell, the editor of *Blackness and Disability: Critical Examinations and Cultural Conventions* (2012), resonates with Kriegel’s view and emphasizes the fact that both race and disability are socially constructed and have been historically misrepresented. Bell calls for keeping a conversation between blackness and disability in order to discover their fallacies and rethink their representation.

Racism and inequality in American history have often been justified through a Eugenic perception of race and its connection to disability. Douglas C. Baynton questions this relationship in his article “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History,” in which he writes:

Disability has functioned historically to justify inequality for disabled people themselves, but it has also done so for women and minority groups. That is, not only has it been considered justifiable to treat disabled people unequally, but the *concept* of disability has been used to justify discrimination against other groups by attributing disability to them. Disability was a significant factor in the three great citizenship debates of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: women’s suffrage, African American freedom and civil rights, and the restriction of immigration. When categories of citizenship were questioned, challenged, and disrupted, disability was called on to clarify and define who deserved, and who was deservedly excluded from, citizenship. (17, emphasis in the original)

In his article “Race and the Concept of Progress in Nineteenth Century American Ethnology” (1972), John S. Haller argues that in order to justify race legislations in nineteenth-century America, ethnologists relied on the word “evolution” in the definition of their culture theory. The non-white races were perceived to be “mere ‘survivals’ from the past, mentally and psychologically unable to shoulder the burdens of complex civilization” (710). The amalgamation of non-whites within the society, according to

Haller, would pull the whole nation back. Nineteenth-century anthropologist Herbert Spencer borrows the principles of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) in his book *The Principles of Biology* (1864) to develop his Social Darwinism theory that claims the physical, moral, intellectual, and genetic deficiency of the non-whites and the necessity to eradicate them from the social system. In Eugenics, racial characteristics were interpreted as limiting and disabling of human capabilities and calls for eradicating the biologically disabled unfits were very popular (Galton; Paul; Sanger).

The freak shows in the nineteenth century were actual manifestations of the anti-racial theories and Eugenics. These curiosity shows introduced unfitting disabled others to amuse and entertain white voyeurs. Showcasing connected Asian twins like Chang and Eng helped to inculcate the connection between race and disability in the American common perception and to separate American standard humanness from ethnic anomalies. Ironically, Chang and Eng could conversely refute the fallacy of this dichotomy as the twins managed to move from the status of the anomaly to the status of the successful other. Gotanda skillfully dramatizes this fluctuating definition of the twins' ethnicity and disability in *I Dream of Chang and Eng*. He follows the history of the twins' degradation and success through the narratives of their bi-racial daughter Katherine-Josephine. The play starts in 1868 with the fifty-seven-year-old renowned Chang and Eng touring London with the famous freak show organizer Phineas T. Barnum in order to recover their Civil War losses. The narrative then returns to Siam in 1820 when the nine-year-old twins were discovered by Captain Hunter and brought to America in order to expose their conjoined bodies in front of the American public. This non-linear re-imagining of the Bunkers' lives does not only confuse their lifeline, but also confuses their identity and their racial and social position in antebellum and postbellum America.

Throughout the play, Chang and Eng are defined and redefined in a manner that oscillates between xenophobia and xenophilia. As soon as they reach the shores of America on the ship *Sachem*, Chang and Eng's identity is put into question by Learned Jack, the black English man who is only free at sea. "You are not White and that is what matters to some

men.... They have not seen the likes of you in color of skin or shape of body. It is yet to be seen what you are in America's eyes" (Gotanda 19), Learned Jack confides to Chang and Eng. The twins discover that they are not business partners with Captain Hunter as they had expected in Siam. To their dismay, Hunter treats them as orientalist commodities and sells their contract to Abel and Susan Coffin who reserve the sole right to present them in curiosity shows in return for very low wages. In the first exhibition of the twins, Abel and Susan Coffin introduce them to the American audiences as freaks from the mysterious Orient, an enigmatic combination of the primitive, the defective, the grotesque and the alien:

Abel: (OS) Ladies and Gentlemen. Presenting the amazing Siamese Double Boys. Born in the wild of Siam. Cursed by a freakish body. Rescued by an English Captain. Then tamed and mannered by its American owners, Susan and Abel Coffin. Never seen before by occidental eyes! Please look upon this curiosity of nature! Marvel at this living exhibition of the Mysterious Orient! (Gotanda 26)

The Coffins present Chang and Eng as if they were more bestial than human, "pet monkeys to be locked up between shows" (Gotanda 22). They request them to get dressed like children and to keep their queues uncut to accentuate their foreignness and to look like "two harmless boys" (Gotanda 21). The Coffins command the twins to rigidly hold their poses during the performances in order to give a chance for the spectators to enjoy the voyeurism of abnormal ethnic others and to rejuvenate the insurmountable distance between the normal Occident and the abnormal mysterious Orient. The juxtaposition of the ethno-disabled bodies of the Siamese twins devalues the Asian body and inspires the onlookers with a sense of physical and cultural normalcy and superiority. Disability lends its crippling traits to race, thereby blurring the boundaries between racial and freakish attributes. This voyeurism interest is maximized through fabricated stories about the twins that reiterate their monstrosity and show them as savages that were saved and tamed by a Western guardian, and shipped to America as unique natural wonders.

In the exhibition of Chang and Eng, the racial is enfreaked and the freakish is racialized in order to confirm the Western dichotomy of able-bodied white man and disabled-bodied racial/Asian other. Rosemarie

Garland Thomson points out that “freaks are above all products of perception: they are the consequences of a comparative relationship in which those who control the social discourse and the means of representation recruit the seeming truth of the body to claim the center for themselves and banish other to the margins” (62-63). Chang and Eng’s disabled bodies are marginalized and presented as antithesis to the Western abled body. Thomson elaborates this antithetical relationship by saying:

The American produces and acts, but the onstage freak is idle and passive. The American looks and names, but the freak is looked at and named. The American is mobile, entering and exiting the show at will and ranging around the social order, but the freak is fixed, confined by the material structures and the conventions of staging and socially immobilized by a deviant body. The American is rational and controlled, but the freak is carnal and contingent. Within this fantasy, the American’s self determines the condition of his body, just as the freak’s body determines the condition of his self. This grammar of embodiment culturally normalizes the American and abnormalizes the freak. (65)

Constructing the average American as “masculine, white, nondisabled, sexually unambiguous, and middle class” (Thomson 64) drives all opposites to the margins. Through ascribing disability to the racial other, the white man is installed in “the position previously held by the dethroned exceptional man, the aristocrat or the king” (Thomson 64), keeping the racial other in a quirky and deviant position.

While Chang and Eng’s racialization is rationalized by their disability, it is also disability that redefines them as successful entrepreneurs and symbols of cultural pluralism and liberal capitalism. In his introduction to *I Dream of Chang and Eng*, Gotanda writes: “In the turbulent zeitgeist of antebellum America, the new nation *looks* at Chang and Eng and sees in them something it needs” (2, emphasis in the original). What was found in Chang and Eng’s bodies in antebellum America was the rationalization of inequality, the exclusion of race, and the establishment of white normalcy. America also found in Chang and Eng symbols of egalitarian principles and the emerging American Dream. This double deployment of disability emanates from the paradoxical cultural and political tendencies in nineteenth-century America when

whiteness, diversity, unity, disunity, federalism, republicanism, agrarianism, and industrialism were all pronounced in one breath. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the new nation was torn between a British history of class system and a newly-born national independent identity founded on equality and the rights of the common man. With the nineteenth century heading on, the American WASP culture was challenged by an emerging race, class, and gender consciousness that threatened to re-conceptualize the American Anglo-European identity. Meanwhile, the westward expansion and the ongoing American exploration of the frontiers demanded a progressive society that valued individual entrepreneurialism. "White supremacy," argues John Kuo Wei Tchen, "did not define all relationships at all times. In the process of urbanization and westward expansion, Americanness came to mean a pluralistic contact with cultural others" (xix). Within a nineteenth-century racist climate, calls for slavery abolition and women and minority rights were loudly heard in the United States which eventually led to the Civil War in 1860. American white particularism and American tendencies towards cultural pluralism existed side by side. In response to these oscillating cultural tendencies, the connections between the abled and the disabled and the boundaries between the white and the racial were shifting and taking different forms when placed in different socio-political contexts.

The twins' disability acquires a new meaning when it is aggrandized and viewed as aesthetically fascinating. Chang and Eng successfully utilize their conjoined bodies to commercialize their orientalism and to accentuate their entrepreneurial skills in a capitalist society that values individualism and personal success. The untraversable difference between the Siamese twins and white spectators is seen in a new light by Ms. Elizabeth, the English wife of Sir Edward Monroe, the attaché to the French Consulate in London. Elizabeth feels erotically attracted to the aestheticism of the twins' connectedness and decides to have sex with them. She feels a strong desire to explore their bodies: "You are not like Edward or any of the other men I have known. You are two. I do not know. You are Siamese. I do not know. I wonder what your organ looks like?" (Gotanda 32). The coordination of the twins in bed fascinates

Elizabeth. “You are quite coordinated in your moves – it was both of you, yes?” (Gotanda 34), she asks the twins with wonder. Elizabeth confides to Chang and Eng that she has a big arse, like the majority of rich ladies in London and Boston, in imitation of the spectacular big genitalia of the African American freak Hottentot Venus Sara Baartman who is viewed as “an exotic, beautiful, full-bodied African lady.... Her *posterior* was large” (Gotanda 30). This grotesque beauty of the freak body becomes a secret fantasy to the white woman. Elizabeth confesses: “We all stared but no one would speak it aloud. Instead we went home, closed our bedroom doors and fantasized about this posterior until one day we woke up and voila! We had big *arses*! In a *fashion* of speaking” (Gotanda 30). This fascination with the foreign body inspires Chang and Eng to present their deformity aesthetically in order to get into the Occidental world and celebrate “the shedding of old skin and the spreading of new found wings” (Gotanda 33). The aestheticism of disability re-channels the meaning of race. Ugliness is replaced by bizarre beauty and subordination gives place to empowerment.

After the termination of their five-year contract with the Coffins, Chang and Eng could manage their performances and sell their own wares. The erotic experience with Elizabeth teaches them to place their disability within an emerging capitalist paradigm and to present their deformity willingly as an oriental luxury. In his book *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882*, Tchen states that in the nineteenth century, “possessing luxuries from ‘the Orient’ was one means by which well-being came to be measured” (xvii). Chang and Eng employ their disabled Asian bodies as oriental luxuries that they could commercialize to find a place in American society. They recall the entrepreneurial skills and the profitable duck and egg business they had in Siam and their early dreams to travel to America and make a huge business: “China Men go where they have to sell their wares. That is what home is for them” (Gotanda 14). In less than five years, the Siamese brothers could make a fortune and achieve a respectful status in America. By the time they cease to be public entertainers, Chang and Eng have already made a fortune and become officially American citizens when citizenship could only be granted to

white Americans. During the naturalization ceremony, they are Christianized and given the name Bunker. The Bunkers become emblems of the hardworking successful “New Chinamen” who make money and “get treated like kings” (Gotanda 45). They own plantations and black slaves in North Carolina, and through their richness and expensive offerings, they could get married to two white sisters, Adelaide and Sally Yates. They call their marriage “a successful business transaction. Their combined dowries will allow us to buy two hundred more acres” (Gotanda 56). The Bunkers form a large family composed of twenty-two American children, standing as an example of the success of the American dream despite their Asianness and deformity. They provide a prototype of the “modern minority” myth which, according to Natsu Taylor Saito, defines Asian Americans stereotypically as “hardworking, industrious, thrifty, family-oriented, and even mysterious or exotic” (72).

The Siamese twins return to sideshows after the end of the Civil War in order to compensate their losses. They approach Phineas T. Barnum, one of the most famous freak-show exhibitors in America, who presents them among his menagerie of multiracial curiosities. Unlike other racialized freaks, Chang and Eng are presented in Barnum’s shows as Siamese American gentlemen. In postbellum America when the country was looking for egalitarianism without threatening white supremacy, Chang and Eng served the mission. Their bodies were commercialized and their deformity was accepted as grotesquely beautiful rather than threatening. Gotanda dramatizes this transformation of the twins’ status in his depiction of their glowing appearance on stage in their last shows. During their farewell tour, the Bunkers appear on stage in gentlemen’s costumes, along with their children, surrounded by flash powder, smoke, drums, and music and are received with roars and waves. Speaking in a large microphone, P.T. Barnum introduces the twins as superstars:

Barnum: More extraordinary than the Giant of Cardiff! More amazing than the Great pyramids of Egypt! The 8th Wonder of the new world, ladies and gentlemen, after twenty five long years away, welcome back your old friends, Chang and Eng. (Gotanda 4)

During these late exhibitions, Chang and Eng occupy the position of celebrities. They are presented within what Emma Louise Backe conceptualized as “an aesthetic space” where “the personhood of the sideshow freak was separated from their physical body, so that their display in carnivals was composed like an artistic installation” (28). Robert Bogdan calls it an “aggrandized” mode of presentation in his book *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (1988). Unlike the “exotic mode” which presents the freak as primitive and culturally different, the aggrandized mode enables the freak and installs him/her in a respectful social position. Bogdan explains:

With the aggrandized mode of presentation emphasized how, with the exception of the particular physical, mental, or behavioral condition, the freak was an upstanding, high-status person with talents of a conventional and socially prestigious nature. Under this mode some exhibits were presented as prototypical Americans One, some, or all of the following attributes were fabricated, elevated or exaggerated, and then flaunted: social position, achievements, talents, family, and physiology. (108)

The primitiveness of the Oriental is challenged within the realm of disability and what was previously de-privileged acquires a value that deconstructs already-established suppositions and binaries, and problematizes the social construction of whiteness, normalcy, and racial freakishness. By enabling disability, the Asian body shares various poles with the Caucasian one, including economic success, social status, and Americanness. The boundaries previously created between whiteness and race through disability are repositioned within the same space when located in a different socio-political context. While Chang and Eng were exhibited by the Coffins as two disabled mysteriously connected Asian twins when they first arrived to the country, they transgress the law of presentation set up for them and define themselves in a new manner; albeit this self-presentation is manipulated by the society itself. Confronted with Afong Moy, the Chinese bound-feet lady, Chang and Eng place themselves within a liberal capitalist ideology that treats their deformity as a commodity. Eng proudly brags that people come to stare at them “and pay 50 cents for that opportunity, 100% of which will be ours as soon as we are our own bosses” (Gotanda 37). During one of their trips

in America, the Siamese twins are mistakenly taken for Indians and could only escape lynching and racist torture when they declare that they are “the renowned *Siamese twins*” (42) and not abominations. The experience posits a controversial question for Chang and Eng: “Are we colored or abominations?” (43). The twins’ connectivity is doubly viewed as empowering and disempowering at the same time. The way the Yates parents respond to Chang and Eng’s proposal to Sallie and Addie mirrors this confusing view of race and disability. The brides’ father looks at the twins as two successful American gentlemen who could secure easy lives for his daughters and who “are raising quite a few eyebrows with your [the twins’] scientific farming” (Gotanda 49), while Mrs. Nancy Yates, the mother, treats them with disgust because of their conjoining ligature which “cause[s] pregnant mothers to lose their babies” (50).

In his comic sketch “Personal Habits of the Siamese Twins” written in 1869, Mark Twain employs Chang and Eng’s disability as a double metaphor for unity and exoticism. Twain praises the twins being “naturally tender and affectionate in disposition” despite the fact that these creatures are “ignorant and unlettered – barbarians themselves and the offspring of barbarians, who knew not the light of philosophy and science.” For him, Chang and Eng’s connection is a model of unity, faithfulness and loyalty that was lacking in American culture during the Civil War period. Twain exclaims: “What a withering rebuke is this to our boasted civilization, with its quarrelings, its wranglings, and its separation of brothers!” Commenting on Twain’s article and Thomas Nast’s cartoon “The American Twin,” cultural scholar Cynthia Wu proclaims that the anatomical and racial difference of the Bunkers was used as a rhetorical device in the nineteenth century to demarcate America’s incapability of defining its national identity. Wu writes:

Although both texts invoke a reconciliatory politics during times of civil unrest, they demonstrate an uneasy ambivalence about the national unity they advocate. Both evince an unspoken concern about the nation’s inability to contain racial—and other valences of—difference in visions of national unity even while calling for harmonious interconnectedness among Americans variously situated socially with respect to race, class, and gender. (30)

Gotanda advises in his introduction to *I Dream of Chang and Eng* that the twins' identity should remain confused throughout the performance of the play. He suggests that the actors playing the roles of Chang and Eng should appear as two distinct individuals in some scenes and as real-life connected twins in others (Gotanda 2). The twins appear on stage as connected brothers in times of glory and success, and act separately in their desperate moments. As America was trying to reach a compromise between opposing cultural and political tendencies in the nineteenth century, Chang and Eng in Gotanda's play try to find voices of their own in a racist climate and to reach a compromise with their connected bodies. The twins fail to define their relationship to Americanness, Asianness, connectivity, and individuality in the same manner that America swings between individualism and community. Eng repeatedly muses over this identity conflict in the play. Amidst their profitable curiosity show business, he tells Chang: "I am sick of it. I am sick of all of it" (Gotanda 45). In their late years, they live in two different houses spending three days in each house to meet their wives. In the last scene of the play, Eng discloses to his brother who passed away five hours before: "I will not pray. I do not believe in God. I believe in you Chang. That is enough" (Gotanda 69). Eng's confession that his assimilation into American culture is not genuine evinces America's nineteenth-century cultural and racial anxiety.

To conclude, one could argue that Chang and Eng's connected bodies are archetypes of an American legacy of erecting racial and ethnic hierarchies to justify white supremacy and to conversely propagate American democracy. The racial affiliation of the twins is disabled in order to establish the superiority and normalcy of whites. However, it is through the intersection of race and disability that these hierarchies are questioned, disturbed, and altered. While the monstrosity of disability categorizes the racial as abnormal, the aestheticism of the disabled body reshapes the racial figure to be socially accepted. Disability could structure and restructure racial boundaries and move the Asian body from racial stigmatization to social integration. In this process of race and disability (re)modification lies America's unstable attitudes towards

immigrants and failure to define the nation's national and cultural identity. Chang and Eng are typical examples of this identity crisis, cultural anxiety, and socio-political construction of race and disability. Simultaneously, the twins represent different racial paradoxical paradigms: the exotics, the aliens, the racially and physically pollutants, the American heroes, and the model minority. Deconstructing relationships and connections between race and other related concepts like ethnicity, class, sexuality, intelligence, and athleticism could raise more questions about established hierarchies and interrogate America's cultural paradoxes and racial formation politics.

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