



Chang and Eng Reconnected: The Original Siamese Twins in American Culture

By Cynthia Wu



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Conjoined twins Chang and Eng Bunker have fascinated the world since the nineteenth century. In her captivating book, *Chang and Eng Reconnected*, Cynthia Wu traces the “Original Siamese Twins” through the terrain of American culture, showing how their inseparability underscored tensions between individuality and collectivity in the American popular imagination.

Using letters, medical documents and exhibits, literature, art, film, and family lore, Wu provides a trans-historical analysis that presents the Bunkers as both a material presence and as metaphor. She also shows how the twins figure in representations of race, disability, and science in fictional narratives about nation building.

As astute entrepreneurs, the twins managed their own lives; nonetheless, as *Chang and Eng Reconnected* shows, American culture has always viewed them through the multiple lenses of difference.



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- Sales Rank: #1773014 in eBooks
- Published on: 2012-08-24
- Released on: 2012-08-24
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

"Wu...has steered her book in a completely different direction from the usual accounts of Chang and Eng, away from the sideshow fascination about disability and also the mechanics of joined twins marrying sisters and fathering 21 children. Nor is this a biography; it is an analysis of society's response to abnormality. Here, the conjoinment becomes a useful metaphor for examining social contradictions about what are 'normal' personhood, kinship, social acceptance, political representation and even national unity."--Fortean Times

"Given the amount of time and archival material the book covers, it is a credit to Wu's ability as a writer that she leads readers seamlessly from beginning to end... Wu's nuanced reading of embodiment provides a way of conceptualizing and analyzing disability diaspora."--Disability Studies Quarterly Vol. 33, No. 2. "Chang and Eng Reconnected is carefully researched and theoretically rich, an essential volume for scholars interested in the construction of US national identity, the history and culture of Asian America, and the social construction and multivalent meanings of bodily difference. Wu is an admirably restrained writer, offering detailed interpretations of the cultural objects she examines without making grand claims for their significance as theoretical interventions... Wu's prose is lucid, elegant, and concise, so that despite the complexity of the material, the book will be suitable for undergraduate classes in disability studies, Asian American studies, and American studies, even as it proves an invaluable source for specialists in all three fields"--MELUS, Summer 2013 "Cynthia Wu has written a brilliant book. It is not only enjoyable to read while revealing new insights and interpretations on the particular case of Chang and Eng Bunker, but it also challenges academic disciplinary perceptions in innovative ways. Scholars of disability studies, Asian American studies, transnational studies, anthropology and cultural analysis, as well as those interested in literature, film, law, museums, and art, will benefit from the book."--H-Net, July 2013 "[A]n in-depth study of not only the social context in which they lived but also the lasting effect their joined image had on the American imagination... Wu sets out in this insightful book to introduce the reader to the twins not only as racial and physical anomalies but as inhabitants of the nineteenth century, objects of sideshow spectacles, and as fathers and husbands in the rural South. Through the careful analysis of literary and artistic works, she demonstrates the continuing significance of Chang and Eng to the ever-changing American culture."--The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, Spring 2013 "Chang and Eng Reconnected productively navigates between examining the representation of disability and recuperating the experience of people with disabilities... The book is attentive to the political contexts, such as the problem of connection and separation, of individualism and collectivity characteristic of US national development in the nineteenth century. It is attentive, also, to issues of 'class advantage' and racialization." - American Quarterly "Chang and Eng Reconnected is the most comprehensive engagement between North American Disability Studies and Asian American Studies to date. Using the example of Chang and Eng Bunker, Wu explores the ways in which disability and race/ethnicity are mutually constitutive. Even the term most commonly used to describe Chang and Eng Bunker - the original 'Siamese twins' - connotes both a disability and racialized identity... Chang and Eng Reconnected is a breakthrough in disability studies in terms of its sophisticated engagement with Asian American literature and perspectives. Wu's book will surely influence many scholars in their analyses of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability." - Disability & Society

About the Author

Cynthia Wu is Assistant Professor of American Studies at the University at Buffalo.

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