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Julie Cohen

English Professor Awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship

Yunte Huang, professor of [English at UC Santa Barbara](#), joins 177 scholars, artists and scientists from the United States and Canada who were named Fellows this year in the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation's 90th competition. Huang received a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship in the area of Creative Arts – General Nonfiction.

Appointed on the basis of distinguished achievement in the past and exceptional promise for future accomplishments, the 2014 Fellows were chosen from a field of almost 3,000 applicants. "I am thrilled to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship," said Huang. "I want to express gratitude to Dean David Marshall, who recommended I apply." Marshall is UCSB's Michael Douglas Dean of [Humanities and Fine Arts](#).

Huang grew up in a small town in southeastern China, where at the age of 11 he began to learn English by secretly listening to "Voice of America" programs on a battered transistor radio. After completing a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Peking University, Huang came to the United States in 1991, landing in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. As a struggling Chinese restaurateur in the Deep South, he continued to study American literature, reading William Faulkner, Ezra Pound and Emily Dickinson on the greasy kitchen floor.

In 1994, Huang attended the Poetics Program at the State University of New York in Buffalo, where, at an estate sale, he happened upon a pair of Charlie Chan novels.

He was immediately hooked. After receiving his Ph.D. in 1999, he taught as an assistant professor of English at Harvard, where he began researching the story of the Chinese detective — both real and fictional — and the life of Earl Derr Biggers, the Harvard graduate who had authored the Chan novels.

Huang is the author of many books and translations, including the award-winning “Charlie Chan: The Untold Story of the Honorable Detective and His Rendezvous with American History” (W.W. Norton, 2010), which received the Edgar Award and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. The book examines the evolution of Charlie Chan’s character, telling the story of both the rough-and-tumble Hawaiian cop on whom Chan was based as well as that of Chan’s creator.

Two additional works by Huang, “Transpacific Displacement” and “Transpacific Imaginations,” are key to the emerging field of trans-Pacific studies. “Transpacific Displacement” examines what Huang calls “the textural migration of cultural meanings across the Pacific.” The book explores American modernism and how it was influenced by East Asian literature, and also how Asian-American literature relates back to Asian literary traditions.

“Transpacific Imaginations” follows in a similar vein but takes a historical perspective, analyzing works by authors such as Herman Melville and Jack London but also Mark Twain, who, according to Huang, “advocated the future of the Pacific.” The book also looks at Asian countries and how different cultures and nations perceive the future of the Pacific as the new center of the world. “Obama is the first president to acknowledge that the United States is a Pacific nation rather than an Atlantic one,” Huang noted.

Huang will use his fellowship to take a one-year sabbatical, during which he will finish researching and writing his next book, “The Siamese Twins.” “The original Siamese twins were very popular in the 19th century so that will get me into the field of 19th-century history, literature, cultural imagination, race and slavery,” he said. “So it’s a study of 19th-century America.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary

collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.