

# OVATIONS OFFSTAGE

presents

A Study Guide for the  
School-Time Performance

## Golden Dragon Acrobats

Friday, March 9, 2012 • 10 am and 7 pm  
Merrill Auditorium, Portland



PORTLAND  
OVATIONS



Study guides are also available  
on the Portland Ovation website at  
[http://portlandovations.org/offstage/study\\_guides](http://portlandovations.org/offstage/study_guides)

# Welcome to Portland Ovations

Each year since 1931, Portland Ovations, formerly known as the PCA Great Performances, has brought a dynamic season of exceptional performing artists to Portland, Maine, including classical music, jazz, opera, dance, theater, and Broadway.

In addition to our live performances, we bring the exhilaration of the performing arts out into our community with season-long educational and outreach programs called Ovations Offstage.

Ovations Offstage creates those magical resonating moments when artists and audiences connect. Whether it's an unexpected "art happening," a workshop or masterclass with a visiting artist, a lively community discussion, or a pre-performance lecture, Portland Ovations invites you to join us as we explore together the relevance and connection of the performing arts to our lives.

Portland Ovations...

- believes that cultural enrichment should be accessible to all
- provides quality live performances and education experiences
- engages our community with integrity and compassion
- collaborates with other arts organizations, nonprofits, education systems and the business sector to promote cultural enrichment and lifelong learning
- celebrates the power and virtuosity of the performing arts
- sustains a staff and board who are thoughtful, committed, enthusiastic and fiscally responsible



# Golden Dragon Acrobats Study Guide

This guide includes information about the specific performance you and your students are about to see; contextual background about the art form; broader historic and cultural connections; suggested activities designed to engage and sustain your students' interest before, during, and after the show; as well as a number of resources to help you extend your exploration. Also included are connections to Common Core State Standards.

Use of this guide will help your students to anticipate, investigate, and reflect upon your live performance experience.



# Artists: Golden Dragon Acrobats



Lien Chi Chang established the Chinese Golden Dragon Acrobats company in Taiwan in 1967. In the beginning, the company toured extensively in Asia for audiences of all ages.

Danny Chang, Lien Chi Chang's son and original member of the company, became the director of the Golden Dragon Acrobats in 1984 when his father accepted the head coaching job at the National Taiwan College of Performing Arts.

Danny Chang grew the company from a small group to a world renowned production company, with its first U.S. performance in 1985. Today, the Golden Dragon Acrobats has been recognized as the preeminent Chinese acrobatic company in the United States. As the director and the producer, Danny Chang has built a solid reputation based on his talents as both an acrobatic performer and artistic director. Every year, along with the choreographer, also his wife, Angela Chang, attend different acrobatic competitions to constantly select the most elite

performers to join the Golden Dragon Acrobats.

The Golden Dragon Acrobats have received numerous awards including the China National Acrobatic Competition, the National Teen Acrobatic Competition, the Italian National Acrobatic Competition, the International Young Adult Acrobatic Competition in Japan, and the Presidents Award at the International Acrobatic Competition, and have performed for President Bill Clinton and other leaders at the APEC meeting in Shanghai, China.

Adapted from the Golden Dragon Acrobats website  
<http://www.goldendragonacrobats.com/>

Watch a video of the Golden Dragon Acrobats:  
<http://www.goldendragonacrobats.com/videos.php>



# Performance

The performance features acrobatics with theatrical elements and Chinese traditional dance. The company includes contortionists, tumblers and jugglers in acts such as plate-spinning, bicycle pagoda, and juggling (using not only hands but feet!): acrobats perch atop a 30 foot tower of chairs, bend like rubber and balance human pyramids while riding bicycles.

Acrobatics is a long-standing tradition in Chinese culture, maintaining distinct style and routines. Acrobatic acts are performed either solo or in groups. Group acts require team cooperation, trust and constant communication. The following are some signature Chinese acrobatic acts you will be sure to see during the Golden Dragon Acrobats' performance.

**Hoop Diving:** Performers dive through hoops in this act that is over 2,000 years old. This act is also called "Dashing through Narrows" though it was once known as "Swallow Play" because the performers imitated the flying movements of swallows (birds) as they leapt nimbly through narrow rings.

**Unicycle Bowl Flip:** An acrobat rides a very tall unicycle on a round table, kicking up bowls, kettles and spoons with perfect grace, and piling them on her head.

**Chinese Vase:** Acrobats playfully squeeze into tiny brightly colored vases.

**Rolling Balance Contortionist:** In this act, performers gracefully bend and twist into unbelievable knots, frequently while balancing precariously perched objects.

**Double Pole:** A group of acrobats climb up and down thin poles to execute a variety of dangerous movements.

**Chinese Diablo:** Performed in China for over 100 years, two sticks of bamboo are connected with string to spin an additional piece of wood (like a yo-yo) back and forth in a variety of intricately timed movements.

**Spinning Plates:** Performers use long, pencil-thin sticks to support spinning plates that

look like lotus leaves facing the wind or colorful butterflies flitting and dancing. This act is often combined with balancing and tumbling, for example a performer may spin 12 plates while in a headstand on a rubber ball.

**Chair Stacking Handstand:** While on a pagoda or ladder of chairs, 2-7 performers practice handstands and other stunts.

**Bicycle Acts:** Acrobats ride together on a single bicycle, take it apart, turn it over a table and display a variety of postures, notably the beautiful tableau of a peacock fanning its feathers.

**Foot Juggling:** Many different objects can be used in juggling. During the Song Dynasty (960-1279), jugglers manipulated bottles, plates and jars with their feet. Now performers toss tables, umbrellas, rugs and any number of household items.

**Lion and Dragon Acts:** This act comes from Chinese folk dance: the lion represents the spirit of renewal and is revered for dispelling bad luck. Big Lion is played by two acrobats, while Small Lion is played by one. The lion rolls and jumps, exhibiting attributes such as strength, agility and tranquility. Accompanied by traditional percussion instruments, this act creates a jubilant and festive atmosphere.

Adapted from Cal Performances, University of California, Berkeley Golden Dragon Acrobats Study Guide.

# History of Chinese Acrobatics

The ancient art of Chinese acrobatics began in China over two thousand years ago. Through the course of its long and rich history, acrobatics has developed into one of China's most popular art forms.

While many historical records give evidence of Chinese acrobatics as far back as the *Xia Dynasty* (ca. 2070 BCE - ca. 1600 BCE), it is most commonly believed that the art form became wildly popular approximately 2,500 years ago when it captured the attention of the country's powerful emperors.

During the *Warring States Period* (475 BCE - 221 BCE) acrobatics in China reflected the working lives of its people. Instruments of labor, such as tridents and wicker rings, and articles of daily use such as tables, chairs, jars, plates and bowls were used as performance props. This informal popular entertainment eventually evolved into a formal artistic expression.

During the *Han Dynasty* (221 BCE - 220 CE) rudimentary acts developed into the "Hundred Plays." More content and variety quickly developed. Musical accompaniment was soon added to the performance as interest in the art form grew among the emperors. During the *Tang Dynasty* (618 - 907 CE) the number of acrobats greatly increased and the skills of each individual performer slowly became more precise and amazing.

Since these early times, acrobatics have evolved to include dance, opera, martial arts, and sports. Chinese acrobatics now plays an important role in the cultural exchange between China and Western nations including the United States. The citizens of China continue to present their acrobatics as a representation of the rich culture and tradition of Chinese culture.

*Adapted from Cal Performances, University of California, Berkeley Golden Dragon Acrobats Study Guide.*

**Chinese Acrobatics Through the Ages** by Fu Qifeng (Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1985)

Qifeng provides an in-depth look at the history and cultural significance of the art of Chinese acrobatics.

# China

For centuries China stood as a leading civilization, outpacing the rest of the world in the arts and sciences, but in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the country was beset by civil unrest, major famines, military defeats, and foreign occupation. After World War II, the Communists under Mao Zedong established an autocratic socialist system that, while ensuring China's sovereignty, imposed strict controls over everyday life and cost the lives of tens of millions of people. After 1978, Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping and other leaders focused on market-oriented economic development and by 2000 output had quadrupled. For much of the population, living standards have improved dramatically and the room for personal choice has expanded, yet political controls remain tight. China since the early 1990s has increased its global outreach and participation in international organizations.

*Taken from The World Fact Book's profile on China. For more statistics on China's geography, people, government, economy, communications, transportation, and transnational issues visit the World Fact Book online:*

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>

The United States Department of State profile of China includes information about populations, economics, history, government, and more. Visit the profile online:

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/18902.htm>



# Chinese History: A Chronological Outline

## Before Common Era (BCE)

- 5000 BCE Neolithic cultures
- 3000 BCE Xia/Hsia Dynasty (ca. 2200-1750)
- 1800 BCE Shang Dynasty (ca. 1750-1100)  
One of the Three Dynasties, or San Dai (Xia, Shang, and Zhou), thought to mark the beginning of Chinese civilization: characterized by its writing system, practice of divination, walled cities, bronze technology, and use of horse-drawn chariots.
- 1200 BCE Zhou/Chou Dynasty: Western Zhou (ca. 1100-771) Eastern Zhou (771-256)  
A hierarchical political and social system with the Zhou royal house at its apex: power was bestowed upon aristocratic families as lords of their domains or principalities. Although often compared to European “feudalism,” what actually gave the system cohesion was a hierarchical order of ancestral cults. The system eventually broke down into a competition for power between rival semi-autonomous states in what became known as the Spring and Autumn period (722-481) and the Warring States (403-221) period. It was during these tumultuous times that Confucius (551-479) lived.
- 300 BCE Qin/Ch'in Dynasty (221-206)  
Created a unitary state by imposing a centralized administration and by standardizing the writing script, weights and measures. Known for its harsh methods of rule, including the suppression of dissenting thought.

## Common Era

- Han Dynasty: Western Han (202 BCE- 9 CE) and Eastern Han (25 CE 220 CE)  
Modified and consolidated the foundation of the imperial order. Confucianism was established as orthodoxy and open civil service examinations were introduced. Han power reached Korea and Vietnam. Records of the Historian, which became the model for subsequent official histories, was completed.
- 200 CE Period of Disunity (220-581)  
The empire was fragmented. The North was dominated by invaders from the borderland and the steppes. The South was ruled by successive “Chinese” dynasties. Buddhism spread.
- 600 CE Sui Dynasty (581-618)  
China reunified.
- 700 CE Tang/T'ang Dynasty (618-906)  
A time of cosmopolitanism and cultural flowering occurred. This period was the height of Buddhist influence in China until its repression around 845. Active territorial expansion until defeated by the Arabs at Talas in 751.

# Chronological Outline, cont.

- 1000 CE Song/Sung Dynasty: Northern Song (960-1126) and Southern Song (1127-1279)  
An era of significant economic and social changes: the monetization of the economy; growth in commerce and maritime trade; urban expansion and technological innovations. The examination system for bureaucratic recruitment of neo-Confucianism was to provide the intellectual underpinning for the political and social order of the late imperial period.
- 1200 CE Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368)  
Founded by the Mongols as part of their conquest of much of the world. Beijing was made the capital. Dramas, such as the famous Story of the Western Wing, flourished.
- 1400 CE Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)  
The first Ming emperor, Hongwu, laid the basis of an authoritarian political culture. Despite early expansion, it was an inward-looking state with an emphasis on its agrarian base. Gradual burgeoning of the commercial sector; important changes in the economy and social relations in the latter part of the dynasty; also a vibrant literary scene as represented by publication of the novel Journey to the West.
- 1700 CE Qing/Ch'ing Dynasty (1644-1912)  
A Manchu dynasty. Continued the economic developments of the late Ming, leading to prosperity but also complacency and a dramatic increase in population. The acclaimed novel Dream of the Red Chamber was written in this period. Strains on the polity were intensified by a rapid incorporation of substantial new territories. Its authoritarian structure was subsequently unable to meet the military and cultural challenge of an expansive West.

## 20th Century

- 1900 Republic (1912-1949)  
Weak central government following the collapse of the dynastic system in 1911-12; Western influence was shown by the promotion of “science” and “democracy” during the New Culture Movement. The attempt of the Nationalist government (est. 1928) to bring the entire country under its control was thwarted by both domestic revolts and the Japanese occupation (1937-45). The Nationalists fled to Taiwan after defeat by the Communists.
- 1950 People's Republic (1949- )  
Communist government. The drive for remaking society ended in disasters such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Economic reform and political retrenchment since around 1978.

*Adapted from East Asia in World History, Columbia University, East Asian Curriculum Project.*  
Available online: [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/webcourse/key\\_points/china\\_timeline.htm](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/webcourse/key_points/china_timeline.htm)

# Local Connections: Maine and China

The **Chinese & American Friendship Association of Maine** provides forums and outreach to promote cultural interchanges between the US and China. Check out their “Learn” section for information about Chinese in Maine, Chinese insights, language, book reviews, and other resources: <http://cafammaine.org/>

**Maine Memory Network**, a project of the Maine Historical Society, provides access to thousands of historical items belonging to over 200 organizations from across Maine. Search for or browse these items, explore online exhibits, or create your own collection of images from the database.

Maine Memory Network has 61 historical items related to Chinese American people (this number is always growing), check out the photographs, objects, and more: <http://www.mainememory.net/search?keywords=chinese>

There are 5 exhibits related to Chinese Americans in Maine, including “Chinese in Maine,” “Toy Len Goon: Mother of the Year,” “Twenty Nationalities, But All Americans,” “Giving Thanks,” and “Amazing Maine Stories.” [http://www.mainememory.net/search/more?keywords=chinese&active\\_tab=exhibits](http://www.mainememory.net/search/more?keywords=chinese&active_tab=exhibits)

**Maine History Online** tells the stories of Maine and its people through essays, exhibits, historical images, documents, and objects drawn from Maine Memory Network and its more than 200 contributing organizations across the state. Read the essay “Peopling Maine” to learn more about Maine’s diverse native and migrant communities. <http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/879/page/1290/display>

# Additional Resources

***Choreographing Asian America* by Yutian Wong (Wesleyan, 2010)**

Choreographing Asian America is an engrossing journey through Asian American dance and politics. Wong makes clear that dance has been woefully neglected in the growing scholarship in Asian American cultural criticism

***A Girl Named Faithful Plum: The True Story of a Dancer from China and How She Achieved Her Dream* by Richard Bernstein (Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2011)**

In *A Girl Named Faithful Plum*, Bernstein has written a fascinating account of one girl’s struggle to go from the remote farmlands of China to the world’s stages, and the lengths she went to in order to follow her dream.

***National Geographic Countries of the World: China* by Jen Green (National Geographic Children’s Books, 2009)**

From the building of the Great Wall as a means to ward off enemies to the Cultural Revolution, China has gone through many changes and the people of China continue the traditions of their past and are moving toward the future. This book includes a glossary to aid in comprehension of unfamiliar terms and an extensive bibliography that lists books, National Geographic articles, and Web sites.

## Storybooks

***D is for Dancing Dragon: A China Alphabet* by Carol Crane and illustrated by Zong-Zhou Wang (Sleeping Bear Press, 2006)**

*D is for Dancing Dragon* brings China’s history and culture alive by describing its unique customs, art works, music, foods, geography and wildlife. Children will learn, for example, that paper, ink, printing, umbrellas, kites and fireworks are all Chinese inventions. They’ll find the secrets of how silk is made, how chopsticks work and why you should never cry on the Chinese New Year’s Day. They will even learn a few Chinese words, as well as which astrological animal sign belongs to them.

***Good Morning China* by Hu yong Yi (Roaring Brook Press, 2007)**

*Good Morning China* presents a snap-shot, and a final foldout spread collects them all to give a panorama of daily life in China. Yi’s paintings are saturated with color and rich in life and feeling.

***My Little Book of Chinese Words* translations by MaryChris Bradley and illustrated by Catherine Louis and Shi Bo (NorthSouth Books, 2008)**

*My Little Book of Chinese Words* focuses on the visual aspect of Chinese characters. Words are introduced on the verso with the modern Chinese character and a smaller ancient character in the upper left corner of the page, so one is immediately aware of the evolution of the visual form of the word.

# Discussion Points & Activities

## Discussion Points

- What did you expect to see at the Golden Dragons Acrobats performance? What did you see?
- What are the memorable parts of the performance for you? Describe what you remember and why you think it has left an impression.
- How does what you know about China connect to the performance?

## Activities

**Asia For Educators: An Initiative of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute at Columbia University** offers a myriad of resources online for both students and educators, including primary sources, timelines, and lesson plans.

<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/>

Check out the classroom activities by **Primary Source**. Primary Source promotes history and humanities education by connecting educators to people and cultures throughout the world. In partnership with teachers, scholars, and the broader community, Primary Source provides learning opportunities and curriculum resources for K-12 educators.

Understanding Modern China

This guide offers book, film, curriculum, and website resources for teaching and learning about modern China.

<http://resources.primarysource.org/modernchina>

Teacher Created Curriculum

This guide links to classroom activities developed by teachers, including various topics exploring China's history and culture.

<http://www.primarysource.org/teacher-created-curriculum>

Primary Source Resource List

Research assistance, subject guides, and useful resources compiled by the Primary Source library.

<http://resources.primarysource.org/>

# In-School Workshop

Students engage in a variety of activities to highlight the tradition and cultural context of Chinese acrobatics.

\$100 for one-hour in-school workshop with Ovation's Offstage educators



# Study Guide Connections to Common Core Standards

This guide offers activities for students at multiple grade levels.

Common Core State Standards and ME Learning Standards	Reading Literature	Reading Info Texts	Reading Foundational Skills	Reading History/Social Studies Subjects	Reading Science Technical Subjects	Writing	Speaking and Listening	Language	Visual and Performing Arts
Golden Dragon Acrobats			<b>RF</b>	<b>RH</b>			<b>SL</b>		<b>VPA</b>

For more information about Common Core Standards:

Maine Department of Education Learning Standards and Goals,  
<http://www.maine.gov/education/standards.htm>

Maine Department of Education Common Core State Standards,  
<http://www.maine.gov/education/lres/commoncore/index.html>

Common Core State Standards Initiative, <http://www.corestandards.org/>

Maine Department of Education Learning Results Visual and Performing Arts,  
<http://www.maine.gov/education/lres/vpa/index.html>

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