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硕士学位论文

解构《蝴蝶夫人》——评黄哲伦的《蝴蝶君》

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## 摘要

黄哲伦是美国二十世纪后期享有盛誉且影响深远的亚裔剧作家。其作品因生动刻画了华裔及亚裔在当代美国社会中的角色和经历而受到广泛关注。黄哲伦于1988年上演的《蝴蝶君》奠定了其在当代美国戏剧界的先驱者地位，并为其赢得了众多极具分量的奖项，包括普利策戏剧奖。这部作品的原型来源于一篇新闻报道：一位法国外交官与一位中国京剧男角生活了20年之久，而一直认为他是一个女人。作为一部广受争议的作品，《蝴蝶君》不仅为美国的少数民族戏剧作出了贡献，同时也为种族、性别、阶级以及性政治，提供了充满智慧而又复杂的思考。

本文运用解构主义的观点以及布莱希特的戏剧研究成果，通过文本细读的方法，从内容和形式两方面来探讨《蝴蝶君》作为普契尼歌剧《蝴蝶夫人》的解构范例。通过对文本的层层剖析，剧中的两大二元对立：男性和女性、东方和西方被最终消解。同时，该剧的戏剧形式使观众完全间离，从而达到黄哲伦的颠覆期待。《蝴蝶君》揭示了西方对东方、男性对女性由来已久的刻板印象。戏剧一开始就介绍了根植于西方男性心中的“蝴蝶”印象——软弱服从的东方女子为了她的西方情人而牺牲自己。然而，戏剧最终却以外交官的自缢而结束。男主角的自缢终结了由来已久的“蝴蝶”刻板印象，而重生为另一种“西方蝴蝶”印象——西方男子着迷于想象中的来源于殖民思想的东方情结，而最终走向毁灭。这种极端的解构将我们引入深思：在这全球化日益兴盛的世界里，东西方之间、男性和女性之间的关系究竟该走向何方……

关键词：解构主义；蝴蝶；东西方；男性女性；间离效果

## ABSTRACT

David Henry Hwang, with profound influence, is one of the most preeminent Asian American dramatists in the US. He's famous for his various plays concerning Chinese American and Asian American's roles and experiences in modern US society. His best-known play *M. Butterfly* has earned him numerous awards, including a Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The play is loosely based on a news report of the relationship between a French diplomat and a male Chinese opera singer who purportedly convinced the diplomat that he was a woman throughout their twenty-year relationship. As a critical and provocative play contributing to ethnic plays in the US, *M. Butterfly* provides a brilliant and complex analysis of the politics of race, gender, class, and sexuality.

This thesis investigates *M. Butterfly* as a deconstruction of Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* in both content and form, based on a thorough textual analysis. In light of deconstructive theories and Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre, the two main sets of binary oppositions in the play: Male and Female; East and West are deconstructed to resolution; meanwhile, the form of the play alienates all and thus achieving David Henry Hwang's purpose of subversion. It reveals the long-term stereotypes the West has about the East, so as male about female. The play starts by introducing the image of "Butterfly"—submissive Oriental woman sacrificing herself for her Western lover, while in the end, Gallimard's committing suicide deconstructs the former stereotype, and rises as a Western "Butterfly" image—a Western man obsessed with the imaginary relationship between Oriental woman and Occidental man resulted from colonial mind-set. This kind of deconstruction leads us to ponder over its profound realistic meanings in our increasingly globalizing world...

**Key words:** Deconstruction; Butterfly; East-West; Male-Female; Alienation Effect

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## Part One: Introduction

### 1.1 *Madame Butterfly* and *M. Butterfly*

According to Edward Said, Orientalism includes three layers of meanings: First, “the most acceptable one is its meaning as an academic subject, which is still being used a lot in academic institutions.” Second, “Orientalism is a mode of thinking. It is based on the difference between ontology and epistemology.” Last, Said sees Orientalism as a way the West used to “control, rebuild and rule the East.”<sup>1</sup> Having advantages in economy and military, the Occident colonizes, rapes and tramples the Orient. As in culture and thought, Edward Said once quotes Karl Marx in *Orientalism*: “They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented”<sup>2</sup>, the Orient has always been represented not by themselves, but by the Occident. The juxtaposition of the Orient and the Occident has been constructed as the antithesis of the savage and the civilized, the pervert and the rational, the passive and the aggressive, the feminine and the masculine. Following this logic, the Occidental race and culture have to take the responsibility to civilize and rule the Oriental race and culture, and free the latter from obscurity. Based on this unreal and selfish Orientalism, novelists and dramatists portrayed a lot of “Mysterious” oriental images; hence, many stereotypes about the Orient are created accordingly. Among these Oriental stereotypes, the most well-known one is the image of tamed and beautiful oriental women who seek love and protection from white men. The representation of Asian women can be best seen in an icon called *Madame Butterfly* from Giacomo Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*.

Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*, describing how a submissive Oriental girl loves a cruel white man unconditionally, but is abandoned and then commits suicide finally, is, without a doubt, the Westerners’ projection of an ideal Oriental woman and reveals a sense of racial supremacy and imperialist mentality. *Madame Butterfly*, as a cultural product, tends to perpetuate the misconceptions it contains, thus making *Madame Butterfly* a stereotype for the Oriental woman. The strategy of masculinizing the West

and feminizing the East inevitably involves the Western fantasy of a submissive and vulnerable Orient as feminine and reveals the desire of domination.

The image of Madame Butterfly is born from Madame Chrysanthemum, the heroine in Pierre Loti's homonymic travelogue about Japan, published in 1887, then transforms into 'Madame Butterfly' by John Luthur Long, in a novel which was serialized in 1898 in *Century Magazine*. Long's story was dramatized by David Belasco in 1900. Giacomo Puccini attended a London performance of the play, and it became the basis of his well-known opera *Madame Butterfly* in 1902. The problematic of representation is revealed most clearly in Pierre Loti's travelogue. On first meeting his fiancée, Pinkerton the white man claims, "Heavens! Why, I know her already! Long before ever setting foot in Japan, I had met with her, on every fan, on every teacup". Later when he wonders whether or not this particular Oriental woman can 'actually think', Loti asks, "Is it a woman or a doll?"<sup>3</sup> This movement reveals the way Westerners look at Asian women, a lifeless object of desire to play with.

By dominating the Oriental woman and feminizing the Oriental man, the West gains certain superiority over the East. David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* shows up as a countering play, which, in a sense, tries to expose the sexual imperialism and deconstruct the cultural image of Madame Butterfly. Hwang initiates his deconstruction by breaking the myth of Madame Butterfly and reversing the role. Hwang recasts the Japanese geisha into a female impersonator from the Peking Opera, and thus, ironically changes the American sailor into a homosexual French diplomat. By reinterpretation, the Western fantasy and racism are exposed to ridicule and satire, while at the same time the myth of Madame Butterfly is broken and the stereotypes of the East for the West are reversed.

David Henry Hwang's plays navigate towards a new era of the condition of East in the West. Many of Hwang's plays are based on Chinese American immigrants and the problems they confront. Therefore, the issue of searching for identity clearly depicts in many of his works. For example, in *The Dance and the Railroad and Family Devotions*, Hwang arranges the characters to sort out their pasts while encountering new identities and uncertain future in America. In this regard, Hwang's

characters struggle to look for authentic identities as well as tend to find the center of their lives while they hesitate between the conventions, traditions and values of East and West. Hwang reaches his career summit when he published *M. Butterfly*. This play not only explains the issue of searching for identity, but also elaborates gender confusion and misconceptions about Asian female in the Western mind. Then, it becomes contemplation on stereotypes of submissive Oriental women as well as the confrontation of the East and the West. Though he makes his crucial theme in the immigrant experience, Hwang successfully uses masquerade to reveal the influence of race and gender in the West in *M. Butterfly*. As a result, *M. Butterfly* becomes a perfect example to analyze the relation between the East and the West, and Male and Female.

David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* is one of the most celebrated of recent American plays, and the first by an Asian-American to win universal acclaim. It was first produced in 1988 and won numerous awards, including the Tony Award for Best Play of the Year, the New York Drama Desk Award, the Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Broadway play, and the John Gassner Award for the season's outstanding new playwright. *M. Butterfly* enjoyed a popular run on Broadway and when it moved to London's Shaftsbury Theatre in 1989, it broke all box office records in the first week. Since its premiere, *M. Butterfly* has been receiving positive reviews from Western critics and media: "Far more than contributions to ethnic theater, Hwang's plays provide brilliant and complex analysis of the politics of race, gender, class and sexuality."<sup>4</sup>

The play is said to be based on a bizarre but true story of a French diplomat who carried on a twenty-year affair with a Chinese actor and opera singer, not realizing that his partner was in fact a man masquerading as a woman. The diplomat apparently became aware of the deception only in 1986, when he was charged by the French government with treason—it turned out that his companion had been an agent for the Chinese government, and had passed on sensitive political information that he had acquired from the diplomat. This almost unbelievable story stimulated Hwang's imagination, and from it he created a drama that plays with ideas on a grand scale and



manages at the same time to be witty and entertaining. The play ironically reverses Puccini's opera, *Madame Butterfly*. Hwang explores the stereotypes that underlie and distort relations between Eastern and Western culture, and between men and women.<sup>5</sup>

However, such a critical and provocative play, which certainly has much to do with China, does not earn relevant notice and recognition in mainland China due to its highly sensitive and controversial themes. Common perspectives like identity issues, orientalism, gender studies, sexuality, and homosexuality and so on are being explored partially by critics and scholars from home and abroad.

This thesis intends to investigate *M. Butterfly* as a deconstruction of Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* in the sense of both content and form. The author plans on using deconstructive theories to do a thorough textual analysis of the play, meanwhile, using Bertolt Brecht's theatre theories to further illustrate how David Henry Hwang managed to achieve this kind of deconstructive effect by using the form of the Epic Theatre.

## **1.2 Deconstruction as a Theory**

Deconstruction is basically a Western philosophy which began with Friedrich Nietzsche and ran through Martin Heidegger to Jacques Derrida. The term "deconstruct" was first used by Martin Heidegger and its line of thought is characterized by a radical denial of Platonism philosophical doctrine-logocentrism which has been deeply rooted in the Western ideology ever since the ancient Greece. The appearance of deconstruction was an outcome of a concerted impact of historic discoveries in the realms of natural science, anthropology, and modern psychology.

Deconstruction, as the very basic theory of post-modernism, is a transitory theory which connects modernism and post-modernism both in time and positions. As an ideological trend in philosophy, deconstruction sprouted in late 1960s and prospered in the 1970s, and based its theory on the structuralistic notion of language as linguistic signs with arbitrary nature. Yet deconstructionists go so far from the structuralism that they contradict the structural way of analyzing the outside world synchronically as a pre-existing structure, deny the accuracy and determinacy of

language in reflecting reality and dissolve the unitary structure and the center-referring system.

Among a number of famous deconstructionists, the most influential one is Jacques Derrida, who argues that what is central to the Western tradition of thought is the idea that presence is accessible. Metaphysics, in particular, in its search for the meaning of being, as been oriented to seek the foundation of the meaning of being in something which is supposed to exist beyond things that are perceived by our sense and in something which is supposed to exist in itself. Metaphysical terms such as reason, truth, and "logos" are inextricably associated with this orientation of thought. The Greek word "logos" means the words spoken, which in philosophical tradition signifies speech that has always been seen as in direct contact with the presence of consciousness. In this way, "logos" implicitly represents those which are supposed to embody the condition for presence. And in Derrida's view, "Western philosophers have sought for the moment when the self-existent object is present to human consciousness. They believed that the revelation of truth was achieved at this moment." Such philosophical discourse had a great impact on Western way of thinking in a way that has led people to privilege terms such as mind, speech as guardians of truth, and to subjugate the counter terms such as body, writing to the former guardians. Derrida named this tendency of thought "logocentrism", because the Greek word "logos" represents truth; and logocentrism called upon the dichotomous relationship between the terms. Therefore, in logocentric thinking, things are patterned on binary opposition, the two opposites of which do not live in harmonious balance but in a hierarchical order and in which one perches in a predominant position, controlling the order. <sup>6</sup>

To deconstruct the binary opposition, Derrida put forward some deconstructive strategies such as dissemination, *différance*, trace, graph etc.

*Différance* plays on the fact that the French word *différer* means both "to defer" and "to differ." Derrida first uses the term *différance* in his 1963 paper "Cogito et histoire de la folie". The term *différance* then played a key role in Derrida's engagement with the philosophy of Edmund Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena*. The

term was then elaborated in various other works, notably in his essay "Différance" and in various interviews collected in *Positions*.

In the essay "Différance", Derrida indicates that *différance* gestures at a number of heterogeneous features which govern the production of textual meaning. The first is the notion that words and signs can never fully summon forth what they mean, but can only be defined through appeal to additional words, from which they differ. Thus, meaning is forever "deferred" or postponed through an endless chain of signifiers. The second concerns the force which differentiates elements from one another and, in so doing, engenders binary oppositions and hierarchies which underpin meaning itself.<sup>7</sup>

With regard to Derrida's deconstruction of binary oppositions, he believes that to deconstruct binary oppositions at a particular moment is to overthrow this hierarchical order and he uses the existing pattern rather than simply abandoning it. In other words, he employs the system of binary opposition to overthrow the system of binary opposition itself so as to dissolve the base of logocentrism which he believes is the source of unfairness. Moreover, for the purpose of deconstructing binary oppositions, he has resorted to the subordinate term, who aims not to fix the subordinate ones as primary and superior in their relation with the counter terms, but to break down the hierarchal order existing in the binary opposition. In this way, in deconstructing logocentrism, Derrida makes a starting point within the given system of thought and his proposition of deconstruction gives people another way of thinking which urges them to call into question anything that may bring about inequality.

Just as analyzed above, we can see *Madame Butterfly* as a logocentric system which includes a series of binary oppositions that reflect social or racial inequalities. According to Derrida, to overthrow the logocentric system, we should first overthrow those binary oppositions ingrained in this system. This is the fundamental step. Thus, this thesis first attempts to point out and further illustrates how David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* managed to deconstruct two main binary oppositions in the play: Male and Female; East and West.

## Part Two

### Deconstruction of the Content

#### 2.1 The Stereotype of Butterfly and its two layers

The story of *Madame Butterfly* might just be wishful thinking on Western white men's mind. It created an image or stereotype of Butterfly indicating delicate Oriental women, which implies two layers of inequality: race and sex.

Surveying the image of Oriental women in Western literary works, it's easy to find their stereotypical features. They are always obedient, passive, and oppressed, waiting to be saved and liberated, usually by the West. While dealing with their relationship with their "Western lovers", they are devoted and willing to sacrifice everything for the Western men, including their life and dignity. However tragically, their destinies are repeatedly being defined as evil sex slave and self-destruction as the inevitable result.

The play *Madame Butterfly* was written when Western colonial power was at its prime. During that period, that is, between 1815 and 1914, the surface of earth in the control of the West had increased from 35% in 1815(Congress of Vienna, which shaped the international power dynamics) to 85% in 1914(the outbreak of the First World War). Their colonial power was permeative in every corner of the world.

To the West, the Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In the century-long war between the colonizer and the colonized, a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient was formed. According to the Orient's special place in their experience, Westerners see the Orient as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics. In *Madame Butterfly*, Puccini draws on various tropes familiar to the Westerners to mark the Japanese identity. For example, Cho-Cho-San is depicted as a geisha, the quintessential Western figuration of Japanese woman, and a fantasized stereotype-beautiful, exotic, loving, yielding,

giving all and demanding nothing. Pinkerton calls her a diminutive and delicate “flower”, whose “exotic perfume” intoxicates him. His bride, this child-woman with “long oval eyes”, makes her man her universe. And like most Japanese created by Westerners, Butterfly treasures her honor and must kill herself when honor is smirched. And what’s more, her suicide definitely comes in a stereotypical form, that is, stabbing into the body with a knife. In her relationship with Pinkerton, Butterfly gets little, because in Westerners’ eyes. Japanese women are supposed to sacrifice. So she sacrifices her people, her son, and ultimately, her life. Her tragedy coincides with the colonized state of Japan in that period.

The representation of Asian women can be best seen in an icon called Madame Butterfly. On first meeting his fiancée, Pinkerton the white man claims, “Heavens! Why, I know her already! Long before ever setting foot in Japan, I had met with her, on every fan, on every teacup’. Later when he wonders whether or not this particular Oriental woman can ‘actually think’, Loti asks, “Is it a woman or a doll?” (Loti 1887:69)[8] Asian women are “Shy Lotus Blossom of China doll: demure, diminutive and deferential”, “tittering behind her man, and best of all, devoted body and soul to serving him”.<sup>9</sup>

They adore their man and are ready to die for him. The popularity of this type of Oriental women in popular culture among Westerners has long existed. Therefore, Madame Butterfly’s submission to Pinkerton not only implies that the Orient submits to the Occident, but also indicates that female submits to male.

Just as David Henry Hwang spoke through the character of Rene Gallimard, the French diplomat: “There is a vision of the Orient that I have. Of slender women in Chong sams and kimonos who die for the love of unworthy foreign devils. Who are born and raised to be the perfect women. Who take whatever punishment we give them, and bounce back, strengthened by love, unconditionally. It is a vision that has become my life.”<sup>10</sup>

## **2.2 Male vs. Female**

### **2.2.1 From Control to the Resolution of Control**

In the traditional concept of logocentrism, male is usually superior to female. Female is always connected with words like weak and passive, especially when it comes to Oriental women and Occidental men. The former one is uncultured and dependent; therefore, the latter one can always control the former. We can prove this clearly in the case of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*.

The heroine of *Madame Butterfly*, Cho-Cho-San is a typical example of being one controlled by men. In the beginning of the opera, when Pinkerton first got to know Butterfly, he described her as "almost transparently fragile and slender, dainty in stature, quaint little figure"<sup>11</sup>, just a little "play thing" for him, while Cho-Cho-San loved him wholeheartedly and considered herself as the happiest maiden in the world. Obviously, she feared Pinkerton and whatever she wanted to do had to be permitted by him. "Butterfly: Mister B. F. Pinkerton, [shows him her hands and arms which are encumbered by stuffed-out sleeves]"<sup>12</sup>, she addressed her own husband in full name. "Butterfly: [pointing to her sleeves] they are here...are you angry?"<sup>13</sup> She just brought her own dowry, and she was frightened that this might anger her husband. Pinkerton asked about the content of her dowry: "What is that you have? Butterfly answered: a little jar of carmine." When Pinkerton didn't approve, "Butterfly: You mind it? [Throws away the pot of paint] There!"<sup>14</sup> Clearly, the relationship between Pinkerton and Butterfly had been settled since their first encounter.

Later on, Pinkerton's control over Cho-Cho-San became increasingly intense. She abandoned her family for Pinkerton. Butterfly's relatives declared to renounce her for marrying a "foreign devil", and Pinkerton authoritatively ordered all to depart as if he took control over all: "Leave the place on the instant, here I am master..."<sup>15</sup> Even when Pinkerton returned to America, he still had his influence on Butterfly. For three years, Butterfly waited for him to return just because of his random words: "O Butterfly, my tiny little child-wife, I'll return with the roses, the warm and sunny season when the red-breasted robins are busy nesting..."<sup>16</sup> For this, Cho-Cho-San turned away wealthy suitors who loved her a lot, even though she's broke, desperate

and with a baby to support.

When it came to Pinkerton, Cho-Cho-San knew nothing about refusal. It seems that she had got used to being controlled by him. She accepted peacefully the fact that Pinkerton was married to an American wife for one year. Even when the American wife came to her door and asked to take away her son, Butterfly's answer is elegantly sad: "[says solemnly] his son I will give him if he will come to fetch him."<sup>17</sup> This kind of controlling-controlled relationship between Pinkerton and Cho-Cho-San didn't change even a little bit before Butterfly's committing suicide. Her blood-shed finally made a closure to the story between an Oriental woman and an Occidental man.

This kind of plot fits the traditional vision of Oriental women loving Occidental men unconditionally with low self-esteem. The binary opposition here is very clear, while the male and female relationship in David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* is much more complicated.

The French diplomat Gallimard met Song Liling in German ambassador's house for the first time while Song was performing the death scene of the opera *Madame Butterfly* from the point where Butterfly uncovers the hara-kiri knife. The opera definitely aroused Gallimard's fantasy of Oriental women and white men as in the opera itself. "I've always seen it played by huge women in so much bad makeup...it's the first time I've seen the beauty of the story...it's a very beautiful story."<sup>18</sup> However, it seemed that Song didn't give him the chance to control her for the first encounter. Song understood Gallimard's mentality well: "Well, yes, to a Westerner...It's one of your fantasies, isn't it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man...what would you say if a blond homecoming queen fell in love with a short Japanese businessman? Because it's an Oriental who kills herself for a Westerner-ah!-you find it beautiful."<sup>19</sup> Just when Song's blunt words made Gallimard speechless and it felt that Song was surprisingly taking control over Gallimard, Song sent out an invitation: "If you wish to see some real theatre come to the Peking Opera sometime. Expand your mind."<sup>20</sup>, seemingly offering Gallimard a chance to get to know her and further control her, while Gallimard was daydreaming about protecting

Song in his big Western and masculine arms.

Their second encounter was in the Chinese opera house. Though Gallimard accepted Song's invitation from the first time, it took him four weeks before he went to watch Song performing. Still Song did most of the talking, very initiative, while Gallimard occasionally repeated in agreement. Different from the stereotype of submissive Oriental women in Gallimard's mind, Song was especially aggressive, independent and very proud of whom she was, but yet pretty charming: "Your history serves you poorly, Monsieur Gallimard. True, there were signs reading 'No dogs and Chinamen.' But a woman, especially a delicate Oriental woman-we always goes where we please."<sup>21</sup> She also cut their appointment shorter than Gallimard expected and asked him to come again. Gallimard was confused and meanwhile attracted. Though Song is initiating or controlling everything, Gallimard still felt unbelievable about things between them: "What was that?...women do not flirt with me. And I normally can't talk to them. But tonight, I held up my end of the conversation." Though he was hesitating about his relationship with Song, actually deep inside he believed "She cannot love you, it is taboo, but something deep inside her heart...she cannot help herself...she must surrender to you. It is her destiny...the same way you do. It's an old story. It's in our blood. They fear us, Rene. Their women fear us. And their men-their men hate us. And, you know something? They are all correct."<sup>22</sup>

Their third encounter was over the phone, just the next dawn after their second date. Song Liling called at 5:30 in the morning only to give an invitation and ensure the appointment: "Then come again next Thursday. I am playing *The Drunken Beauty*. May I count on you?" When Gallimard agreed to come, she was relieved and said: "Perfect. Well, I must be getting to bed. I'm exhausted. It's been a very long night for me."<sup>23</sup> Gallimard felt flattered and he was positive that what he believed in about Oriental women and Occidental men was true. Their relationship seemed to reach a temporary equality at this stage.

From their fourth to fifteenth date, Gallimard and Song kept this kind of balanced situation until the sixteenth dated came. On that date, Gallimard finally entered Song's apartment. And it was when Song started to cater to Gallimard's



“Butterfly” fantasy: weak, fragile, and submissive Oriental women. “Hard as I try to be modern, to speak like a man, to hold a Western women’s strong face up to my own...in the end, I fail. A small, frightened heart beats too quickly and gives me away...I’m a Chinese girl. I’ve never...never invited a man up to my flat before. The forwardness of my actions makes my skin burn.”<sup>24</sup> This made Gallimard believe his thought: “She does-she feels inferior to them-and to me.”<sup>25</sup> From then on, their relationship seemed to be a little bit imbalanced by Gallimard, the Occidental man taking the dominant position between the two. In other words, it seemed that Song Liling appeared to be controlled by Gallimard, no matter what intention she had.

For six weeks, Gallimard didn’t go to the theatre or Song’s apartment. Here comes their seventeenth encounter, Song wrote letters, begging Gallimard to come to the theatre: “Did we fight? I do not know. Is the opera no longer of interest to you? Please come-my audiences miss the white devil in their midst.”<sup>26</sup> But Gallimard was not satisfied with Song’s concession, not dignified enough in his mind. Therefore, he skipped the opera again that week. He planned to take control of Song completely this time. Just as Gallimard had expected, Song’s letter arrived again: “Is this your practice-to leave friends in the lurch? Sometimes I hate you, sometimes I hate myself, but always I miss you.”<sup>27</sup> This letter was so blunt that Song had admitted her affection to Gallimard, which meant Gallimard was one step closer to his intention. In between, Song wrote another letter to express her anger towards Gallimard and also kind of a threat. But finally, she sent a letter of surrender: “I am out of words. I can hide behind dignity no longer. What do you want? I have already given you my shame.”<sup>28</sup> Just when we thought Gallimard was about to win this deadlock, he himself began to hesitate: “Reading it, I became suddenly ashamed. Yes, my experiment had been a success. She was turning on my needle. But the victory seemed hollow...I felt sick...I have finally gained power over a beautiful woman, only to abuse it cruelly.”<sup>29</sup>

Their eighteenth encounter was in Song Liling’s apartment. At first, Song seemed to be very dominating, she interrogated why Gallimond came to her apartment at such an ungodful hour. Gallimond was happy, as he was promoted to the

vice-consul and Song should be credited for this. Actually, he was here, wishing for an answer: Are you my Butterfly? Song didn't want to admit it clearly, as it was very obvious that if she admitted, it meant Gallimard established his authority over Song Liling. So Song said: "Don't you already know...I don't want to say it..."<sup>30</sup> But finally she submitted: "Yes, I am. I am your Butterfly."<sup>31</sup> It seemed that Gallimard established his dominance in their relationship, therefore, their intercourse later on. But surprisingly, Song Liling, seemingly being obedient, took back the initiative in sex by some excuses, like she was shy, inexperienced and so on. She told Gallimard to lie down in dark and she would make him happy.<sup>32</sup>

From then on, Song Liling became Gallimard's "Butterfly" and lived in the outskirts of Peking where they called "home". It seemed that Song again could not escape from the tragic destiny: Oriental woman being the "play thing" for Western man. But actually, that was not Song's theory. She knew Western men's psychology pretty well. "All he wants for her is to submit. Once a woman submits, a man is always ready to become 'generous'. She did all the ground work and she started to get information from Gallimard's work for Chinese government as a spy. "Tell me-what's happening in Vietnam... I want to know what you know. To be impressed by my man."<sup>33</sup>

From 1960 to 1966, a lot of things happened. Gallimard's wife wanted to have a baby, Gallimard had an affair with Renee, but Song could always keep Gallimard around to provide her intelligence. Because Song could always do something to make him believe that she was just his "little Oriental treasure", very submissive, gentle and she loved him profoundly. She even pretended to be pregnant and asked Comrade Chin to prepare a baby boy for her. And ten months later, she presented this baby boy to Gallimard and told him this was his son.

After Gallimard being sent back to France, Song Liling was sent to a commune in Hunan Province to be reshaped to serve the people. Four years, they didn't connect with each other. But when Song went back to France to further get information from Gallimard after so many years, the French diplomat still welcomed her and took her in. They lived together in France for twenty years before they were put on trial.

During these years, we can see their relationship changed systematically. At first, when Song and Gallimard just met each other, it seemed that Song took the dominant position. It seemed that she could control Gallimard, which made Gallimard confused: Song did not fit the female image in his mind. It aroused his interests and curiosity. But later, Song appeared to be more and more submissive and dependent. Gallimard started to feel that he could manage this girl. And after they developed an intimate physical relationship, Gallimard built the confidence that he could control the woman and she was just his “little Oriental treasure”. However, in Song’s mind, she was the one who controlled the situation all the time. She planned everything. She used her tender appearance and words to make Gallimard believe that she was his ideal woman, the most beautiful fantasy, and his “Butterfly”.

Actually, unlike the relationship between the leading couple in *Madame Butterfly*, the relationship between Gallimard and Song Liling in *M. Butterfly* is pretty complicated and changeable. Both of them thought they took the dominant position and they could control the other. We can clearly see this in Song’s speech and Gallimard’s answer in the trial:

Song: Perhaps I was treating you cruelly. But now-I’m being nice. Come here, my little one.

Gallimard: I’m not your little one!

Song: My mistake. It’s I who am your little one, right?

Gallimard: Yes, I-<sup>34</sup>

In the court, Song was so aggressive. She even stripped in front of Gallimard to make him see her true identity. She thought that she could control him totally after so many years. But after she revealed herself as a man, to some extent, she lost her control that she thought she had. “Now get out! I have a date with my Butterfly and I don’t want your body polluting the room!”<sup>35</sup> Gallimard began to realize who the real Butterfly was. It was only in his imagination. He was in love with a woman he had imaged, who only lived in his mind. Hence, he was actually falling in love with

himself. "Love warped my judgment, blinded my eyes, rearranged the very lines on my face...until I could look in the mirror and see nothing but ...a woman."<sup>36</sup> Just before Gallimard chose death with honor, he also found his true identity "I have found her at last. In a prison on the outskirts of Paris. My name is Rene Gallimard-also known as Madame Butterfly."

Ironically, Song Liling pretended to be a woman, while she never forgot his true identity as a man. Gallimard seemed to be a white man, while he called himself "Madame Butterfly" before his death. David Henry Huang used this kind of confusion and inversion to deconstruct the traditional concept of logocentrism, male is usually superior to female. In this case, everything was different. According to deconstructive theories, it was a kind of meaning resolution. We can not define who controls the other in the relationship between Gallimard and Song Liling. And furthermore, we even can not define who the real "Butterfly" is. Between the binary opposition of male and female, the boundary seems to be indistinct; therefore, it was deconstructed.

## **2. 2. 2 From Love to the Resolution of Love**

In Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, Cho-Cho-San loved Pinkerton deeply, from the beginning to the end. When she first got to know that she was going to marry a white man, she considered herself as the happiest maiden, the happiest in Japan, and even in the whole world. She told Pinkerton that she wished to adopt another religion and she could almost forget her race and kindred for him. However, Pinkerton didn't love Cho-Cho-San back in the same way. He just considered her as a temporary play thing, which he could purchase by money. He denied his marriage with Butterfly as a real one. "And to the day on which I'll wed in real marriage a real wife, a wife from America" <sup>37</sup> Even before their marriage, Pinkerton started to plan when he would leave his "wife" and return to America.

Cho-Cho-San loved Pinkerton so much that she would not leave him even if her family and race tried to renounce her. "Butterfly they've renounced her, they've renounced her, still she's happy." <sup>38</sup> She loved Pinkerton wholeheartedly, but she asked little from her husband. "Ah, love me a little, oh, just a very little, as you would

love a baby, this is all I ask for.”<sup>39</sup> The love is so deep that she accepted her destiny as a Butterfly: “They say that in your country, if a butterfly is caught by man, he’ll pierce its heart with a needle and then leave it to perish!”<sup>40</sup>

When Pinkerton returned to America, Nobody believed that he would go back to Japan and be together with his Butterfly ever again. Suzuki said: “I never heard as yet of foreign husband who did return to his nest.”<sup>41</sup> But Cho-Cho-San just could not believe this cruel reality. She loved Pinkerton so much and she believed in Pinkerton’s love towards her. When she heard Suzuki’s words, she was furious and she couldn’t bear that others spoke ill of her beloved husband. “Just before he went, I asked of him. You’ll come back again to me? And with his heart so heavy, to conceal his trouble, with a smile he made answer: O Butterfly, my tiny little child-wife, I’ll return with the roses, the roses, the warm and sunny season, when the red-breasted robins are busy nesting.”<sup>42</sup> She believed this lie for more than three years, even she was desperate in poverty, she turned away all the wealthy suitors, just because she loved Pinkerton and she believed his love towards her. She told herself that Pinkerton would come back for her and their baby.

Before she knew the truth that Pinkerton was actually married to an American wife one year before, she still lived in her illusion of love. When she saw the American ship coming, she hurried back home to do the decoration using all kinds of flowers from her garden. And she asked Suzuki to dress her up and do some make-up just for welcoming her “devoted” husband. Her love was so pure and passionate, and it even touches the cold-blooded Pinkerton. He just could not face her by himself. He had to ask his American wife Kate to get his son away from Cho-Cho-San. One might think that he felt guilty and ashamed, but he just could not change this situation any more. He was settled in the “real marriage” in his mind. His “love” for her lovely child-wife was too weak to stand all the realities. Maybe he loved Cho-Cho-San before, but it was not as deep as Cho-Cho-San’s love towards him. From the beginning to the end, Cho-Cho-San gave up everything for the white devil. She waited for him, she believed his promises, she gave birth to their son, she cut ties from her own family for Pinkerton, and she turned away the wealthy life she might

have with her suitors. Her love is great and selfless, but meanwhile blind and tragic.

Finally, she chose to kill herself in front of Pinkerton and near their son. Maybe she was trying to wake up Pinkerton's "love", or she might want to save her dignity, or she was too desperate to live on. But it was clear that she wanted Pinkerton to remember his Butterfly always in his mind. She knew this was the only way that her love towards Pinkerton could be rewarded. But Pinkerton's love was illusory, or it might not be love at all. He was just shocked by his Butterfly's undying love. He never thought that Butterfly would wait for him for so long and even raised their kid all alone. He never imaged that his taking away the baby and his betrayal could lead to Cho-Cho-San's death. We may say he was feeling regretful and guilty, but love was too heavy a word for him.

In *M. Butterfly*'s case, however, it's far more complicated. In the first stage of Song Liling and Gallimard's relationship, Song seemed to be restrained. She was cold to Gallimard and very aggressive. It seemed that it was impossible for her to fall in love with the diplomat. But when Gallimard kept a distance from her and didn't come to her theatre for several times, Song Liling's attitude changed a lot. She called Gallimard and asked him to come again. When Gallimard didn't show up after all, she wrote several letters. It seemed that she was making a concession. And in the last one, she even wrote: "I have already given you my shame."<sup>43</sup>, which made Gallimard believe that Song Liling loved him and his fantasy would eventually come true. From here, we may all get the impression that it was another "Butterfly tragedy"---An Oriental woman falls in love with a white man, and she is destined to destroy herself.

During their eighteenth encounter, Gallimard, Who had been promoted to vice-consul gave the credit to Song Liling. He asked Song full of emotion if she was his Butterfly. Yes, she is! Gallimard saw his fantasy finally came true. He was so thrilled that he turned himself in: My little Butterfly, I love you!

Just when we believe that they loved each other and this story would have a happy ending, the truth began to be revealed gradually. Song was actually a spy for Chinese government. Her mission was to gather information from Gallimard and provided it to the government. It seemed that what she did before was only a trick.

She needed to make Gallimard believe that she was deeply in love with him, so that Gallimard would fall for her and gave her the information. "All he wants is for her to submit. Once a woman submits, a man is always ready to become generous"<sup>44</sup>

Four years after, Gallimard and Song were apart, Song was sent to France to gather information from Gallimard again. Gallimard divorced his wife and got his Butterfly in and found a job as a courier, so that he could photograph sensitive documents for Song. It seemed that Gallimard did love Song Liling.

Even during the trial, when Gallimard came onto the stage, he called for his lover: Butterfly? Butterfly? At that time, Song appeared as a man. Can Gallimard accept Song Liling as a male "Butterfly"? When Song offered him the chance to strip him, Gallimard was so scared. He always knew that his happiness was temporary, and his love a deception. For more than twenty years, Gallimard refused to accept the truth that Song Liling is actually a man. He chose to live in the illusion. Finally, his illusion fell apart with Song Liling revealing his true identity—a man. "Stop that! I don't want to! I don't...Please. This is not necessary. I know what you are...A—a man."<sup>45</sup>

Song: ... Well maybe, Rene, just maybe—I want you.

Gallimard: You do?

Song: Then again, maybe I'm just playing with you. How can you tell?...

Gallimard: Why? Why do you treat me so cruelly? <sup>46</sup>

Yes, Obviously Gallimard was deeply hurt. But how can a person be hurt, if he or she is not in love. Gallimard was in love, but not with Song Liling. He fell in love with a perfect lie. He was a man who loved a woman created by a man. He fell for the fantasy or pure imagination created by himself: there are women in the Orient who are willing to sacrifice themselves for the love of a man, even a man whose love is completely without worth. "Yes, love. Why not admit it all?... Love warped my judgment, blinded my eyes, rearranged the very lines on my face...until I could look in the mirror and see nothing but...a woman."<sup>47</sup> It is at that moment he realized that he himself is the butterfly. He loved his "Butterfly" and he was willing to sacrifice

everything for “her”, his career, his reputation and his family, while Song Liling was only using him for the intelligence, meanwhile, he was also a man. What a lie! So similar to the plot in *Madame Butterfly*, only this time, the “white devil” is actually the “Butterfly”.

“The love of a Butterfly can withstand many things—unfaithfulness, loss, even abandonment...And I have found her at last. In a prison on the outskirts of Paris. My name is Rene Gallimard—also know as Madame Butterfly.”<sup>48</sup>

So Gallimard is desperately in love with his own reflection of “Butterfly.” Therefore, his love towards Song Liling doesn’t really count. What about Song Liling’s love? Is it true that Song just took Gallimard as the tool to gather information? Has he ever loved Gallimard?

He was rather cruel to Gallimard in the courtroom. While Gallimard begged him not to remove the briefs, he insisted and did so. He joked about Gallimard’s love towards “Butterfly”. But later on, when Gallimard accepted the truth and called Song “just a man”. He was furious, and it seemed that Gallimard dropped all affection towards him. He picked up Butterfly’s robes and started to dance around. He tried to awaken Gallimard’s love towards him, but in vain. He was so disappointed when Gallimard refused to admit him as his butterfly: “I’m your Butterfly. Under the robes, beneath everything, it was always me...I’m your fantasy!”<sup>49</sup>

It seemed that Song Liling actually loved Gallimard. He was trying to confront Gallimard and persuade him to love him in his true identity, as a man. In fact, he had always been dreaming to love Gallimard as a man. When Gallimard refused to take him back as his “Butterfly,” Song was broken-hearted; he realized that Gallimard had never loved him. He loved him only when he was playing a part. Song Liling also lived in his own illusion, just like Gallimard. His life is actually pure imagination as well. “I’m disappointed in you, Rene. In the crush of your adoration, I thought you’d become something more. More like...a woman.”<sup>50</sup> He called Gallimard his little thing. He described Gallimard thus: “Your mouth says no, but your eyes say yes.” Gallimard is actually the Butterfly in Song’s illusion, as Song thought Gallimard was deeply in love with him, however unworthy he was. In the end, after Gallimard committed



suicide to save his dignity, it was Song Liling who was on the stage calling for his beloved Butterfly—Gallimard.

Unlike Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, *M. Butterfly* had a rather complex story. The relationship between a man and a woman usually is represented by their love life. In *Madame Butterfly*, it was pretty obvious that Pinkerton feels superior to Cho-Cho-San in their relationship; one of the biggest reasons is that Cho-Cho-San loved Pinkerton wholeheartedly, while Pinkerton only takes Cho-Cho-San as a plaything. Therefore, it's easy to conclude that Cho-Cho-San will get hurt in the end. This seems again to prove the traditional concept of logocentrism, male is usually superior to female. But in the case of Gallimard and Song Liling, it's hard to define if they ever loved each other. All seemed quite vague. They are "Butterfly" in each others' eyes: in Gallimard's eyes, Song is the fragile and tender Oriental woman devoted to her white lover; while in Song's eyes, Gallimard's committing suicide rises as a Western "Butterfly" image in Orientals' eyes—a western man obsessed with the imaginary relationship between Oriental woman and Occidental man resulted from colonial mind-set. In this way, it again deconstructs the binary opposition of male and female.

## **2.3 East vs. West**

### **2.3.1 From Subordination to the Resolution of Subordination**

According to Edward Said, Orientalism is actually a method Westerners reconstructed to dominate and overtop the Orientals. The relationship between Orient and Occident is power and domination. Orientalism is the cultural source of the stereotype Westerners had towards Orientals. Chinese American scholar Elaine H. Kim believes, "in Westerners' eyes, the difference between Westerners and Easterners is that Westerners are physically, mentally, and morally superior to Easterners. Thus, Easterners should be subordinate to Westerners. This is the rule."<sup>51</sup>

Just like what we can see in Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, as the representative of Westerners, Pinkerton, a Lieutenant in US Navy, enjoyed every privilege in Japan, while Cho-Cho-San and other characters are just lower living creatures or even objects to Pinkerton. Cho-Cho-San, his so-called wife, was actually a commodity that

can be purchased, let alone other characters.

When Goro, the marriage broker, introduced the handmaid, cook, and servant to Pinkerton, their attitude and behaviors towards each other is self-evident.

“[Enter two men and a woman who humbly and slowly go down on their knees before Pinkerton.]” While Goro introduced their names, Pinkerton’s reaction is pretty insulting: “Foolishly chosen nicknames! I will call them scarecrows! [pointing to them one by one] scarecrow first, scarecrow second, and scarecrow third!”<sup>52</sup> Literarily, “scarecrow” means people in shabby clothes. Pinkerton called them scarecrows instead of their own names. It’s really rude and on the other side, it proves that Pinkerton considered the Japanese servants as subordinates.

Some may argue, maybe just because they are servants, not that they are Easterners. But his attitude towards Cho-Cho-San’s relatives showed that he looked down upon Easterners no matter what status they had. When Cho-Cho-San’s relatives came to celebrate the wedding, actually Pinkerton didn’t welcome them at all. He appeared to be hospitable and friendly. He thanked them for coming, but to get rid of them, he showed them the delicacies spread out, and then he told the US consul, Sharpless: Lord, what foolish people!

Yes, Pinkerton thought the Japanese people were uncivilized primitive, therefore, he considered himself as superior to them all. And the Japanese people were scared of Pinkerton, only because he was a Westerner. He got his power and privileges, so Easterners should be subordinate to him and could not disobey him. When Cho-Cho-San’s uncle and relatives tried to renounce her, Pinkerton was pretty annoyed. He ordered all to depart authoritatively: “Leave the place on the instant. Here I am master. I’ll have no turmoil and no disturbance here.” The result was that Cho-Cho-San’s relatives all rushed hastily towards the path which leads down to the town. They were so many, while Pinkerton was all alone. Still they were afraid of Pinkerton, just because he was a white man.

Even his “beloved wife”—Butterfly had to be obedient. Hence, it is pretty obvious that Easterner is subordinate to Westerner in the case of *Madame Butterfly*. However, the situation is rather different in David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly*.

Just in their first encounter, Song Liling and Gallimard seemed to have different opinions in the relationship between Westerners and Easterners. “Song: It’s one of your favorite fantasies, isn’t it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man. Consider it this way: what would you say if a blonde homecoming queen fell in love with a short Japanese businessman? ...but because it’s an Oriental who kills herself for a Westerner—ah!—you find it beautiful.”<sup>53</sup> It seemed that Song Liling, as an Oriental, didn’t feel subordinate to Gallimard or afraid of him. On the contrary, she even argued with him. However, Gallimard still felt he was superior to Song, just because he was a Westerner. “So much for protecting her in my big Western arms.”<sup>54</sup>

Gallimard was convinced by himself that Song must surrender to him. It was her destiny. It was an old story. Oriental women fear Western men. And Oriental men hate Western men. He felt he was powerful and he had the right to win his Butterfly over, no matter how unworthy he was. And as time went by, Song Liling seemed to be different. Her arrogance seemed to disappear. “Hard as I try to be modern, to speak like a man, to hold a Western woman’s strong face up to my own...in the end, I fail. A small, frightened heart beats too quickly and gives me away. I am a Chinese girl...”<sup>55</sup>. This confession made Gallimard believe his theory even more: Oriental women felt inferior to Western women—and to Western men. All this shows white men’s superiority complex after Gallimard conquered an Oriental woman. It’s as if women are fragile before men, the Orient will surely surrender to the Occident. Just like what Song Liling said in the courtroom: “The West thinks of itself as masculine-big guns, big industry, big money—so the East is feminine—weak, delicate, poor...but good at art, and full of inscrutable wisdom—the feminine mystique...The West believes the East, deep down, wants to be dominated...and being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man.”<sup>56</sup> It means even if Song was not costumed as a woman, he was a woman in Gallimard’s eyes.

But as the plot moves on, we see David Hwang does not portray Song Liling to cater to Westerners’ stereotype. Song appeared to be weak and obedient, but actually she was the one to grasp the overall situation. Whatever she wanted to do, Gallimard listened to her and helped her to achieve. Gallimard provided information for Song

Liling to the Chinese government, he divorced her wife, and he found a job according to Song's needs. Thus, from the perspective of purpose, Song Liling is always the winner. Gallimard obeys her in the real sense. What Song has to do is pretending to be subordinate and obedient to her Western lover, so that his Western arrogance can be satisfied. "All he wants is for her to submit. Once a woman submits, a man is always ready to become 'generous'." <sup>57</sup>

In fact, in the end of the play, Gallimard put on Madame Butterfly's costume and said "My name is Rene Gallimard—also known as Madame Butterfly" He became the woman who sacrificed her life for love, while Song Liling regained his identity as a man. Thus, Gallimard became a male "Butterfly" and Song Liling threw away his mask of being Madame Butterfly.

In this sense, we can see that in Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, the relationship between East and West was pretty obvious, that is East being subordinate to the West. Every character in the play had to be respectful and obedient to Pinkerton, including Cho-Cho-San. They are afraid of Pinkerton, just because he was a Westerner. Meanwhile, Pinkerton also felt superior to everyone and he was proud of his white man identity. But this is not the case in *M. Butterfly*. It's hard to define who's superior and who's inferior. Gallimard, as a white French diplomat, seemed to be in charge of the relationship between Song Liling and himself. And it's true that Song Liling always appeared like Cho-Cho-San, fragile, shy, and devoted. But later on, we know Song was a spy for Chinese government and she was actually a man. Therefore, Gallimard was the one in the dark. He knew nothing and Song Liling was the one in charge of everything. He used his understanding about Gallimard's Butterfly fantasy to trick him. He used Gallimard for his own purpose, to gather information for Chinese government. Also, we can see from some details that Gallimard loved the Orient deep down in his heart. When he went back to France, he described his life there as disappointing. He angrily rebuked his wife, only because his wife spoke ill of China. He had Oriental complex and Song used it, which leads to Gallimard's punishment in the end.

In this way, we can not define the relationship between East and West in any

received fashion. What we can get is that the East is not subordinate to West in this case, thus, the binary opposition of East and West is deconstructed.

### 2.3.2 From Ingratiation to the Resolution of Ingratiation

The East has long been considered as irrational, corrupted, naïve and abnormal in Westerners' eyes, while the West itself is the symbol of reason, sublimity, maturity, and normality. Therefore, Western writers or playwrights always occupy a commanding position in portraying the East in their own mindset. They enormously exaggerate primitive and uncultured situations in the East to meet Westerners' mind of seeking novelty. They believe Easterners usually put themselves in the positions of servants to serve the Westerners unconditionally. Good Easterners ingratiate the Westerners, because deep down, they admire the "great culture" of the West. Thus, here we have a lot of works like *Madame Butterfly* with "adorable characters" like Cho-Cho-San.

In Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, we can see a lot of situations in which Easterners ingratiate Westerners. We know that Pinkerton was not handsome nor successful compared with other Westerners. But in Cho-Cho-San's and her relatives' eyes, "He is grand, I think him fine!...Truly a great lord is he!"<sup>58</sup>

And Cho-Cho-San as the representative of "good Easterners" in *Madame Butterfly*, worshipped Pinkerton and Western culture; however, she despised her own Japanese culture and her own fellow citizens of Japan. Pinkerton was surprised that his Butterfly tried to kiss his hand. And Cho-Cho-San's explanation is: "They tell me that abroad, where the people are more cultured, this is a token of the highest honor."<sup>59</sup> She imitated the Western etiquette of kissing her husband's hand, while she called her motherland Japan lazy and idle.

Meanwhile, Cho-Cho-San was so proud of her husband's great motherland America. And she even called that her own country.

Goro: For the wife desertion gives the right of divorce.

Butterfly: That may be Japanese law, ...But not in my country.

Goro: Which one?

Butterfly: The United State...I know of course, to open the door and to turn out your wife at any moment, here, constitutes divorce. But in America, that cannot be done. <sup>60</sup>

When Cho-Cho-San mentioned America, she offered it big names full of emotion, like “his big native country.” When there were American guests coming to her home, she greeted them warmly and tended to offer them what she considered as the best. “You prefer, most likely to smoke American cigarettes?” <sup>61</sup>

Further more, she even knew about the national flag of America and read some English words. Whenever there were ships arriving in port, Cho-Cho-San and her maid went there to see if it was from America. She knew clearly how to identify if the ship was from her husband’s homeland. “Big native country, white, white...the American stars and stripes!...I may read the name, the name, Where is it? Here it is: ABRAHAM LINCOLN!” <sup>62</sup>

What strikes us most is Butterfly’s death scene: “Butterfly takes the child, seats him on a stool with his face turned to the left, gives him the American flag and a doll, and urges him to play with them.” <sup>63</sup> Even before committing suicide, she urged her son to play with an American flag. From this, we can see that Cho-Cho-San considered her son as an American. As his mother, she was so proud of having an American baby. In a sense, her son continued and sublimed her unfulfilled “American dream.”

In *Madame Butterfly*, we can find a lot of traces that East ingratiate the West. This fits Westerners’ assumption that good Easterners will be unnoticeably influenced by Western culture, and later on, civilized by it. Deep down, Easterners admire and worship the West, Westerners and their culture.

But David Henry Hwang tried to deconstruct this stereotypical assumption in his *M. Butterfly*. On the contrary, we see a Westerner obsessed with China, Chinese woman and Chinese culture.

In their first encounter, Song Liling criticized Gallimard’s prejudice on the so-called beauty of *Madame Butterfly*. She thought Gallimard was fond of this classic,

just because he was a Western man. “It’s one of your favorite fantasies, isn’t it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man.”<sup>64</sup> Song Liling did not ingratiate Gallimard, instead, she pointed out Gallimard’s biased opinion by using a sarcastic “blonde homecoming queen and short Japanese business man” irony.

And in the next few encounters, Song Liling seemed to be very proud of being a delicate Oriental woman. She was often very arrogant in front of Gallimard. She disapproved so-called Western culture, on the contrary, she often says things like “Your history serves you poorly...we will further expand your mind” to mock Gallimard and his lack of knowledge.

Just when we thought Song Liling, who always put on a strong face, was so different from the obedient Cho-Cho-San who always ingratiated the West in *Madame Butterfly*, the plot moved to the opposite direction. Song began to speak ill of the “New Society”: “we are all kept ignorant equally. That’s one of the exciting things about loving a Western man.”<sup>65</sup> And she called Gallimard coming from a progressive society. It seemed that she began to admire and worship the West just like Cho-Cho-San.

But later on, Song Liling seemed to disapprove of the West again. Gallimard’s wife asked Gallimard to go to the doctor for a check-up to see why they could not bear a child after many years of marriage. Hearing this, Song said: “You men of the West—you’re obsessed by your odd desire for equality. Your wife can’t give you a child, and you’re going to the doctor?”<sup>66</sup> And then, she also tried to educate Gallimard about the ancient Chinese culture: “In Imperial China, when a man found that one wife was inadequate, he turned to another—to give him his son.”<sup>67</sup>

When Gallimard claimed that he wanted to see Song Liling naked, Song was so furious that she praised the Oriental women as “modest”, while burst out to criticize Western women and their behaviors: “So you want me to—what—strip? Like a big cowboy girl? Shiny pasties on my breasts? Shall I fling my kimono over my head and yell “ya-hoo” in the process?”<sup>68</sup> Here, in Song Liling’s words, the Western culture became the uncivilized and primitive culture that was not comparable to the ancient and advanced Chinese culture. And Gallimard actually approved all these notions as

they fit his interest and fantasy.

Later on, from the plot, especially the court scene, we got to know that Song Liling was actually a spy for the Chinese government. She used Gallimard to get the information she needed. She first opposed the West, and then ingratiated it and later on, even educated Gallimard about the Eastern culture, only to make Gallimard believe her and love her so that she can take advantages of him.

Song's tricks were successful. Gallimard was so obsessed with her, China, and Chinese culture that he was unhappy when he was sent back to France. His fantasies were broken into pieces. When his wife spoke ill of China, he just could not bear it, and finally he had to divorce his wife. It seemed that it was the Western man who ingratiated the Orient.

Why would Song's tricks be that effective? Song Liling's own confession made sense. Because she knew Westerners' understanding about the East well. "The West believes the East, deep down, wants to be dominated...you expect Oriental countries to submit to your guns, and you expect Oriental women to be submissive to your men...when he finally met his fantasy woman, he wanted more than anything to believe that she was, in fact, a woman." What she did was using Gallimard's obsessed fantasy about obedient Oriental woman and his fantasized Oriental culture. Then Gallimard would be under her spell and the fantasized culture.

In the end of the play, Gallimard killed himself in the name of Butterfly. He quoted the line from his favorite play *Madame Butterfly* "Death with honor is better than life with dishonor," which proved that he was so obsessed with his own fantasy about the perfect woman and his fantasized Eastern culture.

Comparing *Madame Butterfly* and *M. Butterfly*, the latter is much more complicated than the former. In Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, the relationship between East and West was very obvious, that East always ingratiated to the West. Almost every Oriental character in the play was afraid of Pinkerton, but also admired and worshipped him and his culture, just because he was a Westerner. Cho-Cho-San, as the representative of "good Easterners," worshipped her Western husband and ingratiated to his culture unconditionally. Whatever she did in the play was resulted



from her “American dream”, which made people believe that the East is destined to ingratiate to the West, for civilized culture can always be influential to the primitive culture and therefore assimilate them. But this is not the case in *M. Butterfly*. It seemed that Song Liling was criticizing her sweetheart’s so called enlightened culture all the time. She criticized Gallimard’s Western stereotypical opinion about China and Chinese culture. She also criticized some universal opinions in the Western society, like equality between man and woman and sexual openness. Even when she seemed to be admiring Gallimard and his Western culture, she had her own purpose. Actually, Song Liling was trying to manipulate Gallimard, so that he would provide information for her willingly. Song Liling always catered to Gallimard’s pleasure and pumped Eastern culture to Gallimard according to his fantasy. Gallimard got so obsessed with his favorite part of Eastern culture to which he started to ingratiate.

In this way, we can not define the relationship between East and West in the usual mode any more. It seemed that the situation was reversed. The Westerner started to identify with the East, but the Eastern culture he was obsessed with is not the Eastern culture in the real sense. Therefore, what we can only assume is that the East does not ingratiate to West in this case, thus, the binary opposition of East and West is again deconstructed.

From the illustration above, we can now conclude that both the binary oppositions: Male and Female, West and East are deconstructed in David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly*. We could not find a definite position or relationship between them, only a meaning resolution. Thus, from the perspective of content, *M. Butterfly* is an effective deconstruction of *Madame Butterfly*.

## **Part Three**

### **Deconstruction of the Form**

#### **3.1 Bertolt Brecht's Theatre Theories and the Alienation Effect**

Bertolt Brecht was a German poet, playwright, theatre director, and one of the most prominent figures in the 20th-century theatre. Brecht made equally significant contributions to dramaturgy and theatrical production, the latter particularly through the great impact of the tours undertaken by the Berliner Ensemble—the post-war theatre company operated by Brecht and his wife and long-time collaborator, the actress Helene Weigel with its internationally acclaimed productions, while the former was through his invention and experiments of a drama form called epic theatre and also the technique of alienation effect.

According to Brecht, “the theatre must become a tool of social engineering, a laboratory of social change.” To this end, Brecht, an assertive rationalist through and through, expounded his theory of “epic theatre,” running counter to Aristotle’s age-old tradition of “dramatic theatre.” One of the principles underlying this theory is what he called *Verfremdungseffekt*, that is, “alienation effect”, or distantiation in French. In other words, the audience should avoid identification with the play and the actors be asked to think; to ponder on what is transpiring on stage. For Brecht, the Aristotelian concept of drama, which emphasizes catharsis by terror and pity, was to be dispensed with. He was opposed to a kind of theatre that created illusions and, in suspension of disbelief, beguiled the audience into believing that what is happening before their very eyes is true. It was by virtue of these elements that Bertolt Brecht mocked “Aristotelian drama,” calling it culinary theatre.

Brown illustrates how Brecht’s concept of ‘*verfremdungseffekt*’, also known as the distancing effect, prevents “the audience from losing itself completely in the character and lead the audience to be a consciously critical observer”.<sup>69</sup>

“Epic theatre” is defined as a “movement where play invites the audience to

make judgments on characters and that characters are not intended to mimic real people, but to represent opposing sides of an argument, archetypes, or stereotypes”<sup>70</sup> In other words, epic theatre is used to “alienate” or “distance” the audience to think objectively about the play, to reflect on its argument, to understand it, and to draw conclusions.

Alienation includes two aspects: alienation between actors and the characters, as well as stage and the audiences. According to Brecht, the traditional “dramatic theatre” puts the audiences in an unalive state that they lose the ability to judge because of strong emotional resonance. What they can get is only some sensational pleasure. Brecht was totally against Sympathy and Empathy theory that has been popular in Europe for more than two thousand years. He originated “epic theatre” to differentiate from dramatic theatre. As a whole, it does not use a dramatic conflict through the whole play; instead, the connections between scenes are relatively loose in the purpose of receiving an “alienation effect” that can produce rational thinking.

“Alienation effect” is the core of Brecht’s theory of drama. It can replace emotional sympathy completely as the root of artistic treat. For this kind of new theatre, the audiences become observers who are judgmental and inquisitive about the stage performance. Their reactions are more about the rationality than emotion. Brecht hopes that the actors can “report” the role, instead of being it. It is not that he’s totally against actors performing the role with experience. He’s just against that they transform to be the role itself. He allows a dialectical relationship between rationality and emotion. Of course, the leading position should be rationality. Actors who follow Brechtian principles, their priority is to observe their roles in sober objectivity. They can even jump out of the role to put out comments; the stage elements do not have to be in harmony, but alienate and negate each other; with the insertion of titles and asides, the stage scenes are corrected and supplemented. Through the technique of alienation effect, the audiences’ sympathy is suppressed and the illusion is destroyed, so that they can keep rational thinking about the stage and performance.

In *M. Butterfly*, David Henry Hwang adopted some epic theatre techniques to achieve the alienation effect, so that his deconstruction of the content can be achieved.

### 3.2 From Order to Disorder

When we read *Madame Butterfly*, it is easy to find that the plot is in time and causal sequence. The connections between acts are very close. Act 1 illustrates the story of how Pinkerton married Cho-Cho-San, Act 2 is basically about Cho-Cho-San's life after Pinkerton left Japan, and Act 3 is actually about Pinkerton asking his American wife to come and fetch Cho-Cho-San's baby. It is very obvious that the cause and effect lead the audiences into the illusion, as if they are one part of the play. The plot itself will not be interrupted, therefore, the audiences are just the viewers of the play, and they just experience the life of the characters in the play through the acting of the actors. This is a relatively traditional dramatic form, which is very similar with Aristotelian drama.

David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* is definitely different from this type of theatre... Narration is not the only technique David used in *M. Butterfly*. From the first Scene of Act 1, we can see that this play is a flashback. For a long time, the heroine of the play—Song Liling was not presented. It started from Gallimard's prison days. Gallimard joked about his life in prison and started to introduce the plot of *Madame Butterfly*, among which we can find a lot of narration interposed. For example, we have the insertion of Gallimard's conversation with his friend Marc from high school and his introduction about his history with women, including his marriage. And later on, he started to recall how he got to know Song Liling for the first time in Scene 6, Act 1.

And then we can see the narration started to link with each other and we find a temporary order here. After Scene 6, Act 1, the playwright started to narrate the plot in time sequence. However, the connections between scenes were relatively loose, though we can still find the insertion of Gallimard's conversation with Marc here and there.

Just when we get used to the logic of viewing the play in time sequence, the playwright started Act 2 from Gallimard's prison days, and cut back to the story-telling in Scene 2.

Act 3 started from the trial of Gallimard and Song Liling in 1986, and the three

scenes of Act 3 are all in time sequence. Here, we can see that actually the Act 2 is a total insertion or narration interposed about Gallimard's memory of the twenty years that he spent with Song Liling.

Even if some of the scenes and acts are in time sequence, we can seldom feel the plot consistency; instead, the scenes and acts are rather independent. We can barely feel causality between them. For example, in Act 1, just when Gallimard was introducing Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* in Scene 3, Scene 4 was a total different situation in which Gallimard and Marc converse about Gallimard's experience with women. Scene 5 continues with the plot of *Madame Butterfly*, while Scene 6 is about Gallimard's first encounter with Song Liling.

To sum up, the structure of *M. Butterfly* is not in chronological order compared with *Madame Butterfly*; as the two plays are of different purposes, therefore, belong to two different genres. *Madame Butterfly* is a rather traditional one, which follows the audiences' logic flow and common perception, so that the audiences can be fully immersed in the play and experience the happiness and sorrow of the characters. On the contrary, *M. Butterfly* is in "disorder"; therefore, the audiences can not be fully occupied by the plot. Once they immerse into it, another fragment will pull them out so that they can always keep their own judgment about what's going on onstage.

### 3.3 From Enchantment to Alienation

Opera is an art form in which singers and musicians perform a dramatic work combining text (called a libretto) and musical score. Opera is part of the Western classical music tradition. It incorporates many of the elements of spoken theatre, such as acting, scenery, and costumes and sometimes includes dance. The performance is typically given in an opera house, accompanied by an orchestra or smaller musical ensemble. As a work of opera, Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* fits this genre. Music and singing is throughout the whole play, so that the audiences will get used to the artistic form. Meanwhile, the actors conduct the technique of "being the role", so that the audiences will feel that they are experiencing the life of the characters. The artistic effect is so enchanting that the audiences will be fully occupied in the plot and

suspends their judgment.

However, David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* is another story. He used a lot of techniques of epic theatre to alienate the audiences from strong emotional resonance, so the audiences won't take what happens onstage for granted.

One feature of *M. Butterfly* is that the hero himself can communicate with the audiences, to introduce plot and situations and even present his comment. At the beginning of the play, Gallimard presented a long self-statement to introduce his situation in the prison. He also talked directly to the audiences, as in Act1, Scene 6, "Gallimard: (To Us): So much for protecting her in my big Western arms"<sup>71</sup> This kind of technique deliberately breaks the "fourth-wall" of traditional theatre. The audiences will feel that they are one part of the play as well; therefore, they are not only the viewers. They have to have opinions and make decisions. They are fully aware of the situation on the stage and they are invited to make their own conclusions.

The second feature of the play is that "fictional" characters appear on the stage and interact with the real characters. Gallimard's classmate from high school Marc is actually a character who only appeared in Gallimard's mind. But David Henry Hwang made him appear onstage four times. The first time is in Act 1, Scene 4, which is a conversation between Gallimard and Marc. This conversation gave us an impression on Gallimard's history with women. The second time was in Act 1, Scene 9, Marc encouraged Gallimard to go after Song Liling. The third time was in Act 1, Scene 11, Marc recalled Gallimard's first experience with woman and further encouraged Gallimard's relationship with Song Liling. The fourth time was in Act 2, Scene 11, Gallimard was upset about the life in the West, and Marc tried to comfort him. Even girls from girlie magazines came onto the stage and had a conversation with Gallimard, which further revealed Gallimard's unsuccessful history with women.

Actually, these "fictional" characters are the reflections of Gallimard's own thinking. He was paradoxical inside. His conversation with the "fictional" characters is actually the conversation with himself. Using this technique, the audiences' train of thought was interrupted. They were able to realize that this is actually a play, not the reality.

The third feature of the play is the quick temporal and spatial variation. Theatre's time and space limitation is resulted from the limitation of physical time and space. According to classical physics, time and space are existing frames. As they are objective and absolute, they can not be changed or surpassed. The audiences and the actors exist in the four-dimensional space, which is the performing time and the location; while the play itself provides another time and space, which is the virtual time and space for the characters in the play. In traditional Western theory, theatre is imitating; is the reflection of life on the stage. So if only the virtual time and space integrates with the real time and space, this kind of reflection is rational and acceptable. A person in rational mind will not believe that a story of forty years can be represented in two hours and the small stage can once be Venice and later on, Paris. Thus, to make the audiences fully involved in the plot of the play, the time and space should be as stable as possible. And time and space can be shifted between acts and scenes, but not within it. Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* is a typical example for this kind of play. The whole play only has one location, which is in Cho-Cho-San and Pinkerton's residence. And there is only one time shifting: the day Cho-Cho San and Pinkerton got married and three years after Pinkerton returned to America.

David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* is much more modern and variant in this respect. In this play, we can see several different locations, including Gallimard's prison cell in Paris, German ambassador's house in Beijing, Gallimard's apartment in Beijing, Chinese Opera house and streets in Beijing, Song Liling's apartment in Beijing, Ambassador Toulon's residence in Beijing, Gallimard and Butterfly's flat in Beijing, French Embassy in Beijing, A party scene in Beijing, A commune in Hunan Province, Gallimard's residence in Paris, and a courthouse in Paris. So many locations shift quickly from each other. Sometimes, two locations are set side by side on the same stage; the dramatist uses the lighting effects to differentiate them.

Also the time span is very large—twenty six years, from 1960 when Gallimard and Song Liling first met with each other, to 1986 when Gallimard killed himself as Butterfly. Just like the locations, the time shifts quickly as well, and it's not in time sequence. It flashes back and forward, very flexible. For example, the play started in

1986, when Gallimard was in the prison cell. And suddenly, it jumped to the year of 1947 and 1961.

This kind of time and space shift makes it hard for the audiences to accept things at face value and indulge themselves in the plot of the play. On the other hand, they pay more attention to the thinking and ideas that the play tried to convey, instead of being fully emotional and being sympathetic about the characters, thereby, critically alienated.

The fourth feature of the play is the multiple role-playing. According to the traditional Aristotelian theatre, the most important factor for acting is imitating. The actors should make the audiences believe they are actually the characters, so that they can be fully engaged in the plot of the play, therefore, the sympathy and empathy can be achieved. But Brecht's theories are different. In his opinion, actors should be alienated from the characters and roles. Not only that the author of the play is dead, but also the actors. What we can see is the subjectivity of the audiences.

In David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, we can see the actors are not only performing one role in the play, but several of them. For example, in Act 1, Scene 1, when Gallimard was introducing the plot of the *Madame Butterfly*, the actor who played Marc wore an official cap to designate Sharpless. He entered and played the character. In Act 1, Scene 5, Comrade Chin played the role of Suzuki. In Act 1, Scene 6, when Gallimard was in the German Ambassador's house, Marc was there to play a diplomat. For one time, this actor acts that he is Marc and later on, we see he's a diplomat in the party. This will demand the audiences to be alert so as not to be confused, so that they will alienate themselves emotionally away from the play and they will know it's only a play, not real life. What they can do is not experiencing the characters' lives, but keeping a distance from them to judge and learn from what happened on the stage by using their own rationality.

To sum up, these techniques alienate the audiences from the plot and made them pay attention to the content of the play. Meanwhile, the two binary oppositions: Order and Disorder, enchantment and alienation are deconstructed.



## Part Four

### Conclusion

With the popularity of the play on the stages of the US and other countries, the voice of the play *M. Butterfly* is heard by the public and arouses a lot of thinking. As a deconstruction of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, the play subverted the image of "Butterfly", also known as the stereotype of "submissive Oriental woman". Through the deconstruction, the minority groups in the US expressed their desire to be freed from the long-last stereotypes set by the dominant group.

However, *M. Butterfly* should not be regarded as a purely anti-Western play, a criticism against the stereotyping of the East by the West, of Women by Men, and so on. On the contrary, just as Hwang says in his "Afterword", the play is "a plea to all sides to cut through human's respective layers of cultural and sexual misconception, to deal with one another truthfully for our mutual good, from the common ground we share as human being".<sup>72</sup>

In the play, Hwang hopes to create a universalistic view of the relationship between East and West, Male and Female. However, during the process of reconstruction, against his original intent, Hwang inadvertently reinforces the stereotyped feminine image of women. Therefore, the deconstruction of Male and Female is achieved, but not as complete compared with the deconstruction of East and West.

In one scene of the play, Hwang has the singer explain: "The west thinks of itself as masculine-big money, big gun, and big industry-so the east is feminine-weak, delicate, poor...".<sup>73</sup> The East becomes the measure by which one recognizes one's power, just as the feminine becomes the means by which the man recognizes his masculinity. However, Hwang's analysis, a powerful tool to explore the ways in which the East is constructed, is less effective in the matter of gender. In Act 3, when Song removes the costume of Butterfly, and Gallimard puts on the makeup of Butterfly, it seems that they have changed their status completely. The West

ultimately loses the power by degrading into a female, while the Oriental regains the power by regaining his male identity.

It is beyond doubt that the reverse in sexual identity serves as an extraordinary way to practice the Oriental's revenge, but on the other hand, it also puts the feminine figure under the masculine and reinforces another kind of power inequality.

*M. Butterfly* is a piece of perceptive and thought-provoking work. It reminds us that just one hundred years ago, when *Madame Butterfly* was first produced, the West and East "formed closed, mutually, exclusive spaces where one term inevitably dominates the other".<sup>74</sup> The play also warns us that we will all suffer if traditional ideologies of sexism, racism, imperialism continue to function in the post-colonial age. Now we are living in an age when globalization prevails, which requires co-operation and equality between different cultures and identity groups. Just as in the deconstructive theories, there is no definite meaning, everything goes to a resolution. To harmoniously live on the earth, people of different civilizations have to throw away the stereotypes in our mind both for East and West, and Male and Female, resist racial and sexual misconceptions. Only in this way the tragedy of *Madame Butterfly* and the farce of *M. Butterfly* will never happen again.

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