



A Study of Sexuality and Gender in *M. Butterfly* Under the Context of Post-Colonial Feminism

WU Yongzhen^{[a],*}

^[a] School of Information Management, Nanjing University, Nanjing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 10 November 2022; accepted 25 January 2023

Published online 26 March 2023

Abstract

David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* is a reinterpretation of the classic opera *Madama Butterfly*. He intends to expose to the readers the profound ideological imprints of racism, colonialism and patriarchy contained in Puccini's oriental fantasy love tragedy, and to extend the discussion of such propositions as gender discrimination, racial prejudice, western misreading of the East and cultural hegemony that still exist in today's society. This play serves as a vivid profiling of the particular historical situation suffered by Asians in the American racist environment. It is also progressive in that it challenges the stereotypes of Oriental women in Western literature. However, there is no denying that the deconstruction of colonialism and patriarchy in *M. Butterfly* is incomplete and inadequate. Taking a post-colonial feminist perspective as an entry point, this paper tries to analyze the orientalist colonial elements presented in *M. Butterfly* and focus on the sexuality and gender issues of the two main characters, Song Liling and Gallimard, hoping to help readers break out of the established framework and have a new understanding of the relationship between the West and the East, and between men and women.

Key words: *M. Butterfly*; Post-colonial feminism; Orientalism; Gender study

Wu, Y. Z. (2023). A Study of Sexuality and Gender in *M. Butterfly* Under the Context of Post-Colonial Feminism. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 19(1), 73-79. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/12949>
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12949>

1. INTRODUCTION

David Henry Hwang is often recognized as one of the most successful and prestigious Asian American playwrights in the history of American drama. His representative work, *M. Butterfly*, is perhaps also one of the most known and highly acclaimed Asian American plays in the late twentieth century. So far, there have been some researches on the creative style of *M. Butterfly*, but nothing has been done from a post-colonial feminist perspective. This chapter will briefly describe the text analyzed and the theory employed.

1.1 Background to the Creation of *M. Butterfly*

The inspiration for the creation of *M. Butterfly* comes from a real story reported by the New York Times: French diplomat Bouriscot was deeply infatuated with a Chinese opera star. They had a seemingly intimate relationship for twenty years. Ironically, it was not until the end that the French diplomat discovered that his Chinese "mistress" was not only a spy, but also a man. This anecdote created a great sensation and soon became a hot topic. Hwang heard the story by chance and was infuriated by the stereotyping of Chinese race and gender that Westerners had inadvertently revealed. In response to the diplomat's defense of why he had never seen his "girlfriend" naked, that is, "I thought she was very modest. I thought it was a Chinese custom", Hwang wrote in the afterword: "This is not a Chinese custom. Asian women are no more shy with their lovers than are women of the West" (1988). He then went on to conclude that Bouriscot's love of the Chinese actress was nothing more than a Pinkerton's fantasy -- that he had found his own *Madama Butterfly*.

The legend of "Madama Butterfly" began in the 19th century with Pierre Loti's travel writing, which depicted a casual love affair between a French naval officer and a Madama Chrysantheme lived in Nagasaki. John Luther Long later wrote a short story inspired by the former and changed the heroine's name to Cio-Cio-San, and

her ruthless husband's to Pinkerton. Finally, in 1904, the image of the Oriental woman Cio-Cio-San was shaped and spread widely in the hands of the famous Italian composer Giacomo Puccini through his popular opera *Madama Butterfly*. As a white male who had never been to the East, Puccini relied mostly on hearsay and his own imagination to create stories. The contradiction and tension presented in his work are relatively simple, and the fantasy of "the perfect woman" buried deeply in the heart of men is brought into full play (Li 57). Hwang was keenly aware of the rich cultural, political and gender metaphors behind this enduring and resonant tragedy of interracial marriage. Under the inspiration of the real event, he decided to do "a deconstructivist *Madama Butterfly*".

1.2 Overview of Post-Colonial Feminism Theory

The union of post-colonialism and feminism stems in part from the marginality they share. Freud once compared women to "the dark continent". In the subconscious of many white men, there is an essential similarity between women and the former colonial peoples of the Third World.

Post-colonial feminism is an exploration of and at the intersections of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and sexuality in the different contexts of women's lives, their subjectivity, work, sexuality, and rights. The work of post-colonial feminists is much more complicated. Women living in the once colonized countries suffer from "double colonization". Her colonized father and brother play the role of oppressors on gender issues, exploiting her by misrepresenting her in the nationalist discourses. Meanwhile, her "sisters" growing up in the First World are also oppressors. Although Western feminism has emerged as a challenger against patriarchy, it has grown up in a Western cultural and academic environment and is therefore unlikely to escape the shadow of cultural hegemony and colonial tendencies. White feminists often condescended to define women in the Third World uniformly as backward, ignorant and dependent, in order to foil the independence and progress of Western women and reap a sense of superiority. Bertha Mason, the madwoman locked up in the attic in *Jane Eyre*, is a typical product of this mentality. Post-colonial feminist Gayatri Spivak points out that Mason, as a non-Western woman, is portrayed as "mad" in the field of imperialist discourse, and that this "dehumanization" is a result of the racial prejudice of the First World, in a historical context where imperialism dominates the discursive field of all literary texts. A similar case can be found in *M. Butterfly* when Gallimard said: "Did you hear the way she talked about Western women? Much differently than the first night. She does—she feels inferior to them—and to me." (Hwang 31).

2. POST-COLONIAL FEMINISM REFLECTED IN SONG LILING AND GALLIMARD

2.1 Song Liling: The Disillusioned Oriental Butterfly

Edward Said once stated that Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and "the Occident", which has been effectively confirmed in *Madama Butterfly*. In Puccini's opera, men are men, women are women, Japanese are Japanese, and Americans are Americans, as defined by familiar narrative conventions. The heroine, Cio-Cio-San, was described as exotic and sensual, but somehow also managed to maintain her unconscionable fidelity and purity. As a typical oriental female figure forcibly endowed with the characteristics of infatuation and masochism, she fell in love with an iron-hearted Navy Captain named Pinkerton and was willing to sacrifice everything, including her belief and dignity for him. Pinkerton, who was plain in appearance, shallow in talent and actually a coward, however, only treated Cio-Cio-San—his secret lover who was as meek and fragile as a butterfly, as a disposable plaything, which eventually led to her suicide in despair.

Hwang imitates the direction of love tragedy in *Madama Butterfly* within the established framework, but symbolically transforms the relationship and identity between the male and female protagonists. The play's dismantling of Orientalist mythology begins with its confirmation of the cultural constructivism of gender and the fictionalization of ethnic/racial fantasy in relation to Orientalist discourse (Fung, 2010).

Madama Butterfly is the introduction and important clue throughout the whole play. For example, Hwang starts using the opera *Madama Butterfly* at the beginning of *M. Butterfly*. While speaking to his imaginary audience, Gallimard turns on his tape recorder and talks about the general plot of the opera. He then states that this opera will help to explain what he did and why he did so in his life.

Gallimard: In order for you to understand what I did and why, I must introduce you to my favorite opera: *Madama Butterfly*. By Giacomo Puccini. First produced at La Scala, Milan, in 1904, it is now beloved throughout the western world. (p.5)

With this technique, Hwang presents the stereotypes invented by the Western people to the audience.

Gallimard has never been impressed or moved when watching the role of *Madama Butterfly* played by Western actress because their huge physiques could not accurately reflect his understanding of the diminutive and delicate nature of Oriental women. While Song, the Chinese opera diva, appeared on the stage as an illusory butterfly. Her beautiful, tender and charming appearance cleverly

disguised the reality and successfully made the French diplomat fall in love with her at first sight at the same time. Just like any other Western men, Gallimard yearns for the conventional love mode presented in *Madama Butterfly* and admits that “We, who are not handsome, nor brave, nor powerful, yet somehow believe, like Pinkerton, that we deserve a butterfly.” (Hwang 10).

Gallimard: ... 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. (p. 68)

In the story of *M. Butterfly*, Gallimard creates his life and work according to his own will like an artist. Drama often has the magical power, which enables people to get rid of the inferior, vulgar and despised parts of real life, and to appreciate the great emotion and noble sentiment in art works. It is also the most contagious thing in consideration of the fact that ordinary people may easily fall into an illusion under its influence. Antonio Gramsci named this phenomenon “the melodramatic conception of life”. Hwang makes it fairly clear, that the vision which incites and determines Gallimard’s love is in fact a “fantasy”, an illusion. After all, what bewitches him is the fictive stereotype itself rather than the real person Song (Li, 2011).

In the first two acts, Hwang roughly mimics the plot trend of *Madama Butterfly*. Showing the audience that Gallimard’s manipulation of Song is a psychopathic means of catching a butterfly, piercing it with a needle, then leaving it to a writhe. While Gallimard enjoyed the pleasure of being in control, Song Liling was caught in a passive game of love. Discursive hegemony and intellectual violence obscure the developmental aspirations of oriental women like her, leading them to be represented and spoken of. Beyond the dissolution of self-consciousness, the phenomenon of the internalization of stereotypes is also evident. Under the oppression of what is euphemistically called “benevolent love of racial discrimination”, Asian women seem to have accomplished self-contempt, self-exclusion and self-disintegration. Hwang convinced readers that it was precisely out of the deep-rooted ethnic and gender inferiority complex that Song humbly said, “I’m not asking you to be my husband. But I am already your wife.” (Hwang 51).

The act three, though shorter, is the climax of the play. In 1986, Gallimard was arrested for divulging confidential information. Much to his surprise, his “mistress” Song Liling, who stood in court to testify against him, was a man. It turns out that with these Orientalist discourses derived from *Madama Butterfly* and other Orientalism writings, based on his own wishful thinking, Gallimard tries to explain Song’s conspiracy to control him step by step. Therefore, his being deceived and exploited by Song—a man disguised in female attire—for twenty

years, can only be interpreted as that under the long-term torment of Orientalism, he has been completely addicted to fantasy and lost the ability to distinguish the truth, which is incurable.

Jacques Derrida, an advocate of deconstruction, used to suppose that the western ideological system is based on the paradigms of binary opposition, such as essence and appearance, truth and lie, consciousness and unconsciousness. The former is better than, or superior to the latter in each group, and the latter is regarded as a derivative of the former. Derrida himself opposed this dualistic paradigm which shows the difference of class and hierarchy, and advocated reversing the established hierarchy order for equality.

This technique is well used in *M. Butterfly*. The audience will gradually discover that this butterfly played by Song was not as weak and lacking in thought as they usually or expect to see—he even had the power of eloquence. In the court trial, Song stated the following facts to the point: The West has sort of an international rape mentality to the East. Obviously, in the past one hundred years, if the tearful Westerners have a little bit of empathy, they surely would have found out that what truly touched them, deep down there, is not a sheer love tragedy. As Song once asked Gallimard sarcastically: what would you say if a blonde homecoming queen fell in love with a short Japanese businessman? A western woman met an Oriental man and lost her mind for him. Even after being tortured and humiliated, she still held the unrealistic “love”, hoping he will turn his heart. Considering that Asian men have gradually become emasculated in the Western cultural atmosphere and deprived of the opportunity to be lovers, husbands and fathers, everybody would say that this girl must be crazy. “But because it’s an Oriental who kills herself for a Westerner—ah!—you find it beautiful”. In the final analysis, behind that hypocritical praise of love, there goes such a nude and bloody prejudice: “The West thinks of itself as masculine—big guns, big industry, big money—so the East is feminine—weak, delicate and poor... The West believes the East, deep down, wants to be dominated—because a woman can’t think for herself” (Hwang 83). Such sharp judgments not only opened the cracks in the colonial discourse, but also eliminated its authority.

When Song Liling’s male identity was finally revealed, Gallimard was suddenly enlightened and painfully aware of the mismatch between life and drama. His obedient butterfly turned out to be such an ugly thing. In the face of the truth, however, he could give up his love for Song, but he couldn’t let go of the illusion towards the butterfly—the perfect female image. The play ends in Gallimard’s committing seppuku (Japanese suicide through self-disembowelment) wearing the kimono and geisha’s make-up while Song, dressed as a man, watches and smokes a cigarette, murmurs to himself: “Butterfly? Butterfly?”.

2.2 Gallimard: The Alienated Agent of Imperial Patriarchy

2.2.1 Fetishism for the “Butterfly”

In this play, after watching *Madama Butterfly* starred by Song Liling, Gallimard fixed the image of Song directly on what Westerners perceived as a rather dogmatic traditional impression of the Orient, ignoring the different personalities Song may have as a living human being. For him, what really mattered is the role and function of Song Liling. This objectification could be viewed as a classic manifestation of fetishism.

Sexual fetishism refers to a condition in which things that are inanimate or some specific parts of the body other than the sexual organs become the source of one’s sexual satisfaction. From a post-colonial feminist perspective, Gallimard, as a typical white fetishist, imagined a vision of an ideal Oriental woman who would give up everything for a white man who is “neither good-looking nor intelligent” and would willingly become the victim of this unrequited love. His love for Song Liling was merely a form of “sexual empathy”, and Song was merely a representative—a submissive and harmless object materialized in the stereotype of Gallimard (Li, 2011). Song had a clear understanding of this fact from the beginning, teasing rather sarcastically and to the point that the submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man made up his favorite fantasy.

In *M. Butterfly*, Gallimard is cleverly placed in the position of seemingly being a victim. It is as if he was deeply in love and made many sacrifices, including sharing confidential information, for his beloved fetish. But this false self-deception of love will never be the bridge between a white man and his Oriental “butterfly”, because the butterfly never really existed. At the end of the story, when Song began to fight back, talking about how easily Gallimard was tricked, and Gallimard suffered one defeat after another, the arrogance and ignorance of the white male with a deep fetish complex was quite evident to the audience.

2.2.2 Identification and Avoidance of Gallimard’s Homosexual Tendency

Recent scholarship has begun to explore the ideological construct of homosexuality in *M. Butterfly*. Some believes that the French diplomat’s fetish for the perfect exotic Oriental Women mediates homosexual desire in the face of pervasive homophobia, which makes sense (Shin, 2002). At the age of 12, Gallimard found some pornographic magazines in his uncle’s closet, but his sexual desire was not a bit aroused by the naked bodies of these sexy women. Plus, his first heterosexual experience also ended in a mess. Gallimard felt that his arms were pinned to the dirt and was worried about his legs falling off during the sex: “And in the middle of all this, the leaves were getting into my mouth, my legs were losing circulation, I thought, ‘God. So this is it?’” (Hwang 33)

The ordinary white women were “too uninhibited, too willing, so as to seem almost too masculine” to him. Unpleasant sex with white woman led Gallimard to discover his homosexual impulses. In other words, he knew from then on that he possessed a hidden homosexual passion. Even so, he resisted the impulse and chose practicality instead. Gallimard went to the altar of marriage with Helga resolutely because only in this way could he join the political system of forced heterosexuality under the control of patriarchy and became a successful man in the secular sense. He even needed to guard his masculinity and social status by expressing his disgust and fear of homosexuality. A strong yearning for hegemony and dominance could explain the ambivalence and ambiguity of Gallimard’s sexual orientation.

Despite being a French diplomat, Gallimard was never considered to be an obvious success in the Western world’s evaluation system. His one-sided fetish towards Song Liling was also a result of his attempt to escape the fate of being “castrated” in a logocentric society and to gain the legal power that only heterosexual men could have. In R.W Connell’s book *Masculinities*, power relations regarding gender are described as the overall subordination of women and dominance of men. The power struggle between women and men are significant for the politics of masculinity (2005). In the presence of an Oriental woman who showed him every subservience, Gallimard’s lust for man’s power was greatly satisfied. After all, being a white man who possesses the ability to conquer the “perfect oriental woman” is one of the most important signs of success. Part of Gallimard’s tragedy also lies in the inability to articulate his homosexual identity.

2.3 Transformation of the Protagonist’s Identity: Around the Absence of Female Body

The play *M. Butterfly* is recognized to be successfully anti-essentialist by examining the discursive relationship between categories of gendered, racial and national identity. Scholars both at home and abroad have made relatively sufficient research on the deconstruction of Orientalism under the post-colonial context discussed in this play. But not much has been said about the sexuality and gender issues involved. The *Madama Butterfly* does not exist. Real butterflies are men who create illusions of their own volition.

The theme of sexuality and the body has always occupied a key position in post-colonial feminist criticism. Scholars often consider the depiction of sexuality and the body to be an important means of achieving autonomy. The female body as a conceptual and material being is a very complex proposition, and feminist theories about the body cover a wide range of fields including economics, politics, literature and art, where the central issue is recognizing how the female body is constructed through various ideologies, discourses and practices (Xiao,

164). Hwang posed the question through the creation of character Song Liling, “How can people tell whether I am male or female?”. Apparently, Song could be regarded as a prime example of androgyny in literature. According to Virginia Woolf, who fused the concepts of the anima and the animus together and developed her own theory, self-identity should exist beyond the limits of gender and that, as androgyny represents the coexistence of the two sexes, it actually points to a more harmonious and egalitarian direction of development.

Hwang’s intention to use fluid sexuality—in the form of female sexuality and homosexuality—in this play to undermine gender binaries can first be seen in the naming of the script. He picks a French acronym M. In French it is an abbreviation of both “Madame” and “Monsieur”. The ambiguity creates suspense in the opening paragraph. In the case of Song, he took on two opposite roles of woman and man. Or to say, in the first half of the play, he skillfully and naturally played the role of a woman in gender with the physiological sex of a man. It does not depend on the parts of the body we take for granted—vagina, penis, breast and other sexual organs to achieve such an effect—coupling of both gender roles within the same individual. Instead, it relies on the artistic processing of all kinds of clothes, mascara and lipstick which we think are not so important but indeed have strong gender and cultural characteristics. Like Simone de Beauvoir famously declared in *The Second Sex*, “One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one”. Gender is, actually, not a stable signifier but a socially-enacted phenomenon that carries little or no truth value about the perceived notions of identity (Bak, 2005). A person’s gender role is influenced by the social environment and changes over time. It is generally believed that the institutional and cultural factors are the reasons for the differences in male and female roles or behaviors, while the physiological differences are not the decisive factors.

At that time, the social situation worldwide of “men win over women” was also pointed out many times as the story goes on. In a dialogue between Song and Chin in Act Two, Scene Seven, he assumed that the reason why women’s roles are played by men in the Peking Opera is because only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act, unmasked the hidden rule that women should be treated as men’s dolls.

Gallimard was a typical male chauvinist with the similar idea of men being superior to women deeply rooted in his mind. Under the patriarchal hetero-centric mechanism, he needed to protect, conquer, and control a woman to maintain his self-esteem and avoid being castrated and relegated to the same secondary status as women. After the spy case came to light, Song took off his dress in front of Gallimard and showed off his naked body. He tried to argue that “Under the robes, beneath everything, it was always me” (Hwang 89). But Gallimard simply refused to accept the shocking truth. Under the

background of phallus worship, there is no middle ground like that for a “feminine man”. The success of Hwang’s re-writing of *Madama Butterfly* and the French diplomat’s “mis-placed” love for a Chinese opera singer relies on the understanding of gender as a “performance”—as Saal pointed out, we are born naked and everything else is drag. Whatever we make of this nakedness is performance and perception (1998). However, excellent gender performance may help to masquerade the Phallus, but couldn’t hold back the fact that penis is an instrument of patriarchal power and it wields great cultural imperative in Western sexual politics. Just like the erotic joke allegory told by the foreign student Renee in Act Two, Scene Six: ... And that’s what we call a civilized society. The whole world run by a bunch of men with pricks the size of pins. (Hwang, p,56).

3. THE LIMITATIONS OF THE DECONSTRUCTION OF COLONIALISM AND MALE CHAUVINISM IN *M. BUTTERFLY*

In *M. Butterfly*, Hwang focuses on the relationship between East and West, women and men, addressing complex propositions such as ethnicity-race, gender politics and identity. The play also vividly reflects the particular historical situation he suffered under the racial discrimination of American society, and critiques the stereotypes against Chinese women in cultural works created by white authors. At the same time, however, the play remains incomplete, inadequate and overtly didactic in the realm of post-colonial feminist deconstruction.

3.1 The Agnosticism of the Real Eastern World

Although *M. Butterfly* tells a story that spans and connects the two worlds of East and West, there is very little direct reference to the history, culture or current reality of the Eastern Stage (China). Among these few descriptions, negative images are in the majority. What audience could see is a dirty-looking Beijing, a smoky grand theatre, the turbulent Cultural Revolution and the old-fashioned ideological values of the Chinese people.

The play also lacks a sense of realism, dimensionality and specificity in its role shaping of Eastern characters. Song Liling’s superior, Comrade Chin, a native Oriental woman, is portrayed by Hwang in a thinly veiled manner: cold and bureaucratic. Immediately after she gained power, the narrow-minded Ms. Chin exiled Song, the imperialist “plaything” to a small village in Hunan Province. By comparison, Hwang’s character building of Song Liling is not much better. This opera star tends to give many audiences a negative impression of being cunning and good at mind games. The victory he achieved by defeating Gallimard is even more illusory.

Admittedly, some of these portrayals and assessments towards China or Chinese made by Gallimard do not represent the playwright's own views. But a fact that must be faced is that after reading this play, it is difficult for the audience to gain any better understanding of the real East/Third World. The reason for this may be that although the author is ethnic Chinese, he grew up in the West. His dual identity led him to fall into an awkward situation. He not only knew literally nothing about the real East, but also could not completely escape the subtle influence of Orientalism. Hwang's state of "dissonance" in relation to Chinese culture and his anxiety about his identity as a "third person in the crevice" contribute to his narrow nationalist narrative of revenge with an Orientalist slant (Zhao, 2004).

3.2 The Continuation of Phallus Centrism

Gabrielle Cody once commented that Hwang's *M. Butterfly* is perpetuating the misogynist myth, and that "The real play underneath *M. Butterfly*'s seductive theatricality has very little to do with exposing sexism or cultural imperialism" (1989). An interesting fact is that in the end, Gallimard becomes a "woman" out of desperation and shame. Butterfly remains a "man" out of revenge and success. Hwang seems to have ended up falling unwittingly and bewilderingly into the trap of male chauvinism. The play in fact ends where it started. How powerful the phallus is! By simply showing his penis to Gallimard, Song Liling is demonstrating a kind of authority, a deterrent by saying "I am a man". Try as he might, Hwang ultimately fails to break through the paradigm of the gender binary opposition, conveying the clichéd patriarchal tenet that the phallic is naturally more superior to the non-phallic.

M. Butterfly is steadily built on a phallus central subtext, whether the playwright wants to admit it or not. The gender and identity issue of the two main protagonists is confusing. They even switched roles in the play's epilogue. But no matter how their characters are reversed, the one to be killed at last would be Madama Butterfly, who is a woman, rather than the U.S. Navy captain, who is a man (Tong, 2014). During an interview conducted by the New York Times in 1988, Hwang honestly said that pleasure in giving pain to a woman is not that far removed from a lot of male experiences. Probably, it is Hwang's western half and his male perspective that prevents him from waking up to the more multifaceted and deep-seated hegemonic oppression suffered by women in the East.

4. CONCLUSION

M. Butterfly is a political satire and revenge work in the guise of a plain spy story. The core content is fueled by Hwang's depiction of blatant prejudiced dialogue involving male manipulation of women and the inferior position that the West attributes to the East.

In this play, Hwang uses a great deal of metaphors and symbols that, together, parallel a relationship between two male characters--a man who appears to be heterosexual but actually has an underlying strong homosexual passion and a man who hides under the dress and social identity of a woman. The whole play revolves around the specific figure of Madama Butterfly. The playwright shows his audience clearly that the image of Madama Butterfly actually originates from European and American Orientalism. White male literary creators from the West tend to use the figure of a fragile, innocent Japanese woman to fulfill their racialized and gendered orthodoxy of East-West relations.

Interpretations of *M. Butterfly* based on an anti-colonial perspective have been done quite thoroughly by domestic scholars. However, not much has been explored from a feminist, particularly post-colonial feminist, perspective. This paper begins with a brief introduction to the author and the background of the creation of *M. Butterfly*, followed by a brief overview of the current state of research at home and abroad, and an explanation of the main ideas and characteristics of post-colonial feminism. The key part of the essay is to analyze sexuality and gender issues embodied in the characterization of two protagonists--Song Liling and Gallimard, using post-colonial feminist theory as a guide. The last section aims to illustrate the incompleteness of the deconstruction.

M. Butterfly is a classic play that deserves to be read again and again, but it was written decades ago, and future research on the subject could probably be approached from a more original and critical standpoint. Hwang once said that we are all prisoners in our time and place. Perhaps the message he wants to convey to us through this play is that all sides should cut through their respective layers of cultural, racial and sexual misconception and try to relate honestly and equally with each other.

REFERENCES

- Bak, J. S. (2005). "Vestis Virum Reddit:" the gender politics of drag in Williams's "A Streetcar Named Desire" and Hwang's "M. Butterfly." *South Atlantic Review*, 70(4), 94-118.
- Beauvoir, S. D. (1997). *The second sex*. New York: Vintage.
- Cody, G. H. (1989). David Hwang's *M. Butterfly*: Perpetuating the misogynist myth. *Theater*, 20, 24-27.
- Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Fung, E. C. (2010). Deconstructing the "Butterfly": Teaching David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* in cultural and socio-political contexts. *Asian American Literature Discourse & Pedagogies*, 1, 16-26.
- Hwang, D. H. (1989). *M. Butterfly*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Li, L. (2012). *Gender and sexuality in the works of Chinese American literature: David Henry Hwang's M. Butterfly*,

- Frank Chin's Gunga Din Highway and Maxine Hong Kingston's The Fifth Book of Peace as Cases Study*. (Doctoral dissertation, Shanghai International Studies University). Retrieved from <https://www.cnki.net>.
- Li, W. (2011). The politics of gender: Feminist implications of gender inversions from *M. Butterfly*. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 7(2), 272-277.
- Loo, C. (1993). *M. Butterfly: A feminist perspective: Bearing dreams, shaping visions Asian Pacific American perspectives*. Whitman: Washington State University Press.
- Ma, R. (2018). The ideology of cultural and gender misunderstanding in D.H. Hwang's *M. Butterfly*. *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Compare*, 23, 1053-1063.
- Saal, I. (1998). Performance and perception: Gender, sexuality, and culture in David Henry Hwang's "M. Butterfly." *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, 43(4), 629-644.
- Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Shin, A. (2002). Projected bodies in David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* and golden gate. *MELUS*, 27(1), 177-197.
- Tong, J. (2014). The metaphorical rules of oriental male narration in *M. Butterfly*. *Home Drama*, (03), 157-158. Retrieved from <https://www.cnki.net>.
- Tyagi, R. (2014). Understanding postcolonial feminism in relation with postcolonial and feminist theories. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 1(2), 45-50.
- Zhao, L. (2004). The post-colonial deconstruction and post-colonial interpretation of *M. Butterfly*. *Literatures in Chinese*, (05), 69-74. Retrieved from <https://www.cnki.net>.