

# Deconstructing the Butterfly Image: A Cross-Cultural Exploration from Puccini to David Henry Hwang

Gao Juan & Johan Awang bin Othman

School of the Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM Penang, Malaysia

Corresponding Author Email: [j\\_othman@usm.my](mailto:j_othman@usm.my)

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v14-i8/22355>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v14-i8/22355

**Published Date:** 21 August 2024

## Abstract

The pervasive "butterfly stereotype" depicted in Giacomo Puccini's opera "Madame Butterfly"—which presents Asian women as fragile and compliant—has significantly shaped Western cultural perceptions of Eastern femininity. This stereotype's impact is profound, influencing not only artistic expressions but also broader social and cultural interactions between the East and West. David Henry Hwang's play "M. Butterfly" challenges this entrenched image through a critical reevaluation, making this topic crucial for understanding the dynamics of gender and cultural representation in media. This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing textual analysis and Derrida's deconstruction methodology to evaluate the butterfly imagery in both "Madame Butterfly" and "M. Butterfly". The study is structured in two phases: the first phase identifies and challenges the binary oppositions (e.g., East/West, male/female) present in these texts, while the second phase destabilizes these binaries, contributing to a deeper understanding of the representation of Asian women in Western media. The major findings suggest that Hwang's "M. Butterfly" not only critiques but also subverts the submissive female archetype depicted in "Madame Butterfly". Hwang's adaptation introduces complexity to the stereotype by portraying its male protagonist in traditionally feminine roles, thereby challenging the viewer's perceptions and expectations. This deconstruction reveals deeper societal norms and power structures that govern gender and cultural identity, suggesting that these identities are more fluid and constructed than traditionally portrayed. Further research is proposed to explore the impact of these deconstructed stereotypes across different cultural contexts, examining other works that utilize similar stereotypes to understand their role in shaping cultural narratives and identity. Additionally, studying audience reception in various cultural settings could provide insights into how such stereotypes are perceived globally, offering a broader understanding of the interplay between media representation and cultural identity construction.

**Keywords:** M. Butterfly, Madame Butterfly, Deconstruction, Butterfly Stereotype, Butterfly Image.

## Introduction

### *Introduce the Problem*

In Western culture, the butterfly has become emblematic of the characteristics attributed to Eastern women. One of the most pervasive stereotypes of Eastern women is embodied in the idealized Asian woman, epitomized by the heroine of Giacomo Puccini's renowned 1904 opera, "Madame Butterfly" (Wen, 2013). Puccini depicts Madame Butterfly, also known as Cio Cio San, as a beautiful and docile butterfly, symbolizing the archetype of a weak and submissive Eastern woman (Shuwen, 2010; Ling, 2010). In "Madame Butterfly," conventional narrative conventions dictate clear-cut roles: "men are men, women are women, Japanese are Japanese, Americans are Americans," leading to a predictable triumph of the West over the East, of men over women, and of white men over Asian women (Kondo, 1990, p. 10). Thus, the butterfly image becomes a discourse about the Orient, permeating literary and artistic productions as well as political and scientific writings (Loomba, 1998, p. 47). This gender stereotype is often referred to in Western discourse as the "butterfly stereotype" (Wen, 2013; Shuwen, 2010; Ling, 2010).

Henry Hwang's "M. Butterfly," which won the 1988 Tony Award for Best Play, aims to deconstruct the image of weak and submissive oriental women created by Puccini's famous opera (M. Butterfly, postscript). In Hwang's play, the roles of hero and heroine are transposed: Gallimard, the protagonist, is portrayed not as the heroic and masculine naval officer Pinkerton from "Madame Butterfly," but as a weak, henpecked, homosexual French diplomat. Song Liling, the counterpart of Madame Butterfly's Cio Cio San, assumes multiple identities, vastly different from the passive portrayal of Cio Cio San. Song Liling strategically employs the stereotypes and sexual fantasies associated with Madame Butterfly to ensnare Gallimard, who is beguiled by his oriental fantasy (Hwang, 1993).

Jacques Derrida, who developed a semiotic analysis known as "deconstruction," initially introduced this concept in a 1971 interview "Positions" and further in the 1972 preface to "Dissemination." According to Derrida, deconstruction involves two phases (Positions, pp. 41–42; Dissemination, pp. 4–6). The first phase challenges metaphysical assumptions by reversing traditional Platonist hierarchies, such as essence over appearance, soul over body, and sound over word, suggesting that essence is actually intertwined with appearance, rather than superior to it. The second phase redefines previously subordinate terms as "origins" or "resources" for opposition and hierarchy, positing every occurrence as inherently temporal and filled with subtle, undecidable differences, referred to by Derrida as "traces" that undermine established hierarchies (Lawlor, Leonard, 2023).

Currently, scholarly discourse on "Madame Butterfly" and "M. Butterfly" typically follows two main lines of inquiry: intertextuality between the two works and whether "M. Butterfly" completely or incompletely deconstructs "Madame Butterfly." The prevailing view that "M. Butterfly" fully deconstructs "Madame Butterfly" encompasses theories from Orientalism, post-colonialism, gender and race, and the power dynamics between the East and the West. However, perspectives suggesting an incomplete deconstruction often cite Orientalism, gender deconstruction, and new historicism, and point to the cultural identity of Chinese Americans as "a cultural butterfly" (Sheng, 2008). These debates tend to limit the discussion of butterfly stereotypes to a binary framework of either complete or incomplete

deconstruction. Yet, true deconstructive analysis aims to restructure or “displace” the opposition, not merely reverse it (Britannica, Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2024). This paper, therefore, seeks to re-examine the butterfly image through Derrida's two-stage deconstruction, enriching the current research on the representation of the butterfly in these two intertextual works.

### *Significance of the Study*

This paper holds significant academic merit as it delves into the exploration of the butterfly stereotype within two intertextual works, employing Derrida's critical theory of deconstruction to analyze the utilization of the butterfly stereotype as a symbolic construct. By doing so, it contributes to an expanded understanding of how butterfly imagery is utilized and manipulated within literature and art, enhancing sensitivity to the nuanced intersections of culture, gender, and power dynamics, and fostering a deeper appreciation for the diversity and complexity inherent in literary and artistic works.

This revised version seeks to improve clarity, flow, and academic tone while maintaining your original insights and detailed analysis.

### **Literature Review**

The question of whether "M. Butterfly" subverts the binary opposition model established by "Madame Butterfly" has been extensively explored. Sheng and Rongshou (2019) discussed the deconstruction of gender roles and race relations in the context of these two cultural works, elucidating the dynamic interplay between East and West. Zhengyan (2011), applied a deconstruction strategy to specifically analyze the dislocation of binary oppositions concerning gender and political power in "M. Butterfly," thus enriching the political power discourse. Wang Shunlai (2011) employed theories of deconstruction and postcolonial criticism to highlight how ethnic minorities transition from the margins to the center in a multicultural context, challenging the traditional binary model of domination and subordination.

However, Haoran (2013), contended that while Henry Hwang made significant strides in dramatizing the deconstruction of the Oriental female stereotype epitomized by "Madame Butterfly," he did not fully transcend the entrenched binary oppositions of gender, geography, and power due to the constraints of cultural identity and historical context. Lu (2012), critiqued that Song Liling's character perpetuates identity stereotypes, inadvertently providing a basis for continued Orientalist fantasies in Western thought. This, according to Jin, indicates that Hwang's play may reinforce rather than dismantle Orientalist stereotypes, thereby continuing a cycle of misrepresentation between East and West.

Yakun (2020), in his master's thesis on the writing strategies of "M. Butterfly" from a deconstructive perspective, noted that although Hwang attempted to deconstruct the binary oppositions of strength and weakness between East and West, he inadvertently established a new binary dynamic. Furthermore, Li Lihua's doctoral thesis highlighted an often-overlooked aspect: the absence of the female body as a concrete entity in "M. Butterfly." This absence complicates discussions on whether the play truly subverts traditional gender binaries.

Generally, scholarly analysis of the butterfly image in these two works, grounded in deconstructive theory, has predominantly focused on the aspect of reversal. Lucie Guillemette and Josiane Cossette (2006), Mauer (2018), and Allen (2023), alongside Derrida himself, have articulated that deconstruction involves two stages: a reversal stage and a neutralization stage. However, much of the current discourse remains fixated on the initial reversal without fully engaging with the neutralization process, which aims to dismantle the underlying structures of binary thought.

Therefore, this article seeks to apply both stages of Derrida's deconstruction to more comprehensively analyze the butterfly image, aiming to move beyond mere reversal to a deeper interrogation and restructuring of the oppositions depicted in "Madame Butterfly" and "M. Butterfly."

### **Methodology**

This study focuses on the "butterfly image" in David Henry Hwang's play "M. Butterfly" and Giacomo Puccini's opera "Madama Butterfly". The analysis will encompass both textual and video materials from these intertextual works. Jason A. Smith (2017) has confirmed that textual analysis is a valuable research method utilized by scholars to examine messages as they are presented through various mediums, including documents, films, newspapers, paintings, and web pages. Accordingly, this study employs a purely qualitative textual analysis design, integrating video materials with related documents and applying the two stages of Derrida's deconstruction to gain a comprehensive understanding of the "butterfly image" in both works.

### **Data Collection Method**

Data collection for this study primarily involves videos and texts, including transcripts and documents from both "Madame Butterfly" and "M. Butterfly". David Silverman (2000) emphasized the diversity of data collection methods in qualitative research, which includes observations, textual or visual analysis (e.g., from books or videos), and interviews (individual or group) (Silverman, 2021). Consequently, this study collects primary and secondary data through observational methods and document analysis for data processing.

### **Research Procedure**

*The research procedure is twofold*

**Observation:** This initial stage involves closely observing the depictions and activities related to the "butterfly" theme in both works. It aims to understand the behavior and interactions of characters associated with the "butterfly" motif within their cultural contexts, recording these observations for further analysis.

**Textual Analysis:** Following observations, the study analyzes descriptions of the "butterfly" found in the libretto and script of the two works. Data obtained are categorized and organized by themes, which facilitates the detailed analysis that incorporates Derrida's two stages of deconstruction.

### **Deconstruction Framework**

Deconstruction, a critical theory developed by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida in the 1960s, aims to destabilize, dismantle, and reposition texts that convey implicit or explicit

idealisms (Hottois, 1998). It is crucial to note that deconstruction is not synonymous with destruction but rather involves a two-stage process:

Reversal Stage: The first stage involves dismantling hierarchical binaries, where writing is prioritized over speech, the other over the self, absence over presence, and perception over understanding, among other dichotomies.

Neutralization Stage: The subsequent stage removes the favored term from the binary logic established in the reversal stage. This phase involves discarding all previous dualistic significations, giving rise to concepts such as androgyny, super-speech, and arche-writing, rendering the deconstructed term undecidable (Hottois, 1998, p. 306).

### **A Deconstruction Understanding of Butterfly Images in Madame Butterfly and M. Butterfly**

#### *The First Stage: Eliminating Hierarchical Binaries in the Butterfly Images*

David Henry Hwang elaborates in the afterword of "M. Butterfly" that the play's "creativity" lies in the profound misunderstandings between genders and cultures. He suggests that the "impossible" story of a Frenchman deceived by a Chinese man disguised as a woman seemed inevitable given the pervasive misunderstandings between men and women, as well as between the East and West. Consequently, this article applies Derrida's two stages of deconstruction to the hierarchical binaries of man/woman and East/West.

#### *"M. Butterfly": Undermining the Butterfly Image Through 'Drag' and 'Parody'*

Judith Butler's concepts of "drag" and "parody" highlight that imitating gender exposes the mimetic structure of gender itself and its contingency. According to Butler, drag costumes and parody transform the body into a "contested territory," turning it into a site of denaturalized performance that reveals the performative state of nature (Butler, 1990, p. 146).

In "M. Butterfly," Song captivates Gallimard by embodying a docile Oriental woman through "drag" and "parody" of Cio Cio San, exploiting the butterfly stereotype. This performance turns his body into a stage for gender performance, showcasing the constructed nature of gender. Song's portrayal of femininity is manifested in various ways:

#### **Clothing**

Described in Act 1, Scene 9, Song wears a robe, sitting elegantly with crossed legs and a phone to her ear. In another scene, he dons a 1920s black nightgown, standing at the door, evoking the image of Huang Liushuang. Act 2, Scene 4, Comrade Qin said: You are wearing women's clothes, and every time I come here, ... Song replied: This is a...disguise. The 11 scene is described as follows: Song appears on the stage, wearing a wedding dress and pretending to be a butterfly. Act 3, Scene 1 describes: She took off her wig and kimono... ...He was happy to see me, even if he was wearing simple clothes and some mascara. Act 2, Scene 2 describes: Song appears in a cheongsam and curls up at his feet.

#### **Body Posture**

Act 1, Scene 8, Song glides gracefully between two dancers. In Scene 9, she sits on a chair in a gown with her legs crossed... In Scene 10, Song kneels down to salute. In Scene 13, he begins to kiss her roughly. She resists gently. ...Song elbows her in anger, throws her hair behind her, and smiles.

### Language

Song's dialogues emphasize his femininity, as he often remarks on his bashfulness and vulnerability, reinforcing the persona he projects to Gallimard. In Act 1, Scene 6, Song says to Gallimard: You make me blush. In Act 1, Scene 10, a small, frightened heart beats so fast... My reckless behavior makes my skin hot, ... I am a shy girl. In Scene 13, I am a shy Chinese girl. In Act 2, Scene 8, I feel... too embarrassed. In Act 1, Scene 10, Gallimard also thinks that she is indeed shy and afraid in her heart. Our love is in your hands, Act II, Scene 6. I am helpless before my man.

Ultimately, Song uses "drag" and "parody" to project a femininity associated traditionally with women, leading Gallimard to believe he has found his "Madame Butterfly." This successful disguise allows Song to subvert the traditional roles, gaining agency and challenging the submissive, weak image of Cio Cio San established in the opera "Madame Butterfly." Moreover, Song's performance reveals that gender is a social construct, showcasing that traditional gender roles are not innate but performed, highlighting the arbitrary nature of gender norms. This revelation challenges the conventional heterosexual relationship dynamic portrayed in the opera, where the man is dominant, and the woman is submissive—a notion that, according to the play, is fundamentally flawed.

*"M. Butterfly" dismantles the butterfly image established by "Madama Butterfly" in terms of Eastern and Western hierarchies.*

Western society has rapidly advanced post-Industrial Revolution, in stark contrast to the slower development of Eastern countries. This disparity has led to a condescending posture from Western nations, viewing the East as relatively weak and in need of rescue. This perspective is encapsulated by Gallimard's naive view of Song Liling. Edward W. Said (1978) described this phenomenon, stating, "What Westerners call 'East' is not so much a real existence, but rather an imaginative construction of the 'other,' a strategic construct devised by the West to reinforce its own superiority." The East, to many Westerners, represents the mysterious original state of nature, thus perceived as something to be dominated and civilized.

As Song asserts in Act 3, Scene 1 of "M. Butterfly": "The West has an international rape mentality towards the East." The Western world views itself as the embodiment of male characteristics—powerful, industrious, and affluent—while the East is seen as the feminine mystery: weak, delicate, impoverished, yet artistically rich and profoundly wise. This analogy extends to how the East is often feminized, seen as uncivilized, and in need of 'enlightenment' from the West. Chen (2007) supports this view by describing the stereotype of Eastern women in Western society as irrational, depraved, childish, and abnormal, in contrast to the rational, mature, and moral West. Eastern women are portrayed as exotic, obedient, gentle, and self-sacrificing.

Giacomo Puccini's "Madama Butterfly" reinforces this sense of Western superiority through the character of Cio Cio San, a beautiful and gentle Eastern woman who sacrifices everything for Pinkerton, a Western man. This narrative aligns with Western fantasies about Eastern

women, indulging in the tragic beauty of their submission. However, if roles were reversed, perceptions would shift dramatically. Song Liling challenges these perceptions in Act 1, Scene 6, by questioning how a story of a Western woman sacrificing herself for an Eastern man would be received, highlighting the inherent biases in such narratives.

Song Liling's persona cleverly plays into Gallimard's fantasies, making him believe she embodies the demure "Madama Butterfly" he desires. However, she is not the naive Cio Cio San willing to sacrifice everything for a Western man. Instead, she is aware, strategic, and far from the submissive stereotype. Gallimard, trapped in his stereotypes and fantasies, fails to see the reality, instead choosing to view Song only through the lens of his fantasies. He perceives himself as conquering Song, thus fulfilling his own need for superiority.

Ultimately, Gallimard's realization of Song's true identity and his male gender shatters his fantasy, exposing the flawed foundations of his beliefs. The revelation subverts the traditional binary oppositions between East and West, with the East taking a position of power, and the West becoming the conquered. This twist reveals that the perceived dominance of the West is vulnerable and can be overturned, challenging the established norms and stereotypes that have long dictated East-West relations.

*The second stage: Abandoning the past based on binary thinking in the butterfly image*

Jacques Derrida suggested that "an opposition of metaphysical concepts (such as speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) is never merely a face-to-face encounter between two terms, but rather a hierarchy and an order of subordination" (Derrida, 1982). The deconstructive strategy aims to unmask these deeply entrenched ways of thinking (Wrenn, 2024). By deconstructing the hierarchical and subordinate order between the binaries of men/women and East/West, as represented in the butterfly image, the relationships between Gallimard's and Song's genders and their cultural identities become indeterminate.

*Androgynous Gallimard and Song Liling*

Gallimard is compelled to adopt a masculine facade due to societal power structures, yet his feminine presentation renders him androgynous. From an early age, Gallimard is portrayed as unpopular; as a 12-year-old, his first encounter with "girlie magazines" excites him—not with lust, but with the thrill of exerting power over women (Act 1, Scene 5). This power dynamic is later mimicked in his impersonation of Pinkerton's love duet, where he revels in the control it symbolizes (Act 1, Scene 11). Ironically, his first sexual encounter is portrayed as non-consensual, further complicating his relationship with power and gender (Act 1, Scene 11). His adult life continues these themes: his wife Helga suggests a medical consultation for infertility, undermining his sense of masculinity (Act 2, Scene 5). Gallimard's dialogue with Song further reflects his gender insecurity, as he laments the divine mockery he perceives in his inability to father a child (Act 2, Scene 6). This insecurity is echoed by Comrade Qin's remarks, which label him and Song as homosexuals, challenging the conventional male identity he tries to uphold (Act 2, Scene 10). Song Liling, meanwhile, is forced into feminine roles by necessity, his androgyny a product of survival and manipulation. Initially resisting these imposed identities, Song ultimately exploits them to captivate Gallimard, using traditional feminine allure as a strategic facade (Act 2, Scene 4). This act of defiance is a profound commentary on the fluidity of gender, challenging the binary constraints of male and female roles.

Scholars like Lu (2012), argue that Song's ambiguous gender identity reflects the Western tradition of emasculating the East, portraying Eastern men as either effeminate or as the exotic "other." This aligns with Derrida's critique of metaphysics, which argues that such binary thinking reinforces hierarchical structures that privilege certain identities over others, perpetuating stereotypes and ignoring the complex realities of gender and cultural identity. Similarly, the imposition of femininity on Song is also a manifestation of power dynamics, rendering his presentation androgynous. Sara Salih notes that identity is not merely chosen by individuals but rather precedes and defines them. Initially, Song Liling, a Chinese Peking Opera actress known for female roles, becomes a spy positioned alongside Gallimard. During their first conversation, upon learning of Gallimard's fondness for "Madame Butterfly," Song firmly declares, "I will never play a butterfly again. If you want to see some real drama, come and see it someday. Watch Peking Opera; it can broaden your mind." However, just four weeks later, when Gallimard attends another of Song's performances, Song shifts his approach. He begins to portray himself as "an oriental woman like a delicate lotus," directly challenging Gallimard: "What about you? For these white men, there's always something magical about us, isn't there?" Although the script offers no explicit explanation, it is plausible that Comrade Qin's influence as an agent compels Song, due to his low status, to exploit the feminine role he knows best, thus continuing to cultivate their relationship. In essence, Song's gender identity is meticulously crafted through parody and drag, intertwined with Comrade Qin's manipulative power.

However, many scholars argue that Song's ambiguous gender identity reinforces the Western stereotype of emasculating the East. In American media and literature, Eastern men are often portrayed as either contemptible and weak or as exotic and dangerous "others," distorting societal norms. Song, trapped in these stereotypes, becomes yet another vessel for Western Orientalist fantasy (Lu, 2012). This phenomenon is what Derrida criticizes in his deconstructionist philosophy. He contends that metaphysics, influencing philosophy since Plato, constructs dualistic oppositions and hierarchical structures that unduly privilege one aspect of each binary—be it presence over absence, speech over writing, or gender and cultural binaries. These entrenched views perpetuate a limited understanding of identity, ignoring the fluidity of gender and the complexity of cultural identities beyond mere Eastern or Western labels.

#### *The undecidability of the relationship between East and West*

The concept of "undecidability," a pivotal aspect of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory, this undecidability refers to the inherent impossibility of arriving at a fixed, definitive understanding or interpretation of a text, symbol, or relationship due to the constant interplay of differing meanings and interpretations (Derrida, 1982).

In Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, the opera depicts the tragic love story between Cio Cio San, a Japanese woman, and Lieutenant Pinkerton, an American naval officer. The text presents a seemingly straightforward narrative of love and betrayal, yet its interpretation is complicated by cultural stereotypes and the historical context of East-West interactions. Cio Cio San's character embodies the Western stereotype of the submissive and naïve Eastern woman, while Pinkerton represents the domineering and fickle Western male.

Derrida's undecidability comes into play as audiences are left to question the narrative's integrity: Does the opera critique these stereotypes by highlighting their tragic outcomes, or does it reinforce them by indulging in a sensationalized portrayal of East-West romance? The inability to conclusively answer this question embodies Derrida's notion of undecidability, illustrating the complex layering of meanings and the difficulty of extracting a singular truth from the narrative.

David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* revisits and deliberately subverts the traditional narrative of *Madame Butterfly*. Hwang introduces a twist—Song Liling, the Chinese opera singer, is not only a man posing as a woman but also a spy manipulating Gallimard's (the French diplomat) Orientalist fantasies. This play challenges the essentialist views of gender and cultural identity, destabilizing any fixed notions about the East being passive or mystical and the West being rational and dominant.

Derrida's undecidability is crucial in analyzing the relationship dynamics. The audience must grapple with multiple layers of deception and performance: Is Song truly embodying the Western fantasy of the Eastern woman, or is he subverting this image by manipulating it to his advantage? Additionally, Gallimard's relationship with Song questions the authenticity of cultural perceptions and the very foundation of his desires and beliefs. The play leaves these questions open, resisting easy answers and instead highlighting the fluid and constructed nature of identity and cultural interaction.

Both *Madame Butterfly* and *M. Butterfly* depict relationships that are emblematic of broader cultural and historical interactions between East and West. Through Derrida's lens of undecidability, these narratives are seen not merely as stories of personal romance and betrayal but as complex texts where cultural stereotypes, power dynamics, and identities are constantly being negotiated and reinterpreted. This approach emphasizes that the interactions between East and West are not static or easily definable but are full of contradictions and mutual dependencies that defy simple categorization.

In conclusion, using Derrida's concept of undecidability to analyze these works enriches our understanding of them as texts that challenge and complicate conventional narratives about East-West relationships. It underscores the necessity of approaching cultural and historical interactions with a sense of openness and skepticism about definitive interpretations, acknowledging the perpetual flux and ambiguity inherent in cross-cultural encounters.

#### *Cognitive inconsistencies in butterfly images are just 'traces'*

Jacques Derrida's concept of the "trace" profoundly informs our understanding of the inconsistencies in the representations of the butterfly in both "Madame Butterfly" by Puccini and "M. Butterfly" by David Henry Hwang. The trace, in Derrida's theory, suggests the presence of absence, a residue that both constitutes and destabilizes meaning (Derrida, 1973). This concept allows us to explore how the butterfly's symbolic significance in these works not only holds the echo of past meanings but also undermines and reconfigures these meanings in the context of power dynamics.

In "Madame Butterfly," the butterfly initially symbolizes the delicate and submissive qualities traditionally ascribed to Eastern femininity from a Western perspective. Cio Cio San is

portrayed as embodying these traits. However, as the opera unfolds, the trace of her supposed submissiveness is complicated by her tragic strength and resilience. Cio Cio San's deep loyalty and eventual sacrifice subvert the stereotype of fragility and compliance, presenting a figure of complex emotional and moral depth.

The power dynamics are further traced through the character of the American naval officer, who embodies Western dominance. His actions—marrying Cio Cio San without a commitment to permanence and eventually abandoning her—reveal a moral flaw in the Western conception of power, which is ostensibly dominant but inherently exploitative and ethically compromised. Here, the trace reveals the contradiction between the displayed power and its underlying moral weakness.

"M. Butterfly" reconfigures the butterfly symbolism to critique and subvert Western fantasies and power structures regarding the East. Gallimard's infatuation with Song Liling, under the misperception that Song is a submissive, delicate woman akin to the butterfly, mirrors colonial and orientalist fantasies. The revelation that Song is actually a male Chinese spy deconstructs not only Gallimard's perceptions but also the broader Western narrative about Eastern identity and gender.

The play uses the butterfly as a trace of deception and subversion, highlighting the fluidity of identity and the constructed nature of gender and cultural roles. Song's manipulation of his identity and Gallimard's desires turns the power dynamic on its head, with the East exploiting the West's fantasies and vulnerabilities. This inversion challenges the traditional roles ascribed in cross-cultural interactions, using the butterfly's trace to expose the performativity and instability of identities presumed to be fixed and natural.

In both "Madame Butterfly" and "M. Butterfly," the butterfly serves as a trace that disrupts and interrogates established power relations and cultural stereotypes. Through these works, the butterfly's symbolic trace not only reflects the cultural and gender identities imposed by power structures but also provides a means to resist and redefine these structures. The trace, thus, becomes a critical space where fixed meanings are contested and new understandings emerge, illustrating the ongoing negotiation and fluidity of power and identity in intercultural contexts (Derrida, 1973).

## Conclusion

Deconstructing the butterfly image in "Madame Butterfly" and "M. Butterfly" using Derrida's framework reveals the complexities and instabilities inherent in the binary oppositions these works present. In "Madame Butterfly", the image of the butterfly as delicate and submissive is challenged by the tragic strength of Cio Cio San, while the supposed dominance of the West is shown to be morally flawed. In "M. Butterfly", the butterfly becomes a symbol of deception and subversion, revealing the fluidity and constructedness of gender and cultural identities. This nuanced exploration encourages a reevaluation of entrenched stereotypes and power dynamics portrayed in these narratives, urging viewers and readers to recognize the complexities and instabilities within these cultural and gendered constructs. The deconstruction not only reveals the layers of misrepresentation and manipulation in the cultural exchanges between East and West but also suggests a transformative potential in understanding and engaging with these iconic works beyond their surface narratives. Through

this analysis, the paper advocates for a broader critical reflection on how cultural symbols like the butterfly are employed and the implications they hold for cross-cultural understanding and interactions.

### Acknowledgements

The completion of this paper represents not just the culmination of rigorous academic effort but also the support and encouragement from a diverse network of individuals whose contributions were indispensable. I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Johan Awang bin Othman, whose expert guidance and insightful critiques have been pivotal in shaping the research and arguments presented herein. His mentorship extended beyond conventional academic boundaries, providing both inspiration and practical advice throughout this journey. My family has provided an unwavering foundation of emotional support and understanding. My spouse's patience and encouragement enabled me to pursue my research with dedication, while my daughter's cheerfulness was a constant reminder of the joy found beyond work. Their sacrifices and the personal time they willingly set aside were crucial to my focus and success.

Additionally, I appreciate the contributions of various scholars and experts in the field whose works have informed and enriched my understanding of the topics discussed. Their extensive research and publications have been a significant resource throughout this study.

Finally, my thanks go to all those who indirectly influenced this work. This includes the broader academic community whose ongoing commitment to exploring and understanding cultural phenomena continues to inspire and challenge my own scholarly endeavors. In sum, this paper is a testament to the collective effort of many, each contribution uniquely valuable and deeply appreciated.

### References

- Wen, S. (2013). The Subversion of the Oriental Stereotype in M. Butterfly. *Canadian Center of Science and Education*, (3), 44-49.
- Li, M. (2010). The Disillusionment of the 'Butterfly' Dream: A Discussion on the Subversion of Orientalism in M. Butterfly [《蝴蝶》梦的破灭—论《蝴蝶君》对东方主义的颠覆]. *Journal of Southwestern University of Nationalities, College of Foreign Languages*, (2), 59. Southwest Minzu University.
- Gu, L. (2010). Deconstruction of Madame Butterfly [解构\_蝴蝶夫人]. (Master's thesis, East China Normal University). Retrieved from CNKI Dissertation Database.
- Wang, S. (2011). The disillusionment of the 'butterfly' dream: Deconstructing the binary opposition in M. Butterfly [《蝴蝶》梦的破灭——解构《蝴蝶君》中的二元对立模式]. *Journal of Changzhou Institute of Technology (Social Science Edition)*, 29(3), 45-49.
- Huang, S., & Cai, R. (2009). Deconstruction of sex and race in M. Butterfly [蝴蝶君对性别和种族的解构]. *Journal of Anhui Agricultural University (Social Science Edition)*, 18(1), 82-84.
- Liu, H. (2013). Deconstructive Analysis of Hwang's M. Butterfly [解构角度解读黄哲伦的《蝴蝶君》]. *Journal of Yantai Vocational College*, 19(3), 67-69.
- Weng, Z. (2011). Deconstruction of Images of Protagonists in M. Butterfly [《蝴蝶君》主要人物形象的倒置解构]. *World Literature Review*, 21(2), 105-109.

- Jin, L. (2012). The incomplete deconstruction: Misreadings of cultural elements in David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* [不完全的解构: 黄哲伦《蝴蝶君》中的文化误读]. *Foreign Languages and Literatures* [外国语言文学], (3), 102-107.
- Sun, Y. (2020). Deconstructionist perspectives on the writing strategies in *M. Butterfly* [解构主义视域下的《蝴蝶君》书写策略研究]. (Master's thesis, Southwest University). Retrieved from CNKI Dissertation Database.
- Li, L. H. (2011). Research on sex and gender in Chinese-American literature [华裔美国文学的性与性别研究]. (Ph.D. Dissertation, Shanghai International Studies University). Retrieved from CNKI Dissertation Database.
- Allen, P. (2023). What is Deconstruction? *Texts and Technology Ph.D.*
- Barry, M. (2018). Deconstruction Explained. *Texts and Technology Ph.D.*
- Smith, J. A. (2017). The international encyclopedia of communication research methods, 1-7.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Hwang, D. H. (1988). *M. Butterfly*. Penguin.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Silverman, D. (2021). *Doing qualitative research*.
- Derrida, J. (1982). *Margins of Philosophy*. University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (1973). *Speech and phenomena: And other essays on Husserl's theory of signs*. Northwestern University Press.
- Chen. (2007). Rentong yu shuli: Meiguo huayi liu san wenxue piping de dongfang zhuyi shiye [Identification and alienation: Orientalist perspectives on Chinese-American diaspora literary Criticism]. People's Literature Publishing House.
- Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2024, April 22). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gayatri-Spivak>
- Fang, X. (2017). A review on deconstruction and criticism. *Comparative Literature: East & West*, 1(1), 134–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25723618.2017.1339515>
- Guillemette, L., & Cossette, J. (2006). Deconstruction and différance. In L. Hébert (Ed.), *Signo [online]*, Rimouski (Quebec). Retrieved from <http://www.signosemio.com/derrida/deconstruction-and-differance.asp>
- Hwang, D. H., & DiGaetani, J. L. (1989). "M. Butterfly": An interview with David Henry Hwang. *TDR (1988-)*, 33(3), 141–153. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1145993>
- Lawlor, L. (2023). Jacques Derrida. In E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2023 Edition). Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2023/entries/derrida/>
- Li, L. (2011). 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, 53-61.
- Wang, J. (2020). The ambiguity of cultural identity in *M. Butterfly*. *Journal of Suihua University*, (09), 86-88.
- Wrenn, C. B. Naturalistic epistemology. *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from <https://iep.utm.edu/>