M. Butterfly: Reconfiguring Gender and Geography

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I. Introduction

Ever since David Henry Hwang's M. Butterfly was first produced in the United States in 1988, it has attracted both critical attention and mainstream popularity (including a Tony award). Part of the reason for this is due to the way that the play tapped into a growing awareness in Western audience in Asian identity, colonialism, and gender issues.

The critical assessment of the play has focused on the way that the play challenges or fails to challenge gender and geographical stereotypes. In this paper, I will attempt to delineate more carefully the way that the play engages these issues.

M. Butterfly is narrated by a former French diplomat Rene Gallimard. He is in prison in France, due to his espionage activities with his Chinese lover, a Chinese opera singer Song Liling. For twenty years, he thought that his lover was a woman, but he has discovered that s/he is really a male spy.1 In the prison, Gallimard recalls his relationship with Song, and tries to imagine a new ending to their relationship. His story starts with his adoration of Puccini’s opera Madame Butterfly, and then it proceeds to his encounter with Song and the process of their growing intimacy. In this process, Song is described as his ideal Eastern woman, on whom he projects his fantasy of the West as masculine/dominator and the East as feminine/dominated.

In the latter part of Act II, Gallimard is sent back to France because of his diplomatic failures, which are the result of applying his stereotypical West/East discourse to the prediction of the war in Indochina. Due to the
Cultural Revolution, Song is also sent to a rehabilitation center, but after that, s/he is forced by the Mao government to spy on Gallimard again in France. In this act, Gallimard gradually loses control of his role as the narrator. For example, he is merely an onlooker remaining on stage when Song has a conversation about her/his spy activities with Comrade Chin, the representative of the Chinese nation in the play. It is Song that explains the situation as a narrator. While most of the time, s/he still remains Gallimard's ideal Eastern woman in his memories, s/he gradually usurps control of the narration of the play, and hence the way that the characters are constructed. At the end of the act, s/he completely refuses to obey him. As s/he begins to narrate the play, Gallimard tries to stop her/him: "You have to do what I say! I'm conjuring you up in my mind!" (78 emphasis original). To this s/he responds, "I've never done what you've said" (78), and then, s/he starts to change into men's clothing, ignoring Gallimard's pleading not to do so.

Act III starts with the scene of the court trial of Gallimard and Song for spying for China. Song tells the Judge about her/his relationship with Gallimard, who is not present in the scene. And this is followed by the scene in which Song tries to seduce Gallimard into their new relationship where s/he expects him to be "[m]ore ... like a woman" (88). As a proof of her/his masculinity, Song strips and shows Gallimard her/his naked body for the first time in spite of his protest: "You're only in my mind! All this is in my mind! I order you! Stop!" (87) and "Every night, you say you're going to strip, but then I beg you and you stop!" (87). Forced to see the fact that Song is physically male, Gallimard completely loses control over his story. The play ends with Gallimard in the cell, wearing Song's kimono and wig. He commits ritual suicide as Madame Butterfly. Then Song appears on stage "as a man" (93), staring at Gallimard's dead body.

The play was inspired by an actual incident that occurred between a
French diplomat and a Chinese opera singer, which was reported in *The New York Times* in 1986, as David Henry Hwang says in his “Afterword to *M. Butterfly*” (94-95). As he cites in his “Playwright’s Notes to *M. Butterfly*,” the report goes as follows:

A former French diplomat and a Chinese opera singer have been sentenced to six years in jail for spying for China after a two-day trial that traced a story of clandestine love and mistaken sexual identity.... Mr. Bouriscot was accused of passing information to China after he fell in love with Mr. Shi, whom he believed for twenty years to be a woman.

The diplomat attributed the reason for his ignorance about his lover’s biological sex to the fact that “she” had never been completely naked when “she” was with him, and he added that he thought it was because of Chinese feminine modesty (“Afterword” 94). Hwang sensed in the incident “a certain stereotyped view of Asians as bowing, blushing flowers” (“Afterword” 94), and came to the conclusion that the incident happened because the diplomat believed that the Chinese opera singer was his Madame Butterfly (“Afterword” 95). Then the playwright came up with the idea of a “deconstructivist Madame Butterfly” (“Afterword” 95) by conflating this incident and Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*, which consists solely of politically and culturally stereotypical binarism of masculine/dominant West and feminine/submissive East. Hwang has tried to comment on this power structure by mismatching and confusing gender and geography.

Discussions of *M. Butterfly* naturally center on issues of gender and geographical identities. Critics who applaud the play argue that it presents the deconstruction of stereotypical categories of West/East and male/female, and most of them seem to agree that the characters' role
reversal in the final scene demonstrates the deconstruction of the gender and geographical power structure. However, this reading is too simplistic. What has been reversed in the final scene is merely the personal power relationship between the characters, and not gender and racial power structure. And it is through the demonstration of the unchanged power structure in the final scene that the play urges the audience to recognize the fact that Asians are politically and culturally oppressed by the "masculine West."

The aim of this paper is, then, to elucidate in what way M. Butterfly is a "deconstructivist Madame Butterfly." It is not "deconstructivist" due to the characters' role reversal in the final scene. Rather, it deconstructs gender and geographical power structure through the complex fluidity of identities in the character of Song. To delineate this claim, I will first describe the nature and the extent of the binarism as embodied in the play between the dominant/masculine West and the obedient/feminine East, along with an analysis of the nature of the personal power relationship between Song and Gallimard. Then I will analyze the characters' transformation in the final scene which reproduces gender and racial binarism and discuss the significance of the reproduction. The last two sections of this paper will give a detailed analysis of Song's identities and discussion on how s/he embodies the deconstruction of the binary oppositions between the West and the East.

II. Geographical /Gender Power Structure of the West and the East

Madame Butterfly, a Japanese woman who sacrifices herself for loyalty and love to her American husband Pinkerton, is the ultimate ideal woman for Rene Gallimard. From the moment when he sees Song Liling performing the death scene from Madame Butterfly at an ambassador's house in China, it becomes impossible for him to stop identifying himself
with Pinkerton and "her" with Butterfly.

Song is fully aware of this Western stereotypical view of the East, which s/he terms an "international rape mentality" (83), as s/he explains later in the court during their trial:

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. Her mouth says no, but her eyes say yes. The West believes the East, deep down, wants to be dominated—because a woman can't think for herself. (83 emphasis in original)

As a spy working for the Chinese government, Song takes advantage of this "international rape mentality" in order to seduce Gallimard and get diplomatic information from him. As their relationship grows more and more intimate, s/he plants in him the idea that "she" is a modest and submissive Asian woman, even allowing him to say, "I had finally gained power over a beautiful woman, only to abuse it cruelly" (36). He uses "it" here to refer to Song, and this shows that in his mind "she" is not a human being with "her" own will but an inanimate object whose value is decided by people using it.

Moreover, in addition to impersonating a woman, Song also agrees to be Japanese. Considering the historical facts during the World War II, this is another type of oppression by Gallimard, as Song herself/himself says to him when he praises her/his performance as Butterfly at the ambassador's house as "convincing": "Convincing? As a Japanese woman? The Japanese used hundreds of our people for medical experiments during the war, you know. But I gather such an irony is lost on you" (17). In the war, Japan invaded China and saw it as a part of Japan. Japan forced the Chinese to sacrifice themselves for its national benefits. In
other words, Japan demanded the Chinese to act like the Japanese did, although it has to be noted here that, while it demanded the Chinese to act the Japanese, Japan also used the Chinese for purposes for which it did not want to use the Japanese, such as the medical experiments. Like Japan during this period, Gallimard sees Song as Japanese. He cannot tell the difference between China and Japan, and this is further oppression on Song, sharing the colonial attitude with Japan during the war.

By taking advantage of Gallimard’s stereotypes, Song succeeds in completely convincing him that “she” is, as an Asian woman, inferior to him and that he possesses “the absolute power of a man” (32) over “her.” The more Gallimard sees Song’s “inferiority” to himself, that is, her/his “femininity,” the more masculine he finds himself to be. He lives in a world consisting of binary oppositions, and Song, making use of his way of recognizing the world, has been his mistress for over twenty years, passing over top secrets from Gallimard to the Chinese government.

Thus, on one hand, the Asian male Song is a victim of the binarism of the Western male Gallimard, but on the other hand, s/he exploits him, utilizing to the fullest the stereotypical gender and racial power structure with which Westerners differentiate themselves from Easterners. Although Song chooses to act as a submissive and loyal Asian woman for her/his mission, s/he is, in fact, neither submissive nor loyal to Gallimard, and moreover, s/he is not physically female. Indeed, s/he does not fit into any identity categories which Gallimard has for his ideal Eastern woman. S/he knows that these categories are only useful in order to have a man like Gallimard trust her/him blindly so that s/he can exploit him.

Thus, the personal power relationship between Song and Gallimard is actually the opposite of the one between Pinkerton and Butterfly, as Hwang himself explains: “the Frenchman fantasizes that he is Pinkerton
and his lover is Butterfly. By the end of the piece, he realizes that it is he who has been Butterfly, in that the Frenchman has been duped by love; the Chinese spy, who exploited that love, is therefore the real Pinkerton" ("Afterword" 95-96). Thus, in terms of the calculated exploitation of the Western stereotype of the East, Song has power over Gallimard. It seems that this, together with Hwang's remark that \textit{M. Butterfly} is a "deconstructivist \textit{Madame Butterfly}," causes the critics to conclude that the final scene presents the deconstruction of gender and geographical stereotypes. However, as I will discuss in the next section, the reversal is confined to the personal power relationship between Song and Gallimard, and does not suggest the reversal of the political and cultural power structure between the dominator/masculine West and the dominated/feminine East.

III. Reproducing the Power Structure

As in \textit{Madame Butterfly}, \textit{M. Butterfly} ends with the ritual suicide of a "Japanese woman," whose love was "dishonored" by a "Western man." However, the final scene of \textit{M. Butterfly} is twisted; it is the Westerner Gallimard who has become a Japanese woman and it is the Easterner Song who has become a Western man. Gallimard commits suicide as Butterfly, wearing a kimono, make-up, and a wig. And Song, who wears an Armani suit, a Western designer's suit showing wealth, power, and masculinity in this context, "stands as a man" (93) and stares at the body of Gallimard. Then the play ends with Song's words "Butterfly? Butterfly?" (93), which overlap with Gallimard's "Butterfly, Butterfly..." (1) back in the opening scene.

Influenced by the personal relationship between Song and Gallimard, Song as the exploiter and Gallimard as the exploited, that has been presented up to the final scene, the transformation of the characters in the
scene may be interpreted as showing the reversal of the political power structure between the West and the East: the Western colonizer Gallimard has become the colonized, and the Eastern colonized Song, the colonizer. However, their transformation is not a true reversal of the power structure. More attention must be paid to how the characters play their respective new roles; in order for the Easterner Song to survive and be in a position of power, s/he has to act as a Western man, and for the Westerner Gallimard to die because of the betrayal from the one he loves, he has to act as an Eastern woman. If the final scene were to demonstrate the reversal of the gender and racial power structure, Gallimard would have to die as a Western male and Song would be able to survive as an Eastern female, but the play does not end this way. The framework of the power structure of the West as masculine/dominator and the East as feminine/dominated is maintained in the final scene, and this means that the characters' role reversal merely presents their reversed power relationship on the personal level.

Moreover, it is exactly the existence of this binarism that enables the personal power relationship between Song and Gallimard to be reversed from that of the couple in Madame Butterfly. And as long as their power relationship is based on the exploitation of stereotypical West/East discourse, it cannot embody the destruction or the reversal of the political power structure. What has to be noted here is that the relationship between Song and Gallimard is surely political in the sense that it is affected and formed by the political power structure, and this may seem to go against my claim that their role reversal is confined to the personal realm. However, my point is that Song's dependence on the existing political stereotypes results in perpetuating them after all, and therefore, no matter how much power s/he can exercise over Gallimard in their personal relationship, it does not change the political power structure. And this
is demonstrated in the final scene, where the political power structure is reinforced and reproduced, repeating the beginning situation of the play, where a Western man expresses his desire of oppressing an Easterner in the name of love.

The ending, then, may appear pessimistic at first glance, for there is no end to the stereotypical power structure. However, I would argue that it makes more sense to see the play's strength in its unrelentingly realistic exposure of the fact that the binary oppositions between the West and the East still do exist in the mind of the audience, most of which are Westerners. If the framework were inverted, it would be too easy; it would merely be a fantasy. Once the audience gets out of the theater, many of them would probably forget about the inverted framework that took place on the stage. Also, people tend to stop thinking about a problem already solved, in this case, a successful subversion of East/West power structure. By presenting the on-going fact as it is, the play forces the audience to confront the colonizer mentality that is present in their own minds and to face the fact that they are partially responsible for this problem.

Dorinne Kondo, in her analysis of the play's action as the exposure of the constructedness of what are called true identities, argues that the final scene presents the "stunning gender/racial power reversal" that "forces the audience toward a fundamental reconceptualization of the topography of identity" (19). She continues, focusing mainly on Gallimard's transformation into a woman: "Hwang suggests that gender identity is far more complicated than reference to an essential 'inner truth' or external biological equipment might lead us to believe" (20). I completely agree with her on the point that the play's theme is the deconstruction of the gender (and racial) essentialism, and that the final scene urges the audience to destroy their stereotypes. However, again, I would
argue that the reversal of power structure does not happen in the scene. Gallimard’s transformation into a woman should be understood not as the deconstruction of the “natural” gender identities but as his adherence to the Western stereotype of the East. He is duped by his lover, and in his mind, betrayal from a lover typically happens not to a Western man but to an Eastern woman, and therefore, he can no longer be a Western man; his identity as a Western man has collapsed. And in his world of dichotomy, if he cannot be a Western man, all he can do is to change himself into an Eastern woman.

Moreover, Kondo sees the “inability of the categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ to account for the multiple, changing, power-laden identities”(20) in the characterization of Song, and this leads her to argue that, although the stage direction says Song appears as a man in the final scene, “we cannot say with certainty that he is a man, for ‘man’ is a historically, discursively produced category that fails to accommodate Song’s more complex experience of gender” (20). As I will discuss in detail in the next section, it is true that Song embodies the possibility of mobile and fluid gender (and racial) identities. However, Song’s appearance in the scene with a Western suit associated with wealth and hence power and masculinity should not be underestimated. In other scenes, Song’s actions often do not match her/his appearance; for example, s/he emphasizes her/his masculinity when s/he tells Comrade Chin about the convention of Chinese opera, in which female roles are played by male actors, and while s/he is doing this, her/his appearance stays female (63). This shows her/his unstable identities. But in the final scene, her/his position as a victor clearly matches with her/his appearance as a man, which suggests that Song does appear as a Western man in the final scene in contrast to Gallimard as an Eastern woman. Therefore, the power structure that the West as the masculine victor and the East as
the feminine vanquished is preserved in the final scene. It is too simple to say that the scene presents the reversal of underlying gender and ethnic identities.

Some critics, although asserting as I do that the power structure is unchanged in the final scene, argue that it is the result of the failure of Hwang's intention to subvert or reverse it. David Leiwei Li claims that the play "never quite inverts the dominant gender/race relations it intends to disavow," because it is after all "Gallimard's play, and its plot is enacted through his memory" and "Song is destined to sustain and service Gallimard's development" (164 emphasis in original) to "a dignified death" (163). Sheng-Mei Ma also writes that Hwang's attempt "to subvert Western hegemony ends up perpetuating that hegemony" (131), attributing the reason for the "failure" to Hwang's Western cultural background, although it is not clear whether he is specifically referring to the final scene. Leaving aside the fact that Li has unconsciously exposed his colonizer mentality when he says Gallimard's death as Butterfly is "dignified," unconsciously admitting the value of self-sacrifice of the colonized for her love to the colonizer, what is common to these two critics is that both of them presuppose that the purpose of the play is to present the altered or reversed West/East power configuration, and that they conclude the attempt has failed because Hwang could not or did not write the play from an Eastern point of view.

However, these arguments lack persuasiveness, considering that the play was primarily written with Western audiences in view. As Marjorie Garber points out, it is most likely that the majority of the audience share with Gallimard the lack of knowledge that the Chinese opera is a transvestite theater (128), and I would add that it is also most likely that they share the stereotypical idea about the East as feminine. The cultural ignorance reinforced by the stereotypical mode of thought eventually
leads Gallimard to the collapse of his identity as a Western male, and hence, to his death. Having Gallimard as a narrator allows the audience to trace with him the process of his downfall as their own and also the process of being forced to face the fact that the East as feminine is merely a stereotype that the West created. Therefore, the adoption of Gallimard as a narrator itself does not suggest a biased conception of the play.

Thus, the reproduction of the stereotypes in the final scene is neither a sign of the playwright's failure to reverse it nor the result of his Western cultural background. The dichotomy presented in the scene points to the reality outside the play whose existence most members of the audience have to admit, and this recognition is the basis toward thinking radically about the stereotypical power structure of the masculine West and the feminine East, and thus, possibly, creating a new relationship. Indeed, a movement toward this opening up is suggested through the figure of Song.

IV. Song's Unstable Identity

As discussed earlier, Song is not what the West thinks the East should be. S/he is not a powerless and stupid woman who wants to be dominated by Westerners. "In the figure of Song," as Karen Shimakawa points out, identities of the East as determined by the West are "resisted, expanded and openly contradicted throughout M. Butterfly" (353-54). Shimakawa, however, argues that this is not accomplished exclusively through Song (353). In my understanding, what she means is that Gallimard also crosses the boundary of gender and geography through his transformation to Butterfly in the last scene. However, in his case, transformation happens only once in his life, and it only allows him to fit himself into the category of his ideal Asian woman. And with his death as Butterfly, his transformation has been completed. Song also experiences transforma-
tion, but her/his identities continue to change throughout the play. By destroying the binary stereotypes of male/female and West/East, Song escapes from being trapped into the categories that the West determines for the East.

First, although Song is physically not a woman, s/he does not completely regard herself/himself as a man. On one hand, s/he stresses her/his own masculinity in her/his conversation with Comrade Chin by implying that the reason s/he can understand Gallimard's mind is that s/he herself/himself is a man (63, 72). Moreover, after their relationship has been made public and Gallimard has learned that Song is physically male, s/he forces him to see her/his naked body as a proof of her/his masculinity in her/his attempt to start a new relationship with him, expecting him to act more like a woman. After this exposure, Gallimard laughs in scorn at his long-term commitment to "just a man" (88). However, Song responds that s/he is not confined to this simple categorization. S/he denies her/his entire masculinity: "I'm not 'just a man'" and "I'm not just any man!" (88). Then s/he picks up a robe of Butterfly and starts dancing in a feminine way that pleases Gallimard. And in the final scene, s/he appears as a man. In this way, s/he moves back and forth between male and female genders.

Song often crosses the East/West boundary as well. S/he is ethnically Eastern and reacts negatively to "international rape mentality" (82) that the West has, not only in the court but also in her/his first meeting with Gallimard where he comments about Madame Butterfly: "It's one of your favorite fantasies, isn't it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man" (17). Here, s/he accuses the West from the Eastern perspective. On the other hand, s/he often detaches herself/himself from the East. For instance, the type of a cafe s/he misses on the Beijing streets, the one "[w]ith cappuccinos, and men in tuxedos and bad expatriate jazz"
is Western-style. In addition, s/he appears in the court in an Armani suit and makes negative comments about the Chinese, such as “whatever else may be said about Chinese, they are stingy!” (80). S/he uses “they” to refer to the Chinese, showing that s/he excludes herself/himself from them. Thus, s/he is floating between geographical and cultural identities.

Furthermore, not only does Song sometimes identify herself/himself with the West, but also s/he is associated with the West by the East, due to her/his homosexuality, which is prohibited in China according to Comrade Chin: “Don’t forget: there is no homosexuality in China!” (48). Comrade Chin believes that homosexuality came from the West, as shown in her lines when she orders Song to go to France to get diplomatic information from Gallimard: “[Y]ou won’t stink up China anymore with your pervert stuff. You’ll pollute the place where pollution begins—the West” (72). This is also a stereotype, the Eastern stereotype of the West.

What is notable regarding Song’s homosexuality and the Eastern stereotypical association of homosexuality with the West is that, although Song refuses to fit into the identity categories that the West has prepared for the East, s/he cannot resist the stereotype that her/his own country forces on her/him. Judith Butler argues that “gender is a performance” and performing gender is a “strategy of survival,” because “those who fail to do their gender right,” that is, those who fail to perform a gender that is presupposed to match their bodies, are “regularly punished” (273). This is surely convincing in many circumstances, but it does not seem completely applicable to Song’s situation. S/he is a homosexual, which violates the law of “natural” attraction to the opposite gender. Homosexuality is regarded as abnormal in China, but Comrade Chin orders Song to be involved again in a homosexual relationship with Gallimard in order to get useful information for China, telling her/him
that unless s/he goes to France and becomes "a pervert for Chairman Mao" (73), s/he has to go back to a rehabilitation center, where the Cultural Revolution would force her/him to engage in a hard physical labor. This means that s/he has to be "abnormal" to avoid punishment. Therefore, on this level, her/his service to China as a Western stereotypical homosexual is a survival strategy. In order to survive in her/his community, s/he has to work as a "Western pervert," not as an Eastern heterosexual male.

Nevertheless, although associating homosexuality with the West is surely a stereotypical mode of thought, the Western attitude of the East can be regarded as homosexual in some sense. The West sees itself as male, and the East as female, and in this context, Eastern men are regarded as female, as Song says in the court: "I am an Oriental. And being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man" (83). It is being a homosexual of a certain kind for a man to expect other men to play a role of women. In his "Afterword," Hwang discusses the term "Rice Queen," which, in the gay community, is a negative label for a gay Caucasian man who has a preference to Asians: "In these relationships, the Asian virtually always plays the role of the 'woman'; the Rice Queen, culturally and sexually, is the 'man.' This pattern of relationships had become so codified that, until recently, it was considered unnatural for gay Asians to date one another" (98).

This applies to Gallimard's attitude toward Song. He never sees her/his naked body throughout their relationship, and this is because he ultimately does not require her/him to have a female body. What is important for Gallimard is that he sees Song as one who has the "feminine" attributes, such as submissiveness, shyness, and modesty. What excites him is not a female body but the masculine power he believes he possesses over Song; his body shook, when he first saw women in pornography in
his childhood, “[n]ot with lust” but “with power” over women “who would do exactly as [he] wanted” (10).

Trying to escape from being categorized as an “ideal Easterner,” Song, despite her/his own homosexuality, exposes the fact that Gallimard’s Western “masculine” dominance over her/him is merely an illusion, since, again, s/he is not truly “feminine”; s/he is neither submissive nor loyal to Gallimard. She can act as a “masculine” man as s/he occasionally does after their relationship is made public. Song is a homosexual, but not in the ways that Westerners expect Easterners to be.

Thus, Song resists the Western stereotype of the East by unsettling the boundaries between male and female, and West and East. S/he can act as both a male and a female, and, at the same time, a Westerner and an Easterner. Toward the end of the play, it becomes impossible for the audience to define Song in terms of fixed ethnic and gender identities. The audience, as well as Gallimard, does not know any longer who Song Liling is.

Due to her/his unstable identities, James Moy argues, Song is “marginalized,” “desexed” and “made faceless” (55), which causes her/him to fail to have “a new, hoped-for version of Chinese or Asian identity” (54). However, the critic seems trapped in the binarisms of West/East and male/female; for him, anyone that does not belong to either category of binary oppositions is probably “marginalized,” “desexed” and hence “faceless.” Moreover, Moy is essentialistic in assuming the existence of a fixed identity in his claim for a new Chinese or Asian identity. What we see in Song’s unstable identity is not a faceless Asian, but rather, the denial and the rejection of essentialism and the deconstruction of the system of binary categorization itself.
V. Conclusion

Song’s last line “Butterfly? Butterfly?” (93) echoes Gallimard’s “Butterfly, Butterfly...” (1) at the beginning of the play. This appears to suggest that a play with the same pattern of masculine West and feminine East will continue with the only difference being that Song is the Western man. However, Song’s lines are not exactly the same as Gallimard’s. Unlike Gallimard’s, Song’s words end with a rising intonation. One possible interpretation of this difference is that, while Gallimard longs for his ideal Eastern woman with the assumption that she exists, the rising intonation of Song’s words may be showing her/his doubt about the existence of such a woman.

Song’s doubt about the category of “ideal Eastern women” is supported by her/his own characterization. S/he herself/himself is not what Westerners think Easterners should be. Therefore, although Song plays a Western man in the final scene, it is not certain, with her/his undeterminable identities, whether s/he remains a Western man in the future, even if the play’s structure appears to suggest a cyclical repetition. It is more likely that s/he will continue to switch between Western and Eastern as well as male and female identities. This constant transgression of binary boundaries, even on the personal level, demonstrates to the audience the deconstruction of the political binarism of gender and geography.

Thus, although the final scene reproduces and reinforces the power structure of the West and the East, and although the personal relationship between Song and Gallimard cannot affect the political structure, Song’s characterization hints at an escape from the stereotypical West/East discourse. Her/his fluid identities challenge the binarism in the audience’s understanding of the characters. *M. Butterfly* urges the
audience to think not only about the gender and geographical power structure of the West and the East but also about the system of binary categorization itself. In this sense, *M. Butterfly* is indeed a deconstructivist play.

**Notes**

1 When referring to Song, I will use a pronoun s/he, her/his, or her/him, but when I talk about Gallimard’s view against Song, I will use “she” or “her” with quotation marks, because as I will discuss later in this paper, Song is both female and male, but in Gallimard’s mind, Song is female.

2 “Afterword to *M. Butterfly*” will henceforth be abbreviated as “Afterword.”

3 I cannot place the page number here, because, in the edition used for this paper, the “Playwright’s Notes” have no page number. They come prior to page 1, where Act I starts.

4 Hwang’s conception of the Western stereotypical attitude of seeing itself as masculine and the East as feminine follows Edward Said’s thesis in his *Orientalism*, in which he points out and explains the West’s “sexist blinders” of viewing itself and the East; the West constructs and feminizes the identities of the East in its “male power-fantasy” (207).

5 Hwang is talking about the play in his interview conducted by John Louis DiGaetani, “*M. Butterfly*: An Interview with David Henry Hwang” in *The Drama Review: A Journal of Performance Studies* 33, which was published in 1989. Hwang may be explaining his intention of calling the work a “deconstructivist *Madame Butterfly*” in the interview, but due to the limited circumstance while I am writing this paper, I do not have the access to the interview. Hence, the only source I have regarding the playwright’s direct comments on the work is “*Afterword to M. Butterfly*,” which is not helpful enough for me to explore why he calls the work “deconstructivist.” Therefore, my purpose of this paper is to investigate not the author’s intention but how the work can be read as a “deconstructivist *Madame Butterfly*.” I think this approach is validated, because authors’ intentions are not always embodied in their works.

6 From Hwang’s description in “*Afterword to M. Butterfly*” of the process of
writing the work and putting it on stage, it is clear that he wrote the play with the Western audience as his target. He first showed the script to a producer Stuart Ostrow, who he had worked with before. Hwang was thinking of bringing it to a regional institution, but Ostrow, fascinated by the play, suggested Hwang that they put it on stage in Broadway. Then in 1988, after the run in Washington, they opened another in Broadway (95-97).

**Works Cited**


56.