

Toward the Planetary Hospitality
Beyond the Phallic Jouissance:
David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*
and *Trying to Find Chinatown*

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Expand your mind.

— *M. Butterfly* (1989)

Open your eyes.

— *Trying to Find Chinatown* (1996)

I. Western Racism and Hwang's Plays of Identity Politics

Regardless of East and West, humanity has been sought to answer the essential inquiry of existence — “Who am I?” — in its philosophical development. As for the Western part, René Descartes once observed as “*Cogito Ergo Sum*”

(18) in *Discourse on Method* (1637), making a clear distinction between the individual ego and the universe. While such “consciousness by the ego itself,” which perceives the world as separated into two parts—“the ego and the non-ego”—contrasts with Eastern philosophy, which does not demarcate “the distinction between the individual and the universe,” Descartes’ egoistic idea was an essential milestone of modern western philosophy and has raised another issue of “how the subjective ego can have knowledge of the objective non-ego” (Fung 3).

Such a western dichotomy in epistemology has been descended as diverse ideologies that divide the subject and the others, one of which is *Orientalism*. Edward W. Said defines Orientalism as an “enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient” (3). In other words, Orientalism is European westerner’s reductionist view on the Orient for “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over it (3). To Orientalists, the Orient has been the place of Europe’s “greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant,” and, Said further argues, “one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (1). That is, while Orientalists have fostered imperialistic prejudice against the Orient as “irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike” (40), it is, in fact, nothing more than the reflection of their own unconsciousness.

One of the renowned literary works which have been actively discussed in terms of Orientalism is David Henry Hwang’s representative play, *M. Butterfly* (1988), which won the 1988 Tony Award for Best Play. As a contemporary Asian American playwright, screenwriter, and theater professor, Hwang has been distinguished for his thorough investigation into the identity politics regarding race and gender, centering on themes of “Western imperialism” and “American racism” (Young 232). Basing itself on the real scandal of a French

diplomat whom a Chinese opera singer deceived, *M. Butterfly* unfolds how the protagonist and narrator, Rene Gallimard, vainly falls in love with his feminine ideal through the medium of Song Liling, a Chinese male spy. Gallimard does not notice that his lover is a man due to his “vision of the Orient” (986)—the fantasy of a submissive Asian woman like Cio-Cio-San in Giacomo Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* (1904)—and thus later goes through a tremendous agony, which eventually makes him commit suicide.

Although there have already been numerous and diverse researches on *M. Butterfly*, there are due reasons why it would still be worthwhile to study its narrative. First, Hwang’s political stance regarding the issue of ethnicity has undergone a significant flux up to today (Woo, “Searching” 201). Thus, *M. Butterfly*, as one of Hwang’s fundamental plays, can render the basis to understand his later works, such as *Trying to Find Chinatown* (1996, hereafter *Trying*), which reflects Hwang’s recent philosophy about identity politics. Besides, the debate of ethical interaction with cultural others, being enhanced with the emergence of postcolonial theory in the 1980s, is still animatedly going on along with the ego’s eternal and universal question—“*Who am I; in terms of the relationship with others?*”—and ever-existing racism.¹⁾

Moreover, while psychoanalysis can be a useful tool to examine the impact of imperialism and Orientalism on Asian American identity (Jeong 191), psychoanalytic studies on *M. Butterfly* have primarily focused on how Joan Riviere’s discussion of “Womanliness as Masquerade” (1929) can be reversed

1) One notable example would be the Black Lives Matter movement, which started in 2013 with Trayvon Martin’s death and persisting with the George Floyd incident in 2020. Also, the recent outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019 fueled xenophobic tropes about Chinese people, such as “eating strange foods and being [disease-ridden]” (Cheah et al. 2).

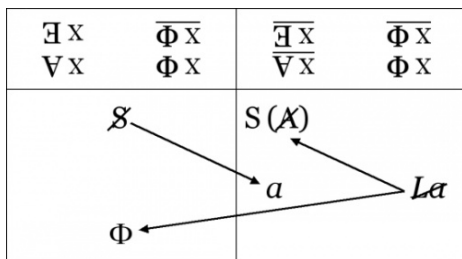
as the masquerade of heterosexuality by a homosexual subject (Shin; Grist; Cheng). Otherwise, Gallimard's melancholic homosexuality has been interpreted as derived from the meltdown of imperialist masculinity in the postcolonial era (Park) or the identity crisis of White heterosexual Americans (Jeong). Exceptionally, Wooil Lee and Hyung Shik Lee provide valuable insight by analyzing Gallimard as a psychical man in terms of the Lacanian sexuation formula (34). However, they nevertheless overlook the possibility that Song can also be located within the same dichotomic categorization as a psychical woman who enjoys another kind of *phallic jouissance*. To expand their sharp discernment further in such a twist will enlighten the deeper unconscious of the failed interracial relationship.

Therefore, this paper will start from a Lacanian analysis of Hwang's ever-influential play, *M. Butterfly*, in its odyssey for the changing landscapes of Hwang's identity politics, focusing on its tropes of desire between different cultural subjects. First, it will probe into whether Gallimard and Song, as metonymic delegates of Western Orientalist ego and Eastern non-ego, did sincerely *love* and then move on to whether true *love* between East and West is possible. Ultimately, this paper will discover the fluid and hybrid understanding of identity from another transracial rapport between two men in *Trying* as a solution for planetary hospitality toward others, with the ethical imperative of post-colonialist studies.

II. Gallimard as a Psychical Man: His *Phallic Jouissance*

As Helga, Gallimard's wife, says in Act One of *M. Butterfly*, "East is east, west is west" (970),²⁾ Orientalism has derived from the western philosophical

dichotomy which separates the self from the others. Such binary structure is also found in the sexuation formula of Jacques Lacan, who expanded Sigmund Freud’s discovery of the id in terms of the structuralist approach, stating “the unconscious is structured like a language” (SXX 15). Lacan argues, to figure out who we are, we should investigate our desire, which is ultimately related to how we perceive and interact with others in the Symbolic. From this insight, Lacan develops his dichotomous formulation of *sexuation*, a psychological division between men and women based not on biological sex but on how the subject desires the other. As seen in graph 1, psychological men on the left side are entirely subordinated to the Symbolic order (Φx : phallic function) and thus exist as castrated subjects ($\$$). Since men are loyal inhabitants of the Symbolic, a “terrain cleared of *jouissance*” (SXVI 220), they desire *plus-de-jouir* – *objet petit a* – as substitute satisfaction, or Symbolic phallus, in their relationship with others. Something to notice here is that in such pursuit of *phallic jouissance*, “ $\$$ never deals with anything by way of a partner but *objet a* inscribed on the other side of the bar” (SXX 80). In other words, women’s real existence ($L\alpha$) is not shown to men ($\$$) since men only see and seek *objet a* in their relationship with women.



Graph 1. Lacan’s Sexuation Formula (SXX 78)

2) This saying repeats the refrain of Rudyard Kipling’s poem, “The Ballad of East and West” (1889): “OH, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet” (lines 1, 93).

On the contrary, psychical women on the right side are not wholly alienated within language. In other words, they are not altogether subjugated under the Symbolic order. Thus, as subjects who can recognize the lack of the Other (S(A)), being stepped aside to the patriarchal system's margin, women identify themselves with symbolically castrated men and willingly become the *object* a that men need. The critical thing here is that *object a* is not even what women have; they give what they do not possess for others, which is why this act of love is called *jouissance Autre* (jouissance of the Other). However, at the same time, women also enjoy *phallic jouissance* by seeking the phallus of men (Φ), both Real and Symbolic ones, since they are also barred within the Symbolic (SXX 81). This Lacanian dichotomic view on intersubjective relationships would be appropriate to inspect Gallimard's imperialist desire toward Song and Song's deceptive bond with Gallimard since they both relate with one another within the binary frame of the ego and the non-ego.

In terms of the Lacanian sexuation formula, Gallimard is a narcissistic psychical man with a masculine structure, whose Symbolic is the white imperialist society. As he confesses, he has a "vision of the Orient" (986) as a servant of his colonial Symbolic. This Symbolic leads him to have a *gendered* map of imperialism in his head, which feminizes colonial space, while the acts of exploration and conquest are masculinized. Ann McClintock defines such map-making as a tool of "colonial plunder" to precede and legitimate the conquest of territory, connecting it with an extensive discourse of the colonized/women (27). With the examples of Christopher Columbus' fantasy, who thought the earth is "shaped like a woman's breast" (21), and Henry Rider Haggard's map of "Sheba's Breasts" (22), McClintock further criticizes how colonialists projected their unconscious sexual desires into the Orient, establishing a gendered system of labor and exploitation. Such imperialist

cartography becomes the sexual fantasy of Gallimard's Symbolic, which Song refers to as "international rape mentality" (984) and is frequently called *yellow fever*, where white colonialists (sexual predators) trample on the self-determination of obedient subalterns (virgins).

While such a Symbolic system entirely dominates Gallimard, Gallimard embraces any lack of white western society as his own, as a psychically masculine subject. As Jeong explains, around the 1960s, in which the play is set, western manhood suffered from anxiety; the United States was enduring the painful Vietnam war (1955-75), which worsened its economy, politics, and culture (189). Or even long before, there was a sign of diminishing western world, as Japan won the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, the year when Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* was premiered; Japan's victory was interpreted throughout the world "as the first victory of an Asian nation belonging to the yellow race against a major white and Christian Western empire" (Aydin 213). That is, behind the opera's success, there may have been an uneasiness of western society at Japan's victory; it may have wished to settle its masculine anxiety by the story of which the heroine is a submissive Asian woman. Moreover, after experiencing the two World Wars (1914-18; 1939-45), which made imperial powers grow feeble, western manhood got further challenged during the Cold War (1947-91) not only by colonized people but also by the two superpowers which pressed European empires to release their colonies (Kalliney 27). Such angst of Western manhood must have been even strengthened by the Bandung Conference of 1955, at which "the emergent postcolonial nations denounced European imperialism" (Kalliney 26); not to mention the Great Depression (1929-1939) which made Americans frustrated in comparison with the economic success of Japan. This precarious sense of white power has come of age by the 1980s, during which Hwang composed *M. Butterfly*, partly contributing to the

victory of Ronald Reagan in the presidential election, who published a slogan of “Let’s Make America Great Again.” Apparently, it was an attempt to revive the hegemonism of *Pax Americana*.

This instability of white western society becomes the lack of Gallimard, as his masculine void is repeatedly displayed as sexual incompetence throughout the play. First, he has traumas of erectile dysfunction and oppressive sexual debut. Young Gallimard tries to masturbate with the image on a magazine, “not with lust” but “with power” (968); however, he fails because of unknown oppression on his body. This scene indicates that Gallimard has attempted to compensate for his weak sense of self by his fantasy, but he has been disappointed because his manhood is ever unstable within the suppressing Symbolic. Besides, he remembers his first sexual intercourse, which Marc helped him to do, as a forceful and traumatic experience in which “the leaves were getting into [his] mouth” and he “worried about [his] legs falling off” (973). Compared with his womanizing friend, Marc, Gallimard is portrayed as naive and incompetent in sexual relationships, just as his Symbolic is losing its imperialist vigor. Moreover, Gallimard is suspected as infertile (“defective”), which he denies acknowledging (977). Such masculine insecurity is revealed in further detail with his conversion with Renee. While Gallimard feels threatened by her excessive masculinity, she intimates that his phallus is “small” and “young” (978), implying that Gallimard’s manhood is oppressed and weakened with his anxious Symbolic.³⁾

Besides, when Renee says she is learning Chinese because China will “end

3) Renee’s name is Rene Gallimard’s repetition with the French feminine ending. This resemblance, along with Renee’s menacing masculinity, may imply that the feminine accretion of “-e” corresponds to Renee’s symbolic phallus that is bigger and stronger than Gallimard’s.

up taking over the world,” Gallimard ignores this expectation as nonsense (986). Although the world power dynamics were already shifting, Gallimard refuses to confront such a Symbolic lack. This self-deception is because, as Bruce Fink associates Lacan’s masculine structure with the obsession (256n20), Gallimard’s subject (\$) should not be symbolically castrated (barred) as far as he perceives, like Fink rewrites the Lacanian formula of fantasy as ($S \diamond a$) for the obsessive (122). Thus, he conducts manliness masquerade to mask his weak masculinity. This “remasculinization,” as Nguyen puts it (89), is again elaborated by Renee’s politics of the phallus; she criticizes western colonizers as they “take over a really big piece of land” in order to hide their “small” phallus (978). Likewise, Gallimard re-masculinizes himself by reversing his masculinity with Marc in his *Madama Butterfly* fantasy, where he becomes a playboy Pinkerton, whereas Marc plays the role of Pinkerton’s conservative foil, Sharpless (966).

Still, Gallimard needs his docile heroine, so he casts Song Liling to complete his manliness masquerade. Through this *object a*—“the Perfect Woman” (975)—Gallimard tries to satisfy his instinct for narcissistic mastery, feeling “the rush of power—the absolute power of a man” (973) he has longed for as a subordinated subject to the Symbolic. In this way, within Gallimard’s masculine structure, Song becomes Gallimard’s pseudo-phallus which may fill his castrated void. That is to say, Gallimard seeks a kind of salvation by reducing Song into an *object a*.⁴⁾ However, since Gallimard (\$) merely

4) Gallimard’s arbitrary, otherizing, and imperialist desire further reminds of *Éditions Gallimard*—one of the leading French book publishers—which “is widely credited with bringing a range of non-francophone writers to global audiences” (Kalliney 103). The circulation of world literature that *Éditions Gallimard* allows may tend to be accompanied by cultural reinterpretation and appropriation, which sometimes can be violent in an imperialist way.

objectifies Song as his Butterfly, not seeing Song's real self—a Chinese male spy (ㄊㄚ)—his *phallic jouissance* cannot be a sincere love; he only desires his inner illusory image, not confronting his lover's and his own lack. Thus, Gallimard's suicide at the end, being dressed like Madame butterfly, can be interpreted as an inevitable end of his false love, since he incessantly refuses to embrace his lack in the Real, fixating on the Imaginary (“I choose fantasy”; 986).

III. Song's *Feminine Jouissance* for Another Otherization

Song, on the contrary, presents a feminine structure of the Lacanian sexuation, as she penetrates the lack of the Other—not only his own but also of Gallimard. For one thing, Song can “distance” himself from his Symbolic—Chinese communist society—criticizing its ideology (“*Art for the masses* is a shitty excuse to keep artist poor,” 970) and violating the Symbolic order by his act of homosexuality which is banned in China. At the same time, Song figures out the lack of Gallimard's Symbolic and reads the fantasy of white westerners: “the submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man” (969). Based on this insight on Gallimard's Symbolic, Song willingly becomes Gallimard's *object a*, Madame Butterfly, to make Gallimard desire him; Song even gives (infertile) Gallimard a child. In this way, Song provides Gallimard what he does not possess as a psychical woman.

Meanwhile, Song's existence is sacrificed since Gallimard only relates with his *object a*, not ㄊㄚ. The real Song, Asian masculinity and femininity, along

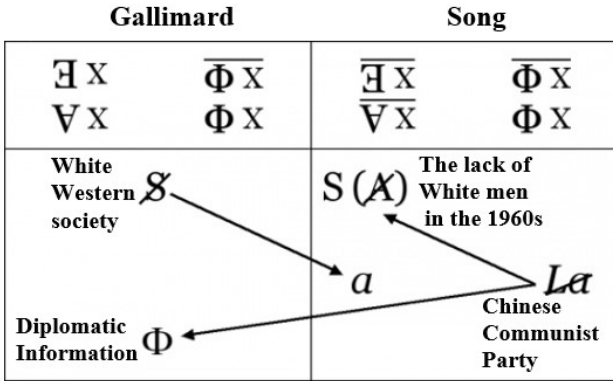
Such potential imperialism of the publishing house may have influenced Hwang in his naming of Gallimard.

with Chinese tradition, are distorted or even disappear in *M. Butterfly*'s Symbolic since it is a retrospective play from Gallimard's perspective. For instance, when Song sings the lyric of Puccini's opera—"I come from a people / Who are accustomed to little / Humble and silent" (978)—he hides his people's true identity, acting a false representation in order to satisfy Gallimard's fantasy. Song also gives testimony at the court later: "Being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man" (984), meaning that he sacrificed his actual identity for Gallimard in his *jouissance of the Other*.

However, Song is also a subordinate of his Symbolic order—the Chinese communist party; he never subverts his Symbolic entirely, committing "a counterrevolutionary act" just as "necessary to counterrevolutionary act" (980). For this reason, despite Song's seemingly sacrificial and sublime act of *feminine jouissance*, it turns out that his real intention was to enjoy *phallic jouissance*, making use of Gallimard to get the French diplomatic information.

To sum up, both Gallimard and Song's love was not real love, which perceives and desires the other's true identity, but was a deceptive masquerade for their selfish *phallic jouissance*. As a barred masculine subject ($\$$) of white western society, Gallimard desires his *object a*, the image of a subversive Asian woman, from the sexual relationship with Song, only to find himself deceived by his own *plus-de-jouir*. On the other hand, Song (£a) is also subordinated under his Symbolic (China communist party). However, as a psychological woman, he can see what Gallimard is missing—the lack of white male society in the 1960s. Thus, Song uses his discernment on $S(\text{A})$ to get Φ (secret information) from Gallimard to serve his advantage in the Symbolic, as shown in graph 2.

Therefore, after all, there is no love in *M. Butterfly*, as Lacan puts in: "there's no such thing as a sexual relation" (*SXX* 126).⁵ Love can be said as sincere only when it creates a sheer *jouissance of the Other*, the altruistic urge



Graph 2. Masculine Gallimard and Feminine Song's *Phallic Jouissance*

to give what I do not have to the other. However, both Gallimard and Song desire each other in order to obtain their selfish benefits, thereby failing to interact genuinely. With that being said, we can raise our doubt on if perfect *jouissance Autre* is even possible, which rightfully pinpoints the real problem: if we perceive others as *alterity*, it would be impossible to identify them as they are. It is because the otherization, which is purely subjective, would unavoidably interrupt the moment of encounter with the *non-ego*. In other words, if we continue to meet others within the dichotomic structure of Lacan, Descartes, or western imperialism, East and West will remain alien to each other.

5) This echo of Lacan's statement in the absence of truly altruistic love within *M. Butterfly* is interesting when we remind of the history of *Madama Butterfly*. Pierre Loti—the author of *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887), the original motive story of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*—“was a homosexual who had tried to create his image as a heterosexual romantic and that there was no such unconditional love between the Japanese woman and the Western hero” (Woo, “Shifting” 73). Thus, after all, there indeed was no sexual relationship from the womb of this interracial romance.

IV. Benjamin and Ronnie's Parallel of Racist *Phallic Jouissance*

Such lingering misunderstanding and prejudices toward cultural others, raised with *M. Butterfly*, continues on Hwang's another play about racial identity, *Trying*, which was written almost ten years later. This short, one-act play presents another encounter between two male characters of different races against the backdrop of "a street corner on the Lower East Side, New York City" (227). Benjamin Wong is a Caucasian male in his early 20s, with his blond hair and blue eyes, but he perceives himself as an Asian American since a Chinese-American couple adopted him. On the contrary, Wong's counterpart, Ronnie Chang, is a biological Asian in his mid-20s, but his cultural identity is rooted in blues music, not in Chinese opera; he believes his ethnic background is not solely Chinese, but the mixture of his genetic race and bigger "worlds out there," which is comprised of ineffable hybridity (233). Thus, when Benjamin runs across and asks Ronnie where Chinatown is, Ronnie expresses intense resentment, asking back why Benjamin singled him out to tell it. Then there starts a long dispute between the two on mainly three agendas: whether Benjamin really can have an Asian identity despite his white skin and "genetic heritage" (232), if Ronnie is one of "self-hating, assimilated Chinese Americans" (232), and most importantly, whether one can *choose* his or her ethnic identity.

Within this heated conversation between Ronnie and Benjamin, some "emasculating and brutal" stereotypes regarding the yellow race appear in their direct mention: "the opium den, the sexual objectification of the Asian female, the exoticized image of a tourist's Chinatown which ignores the exploitation of workers, the failure to unionize, the high rate of mental illness and tuberculosis" (230). They also stigmatize each other based on their "skin-deep"

biases (233). In terms of Benjamin, although he strongly defends himself against the charge of racism, he indeed has picked out yellow-skinned Ronnie “of all the street musicians in the City—to point [him] the direction of Chinatown” (229). Even when Benjamin tries to justify his action, he takes a somewhat narrow-minded stance like he knows everything about Ronnie’s “marginalized” life “by a white racist patriarchy” (229), which is violently generalizing and evidently another stereotyping practice. Likewise, Ronnie also superficially rates Benjamin only by his Caucasian appearance, not considering that Benjamin might have an Asian cultural background. This misconception is based on his bigoted thinking that “all Asian skin tones conform to a single hue” (231). Besides, Ronnie also intimates his racist, parochial, and branding attitude when he says “the idea of Asian students in the Midwest going on a hunger strike” never occurred to him (230).

When the psychical structure of Lacan’s sexuation formula is applied again into this confrontation between the two subjects, we can see that Benjamin and Ronnie also seek *phallic jouissance*, otherizing each other as mere tools to satisfy their purposes. To Benjamin ($\$$), who belongs to the American Symbolic of racist nature, Ronnie is a *convenient Asian stranger* (a) who may show him the way to Chinatown or a “glorious warrior survivor” (a) who righteously rages every day against the white racism in defense of his Chinese community (230) and thus to whose anger he can “absolutely relate” (229). With such a masculine mind, Benjamin does not understand that Ronnie might be uncomfortable with his hasty and external judgment, not being able to perceive the authentic identity of Ronnie (La).

On the other hand, Ronnie ($\$$) also resides within the same American Symbolic with Benjamin. However, since he is an Asian-looking man with a multi-cultural identity in a white-dominated society, he is filled with strong

hysterical discontent, being misrecognized and subordinated by racist prejudices. Thus, Ronnie requires *white racist hypocrites* who look younger and weaker than himself (*a*) to whom he can pour his anger against the white racism and who can help him to gain his sense of masculine authority by making him feel that he is more knowledgeable regarding the mechanism of identity. And that happens to be Benjamin who was accidentally passing by on the street; Ronnie cannot imagine that this junior white man may have an Asian identity even with a college degree in Asian American studies. For this reason, Ronnie superficially judges Benjamin as an ignorant caucasian and commands him to “open [his] eyes” and “hear with [his] ears” as if he is superior to him. In this way, both Benjamin and Ronnie reduce each other as their *object a* to satisfy egoistic interests, as shown in table 1. Even though this intercommunication does not contain sexual or erotic desire, the *phallic jouissance* of the main protagonists in *Trying* is established on another important scheme of desire: the racial power dynamics.

The Symbolic	Agent (\$)	<i>Object a</i>	The other's true self (Ła)
White-dominated American society with a racist culture	Benjamin	1) <i>Asians</i> who know the Chinatown 2) <i>Chinese victims</i> of white racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Multi-cultural identity · Attachment to the blues music · No sense of belonging to the Chinatown
	Ronnie	<i>White racist hypocrites</i> who look younger and weaker than himself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Asian American · Member of the Chinatown community

Table 1. Masculine Benjamin and Ronnie's *Phallic Jouissance*

By juxtaposing the two men of complex identity in their incompatible *phallic jouissance* again, as he did earlier in *M. Butterfly*, Hwang effectively conveys his message that “cultural identity is increasingly becoming a matter of

personal choice” in the era of globalization (E. K. Lee 92). That is, one’s identity is not being born but is made by subjective choices throughout life, thereby forming a customized portfolio of oneself. Apart from Ronnie and Benjamin’s biological ethnicity, they autonomously create their own psychological identity, blurring the traditional lines among national borders and races. Ronnie has Asian skin but has absorbed transnational cultural forces in his trajectory of musical pursuit, whereas Benjamin is a biological white, but he feels hometown-like familiarity only when he finally enters Chinatown (234). Such elusive personalities of Ronnie and Benjamin indicate that identity is never a static *being*, which is determined at the moment of birth, but an ongoing procedure of *becoming*, where one interweaves different and sometimes colliding senses of self.

Despite the collision between Ronnie and Benjamin, there also appears a hope of reconciliation at the end of *Trying*. Although Ronnie has denied the Chinese community as his own throughout the play, Ronnie’s music eventually “[begins] to reflect the influence of Chinese music” at the last scene (234), demonstrating the fact that no one’s identity is made up of a homogenous cultural background. With Ronnie’s cosmopolitan music, which mixes up Asian and Western styles, Benjamin’s soliloquy continues; Benjamin figures out the historic footage of his adoptive family in Chinatown and even feels the spirit of his dead father returning (234). And yet, he feels “an ache in [his] heart for all those lost souls,” including himself and Ronnie, who strive “to know who they truly are” (234). As such, Benjamin finally understands what Ronnie argued about the complex compound of identity: certainly, identity is never a “simple” issue (233). This epiphany takes us back to Song’s statement in *M. Butterfly*, “I’m not just any man” (986).

As Song and Gallimard exchange their clothes in Act Three of *M. Butterfly*

—Song wearing “a well-cut” western suit in the courthouse in Paris (984) and Gallimard dressed in Kimono and put Chinese make up (986)—Song is not just a Chinese man in terms of his cultural identity, and so is Gallimard, not a simple French man. Besides, when Gallimard meets his death, he identifies himself with his *object a*—Madame Butterfly—conducting the Freudian mourning; he introjects his lost object into his ego and becomes one with it (Jeong 208).⁶ That is, both Song and Gallimard possess a hybrid cosmopolitan identity, as Ronnie and Benjamin do. This verdict illuminates that when East and West, or any other different cultures meet, they produce a blended mixture of identity, which cannot be categorized into imperialist, structuralist, or the Lacanian dichotomy.

V. Blurring the Racist Lines in Cultural Hybridity

Therefore, in *Trying*, Hwang raises a need for a new ethical direction of identity politics and postcolonial studies, which would embrace every number of different cultural syntheses. Such discussion has been simmering since Song said, “Expand your mind” (969) in *M. Butterfly* but is finally concretized in Ronnie’s imperative: “Open your eyes” (233). One noticeable development Hwang makes between the two works is that whereas *M. Butterfly* censures only the Western Orientalism on Asians, *Trying* reflects a much more extensive vision on the ineffable nature of identity creation within the globalized world.

This remarkable transition can be interpreted in terms of the political

6) Although Gallimard conducts a rather successful Freudian mourning, he fails to wake from his inner fantasy—the distorted image of Asians by Western Orientalism.

context of the two plays. When *M. Butterfly* came on the stage in 1988, Reagan's presidential term was almost done amidst the accelerated social anxiety. Although Reagan gained the American people's favor with his nationalistic vision to make America great again, the consensus toward him in the late 1980s, especially that of non-white people, deteriorated for the following reasons. First, Reagan was the prime mover of the Iran-Contra Affair (1986), arguably making Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) involve in bringing cocaine to American society (Ismi 3). On the surface, Reagan's government manifested the War on Drugs, but it is alleged that they prompted drug smuggling behind (3). This crime eventually led the habitats of low-income groups, including the society of blacks, to turn into dismal ghettos. Second, his privatization of prison and modification of the bail system in the 1980s further increased the proportion of colored race among prisoners, strengthening Racism in America (Platt 61-62).⁷ Moreover, the problem of Reaganomics was finally emerging in the late 1980s, with the plight of Black Monday (1987); all these situations worsened the masculine angst within the white American society, causing the internal conflict between different ethnicities and mass racial violence, such as Miami Riot (1989). Hwang must have reflected such an imminent landscape of white racism in the late 1980s within his narrative of *M. Butterfly* by intensely dramatizing the self-delusion of Gallimard who is eaten up with the blinding Orientalism of Euro-American society.

When Hwang composed *Trying* in 1996, on the contrary, three years had passed since Bill Clinton's election. As a president of the Democratic party, Clinton showed a more open-minded tendency toward people of color than

7) In 2019, Reagan's 1971 phone conversation with then-president Richard Nixon has been revealed, in which Reagan called UN African delegates "monkeys," undeniably showing his racist attitude (Chotiner).

Reagan. Clinton was even contentiously rated as “our first black president” by Toni Morrison as follows:

Blacker than any actual black person who could ever be elected in our children’s lifetime. After all, Clinton displays almost every trope of blackness: single-parent household, born poor, working-class, saxophone-playing, McDonald’s-and-junk-food-loving boy from Arkansas. (Arkin)

Although such a black-characterization of Clinton instigated intense arguments, this remark well depicts how identity politics was transforming at that time with the emergence of postmodernism; identity was transgressing the previously established lines between biological ethnicity, going underneath the skin color and operating in a way that cannot be embodied within a master theoretical frame of structuralism. The end of the Cold War in 1991 during the term of Clinton also may have raised the necessity of handling the aftermath of the long-stood conflicts among different ethnicities, to which Hwang contributes by his portrayals of the pluralistic identities of Benjamin and Ronnie in *Trying*. Indeed, as Peter Y. Paik legitimately indicates, “this period of mass migration and cultural mixing has also been one where the concept of racial and ethnic identity has taken on far greater importance than in the past when air travel was far less frequent, and cultures were more distinct and homogeneous” (1).

One possible solution to articulate the ineffable cultural hybridity in *Trying* and escape from the comfort zone of the epistemological dichotomy is Gayatri Spivak’s concept of *planetaryity*. Spivak suggests planetaryity as a discursive system that makes “our home *unheimlich* or uncanny,” saying, “To be human is to be intended toward the other” (73-74). That is, in order to interact with the other subjects authentically, a subject has to discover itself within cultural

others, replacing their alterity with comprehensive planetarity. Spivak further insists that “identity politics is neither smart nor good” (84) since it defines one’s identity based on the differences from other people. Instead, Spivak argues that a subject should try to realize the shared existence with others, and only when “cultural origin is detranscendentalized into fiction” with the question—“How many are we?”—such collectivities can be enlightened (102).

This moral implication of Spivak’s planetarity becomes even more manifest with Sara Suleri’s “radical inseparability” between imperial and subaltern subjects (3). At the point of cultural intersection, she argues, identities of different subjects are mingled with each other’s and thus become ambivalent and hybrid. Thus, we cannot possibly think of a spotless or seamless identity in the era of globalization, where there is an explosive soar in the range of exchange between diverse ethnicities in both vertical and horizontal directions. In a similar vein, Homi K. Bhabha, another celebrated postcolonial scholar, indicates that the articulation of such cultural “in-between” spaces is to move away from “the singularities” and focus on “the interstices” where “intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (2). In other words, interacting with others in this cosmopolitan world is nothing more than acknowledging cultural hybridity.

To accept this significant change in identity politics, Jacques Derrida further suggests “unconditional welcome” as “impossible” hospitality in *Of Hospitality* (75-77). This “unconditional or hyperbolic” hospitality is different from Immanuel Kant’s “conditional and juridico-political” hospitality, asserted in *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795), in that it is not restricted by any “fixed principles of respect and donation, or by exchange, proportion, a norm, etc.” (Derrida 137). Rather, Derrida commands us to suspend all phenomenological judgment on others’ identity and cultural origins,

deconstructing every difference between subjects. If we connect this Derridean poetic hospitality with Spivak's notion of planetarity, it becomes clear that identity politics and postcolonial studies in the twenty-first century should move forward from the philosophy of differences to that of shared values, pulling down the wall between subjects—like Eastern philosophers did not divide the *ego* and the *non-ego* (Fung 3).

VI. Conclusion: Toward the *Planetary Hospitality*

Beyond every challenge and opportunity before identity politics and postcolonial studies, the lessons from Hwang's *M. Butterfly* and *Trying* are evident: we cannot truly meet others if we keep pursuing *phallic jouissance* which is derived from the dichotomic perception of the world. As for *M. Butterfly*, Gallimard and Song show a pitiful crisscross of desire, respectively being a psychological man and woman plotted on the binary of Lacanian sexuation formula. Despite Song's acute discernment of Gallimard's lack, who emblems the weak masculinity of the white men in the 1960s, they eventually both otherize each other in pursuit of egoistic purposes. Also, in *Trying*, Benjamin and Ronnie, whose skin colors do not match with their heterogeneous cultural identities, initially show a shallow understanding of racial identity based on their selfish agendas: Benjamin was looking for an Asian who knows the Chinatown as well as a victim of white racism to whom he can boast his knowledge of identity politics and enjoy the pleasure of self-centered sympathy; Ronnie was also in need of an insignificant-looking white hypocrite to whom he can gallantly vent his anger toward racist culture. In this way, both interracial pairs of men in two plays fail to have a genuine encounter, being

stuck in the blindspots of their Symbolics; they enjoy connections only with their *object a*, not with the truthful self of the other.

Nevertheless, *Trying* advances deeper into the essence of racial identity than *M. Butterfly* does; it clarifies that identity is becoming an extremely individual matter, growing independent of ethnicity, race, or genetic background. It is because the contacts among different cultures are proliferating in this cosmopolitan era, making every individual identity record its own trajectory of cultural discourses. In the process, choosing which form of life to incorporate into his or her ego depends on one's will. Besides, *Trying* also suggests that people are all connected within a universal network. That is, each subject is inseparable from one another in infinite cultural hybridity and thus holds an ambiguous and mixed medley of sense of self, as Ronnie and Benjamin show. Therefore, to welcome such a significant transformation in identity politics among *M. Butterfly*, *Trying*, and beyond, we should take serious notice of Derridean *absolute hospitality*, attempting to replace the alterity with *planetaryity*. From that point where we formulate our own customized identity while accepting others who already dwell within ourselves, we could belatedly say that we are finally meeting each other.

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Toward the Planetary Hospitality Beyond the Phallic Jouissance: David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* and *Trying to Find Chinatown*

Abstract

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This paper delves into the ever-present issue of 'how can a subject genuinely interact with others,' through David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (1988) and *Trying to Find Chinatown* (1996). Starting from the Lacanian psychoanalytic analysis on *M. Butterfly*, the paper investigates the tropes of *phallic jouissance* among different racial and cultural subjects. In the process, it is revealed that we cannot authentically communicate with others if we keep the western dichotomic perception of the world, which divides the ego and the non-ego. As the paper further explores the shift in Hwang's identity politics within *Trying to Find Chinatown*, identity is disclosed as a matter of individual choice, and people are shown to be all connected within a universal network, notably in this cosmopolitan era. That is, each subject is inseparable from one another in infinite cultural hybridity and thus holds an ambiguous and mixed medley of sense of self. Thus, the paper ultimately attempts to find an ethical direction of identity politics that will allow a sincere encounter with cultural others from several gems of postcolonial theories: Gayatri Spivak's planetarity, Sara Suleri's radical inseparability, Homi Bhabha's cultural hybridity, and Jacques Derrida's absolute hospitality. Such trace of thinking begets the final imperative that we should create our distinct compound of plural identities while accepting others as part of ourselves to commune in *planetary hospitality*.

Key Words David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*, *Trying to Find Chinatown*, identity politics, Derridean hospitality, Lacanian phallic jouissance, Spivak's planetarity

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