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Orientalism in Contemporary Asian American Literature
- Mounting Madame Butterfly on the Asian American Needle -

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Preface

When I began my research on this thesis, I profited a lot from discussion and brainstorming sessions with others. Many fellow students, themselves in the process of writing their thesis, helped me in this fruitful endeavor of completing mine.

The pivotal moment, which I think every writer should have, came when I was explaining my research topic to someone I hadn't seen since my first year in college. Talking about my topic repeatedly, helped me structure my thoughts, draw new conclusions, cross out old thoughts, and elaborate on my previous drafts. So when I told this person my title and started to explain he interrupted and said, "Aha, das passt ja zu dir." I didn't say anything for a few, very long, seconds and thought of a passage I had read in *Thinking Orientals* by Henry Yu. In his introductory passage Yu explains how Asian American scholars were received and perceived in post-war American academia. In an afterthought, he adds, "For too long, we have thought that white men in academia sought Truth (with a capital T) and that women and minority scholars pursuing gender, racial, and ethnic studies studied only themselves" (12). I wasn't mad at my friend for saying this to me, although I hadn't anticipated anything like this to happen to me. I knew I was not just "studying myself," yet I felt marginalized and disturbed.

My friend's comment also had a positive effect to it: it assured me that Orientalism still prevails, both in literature, as this study aims to show, and in the mindset of those that have been exposed to Orientalist literature and thought. Secondly, I could relate to D.H. Hwang's concern and main issue in *M. Butterfly* – how is it that Americans of greater Asian background are still perceived and marginalized as Orientals? What demarcated them as (cultural) Other and why are these anachronistic images of Orientals present today?

I share my motivation to write this thesis with D.H. Hwang's motivation to write a play like *M. Butterfly*¹ – agreed, it was not my initial motivation, nor the decisive one (I just want to graduate) but it greatly contributed to my analysis and focus of research. The long-lasting impact of Orientalism (and hopefully soon of Said's *Orientalism*) is very much observable and substantive today. Orientalism is not just a theorem that applies to literature and the arts, academia and history; it is an axiom deeply engraved in the mindset of every

¹ *M. Butterfly* is partly motivated by French diplomat Bernard Bouriscot's relationship to Chinese male opera singer Shi Peipu, whom he believed to be a woman.

person – be it a person from the “West” or the “East” – as, in Edward Said’s word, “a kind of second-order knowledge [...] with a life of its own” (*Orientalism* 52).

Over coffee, I have had numerous discussions with teachers, friends and fellow students on matters related and unrelated to this thesis. I would like to thank them for their patience and endurance to be my sounding boards when I needed one; they bear no responsibility for the views expressed here or errors made. I also thank Anne and Dorothee for sharing the daunting process of thesis writing with me. This thesis is dedicated to my late aunt Shashi Taparia.

1. Intention

Representations of the unknown and the foreign can be found in every culture. Paralleling the method of constructing identity in relation to the Other, all cultures create myths about the 'foreign' in order to discern what the 'native' is, and thus often essentialize them as either good or bad, ultimately to vindicate one's own actions and values. The nature of myths has it as such that they lend themselves to images, which are easily transformed into representations.

Representations of the foreign in the United States follow the same purpose; they are propagated to define the nation's identity and set it into political and cultural relation to other nations and civilizations. This human characteristic to define relationships in hierarchical structures incarnates into cultural and political manifestations that are embedded into the nation's identity. In this thesis' context, then, representations of Asian Americans in American culture strengthen the imaginative bonds of American national identity manifesto. However, the interdependency of the Self and the Other clarifies and further entangles the subjects that constitute American national identity and in turn legitimizes the belated claim of Asian Americans to be included into it.

Asian American literature is primarily concerned with these myths and (mis)representations that are influenced by Orientalist images in Western culture. Thus, Orientalism – a constructed myth about the Orient, which exists in art, books, and armchair theories of all kinds in the Western world – becomes the main motif for Asian American literature. If we construe this theory a little further then Asian American identity is formed in relation to Orientalist representations that need to be deconstructed first.

From the outset, if Orientalism is considered as a produce of imperialism, it seems that time is a defining factor in Orientalism, both as an agent of change and as a factor of perspective. In reality, however, Orientalism seems resilient to time and change; the creation of the Madame Butterfly myth exemplifies what was created in 1887 had been perfected by 1900 and since then enjoys frequent comebacks until today.

Thus, for Asian American artists and writers to dismantle Orientalist stereotypes begins a literally archaeological process: excavating the leftovers of American Orientalism, evaluating those finds, and re-relating them with their own cultural and historical actuality. Rather than producing a neat line of argumentation, the approaches on defining Asian American identity within the American national identity manifesto fall into unwieldy clusters and even get tangled up into self-contradictions. The methods of dismantling Orientalist

stereotypes are manifold and range from total rejection over evocation and appropriation to reflection.

In order to wrestle such disparate issues Orientalism produces in Asian American Literature into an organic whole, it was important to focus consistently on the over arching theme of American national identity. As this thesis aims to show, Orientalist issues that are dealt with in Asian American literature all point toward the greater aim of national inclusion. This thesis is grouped into two parts. PART I provides historical and theoretical background information necessary to understand Orientalist issues in contemporary Asian American literature. Analogous to Asian American writers that feel the necessity to bed their work into the correct historical frame in order to prevent misunderstanding, chapters two and three serve to couch my argument into the correct frame. The theoretical base work is laid with Edward Said's *Orientalism* and its implementation on the American and Asian American context. Literature and history are both examined in this light and together they build the roots of today's well-known Asian American literary stereotypes.

PART II examines literary examples, applying the theorems discussed in PART I. Chapter four is a close analysis of the submissive Butterfly stereotype that has, since its appearance in late nineteenth century, moved, inspired and even outraged writers.² Beginning with the literary development of Madame Butterfly, D. H. Hwang's deconstructivist *M. Butterfly* gives new perspectives on Orientalism by redefining gender and racial roles. To complement my analysis, in chapter five, I try to trace current Asian American reactions to Orientalism. Texts by comedian Margaret Cho and poet Beau Sia serve as examples of analysis. As a result of the disparate narrative forms of the analyzed works and the unevenness of scholarship on twenty-first century, the analyses vary greatly in scope and detail. In choosing fairly young narrative forms like stand-up comedy and spoken word poetry I want to emphasize how Orientalism pertains to the question of Asian American identity.

² Sherrill Grace tries to get to the bottom of the question why so many men have been infatuated with Butterfly narratives: "From Pierre Loti, David Belasco, and Giacomo Puccini to David Henry Hwang, David Cronenberg, Ken Russell, Alain Boubilil and Claude-Michel Schönberg, and Robert Lepage, male artists have worshipped the idea of Butterfly. Why? Why are all the men playing (with) Butterfly? If Rene Gallimard in Hwang's *M. Butterfly* can be believed, it is because Butterfly is the 'Perfect Woman,' and such a woman can only be created, believed in, and, ultimately, *played* by a man. But this perfect woman is, of course, a fantasy. Moreover, in most of her twentieth-century incarnations she ends up dead: the perfect woman, it seems, is a dead woman." (136)

One may not see a clear shift from the 'historical' Madame Butterfly that metamorphoses into *M. Butterfly*, to the works of Beau Sia and Margaret Cho. Policies on racial equality and political correctness have forced a change of costumes, a masquerade if you wish. But the characteristics of the new Asian American role are similar to those of Madame Butterfly's: submissiveness, self-sacrifice and gratefulness towards the 'host country.' To close the circle of my discourse I will go back to where I start my thesis: Asian Americans and their position within America's national identity discourse. It is noteworthy that until today, Asian American identity remains a hostage of these Orientalist stereotypes that mark the boundaries of their American identity.

2. Asian America

When you seem to arrive,
the journey continues.

Take me as I am, you cry.
I, I, am an individual.

—Lawson F. Inada, *On Being Asian American*

Asian American literature has gone through a long process of development, having its roots in the mid-nineteenth century, three centuries after the first wave of Asian immigration into the United States. Asian American literature is literature by “people whose countries of origin may be found within the geographical triangle formed by Japan, Indonesia, and Pakistan,” (Lim 4) and therefore does not encompass literature about Asia or Asians in America by non-Asians.³ Nevertheless, these two literary traditions are intertwined since the former started as a reaction to the latter. It was not until the 1850s, according to Bella Adams, when Asian immigration into the United States reached the one million mark that the reception of Asians in the United States emerged in American literature (9).

The portrayal of Asian Americans was lopsided; the so-called ‘yellow peril’ image emerged in American public life and triggered a chain of racist reaction both in the factual and fictitious life of Asian Americans. Representation through white American writer’s works supported this public image of them as a threat to Western civilization. As a consequence, their representations found wide reception within the American public. The majority of writers depicted their new countrymen as uncivilized, culturally and morally inferior to white Americans. Mark Twain, already famous during his lifetime, helped circulate the story of Ah Sin, a cheating, job-stealing Chinaman that became the epitome of the ‘yellow peril’ image.⁴ Well-known stereotypes and images of crowded Chinatowns with opium dens, gambling

³ In their introduction, Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling point out that the umbrella term *Asian American* also covers Asian-Pacific Islander Americans. However, their literature differs from Asian American literature insofar that “they stand in a different relation to the dominant culture than do immigrants from Asian countries.” (4)

⁴ It should be noted, though, that Mark Twain and his co-creator of Ah Sin intended to highlight white men’s treachery against the Chinese. Nevertheless, his portrayal is lopsided and not written in defense of Asian Americans. (see Kim 14-5)

houses and brothels are still prevalent in contemporary cinema.⁵ Famous fictive characters like Dr. Fu Manchu, the Dragon Lady and the submissive Madame Butterfly go back to the mid-nineteenth century and are a produce of cultural contact between (1) Asians in America and Europe and (2) Europeans and Americans in Asia.⁶ The fictive characters turned into ‘stencils’ for real life politics and were projected onto Asian subjects, branding their antipodal relation to the West until today.

The act of writing in minority literature is closely linked with the concept of defining one’s identity: in establishing and creating oneself in a new surrounding. It is hardly surprising, then, that the first Asian American work appeared in form of autobiography, a documentation of personal experience as counter-image to those representations provided by white American writers. Throughout American history, Adams supports, Asian Americans have been subjected to “nativist, racist and Orientalist ideologies” and subsequently literature about Asian Americans by white Americans has “powerfully determined the way in which Asian Americans are viewed in American culture, for the most part, as biologically and culturally Other or, more precisely, the threatening ‘yellow peril’ and the controllable ‘model minority’” (8). As we will see, rectification of misperceived and distorted Asian American representation has remained the main driving motif in Asian American literature until today.

To set the parameters of this thesis’ discussion a definition of the applied theorem Orientalism and the socio-historical background of Asian America are essential. As the epigraph suggest, the positioning of Asian Americans in America is yet unsettled; their arrival in the United States compelled them to redefine their national identity. Although the Constitution promises to protect the right of the individual, Asian Americans were denied identification with this American democratic vista and made subject to domination by racial and historical preference. In addition, the belated affirmation of their Americanness was perpetuated through (mis)representations of Asian Americans in literature and culture. It can

⁵ i.e. James Bond – Die Another Day. Dir. Lee Tamahori. Eon Productions, 2002; From Hell. Dir. Albert Hughes. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 2001; Mission Impossible III. Dir. J.J. Abrams. Paramount Pictures, 2006.

Stereotypical depiction of Asia and Chinatowns are even more blatant in Hollywood movies with predominantly Asian cast like for example Jet Li, Jackie Chan, and Chow Yun Fat.

⁶ Compare: “[...] Orientalism derives from a particular closeness experienced between Britain and France and the Orient [...] [S]ince World War II America has dominated the Orient, and approaches it as France and Britain once did. Out of that closeness [...] comes the large body of texts I call Orientalist.” (Said, *Orientalism* 4.)

be concluded then, that the status of Asian Americans in the American national identity manifesto has been affected by their image that is coded in Orientalist stereotypes.

The seemingly indivisible tie between Orientalist stereotypes and Asian American identity is further complicated by evocation and appropriation of the former in Asian American literature. The following chapters on Asian America will illustrate that Asian Americans have ever since been compelled to justify themselves in relation to these stereotypes; be it in literature, cultural studies, politics or history – the embrace of Orientalism has retained an suffocative grip on Asian American identity. To reveal that Asian Americans are misperceived and unveil the orchestration of their misrepresentation is the key to disband Asian American identity with Orientalism.

2.1 Asian American

The term *Asian American* dates back to the 1960s. Before that, Asian Americans were often referred to as *Oriental*s. However, specific names existed for specific Asian Americans, *Chinaman* being a common name for Chinese Americans. The drastic change from *Oriental* to *Asian American*, from Other to (almost) Self, stems from a change in perception of Asian Americans and their status in America society. Although Yu evaluates the change as a “reaction to the exotic connotations of the term ‘Oriental,’ [that] valu[es] a past that had its roots in Asia, yet emphatically sounding a right to be treated as Americans” (viii), he points out its limits: the term remains in an Orientalist context as it is still representative of a group that is perceived through the eyes of the West (7).

The punch line is that the term remains – although coined by Asian Americans – an Orientalist term and quite blatantly carries a double meaning, suggesting a perpetual foreignness. Just like *Oriental*, *Model Minority* – the ‘signified’ stereotype behind *Asian American* – links Asian Americans to some other place, far away from the American majority.

2.1.1 Terminology

Asian American, *Asian-American*, and *Asian/American* – all these transcriptions have been applied by scholars writing within the context of Asian American studies. It is surprising that almost every such study, be it an anthology of Asian American writers, a compilation of secondary texts, or simply a study about Asian Americans, begins with a stipulative definition of the terms used and explains why their definition varies from other definitions. The orthographic transcription is crucial in this context, since it determines the differentia. The reason for including this segment is to illustrate the tension and inconsistency of Asian American studies, literature, and identity, which in turn stand in contrast to the fixed

stereotypes of Asians in America. This segment shall also serve as socio-political and historical reality in which American Orientalism occurs today.

In her introduction to *Reading Asian American Literature – From Necessity to Extravagance* Sau-ling Cynthia Wong describes defining *Asian American* as

much more difficult than it seems. The term is inherently elastic [...] Not merely a denotative label with a fixed, extralinguistic referent, it is a sign, a site of contestation for multitude of political and cultural forces. It is the semiotic status of the term *Asian American* that shapes our understanding of what kind of discourse Asian American literature is, and in turn, what kind of practice Asian American criticism is. (5)

What Wong points out as the constant changing realms and the impact it has on the defined, namely Asian Americans in political and cultural context, is perceivable in the orthographic transcription of the term itself. The “semiotic status,” which I refer to as ‘signified stereotype’ above, alludes to the current image of Asian Americans typified through cultural and literary stereotypes. Adams demarcates *Asian-American* from *Asian American* as a term that was “[u]sed by some cultural nationalist critics to emphasize the Americanness of Asian Americans against the perpetual foreigner stereotype. The hyphen is meant to link Asian and American, thus inhibiting cultural and psychological alienation” (196). The nationalist critics that Adams refers to are, among others, the editors of *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* Frank Chin, Jeffrey Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong. Their anthology, published in 1974, features republications of early Asian American writers. The hyphen in *Asian-American*, according to the Aiiieeeee group, mirrors the inconclusive non-definable identity of Asian Americans.

We have been encouraged to believe that we have no cultural integrity as Chinese and Japanese Americans, that we are either Asian (Chinese or Japanese) or American (white), or are measurably both. This myth of being either/or and the equally goofy concept of the dual personality haunted our lobes while our rejection by both Asia and white America proved we were neither one nor the other. Nor were we half and half or more one than the other. (viii)

However, over the intervening years, the Aiiieeeee group discarded the hyphen in the subsequent anthology *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* published in 1991. This change in transcription follows Maxine Hong Kingston's critique that the hyphen "gives the impression of 'double citizenship'" and consequently "dual personality," whereas *Asian American* refers to a "type of American" on equal level with *African American* or *Jewish American* (Adams 88). In her novel *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* she proclaims through her protagonist Wittman Ah Sing, a fusion of American poet Walt Whitman and the Chinese mythical hero Sun Wukong: "'Chinese-American' takes too long. Nobody says or hears past the first part. And 'Chinese-American' is inaccurate – as if we could have two countries. We need to take the hyphen out – 'Chinese American.' 'American,' the noun, and 'Chinese,' the adjective. From now on: 'Chinese Americans'" (327).

Years later, the hyphen is questioned once again, but this time from another vantage point. David Palumbo-Liu factors in assimilation and invisibility. The hyphen, Palumbo-Liu suggests, transgresses the individual nature of the terms, merging *Asian* with *American*. He further argues that this process leads to an assimilation of Asian Americans, up to a point at which they stop appearing as racial minority at all. The status of Asian to American is thus clearly that of the inferior, whereas a solidus balances the status to an 'either/or' or 'and/or' construction.

The reasons for omitting Asian Americans in inventories of racial groups result from the idea that Asian Americans, as a figurehead of the Model Minority myth, "are no longer 'minorities' in the sense that they are economically disadvantaged, and therefore the sensitivities of the American political economy are excused from laboring to 'include' Asian Americans – [they] have already made it 'inside'" (Palumbo-Liu 4). The assimilation reaches far beyond economic lines; race is the driving factor that differentiates the "types of Americans" and racial assimilation cannot be permuted. Hence, the vacillation that *Asian/American* suggests, mirrors the status of Asians in America within the American national identity manifesto as it has developed in the twenty-first century; economic integration has not facilitated racial equality.

By choosing to utilize varying orthographic transcriptions, the critics visualize their main aspect of concern behind the term: its definition. It is noticeable that the variants are specifically chosen to reflect their main argument and not an attempt to provide a better alternative to *Asian American*. In this thesis the commonly used and, more importantly, the neutral term *Asian American* is applied, when referring to Asians in the United States. This includes Asian immigrants before and in the nineteenth century, whose political status in the

United States was not comparable to that of naturalized and integrated Asian Americans after WW II. This distinction is noteworthy as the term itself implies this political status. Nevertheless, Asian Americans today face the same racial and historical prejudice. Following the geographical differentiation, the term *Asian* refers to people in Asia.

2.1.2 Identity

It is evident that the motive behind the constant change of naming is identity. How shall an American born Asian define himself? What are the cohorts to measure against? Americans, Asians, or both? And where can Asian Americans place themselves within the American national identity manifesto?

The preoccupation of minority groups with their identity is first and foremost evident in their literature. In Postcolonial studies the concept of ‘writing back’ is applied to define work of writers from formerly colonized countries, that are written in the language of the colonizer and usually deal with identity. The identity of the colonized subjects underwent a metamorphosis when the colonizers arrived and again, when the colonizers left. Stuart Hall, British cultural theorist, writes about his identity as an experience of recognition, whereby he emphasizes the notion of defining oneself through the difference to others:

I [...] went through the long, important, political education of discovering that I am “black.” Constituting oneself as “black” is another recognition of self through difference: certain clear polarities and extremities against which one tries to define oneself. [...] It has been thought that this is really a simple process: a recognition – a resolution of irresolutions, a coming to rest in some place which was always there waiting for one. The “real me” at last! (116)

On similar lines, Meena Alexander writes about the importance of recognizing one’s identity before writing about anything else. In her memoir *Fault Lines* Alexander paraphrases James Baldwin: “Didn’t Baldwin say somewhere that being a Negro was the gate he had to unlock before he could write about anything else? I think being Asian American must be like that” (200). The metaphor of the gate mirrors the hyphen and solidus that it suggests an in-between stage, vacillating between “here and there, before and after, becoming and being” (Adams 1). Unlike Hall, who has “come to rest,” Asian Americans are in a state of “about-to-be-ness” as Susan Koshy coins it (467). This incompleteness, their identity crisis so to speak, can somewhat be explained through the diversity of histories and backgrounds of Asian Americans. Although the relation between Asians and Americans is not exactly that of

colonized and colonizer (the Philippines are an exception here), the hierarchical relation between them stem from European and American imperialism, and are therefore comparable.

Stuart Hall refers to Benedict Anderson's theorem of "imaginary communities," in which people base their commonality on fictive bonds, on an imagined common story. Nevertheless, Asian American as an identity is "not a bit the less real because [it is] also symbolic" (Hall 116). The fictive ties that hold Asian Americans together are not sealed by one determining factor. In Hall's case, black identity is strongly held together by race. Black British stem from various geographical backgrounds and their migration history differs strongly; what they share is the fictive kinship of their black skin in a white surrounding, and that carries political symbolism, which has its bedrock in nothing less than Darwin's axiom of natural selection.

The buttress of the bond network that Asian Americans share are less tenable; their migration histories vary in time and political nature; the culture, religion, and language of the different ethnicities are more diverse than that of White and African Americans; their racial and ethnic bonds are not as strong as they are in other identity groups. Yet, what keep them together are the common problems they faced in the United States (Okiihiro xiv). One may not be able to speak of a common historical pivotal moment that marked the beginning of Asian American identity as, for example, Hall claims Jamaica experienced in the 1970s (116). It is rather an accumulation of historical key moments that changed the status of Asians and later Asian Americans within the American national identity manifesto.

Institutional racism places Asian Americans from the very beginning of their American history into a state of in-between-ness. The Nationality Act of 1790 barred Asian settlers from becoming citizens; with the Gold Rush and the arrival of Chinese laborers in 1848, California passes a law in 1858 that bans Chinese immigration; in the course of completion of the first transcontinental railroad the Fourteenth Amendment, passed 1868, misses to permit birthright citizenship to Asians; the Naturalization Act of 1870 explicitly excludes Chinese from naturalized citizenship and is succeeded by the Chinese Exclusion Law in 1882.

The Chinese Exclusion Act, however, marks the beginning of a key moment: Asian Americans form associations to represent their rights.⁷ Institutional racism extended to civil

⁷ In 1882, the CCBA (Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association) is formed in various North American cities, followed by the Japanese Association of America and Korean Nationalist Association in 1908/09 and the Hindustani Association in 1913 (Adams ix-xxvi).

racism over the turn of the century. Anti-Asian riots directed at laborers and ordinary people, embodied in the Asiatic Exclusion League, segregated schools, and anti-miscegenation laws, exemplify the racism they faced. Renewal of exclusion laws are carried out on annual basis, court orders against Asian Americans, who appeal against those, agglomerate, and individual states pass land and immigration laws to lace up Asian immigration and settling.

The second key moment and joint connection of Asian American identity bonds is brought about with the end of WW II. With the naturalization rights and immigration quotas – 1943 for Chinese, 1946 for South Asians and Filipinos, 1952 for Japanese – comes their probation: Asian Americans are tested on their Americanness. Japan being Germany's ally, Japanese Americans are put into internment camps and during the Cold War, the Cold War Confession Program tests the loyalty of Chinese Americans. Similar instances follow suit during the Korean War 1950-53 and Vietnam War 1959-75.

David Leiwei Li calls these two parts of Asian American identity history “Oriental alienation” and “Asian abjection” (*Nation* 5). The first period marginalizes Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners, by outlawing them as citizens. Li adds, “[t]he juridical and legislative process through which the ‘Oriental’ became exclusively racialized as ‘foreign’ [...] are also the processes through which blacks and Indians were formally segregated and the ‘Irish’ became inclusively ‘white’” (*Nation* 4). He goes on to describe how Asian Americans, as the ‘yellow peril’ image suggests, pose a threat to American national identity.

The historical construction of the “Oriental” as the perpetual figure of *xenos*, as both antithetical and antagonistic to the United States, therefore not only reveals the spectral centrality of the Asian in the determination of a formative European American *ethnos*, but also the ways in which the historical consanguinity between racial essence and national legitimacy has been cemented. (*Nation* 4)

Li links on the one hand national identity, which is partly defined by common descent, language, religion and culture, with America's Manifest Destiny. On the other hand “Oriental alienation” suggests a linkage to Said's *Orientalism*; in the wake of imperialism, the United States perceived Asians as subjects inferior to themselves. Thus, the Asian American's “desire for American citizenship shattered popular belief that [the] immigrants were sojourners who had no intention of settling in America” (Yin 5-6). It can also be concluded that integration of Asian Americans into the national identity manifesto was repeatedly prevented because they were perceived as threat. These perceptions, in turn, were grounded primarily on racial issues.

Closely linked to these racial issues are economic issues that are discussed in detail in chapter 3.2 “Orientalism in America.”

The second period, which Li places broadly after WW II and 1965 (after the Civil Rights Act), is when the Oriental foreigner becomes Asian American. The former Others are now “recognized as either citizens or legal aliens” (*Nation 6*) and are de jure equal to all American citizens. But their naturalization remains uncompleted, according to Li. He singles out the media as the driving force behind the perennial public belief of Asian Americans as foreigners.

As the most recently incorporated legal subject of the nation, the Asian American instead inhabits a rearticulated tension between the nation’s commitment to formal equality and the dominant cultural revival of national inheritance. In period II, the Asian American has been turned into an “abject,” into that which is neither radical enough for institutional enjoinment of the kind in period I nor competent enough to enjoy the subject status of citizens in a registered and recognized participation of American democracy. [...] As apparatuses of social and cultural reproduction, mass media and systems of education continue to secure the common sense of Asian Americans as aliens, thus both precluding their sense of national entitlement and inhibiting their American actualization. (*Nation 6*)

It is the public that is rejecting their new fellow citizens, because of fears that stem from period I. The “apparatuses of social and cultural reproduction” in the nineteenth century laid the cornerstone to Orientalist images of Asians that are now being projected to Asian Americans, hindering them to entangle them from archaic stereotypes and reconfigure their image. On the other hand, Asian Americans are perceived as “neither radical enough [...] nor competent enough” to (1) claim a space within American identity or (2) be equal enough to stand on par with mainstream Americans, and are hence disenfranchised into invisibility.

From a common goal to become American citizens, with all its civil liberties, to becoming part of the greater American national identity manifesto – these are the bonds that keep Asian Americans together and thus, make identity a key issue of Asian American studies. With the institutional and civil racism that Asian Americans faced after 9/11, it can be concluded that from a historical and political point of view, they are still in a state of “about-to-be-ness.”

As shown above, naming plays a crucial role in Asian American identity. So far, however, names have come to represent “what a Chinese American is not” (8) as Joan Chiung-huei Chang suggests. Finding one’s identity should be accomplished by naming oneself and not be named, as it is the case with many minority groups. Bella Adams analyzes Meena Alexander’s usage of the word *Negro* in her memoir *Fault Lines* to “highlight the impact of language on racially marked bodies” (2), which instantiates itself as a permanent mark on the identity of the subjugated group. The desire to place oneself in an existing larger identity understanding requires identification with it. Maxine H. Kingston’s adjective ‘asian’ misses to correctly identify the bonds that connect Asian Americans, the bonds of national identity based on their common history in the United States. However, the permanent mark on Asian American identity seems to be that of foreign Orientals, perpetrated by Orientalist stereotypes, locating their identity outside the realms of America.

Mirroring their pioneers, who published autobiographical narratives to provide a more realistic representation of themselves, contemporary Asian American writers deploy deconstructive elements to counter the perennial stereotypes. David H. Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* employs this technique by (1) negating Orientalist stereotypes imposed on Asian Americans and (2) confronting those stereotypes with postmodern approaches to issues on gender and race in an age of transnationalism. Chang regards this as a new starting point for the “search for an appropriate identity [...] In other words deconstruction is the means and reconstruction is the goal” (8).

2.2 Asian American Literature

In the range of American literatures, Asian American literature shares its space within the sub-category of minority and immigrant literature. Although Asian American literary history began at the turn of the twentieth century, it is quite ordinary that Asian American literature is placed at the rear end of American Literature companion books dating them literally after Postmodernism.

Asian American literature emerged as a reaction towards American literature that marginalized Asian Americans. Asian American literature is literature by Americans of Asian ethnic background and often deals with topics relating to identity. It should not be regarded as unrelated to American literature, but as part of it, since it shares its narrative techniques, genres, main motifs with mainstream white American literature, and exists in interdependence to it. Yin calls into account the concept of the Oriental as a perpetual foreigner, which leads to categorize Asian American literature as “virtually foreign writing” that hails from Asian literary traditions. But “stylistically,” Asian American writers “from the very beginning were

influenced by mainstream culture” and “thoroughly Americanized” (4). This segment is a brief outline of Asian American literature spotlighting a few works that question Orientalist stereotypes and lay a claim to be included into the American national identity manifesto. It becomes evident that Orientalism in Asian American literature has been present since its very early stages, as the works of Edith and Winnifred Eaton exemplify.

The history of Asian American literature mirrors Asian American history; key patterns of Asian American literature are timely linked to historical moments in Asian American history. The first historical moment, mentioned above, subsequently produced Asian American literature that began with reflections on Asian American lives in mid-nineteenth century America.

The most well known Asian American authors of that time are the Eaton sisters, Edith and Winnifred, who published under their pseudonyms Sui Sin Far and Onoto Wantanna. Winnifred Eaton, who was more successful in her time than her sister Edith, used her Eurasian appearance to “pass” for Japanese in a time when a “Japonica,” a craze for Japanese objects and subsequently its culture, was popular in America (Honey 2). Although her works echo the then popular Orientalist images and contribute to further manifesting the stereotypes about Asian women in particular, Honey and Cole argue that Winnifred Eaton’s portrayal of Asian women was more realistic than that of her white American male contemporaries. Eaton’s motivation to write in an Orientalist fashion is elemental in successfully publishing her works. Honey and Cole conclude: “Central to any interpretation of Eaton’s work, however, is her position as the first Asian American novelist, facing the demands of a racist, patriarchal publishing industry and pioneering a path from Orientalist caricature to humanized images of Asians” (Honey 6). This aspect of employing Orientalist techniques to reach a wide (and white) audience is picked up by David H. Hwang and is discussed in chapter 4.2.3.1 “Voicing Criticism in Orientalist Codes.”

A realistic representation of themselves became essential to early Asian American writers and their main motif to publish their work. Yan Phou Lee’s *When I Was a Boy in China* is one of the first documented Asian American texts. His autobiography, which was succeeded by many other Asian American autobiographies,⁸ is “intended for an American readership” (Adams 34) and was written in English, clearly designed as a protest against the stereotypes produced and circulated by the media. Therefore, the employment of the genre

⁸ i.e. Yung Wing *My Life in China and America* (1909), Tingfang Wu *America through the Spectacles of an Oriental Diplomat* (1914), and New Il-Han *When I Was a Boy in Korea* (1928)

autobiography should not be interpreted as a means of finding one's identity, as it is the case with later Asian American works, but rather as authentic, first-hand emblemizing for counterevidence. In an article objecting anti-Chinese laws Lee lambasted the quintessence of American democracy: “[The] Nation, which Abraham Lincoln said was conceived in liberty, waxed great through oppression, and was really dedicated to the proposition that all men are created to prey on one another” (qtd. in Adams 36-7). David Li further exemplifies the first generation's criticism on America's democratic principles through the belated textual presence of Asian America in comparison to its historical presence in America.

This gap between a material actuality and its discursive absence betrays the contradiction between the universal and the particular in the formation of an American national culture. [...] The dominant particular is presented as an inclusive universal but translated historically and materially as a practice of excluding other particulars. In this historical imaginary of the American democratic vista, the Asian American is that which exists without a proper name and an appropriate contour. (*State* 603)

Correct, realistic representation and visibility become the leitmotifs of early Asian American literature. The key to these works is unquestionably through the history of Asian Americans. In fact, a negligence of that, Yin notes, results in misinterpretations:

If readers are unable to understand this aspect of Chinese American history, they are likely to dismiss Lee's [Yan Phou Lee] autobiography as simply an ethnocentric and “yellow-supremacy” statement. [...] Many Chinese American writers insist on including passages of history in their work [...] for fear the general audience's unfamiliarity with Chinese American history may cause misunderstanding. (2)

The fear of being misunderstood is still warrantable in Asian American texts of the 1960s. The emergence of the term *Asian American* goes hand in hand with the emergence of a new kind of Asian American literature; the claim for active participation in American national culture “entailed [...] representation” (Li, *State* 604) and thus, a reformation of Asian American literary leitmotifs.

The civil rights movement shook the racial foundations of the American nation-state and the growing number of Asian immigrants caused the ripples of the second Asian

American literary wave. Since then, the number of American-born Asians had increased and outnumbered the first generation, as a result of anti-Asian laws curtailing immigration until WW II. It is important to note that Asian immigrants who came to the United States in the 1960s were faced with an already Americanized Asian community that had no direct ties to their ancestral countries, and subsequently one cannot speak of a homogeneous Asian American community nor of a homogeneous Asian American literature.

The reemergence of the perpetual foreigner image – generated by the new wave of Asian immigrants – in American media led Asian American writers to manifest their generation’s perspective, summarizing the nature and future of Asian American literature. As their literary forefathers, who had striven against the misrepresentation of their community, second-generation writers were determined to rectify their position in American national culture. Although they were still confronted with being left out, writers addressed ‘visibility’ from a different vantage point; particular emphasis was given on a claim to be included into the American national identity manifesto. “Privileging history over culture” (Li, *State* 604) Asian American writers justified their claim on America through their history, which was solely American and not Asian.

The second modification of leitmotifs, which stems from the first, is distinctive in their negation of a split identity (Li, *State* 605). Their quest to be included into mainstream American culture is “expressed in terms of conflict between East-West cultural values, views on interracial marriages, the generation gap, the pursuit of the American dream, the native-born’s imperative to assert Americanness, and the anxiety to demonstrate patriotism as a ‘loyal minority’” (Yin 119). Autobiographical works such as Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950) and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976) are popular examples of afore mentioned themes. Similar to Winnifred Eaton’s usage of existing Orientalist images and stereotypes, Wong and Kingston tell their life stories through Orientalist-colored glasses.

Kingston’s academic antipode Frank Chin accused her and other authors⁹ of corrupting Asian American history by wrongly fusing Chinese fairy tales and autobiography to legitimize their detachment from Asia (*Come All Ye* 2). He evaluates her stories (and those of Jade Snow Wong, David H. Hwang, and Amy Tan) “as a contribution to the stereotype” (*Come All Ye* 3) that subsequently leads to a “popularity among whites” and “holds Asian

⁹ Chin mentions David Hwang’s *FOB* and *M. Butterfly*, and Amy Tan’s *Joy Luck Club*

American literature together” as it only exists in relation to these Orientalist stereotypes (*Come All Ye 2*).

The notion of rectifying Asian American image in the American mind by explaining themselves through Orientalist vocabulary is still present in post-war America. Kingston, who had not consciously intended to write in an Orientalist fashion, addressed her white reviewers who read her as “ineffably Chinese” (Simmons 16) in an article titled *Cultural Mis-Readings by American Reviewers*: “No. No. No. Don’t you hear the American slang? Don’t you see the American settings? Don’t you see the way the Chinese myths have been transmuted to America” (58). The failure of her approach to be seen as American and not Asian, native and not foreign, exemplifies that the concept of Orientalism as Said defined it was present even after Asian Americans legally obtained American citizenship.

Chin’s attempt on claiming a piece of American identity was not less controversial than that of those writers he criticized. His negation of a split identity, or double consciousness as W.E.B. DuBois coined African American identity characteristics, is more radical in so far, as he segregates himself as American-born Asian from Asian immigrants to finally shake off all Orientalist connotations from Asian Americans. His reasons to limit Asian American literature to “American-born and –raised, who got their China and Japan from the radio, off the silver-screen, from television, out of comic books” (*Aiiieeee* vii-viii) exemplifies their negation of the transnational that becomes the center of the third generation’s attention.

The final paradigm shift from representation over identity to an identity mosaic, or echoing W.E.B. DuBois multi consciousness, is perceivable in Asian American literature of the 1990s and millennium years. The fulcrum, as this thesis aims to show, remains to be a response to imposed Orientalism on Asian Americans.

With increasing immigration from Asian countries, increases the diversity of ethnicities that compose the body of Asian Americans. Additionally burdened with the Model Minority stereotype, Asian Americans have to combat the further rooting of Orientalist images of Asian Americans in the American mind. Furthermore, the new paradigm also confirms Koshy’s above-mentioned notion of “about-to-be-ness” and not yet “come to rest.” The changing status of Asian Americans impacts their literature, and simultaneously mirrors America’s changing national identity, that is faced with an ethnically more diverse society. David Li sees the effects of the changing notions of national identity not only in Asian American studies. He proposes an emphasis on the transnational and on psychoanalysis as contemporary paradigms for identity studies by pointing out the new perspectives of Asian American studies that gear towards an alternative to the either/or solution. These perspectives

[...] exemplify an existential anxiety not dissimilar from the critical moment of Asian American inception. [...] [T]his anxiety of representative agency, of institutionalized critics caught between mainstream academy and their putative ethnic constituency, is emblematic of essential structural transformations. [...] With the diminishing influence of democratic states and the rising empire of global corporate power, where do we place the subject whose individual “I” must [...] complete its passage through the collective “we”? (*State* 605-6)

The collective “we” has changed, the definition of *Asian American* has broadened, and so has the outlook of Asian American literature. A noticeable addition is in its ethnic diversity, now literally ranging of “people whose countries of origin may be found within the geographical triangle formed by Japan, Indonesia, and Pakistan.” The works of Asian American writers of the 1990s and 2000s are thematically united. Emphasis on their multi consciousness and an avoidance of assimilation, what Li calls psychological, as well as the possibility of a fracturing of sense, a made-up self that can be juggled, tossed, shifted, and slid (Alexander 202), is what Li calls transnational.

With the broadening concept of Asian American identity come broadening concepts of Asian American literary themes and theoretical approaches. Topics of gender and identity are widened and transgressed to queer studies and multiculturalism, as a result of new theoretical approaches in Asian American studies; although the lynchpin of questioning representations remains, it is unquestionable that “[t]he influence of deconstruction and poststructuralism contributed to a paradigm shift in Asian American literary criticism” (Adams 17), which further enabled a new interpretation of Asian American normativity. Nevertheless, Orientalism and Orientalist themes remain a constant throughout the development of Asian American literature, mainly as an instrument of critique against (1) misrepresentation as voiced by Yan Phou Lee, (2) alienation from Asianness as expressed by Frank Chin, and (3) as deconstructive element revealing outdated political and cultural prejudices of East/West or male/female that still impact our decisions and perceptions.

2.3 Asian American Studies

Asian American studies as an academic field of study emerged in the late 1960s at Californian universities. Gary Okihiro recapitulates, “[f]irst institutionalized in 1969, the field has, during the past decade [the 1990s], grown rapidly. [...] [T]here were twenty-six Asian American studies programs in the United States in 1995 and forty-three programs in 1999” (xv). Asian American studies manifested itself as an interdisciplinary field relating to “the lives

of people in the United States [...] who trace their ancestry to Asia” (Song xiv). The editors of *Asian American Studies: a Reader* point out the difficulties of defining their field of study. Firstly the objects of study, secondly its roots, and thirdly its prospects for the future (viv).

Paralleling the controversy of who constitutes the body of Asian Americans and Asian American writers mentioned above, Wu and Song ask, who the subjects of Asian American studies are. Although they argue, “people of West Asian, Arab, and North African descent should be excluded” (xiv), a regional limitation does not contain conflicting positions on language, religion, sexual orientation and class. By nature, then, Asian American studies encompass myriad fields of study, just as it mirrors its objects’ manifold identity.

The grassroots of Asian American studies are indubitably political. Its institutionalization commenced in 1960s as a result of the San Francisco strike in 1968, during which Asian American students acted as a “collective force,” succeeding in their demand for the establishment of Ethnic studies at American universities. Further political activism followed suit, “empowering previously ignored and disenfranchised sectors of society” (Omatsu 168). Glenn Omatsu judges the 1960s Asian American movement, which coincided with the black liberation movement under Malcolm X, as a resuming of the struggle of earlier Asian American generations and an insurgence against political oppression and power, with the greater aim to liberate themselves (165). He further links his argument to the greater question of the nature of American society quoting Sheila Collins: “The [...] movement [...] challeng[ed] the cultural hegemony of the white ruling elite and caus[ed] everyone else in the society to redefine their relationship to centers of power, creating a radical democratic participation in every aspect of institutional life” (qtd. in Omatsu 167).

The aspects of institutional life that were thus redefined include the nation state and its relation to other nations. The Asian American movement by the same token coincided with the liberation of Third World countries, joining the causes of these regionally apart movements: a mutiny against political and cultural oppression by “the white ruling elite.” The commonalities of the political activists in the United States and the Third World can be discerned in the topics of their academic epitomes Ethnic studies and Post Colonial studies, with race as its biggest common factor.

Race, identity and the relation to the nation state, as Song and Wu put it, are central topics for Asian American scholars.

This emphasis [...] compels them [Asian American scholars] to foreground [...] how Asian Americans in the United States throughout its national history were racialized as foreigners no matter how much they might have assimilated

into mainstream white culture, how they were subsequently subordinated by laws designed to equate citizenship with whiteness, and how their images were insultingly distorted by newspapers and fiction to rationalize such mistreatment. (xvi)

The binary oppositions insider/outsider, or in racial terms white/colored, reverberate in Ruth Hsu's statement on white American identity, echoing Said's conclusion on Orientalism and its value for the West. "Who 'Americans' think they are has always been measured in terms of who they supposedly are not. [...] [T]he dominant culture defines itself by excluding others, but in the same sense that the center can only know itself by saying what it is not, by objectifying the other as those inner, dark impulses that are actually within the center itself" (qtd. in Song xvii).

Asian Americans cannot escape from this binary equation, no matter how much they assimilate themselves educationally, ideologically and class-wise to the dominant culture. This has been instantiated many times at racial riots and violence directed at Asian Americans, most recently in the 1992 LA riots. Institutional racism at universities and glass ceilings in the professional level continue excluding Asian Americans from the dominant American culture, however, they validate Asian American studies' relevance in promoting the recognition of these historical and present facts.

This debate's immediacy to Orientalism is obvious, because throughout its evolution Asian American studies has been incited by a demand to be represented in America, "on how Asians in America have been depicted, demonized, and dehumanized in literature, culture, ideas, politics, history, media" resulting in a "struggle for Place," "Name," and "Face" (Leong ix). The roots are indubitably political activism, however, the branches have spread into alternative directions, allowing for a multifold of interpretation of Asian American studies' main issues on identity and race. It also has relevance to Asian American literature's claim to Americanness and connects the past with the present – Orientalist stereotypes with the question on American national identity.

3. Orientalism

Orientalism is a concept composed of impressions and imitations of the East in art and culture. Orient, etymologically related to ‘to orient’ and ‘orientation’ (we orient ourselves in relation to the sun, and the east is where the sun rises), also refers to Asia in general, however, the connotation is clearly of cultural rather than geographical or political nature. The knowledge of the Orient in the Western world, which is closely linked with impressions and depictions of the Orient, is far from any semblance of reality since it is rooted in “the legions of travelers, writers, artists, and thinkers of the nineteenth century who were intrigued by what they called ‘the Orient’” (Edwards viii). Consequently, the images generated by Western representation of the East became cultural myths and fantasies about the Orient that were created (1) “as models to imitate or to avoid, as memories to praise, venerate, or curse” and (2) “defin[e] and at times even justif[y] the acts and beliefs of a nation or civilization” thus, connecting culture with politics (Grabar 3).

Edward Said analyzed these phenomena in his study *Orientalism* and intermeshed the cultural trope Orientalism with political and ideological notions that the relation between East and West implies. His ideas galvanized into a counter discourse in academia aimed against Orientalism, which are discussed in 3.1.1 and 3.1.2. In 3.1.1 *Orientalism* is appropriated, bestowing a “belated empowerment” on the cultural Other to re-create the images of the East. This is specified in 3.1.2 into the Asian American context, where the legacy of *Orientalism* is theorized; this chapter also serves as theoretical background for analyses in chapter 4.2.2 and 4.2.3.

To set the historical reality against which Asian America was created, 3.2 sketches out the history, function, and consequences of Orientalism in America. Arguments and conclusions from chapter two on the common family lineage of Orientalism and Asian American identity are reflected in the theories of Said and his colleagues. “The Orientalist *net* incarcerating area studies on Asia as well as minorities of Asian ancestry becomes, paradoxically, the *nest* from which the crusade for Asian American selfhood is launched” (Ma xvi).

3.1 Edward Said: *Orientalism*

Orientalism, first published in 1978, enjoys widespread recognition in myriad fields of studies. Conceived many years before its publication, it was mainly written in 1975-76 when

Edward W. Said was a research fellow at Stanford University. Since then his book has been republished four times, most recently in 2003 with an added preface by the author.

The study spans the history of Orientalism, a study of the Orient by Westerners, or in Said's words "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" from early British and French imperialism in the eighteenth century to today (1). Although his focus of study is British and French representations of the Middle East and Arab countries, American Orientalism of the Far East is also discussed. He tags three labels to his study, under which Orientalism can be understood: an academic label that covers Oriental studies and everything Oriental in the cultural sphere, a theoretical label that deals with the imaginative dichotomy East/West or Orient/Occident, and a historio-political label that validates an authority of the West over the East.

The bedrock of Said's hypothesis of Orientalism is Michel Foucault's concept of discourse, which is concerned with the institutional conditions and power-structures that serve to make given statements accepted as authoritative or true. Said employs discourse analysis to entangle and identify Orientalism in history, literature, art and politics, and asserts that every work, thought and action concerning the Orient – be it academic, cultural or political in nature – is shaped by Orientalism. He further explains,

[...] because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought and action. This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when that peculiar entity "the Orient" is in question. (3)

Said's investigation of this process, how Orientalism is omnipresent in one form or another in relation to the Orient, is tripartite into the above-mentioned labels. Connecting these three fields is the effect of Orientalism on the West: an increase of its strength and identity (3).

Orientalism, according to Said, is a constructed idea that exists indirectly in interdependence to the geographical Orient. Both are created entities of the West and both inherit a history peculiar to themselves. To support his argument Said points out the lack of accuracy between Orientalism – as a constructed idea of the Orient – and the real Orient. However, that does not mean that the constructed idea has no corresponding reality, but that reality and fantasy run parallel without an osculation point (5).

Another important aspect of Orientalism is its hierarchical positioning of the West, as the active definer, over the Orient, the represented subject. The passivity of the Orient in relation to the West suggests “a relationship of power” and “domination” (5). Although Orientalism is a constructed theorem, its implications are not; the domination of the West over the East is constantly instantiated, most recently through the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which should not only be seen in regard to politics but also of culture; the power, which a western culture has over an eastern culture, to impose their ethics and values on them. Thus, through domination, wielded by means of hard and soft power, the West gained the right to patronize the East.

This last point constitutes the third aspect of Orientalism as a sign of Western power. The European fantasy of the Orient becomes reality, as it is the dominating truth of the real Orient, and has been made such through constant “material investments” (6) that have contributed to the durability of Orientalism until today. These “material investments” should be understood as influential ideas on the civil society, produced by institutions like schools, family, society and the like. Said draws on Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony” that designates those ideas that are more influential than others. Thus, Said concludes, “[i]t is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that give Orientalism the durability and strength” (7).

The relation constructed through above-mentioned qualities disseminates the dichotomy of us/them or self/other, incorporating identity and nation identity into the discourse of Orientalism. Orientalism may primarily be a theorem applied in humanistic fields of study, especially so in the so-called Area Studies, but one has to bear in mind the political connotations that Orientalism invariably carries. Europe’s fantasy is a political statement that reaches beyond Gramsci’s political societies to civil societies. Said reasons every individual concerned with the Orient is influenced by Orientalism.

[B]ecause Britain, France, and recently the United States are imperial powers, their political societies impart to their civil societies a sense of urgency, a direct political infusion as it were, where and wherever matters pertaining to their imperial interests abroad are concerned. (11)

[F]or a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of *his* actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second. (11)

Problematic to these political facts are their subtleness and distance from “the details of everyday life that govern the minute discipline of a novel [...] as [it] is being written” (12). However, this should not be misunderstood as culture playing the minor role to propagate Orientalism; culture furthered the interest in the Orient from a mere imperialistic interest to a “certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different world,” which makes Orientalism “and does not simply represent - a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world” (12).

3.1.1 Re-appropriation of *Orientalism*

The ripples *Orientalism* has caused in academia have become waves hitting postcolonial and area studies. Many scholars claim Said inaugurated postcolonial studies and introduced a new line of discourse in Literary studies, anthropology, area and ethnic studies.¹⁰ In time, and many translations and editions later, *Orientalism* “has become many different books” (Said, *Afterword* 330) constantly developing as subject of a discourse that does not reach impasse. The interlocutors of this discourse (the discourse of Said’s *Orientalism*) are critical and supportive intellectuals (including Said himself) on the one hand, and the sociopolitical developments since the publication of *Orientalism* on the other hand. Responses to *Orientalism* are embodied in adaptations of Said’s work as founding text to various fields of studies, in critical counter-theories, and in its reception in regards to its use-value.

One aspect of *Orientalism*’s reception, which I just briefly want to touch upon, is that of its alleged anti-Westernism, raised through its claim of representing – and subsequently essentializing – the whole West, branding Europe and America as adversaries of the Middle and Far East respectively (Said, *Afterword* 331). In turn, *Orientalism* has also been misread as “advancing an Islamic agenda” (Viswanathan xiii). Said interprets his critics’ argumentation generated and fuelled by a number of political, ideologically charged, incidents since the publication of *Orientalism* that led to further divergence of West and East. “All this,” Said concluded, “inflamed the sense of persecution felt by people forced [...] to be either Westerners or Easterners. No one seemed to be free from the opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ resulting in a sense of reinforced, deepened, hardened identity [...]” (*Afterword* 335).

¹⁰ Some scholars include: Moustafa Bayoumi, “Our Work Is of This World;” Lisa Lowe, “On Edward Said;” E. San Juan Jr, “Edward Said’s Use-Value for Asian American Cultural Projects.”

He further refutes his Western critics' Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington allegations of Orientalism being meaningless. Said embeds their criticism into the "present political moment, [...] of racist anti-Arab and anti-Muslim stereotypes" ranking their work as "part of the present political, rather than [...] intellectual, environment" (*Afterword* 343).

In spite of the distorted criticism, Said acknowledges a role bestowed on him resulting from the thought of *Orientalism* "as a kind of testimonial to subaltern status," and "of self-representing consciousness" (*Afterword* 336). This is an important point and paradoxically, although presupposed by both parties, differentiates Arab responses on *Orientalism*, which regard it as a political statement arguing either for or against the West, to that of others. Other responses have profited from *Orientalism* in a liberating experience, as Said intended and Xiaomei Chen confirms:

I intended my book as part of a pre-existing current of thought whose purpose was to liberate intellectuals from the shackles of systems such as Orientalism: I wanted readers to make use of my work so that they might then produce new studies of their own that would illuminate the historical experience of Arabs and others in a generous, enabling mode. (*Afterword* 340)

As a result of the cultural and sociological specificities of contemporary Chinese society, such Occidentalism [the discursive significance of the "West" in post-Mao China and the appropriation of Western discourse] can be understood as a powerful anti-official discourse using the Western Other as a metaphor for a political liberation against ideological oppression within a totalitarian society. (Chen 5)

The adaptation of Said's theory can be a mixed blessing to the new discourse that it invigorates, challenging local discourse by couching their counter-arguments into foreign theories. However, this has been common practice throughout history as for example European renaissance of Greek philosophy exemplifies.

"From one perspective, the work represents within the English-language world the increasingly prominent voice of Third World scholars" (Dai x). Jinhua Dai confines the impact of *Orientalism* to a "voice of Third World scholars" of a marginalized academic field, which work within the limits and traditions of Western academia and simultaneously through the prisms of Orientalism. In this context, Xiaomei Chen carries Dai's argument a step further, arguing that non-Western scholars tend to a self-Orientalization by bedding their

discourse into Western theories, what Jinqi Ling has eloquently phrased “the animalization of the native and Western co-optation [...]” (*Before and After* 45). Drawing on Western thought, Chinese revolutionaries and elites alike, Chen argues, have claimed a Chinese uniqueness to their anti-traditionalist discourse – be it during the May Fourth movement, the Tiananmen massacre, or even Chinese socialist literature (2). However, she asserts this self-Orientalization is a modified form, and has in turn created a field of counter-discourse, which stands, for the same reason, under the influence of stereotypes about the West as a counter image of the East. She explains:

As a result of constantly revising and manipulating imposed Western theories and practices, the Chinese Orient has produced a new discourse, marked by a particular combination of the Western construction of China with the Chinese construction of the West, with both of these components interacting and interpenetrating each other. (2)

This notion of juxtaposing both sides is picked up by Margaret Cho, whose works will be discussed in chapter five. By acting out stereotypes about Asian Americans and Americans Cho illustrates the mutuality of constructing Otherness and Stereotyping as a means of defining what one is not – and ultimately who one is.

As anticipated by Said in his essay “Traveling Theories Reconsidered,” *Orientalism* as a traveling theory has been subjected to reinterpretation. Said believes theories “develop in response to historical and social reasons” (Bayoumi, *Epigraph* 195), and thus, when removed from their original point of reference, alter and adapt to new circumstances. And “it is only when,” Gauri Viswanathan argues, “local knowledge can be brought to bear on texts, which are restored to their situations and locales” (xii), that generalization and stereotyping can be contested. And this, in turn, can be controversial to the original theory, as it has been showcased in responses on *Orientalism*.¹¹ But this also calls into question whether to oppose and contest stereotypes, Asian American writers would have to evoke them first. In that case, in order to deconstruct stereotypical representations of Asians in America, Asian Americans are left with no option but to re-appropriate those stereotypes.

¹¹ In the 1990’s many Arabs regarded Said as a defender of Islam. see Edward Said, “I’ve Always Learned During Class,” *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001) 281.

Chen's argumentation of Orientalist discourse remaining within the realms of Western academia – maybe not locally, but intellectually – is valid in so far that the represented Other, the non-Western scholar, cannot restore his agency and merely reinterprets Western theories. Said's refutation of this interpretation lies in his emphasis on what Orientalism has enabled and produced. Viswanathan juxtaposes two solutions; on one hand she mentions the productive characteristic of Orientalism that has brought forth and contributed to many academic fields of study,¹² on the other hand Orientalism has empowered the subjugated subject “with a critical repertoire that is ultimately used, ironically, to contest Orientalism's power and reach” (Viswanathan xv). Thus, David H. Hwang's approach to free the Other from Orientalist representation through deconstruction is a result of Orientalism's belated empowerment of the subject. In Viswanathan's words: “This conviction [empowerment of the subject] [...] provides the dialectical energy for considering negative representations of ‘Orientals,’ not in order to wallow in a rhetoric of victimization but to deflect such representations back to their perpetrators [...]” (xv-xvi). It is only through this step that even today artists like Beau Sia and Margaret Cho can (1) criticize contemporary representation of Asian Americans in America and (2) pave the way for future representations that are free from, what I would like to call here, subconscious Orientalism. Subconscious in so far, that it is indirectly influenced by anachronistic (and fabricated) images about Asians produced in the wake of imperialism. The realization of the fact that Orientalism has involuntarily fathered Asian American identity is pivotal in this context. As Sheng-mei Ma proposes: “Orientalism, to some extent, sires ethnicity, the former being the illegitimate patriarch disowned by the offspring. The vigor with which [...] Asian Americans revolt against Orientalism tacitly acknowledges the family lineage of the two” (xv).

Additionally Said concludes that Orientalism, as cultural hegemony, should not be understood as a confining or restraining concept, but as productive force acting on its contemporaries – albeit writers from the subjugating side – who in turn produced works that “tell us more about nineteenth-century cultural richness than many volumes of hermetic textual analysis” (*Orientalism* 14).

¹² As Lisa Lowe notes, “Said's *Orientalism* inaugurated criticism of Eurocentrism that transformed the humanities and social sciences throughout the 1980s, particularly the fields of history, anthropology, and literature, but also sociology, religion, philosophy, art and theatre [...]” (Lowe 48).

As texts exist within a context, one cannot deny the interplay between the hegemonic ideas, the sociopolitical circumstances of the time, and the writers who produce the texts. Said calls this notion of interplay between scholarly texts and sociopolitical context ‘worldliness,’ which assigns the intellectual to question and challenge these realities existing within the context (Bayoumi, *Our Work* 7). The analysis of Orientalist texts in an Orientalist fashion remains in its exteriority, through the prisms of the socio-historical reality, “that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak [...]. The principle product of this exteriority is of course representation [...].” (Said, *Orientalism* 20-21).

3.1.2 *Orientalism* and Asian American Studies

Having identified in chapter 2.3 race, identity, and representation as those issues that academic discourse in Asian American studies evolves around, it seems clear that Said’s arguments on Orientalism provide “a new critical space and path to self-cognizance and reflexivity” (Dai x). Drawing a parallel to their studied subjects, Asian American studies scholars respond to a misrepresentation, or rather misreading, of Asian American representations. On “their new path” Asian American studies’ scholars enter into new realms of reading and interpreting issues concerning Asian Americans reverberating David Li’s proposal of an emphasis on the transnational and on psychoanalysis in contemporary Asian American literary studies.

The myriad fields of studies that *Orientalism* has invigorated since its publication have shown an effect on Asian American studies, its impact ranging from introducing new perspectives like gender, transgender and queer studies, to challenging existing theories on the relationship between history, nation-state and identity. Works on the influence of Orientalism in the greater Asian American context prove *Orientalism*’s legacy on Asian American studies. As Russell Leong points out, this is no coincidence, since Asian American scholars and Said share a common point of origin and presumption of political activism being intertwined with academic studies. Out of these shared “ideological and political strategies that work to dismantle the legacy of Orientalism” (ix-x) stem critical approaches on *Orientalism*’s (accidental) legacy on Asian American studies; accidental in regards to its unfathomed dimensions of significance to a number of academic fields of study.

Under these presumptions Sondra Hale has referred to Said as an “accidental feminist,” taking Middle East Women Studies “in a different direction from its origins and forever changing the field” (2) and that despite the fact that Said’s research did not dwell on women or representations of women. But yet, one major equation of Orientalist representations is closely linked to women; women are used as metaphor of the East, who

stand in subordination to men, the West. The feminization of the East, the relationship of Western men to Eastern women, “stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West” (Said, *Orientalism* 6). On the other side of the coin is the oversexed, primitive Oriental male, who in time loses his sexual powers in the U.S. and is, lastly emasculated to an Oriental ‘it.’ As Rahul Gairola points out: “Gender difference is what renders women less represented in Said’s work while it is the very point of differentiation that has historically allowed Western culture to brand orientalized men as, among other things, overly sexualized savages to be tamed or effete wimps warranting colonialism’s masculinist interventions” (28).

Gairola reads another issue into *Orientalism*, expanding the margins set by Hale to queer studies. What he phrases “[g]ender anxieties in the form of threats to masculinity” (28) is what lies behind *Orientalism* read “by Braille” (Hale 2) as queer and gender theories are read into it. From this vantage point then, the emasculation of Asian American men, a rising notion since the embodiment of model minority Charlie Chan, can be viewed as a gender anxiety resulting from gender expectations that are “written on the body,” measured against the normative, white male body. *Orientalism* has thus, “accidentally,” invigorated gender, transgender, and queer theories in Asian American studies “that must be teased out further, especially in the vein of American Orientalism and their global monopoly on cultural forms” (Gairola 29). In *M. Butterfly* David H. Hwang touches on these issues, especially on gendered races, setting *Orientalism* in relation to Asian American identity.

The lingering result of sexualized representations of Oriental women and men is a common belief on perverted gender relations in the East, marking the Oriental women as suppressed and inferior to men. Sondra Hale reasons a controlling function to these representations: the Western control over the East, symbolized through negative representation of women, acted as a means to control Western women (4). On similar lines Jinqi Ling bases his argument of how cultural racism “operates as an instrument of social categorization and control” (*Before and After* 44), importing Orientalist ideology to issues on national identity disputed by Americans of all races in the 1960s. *Orientalism* has connected the pre-*Orientalism* notion of racial stereotypes legitimizing domination of the white race to America’s political venture of controlling its citizens. However, this subliminal modus operandi of Orientalism acting through cultural hegemony embodied in mass media, education, and academia (Ling, *Before and After* 43) serves as a point of departure for Asian American writers to bed their oppositional resistance.

Said’s distinction of latent and manifest Orientalism explains the change of Asian American stereotypes such as from Fu Manchu to Charlie Chan. Latent Orientalism, which

Said calls the most basic notion of the Orient, is a constant factor in Orientalist theory. These basic notions, which Said showcases as “[the Orient’s] sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness” (*Orientalism* 205), are bedded in nineteenth century Orientalism and have been used as foundation for further elaboration, embodied in “views about Oriental society, language, literature, history, sociology, and so forth” (*Orientalism* 206). The reason for the replacement of Fu Manchu by Charlie Chan should then not be viewed as an inclusive repositioning of Asian Americans *into* the American identity manifesto, but as a simple change in perception of Asian Americans readjusted to post-imperialist U.S. relationships with Asia. Similarly the Model Minority stereotype is yet another change in perception of Asian Americans in coherence with postwar U.S. – Asian policy. The change of perception, “in knowledge of the Orient” (*Orientalism* 206), is what Said calls manifest Orientalism; the basic notion of the Orient about its mentality and status to the West remains more or less constant. Ling evaluates “the mutability of stereotyping as but a symptom of the West’s fundamental interest in keeping the Orient [of which Asian Americans are regarded as representatives] reduced to ‘an unregenerative essence’ through cultural representation” (*Before and After* 43), marking Asian American’s resistance as an endeavor to transform the “realities” that sustain latent Orientalism.

Proposing a way out of the embrace of Orientalism, Lisa Lowe reinterprets Said’s worldliness aiming towards transnationality. Lowe argues economic Globalization has led to a shift of dichotomies that defined Orientalism. Through a “proletarianization of nonwhite women” (50) – nonwhite female American workers in the 1980s – a new political group emerged that institutionalized non-nationality and non-race based bonds between Americans (51). Yet another change has unfolded: the notion of transnationality within the American society. Lowe concludes: “In this new era, women, new immigrants, political prisoners, refugees, and other non-state subjects who do not possess citizenship are among the important social actors who are transforming how we conceive of social justice and social change” (51). By extending the definition of Said’s worldliness to the scale of his political thinking, Lowe proposes that Said’s legacy to every academic field concerned with notions of national identity is to challenge itself and transgress towards a pan-national pursuit of justice and equality (51).

From controlling “their women” by defaming the “other women” (Hale 4), dominating the foreign “other,” to managing “oriental otherness” (Lowe 49). The range of American Orientalism is wide, covering issues such as race and gender, national and American identity, power and ultimately violence. Sondra Hale observes, “Orientalism is about

representation, about the “Other,” but most especially it is about the ways in which the Other is transfixed by the gaze, is reduced, exaggerated, exoticized, eroticized, romanticized, truncated, and always decontextualized. [...] [A]ny form of representation is violence” (3). Orientalism not only violated the Other’s space but also their identity. On the one side, their history, an essential category of national identity, is “spirited away” through essentializing, effacing the past “as in the common, dismissively contemptuous American phrase, ‘you’re history’” (Said, *Orientalism* xvi). On the other side, the Other is denied any kind of cooperation in representing themselves. The effect of being represented is violent in so far that it forcefully silences the Other and therefore becomes another mode of domination.

3.2 Orientalism in America

Orientalism in America, more precisely Orientalist ideas that circulated among Americans, has gone through a historical development in par with the formation of Asian American identity. Its imbrications with Asian American history and identity reveal their interdependence. This chapter aims to explore the following questions by focusing on the American perspective: How did Americans perceive Asians, and how are their perceptions interrelated to contemporary stereotypes of Asian Americans?

3.2.1 Genealogy

American perception of Asians shares a single genealogy with European perception of Asians dating back to their first ventures to Asia. Although a general notion of Asians existed, based on depictions by Greek scholars dating back to the fourth century B.C.E. (Okiihiro 4), European and subsequently American impressions about Asians primarily go back to early imperialism. Travel writings, logbooks and diaries of European and later American expeditionary like Marco Polo, Captain James Cook and naval officer Matthew C. Perry were among the first significant impressions about Asians that were carried across the Atlantic to the New World. With the *Empress of China*, the first American ship to reach Guangzhou, American trade with China commenced in 1784, returning with tea, chinaware, and silk (Smith 266-7). It can be concluded, that it were objects and stories of Asia that promoted impressions of Asians amongst Americans. Nevertheless, simultaneously to the objects and stories Asians also reached the shores of America, however it is not likely that the general public got their impressions from these indentured slaves. Okiihiro evaluates their non-visibility in the initial decades of the American nation as a result of them blending into other existing racial minority communities (8).

Orientalist impressions in form of prejudices existed before the first major wave of Asians arrived in America. Hostility against Asian immigrants existed in several forms, for example, racial prejudice that deemed Asians inferior. Chan explains: “Negative perceptions of nonwhite peoples have a long history in the Western world. Color prejudice had become such a habit of heart and mind among Euro-Americans by the time Asians started coming that the former had no difficulty justifying hostile actions against the latter [...]” (47). Michael Omi and Howard Winant elaborate on racism as a “habit of heart and mind”: until WW II race was considered “as an essence, a natural phenomenon, whose meaning was fixed – constant as a southern star” (199). Combining racist prejudice of Asians as an inferior race that existed as social fact in the Euro-American hemisphere with the prevailing Orientalist impressions of the American public when the first Asians arrived, one can conclude that those mediums through which these images spread in the American public were produced through the prism of Orientalism as Said had discerned it. Chan assesses that the general knowledge on China in nineteenth century America was formed by three groups of Americans that had traveled to China: diplomats, missionaries and merchants. All three groups, Chan argues, went through some form of negative experience that led to “ambivalent views of the Chinese” (48).

However, Chan does note that Americans were aware of China’s former wealth and “acknowledged that China had once had a magnificent civilization [...]” (48), a view which was mainly spread through early travel writings such as that of Marco Polo, when Europe was still in the middle ages. It is interesting that the notion of exoticization and sexualization of Oriental women date back to those times.¹³ Okihiro quotes John Masefield, who wrote the

¹³ To the erotic connotation the Orient carries and its domestication in the West, Said asserts: “In all of his novels Flaubert associates the Orient with the escapism of sexual fantasy. Emma Bovary and Frédéric Moreau pine for what in their [...] bourgeois lives they do not have, and what [...] comes easily in their daydreams packed inside Oriental clichés: harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys [...] The repertoire is familiar [...] once again, the association is clearly made between the Orient and the freedom of licentious sex. We may as well recognize that for nineteenth-century Europe, with its increasing *embourgeoisement*, sex had been institutionalized to a very considerable degree. On the one hand, there was no such thing as “free” sex, and on the other hand, sex in society entailed a web of legal, moral, even political and economic obligations [...] Just as the various colonial possessions [...] were useful as places to send wayward sons, superfluous populations of delinquents, poor people, and other undesirables, so the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe [...] What they looked for often – correctly I think – was a different type of sexuality, perhaps more libertine and less guilt-ridden; but even that quest, if repeated by enough people could (and did) become as regulated and uniform as learning itself. In time “Oriental sex” was as standard a commodity as any other available in the mass culture, with the result that readers and writers could have it if they wished without necessarily going to the

introduction to the 1908 edition of *The Travels of Marco Polo the Venetian*: “[H]is picture of the East is the picture which we all make in our minds when we repeat to ourselves those two strange words, ‘the East,’ and give ourselves up to the image which that symbol evokes” (qtd. in Okihiro 5). Marco Polo’s picture, so Okihiro, included “generous accounts of prostitutes, sex, and angelic and delicate women [...]” (5). The images Masefield so readily wanted to “give himself up to” reverberate a predated version of *Madame Butterfly*. Okihiro goes on to list other ‘admirers’ of the East that contributed ‘fleshing out’ “those two strange words,” such as Vasco da Gama, Ferdinand Magellan and Christopher Columbus (6). Despite Asia’s seemingly harmless image, *Madame Butterfly* soon turned into a ‘yellow peril’ that was threatening Euro-Americans out of their jobs.

In the mid-nineteenth century, with the opening of Japan and the defeat of China in the Opium wars, America’s history with Asia grew closer. While Christian missionaries brought Asians to America to educate them as missionaries, American trade market attracted many laborers, who were recruited for work on Hawaiian sugar plantations, Californian gold mines and later for the construction of the transcontinental railroad. The increasing number of Asian immigrants, mainly Chinese laborers in California, marked the beginning of America’s many anti-Asian laws that continue to be passed until today.¹⁴ The editors of *Inventing America: a History of the United States* single out race as the decisive factor in California’s anti-immigration laws. Chinese laborers were one among many people that were lured by the gold rush. Miners from all over Europe, Mexico and northern parts of South America arrived at the momentum of California’s gold rush. However, despite the ethnic and racial diversity, it was Native Americans, Mexicans and Chinese that suffered most from illegal and legal measures.¹⁵ Due to a federal law that prohibited non-whites to become American citizens, the new tax law differentiated Chinese and other non-Whites as foreigners. The editors simply concluded: “In mid-nineteenth-century America, religion, skin color, and cultural tradition mattered, in every section of the country” (Mayer 457). Economic discrimination results from

Orient.” (*Orientalism* 190)

¹⁴ i.e. “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act” and “Illegal Immigration Responsibility Act” passed in 1996 adversely affect Asian immigration (Adams xxv).

¹⁵ In 1850 the Californian government issued a tax of twenty dollars per month for foreign miners, which was lowered in 1852 to three dollars per month, excluding those that intended to become American citizens.

prejudice against Asians as an inferior race, which again is an Orientalist concept of Western superiority.

What the editors of *Inventing America* failed to perceive were the actual reasons for anti-Asian sentiments among the American public. In order to understand the intersections of Asian impression imported through travel literature and the like and those impressions of Asian immigrants in America, it is important to note that Asian immigrants were concentrated mainly in California, where anti-Asian sentiments were ignited. Political disenfranchisement, physical violence, immigration exclusion, social segregation and incarceration were results of and justified themselves through Orientalist images and racism. The forces acting against the non-white immigrants were civilians, often other (white) immigrants, that deemed Asian Americans as an economic threat first, arguing that on a social and cultural level. Violence against Asian Americans was carried out in form of murder of individuals, destruction of Chinatowns, and expulsions of Asian Americans from towns and cities (50). Chan beds the reasons for race related hate crimes into major American economic issues, under which Americans suffered.

Several factors help to account for the violence Asian immigrants experienced. Quite apart from the racism and nativism that fueled such attacks, the outbreaks were efforts by Euro-American workers to find scapegoats for their problems. It is no coincidence that the incidents tended to occur during years of economic crisis. The string of arson in California in 1877 [anti-Chinese violence in Chico by a white supremacist organization] took place at a time when the effects of the depression of 1873 finally reached California. Likewise, the almost ubiquitous outbreaks between late 1885 and the end of 1886 [demand of and later forceful expulsion of Chinese from Seattle and Tacoma] can be seen as the Western manifestations of the industrial upheavals that racked the nation in 1886. The 1893 outbursts in southern California also took place during a national economic downturn, and of course the 1930 Watsonville riot occurred during the depths of the Great Depression. (55)

Although political disenfranchisement and immigration exclusion was executed by the government, the federal government also acted as protector in several cases of violence and exclusion. Many hostile actions against Asian Americans were made possible because they

lacked political power (49), however federal troops protected Chinese against violent mobs.¹⁶ The civilians that repeatedly demanded and thus generated a common will for Asian American exclusion laws embody on the other hand the social and cultural impetus behind the violence. Although many civilians also protected persecuted Chinese (mainly employers of Chinese laborers), a general notion of racial superiority prevailed. Chan reasons:

More law-abiding citizens sometimes criticized the violent means used, but they ultimately sympathized with and condoned the actions because they supported the ends espoused by the most vociferous elements. Elaborate “scientific” explanations of nonwhite “inferiority” and the belief that minorities should be kept in their place were widely accepted in the late nineteenth century and provided an ideological justification for treating not only Asians, but other people of color, in a discriminatory and exploitative manner. (56)

Robert G. Lee highlights the characteristics of Californian Euro-Americans: “In the 1850s, California was constructed in the popular mind as a Jacksonian community of independent small producers, miners, and pioneers. These men imagined California as a place where a lost American organic community could be reconstructed and their own identities remade” (15). An identity, which Omi and Winant claim to be defined by race, saying, “[o]ur society is so thoroughly racialized that to be without racial identity is to be in danger of having no identity. To be raceless is akin to being genderless” (202).

Corresponding to the civilians’ cause to exclude Asian Americans, which was reasoned through racial superiority, the reason of governmental support reflects their imperial interests in Asia; America pursued an economic imperialism in China and Japan. In this context one should keep in mind Said’s argument of imperialism as the historio-political frame in which a “free-floating mythology of the Orient that derives not only from contemporary attitudes and popular prejudices but also from what Vico called the conceit of nations and scholars” (*Orientalism* 53) existed. In the American context the “conceit of nations” results from the

¹⁶ During attempts to drive out Chinese from Seattle and Tacoma in 1885/6, Chinese suffered monetary losses, which were indemnified on instructions by President Grover Cleveland. Similarly, the forceful deportation of Chinese led by a local mob in Seattle, was impeded by a local judge who “issued a writ [...] requiring each Chinese to be informed of his and her rights and to tell him whether he or she indeed wished to leave” (Chan 53).

“public-policy aspects of Orientalism” (*Orientalism* 296), which in its essence is acquiring knowledge on the Orient as means of securing one’s national identity and one’s political power positioning in the Orient (*Orientalism* 295).

3.2.1 Modus Operandi

Media has always played a crucial role as the nation’s house organ and it is only logical that various forms of print publications picked out negative effects of Asians in America, in a time of prevailing economic turmoil, as their central theme. The role of the media is crucial in so far as it carried a regional conflict between laborers to a national level, expanding it to a racial question that automatically leads to a false linkage with U.S. global politics in Asia galvanizing in a (con)fusion of Orientalist perceptions of Asia with perceptions of Asian Americans. John Kuo Wei Tchen’s analysis of the “Chinese Question” reconstructs the media’s role in the nationalization of Asian American presence, and subsequently America’s perception of Asian Americans as a threat to national identity. Tchen concludes that anti-Chinese sentiments in late-nineteenth century America were caused by a conflict of organized labor replacing union labor as a development of American free trade (170), illustrating his point through the case of John Swinton, a New York journalist, who coined the anti-Chinese sentiments the “Chinese Question.”

At a major rally in lower Manhattan’s Tompkins Square Park, laborers from the foremost trades in New York City gathered to protest the recruitment of Chinese workers to displace Irish workers in Massachusetts and New Jersey. With the flourish of rhetoric embracing white workingmen, Swinton targeted the Chinese as a national threat. “Mongolian blood is a depraved and debased blood,” he declaimed. Chinese New Yorkers were becoming caught up in a debate between labor and capital – about whether Chinese workers constituted “free” or “slave” labor. (167)

Economic threat of capitalism that justifies cheap labor – the biggest nightmare of all trade unions - is being turned into a national threat, which is argued through the race line. The intertwining of commercial culture and politics reverberates what Said has detected as a precondition of Orientalism. The print publications that acted as house organs promoting the working class, made the “Chinese Question” to a political agenda, and subsequently became the “conceit of nations.” Tchen argues that the rise of U.S. nationalism is closely linked to “[t]his new forum for political discourse,” produced by local “representations of Chinese in

the print media,” which were “received and reinterpreted by this newly empowered republic of readers and voters” (168). It can be concluded that the ‘yellow peril’ image, falsely imposed, was produced through a political discourse about the labor question, branding Asian immigrants as non-conformable to America and American national identity, obscuring the fact that Chinese were employed by American industrialists to curb the growing demands of union traders. The ‘foreign’ aspect of Asian immigrants is labeled by negativity, defining them as not only a racial, but also an ideological, moral, and civilizational antipode to Americans. By the same token, American nationalism is being reinforced through a differentiation of the Other, only this time also within the geographical national borders.

3.2.3 Shift of Stereotypes

The prevailing contradiction of shifting stereotypes remains unsolved; did the presence of Asians in America or the continuing presence of the United States in Asia generate the shift from *Madame Butterfly* to ‘yellow peril’? Although the ‘yellow peril’ image seems to be a sole creation of American Orientalism in America, U.S. politics in Asia continued on its imperialistic road. The growing presence of foreigners in China for example generated many anti-Western sentiments and movements, such as the Tianjin Massacre in 1870 and the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. The defeat of China and the growing impact of America’s monopoly in the Asian trade market bore their fruits in the strengthening of America’s national identity and its political power. The news of anti-Western movements confirmed the growing image of Asians as America’s perpetual enemy, and consequently national threat. Tchen evaluates the shift from *Madame Butterfly* to ‘yellow peril’ in the Orientalist context as follows:

It would be easy (and tempting) to make the claim that the transplanted British and other European forms of stereotyping changed from a “positive” image during the colonial and new-nation period, in which the passionate desire for “oriental” luxuries abounded, to a “negative” image marked by Chinese exclusion. Though roughly accurate, this characterization hides a more complicated set of dynamics. The representations of Chinese things, ideas, and people shifted dramatically from 1776 to 1882, in a manner that coincided with shifts in the political, economic, and social institutions of the United States. Moreover, both representations – the positive and the negative – played a role in the formation of a modern “white” identity. (xv)

The reasons behind the shift in Asian American stereotypes are located in the United States, embedded in changes of political, economic, and social nature. U.S. politics in China contributed in so far as they served as justification of the negative image of Chinese created in America. Anti-American sentiments in China and China's growing decline proved America's perception of the Asian threat as correct.

This pattern of fusing Orientalist imagery of Asian Americans and Asians repeats itself in the late twentieth century. The Butterfly replacing stereotype 'yellow peril' is again played down to the Model Minority stereotype embodied most prominently by the fictitious figure Charlie Chan, a seemingly Americanized Madame Butterfly. The Model Minority stereotype can be interpreted as a response to the successful adaptation of American individualism by Asian Americans, which Tchen summarizes as the differentiating factor between American and European culture (xix). Despite its appraisal of Asian Americans, which is suggestive of accepting Asian American as Americans, Adams adds, "the model minority is a stereotype that helps to maintain the dominant racial hierarchy by misrepresenting the success of some Asian Americans as representative of the racial group, which in turn obscures continuing economic and political inequalities" (198).

With the growing economic power in post-Cold War Asia, grows the fear of America's declining economic world power. Successful Asian Americans, once praised for their assimilation, are perceived as threat to American security, labeled as Asian Millionaire Businessmen, who exploit Americans. Robert Lee illustrates the reemergence of Asian Americans as economic threat in the American social context, drawing on a 1997 cover of *National Review* that featured Bill and Hilary Clinton, and Al Gore as buck-toothed coolie, Maoist, and Buddhist monk. The editors of *National Review* alluded to alleged donations by Asian American businessmen to the Clinton administration for lobbying purposes. "These allegations," Lee concludes, "virtually ignored the much larger illegal campaign contributions of non-Asians," and by not covering the whole facts of "the impact of multinational corporations on American politics" the media helped circulate the image of Asians "pollut[ing] the American political process" (1-2).

As seen with the nineteenth century example of a supposedly 'positive' stereotype turning into a 'negative' one, the shift from Model Minority to polluting businessmen reverberates the Orientalist discourse "in which specific images are measured" and utilized "in terms of their usefulness" to political crisis management (Lee 12). The circle of (mis)perceptions closes here; before the economic crisis in the nineteenth century Asian merchants were "viewed as procapitalist, Protestant-like," "pleasing to the dominant culture,"

and by the same token singled out as American antipodes, who stood in contrast to “the occidental ideal of a rational, self-regulating, free society of individuals as envisioned by John Locke” (Tchen xxi). The interchangeability of Orientalist stereotypes reifies the intermeshing of national identity formation and constructed foreignness that is needed to justify imperialist politics and ultimately domination over the Other.

4. Madame Butterfly

[T]he Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate.

—Edward Said, *Orientalism*

Orientalist stereotypes in Asian American literature illustrate the prevalence of racial and cultural prejudice in the United States. Madame Butterfly is the oldest of Asian American stereotypes in Anglo-American literature; other stereotypes include Fu Manchu, Dragon Lady, Charlie Chan and, more recent versions, the Asian science geek, and the immoral Millionaire Businessman.¹⁷ Depictions of Asian Americans as either good or evil establish an emphasis on the claimed “irreconcilable differences between the Chinese and the Anglo” marking Asian Americans as inassimilable perpetual foreigners (Kim 4-5). Nevertheless, Asian Americans have successfully opposed and rejected these stereotypes. Today many of them are marginalized as political incorrect; Charlie Chan, in fact, has literally been claimed dead.¹⁸ All the more striking is the resilience of Madame Butterfly to Asian American subversion; although it is the ‘oldest’ stereotype, it has proven to be the most popular one and continues to appear ‘on stage,’ as Said suggests.

Madame Butterfly’s “role is to represent the larger whole”: a representation of Asian politeness at best and a sexist caricature of East/West power relations at worst. The perception of Madame Butterfly as contemporary stereotype of Asian women is reflected in conversational language. Hwang recounts: “I knew Butterfly only as a cultural stereotype; speaking of an Asian woman, we would sometimes say, ‘She’s pulling a Butterfly,’ which meant playing the submissive Oriental number” (*Afterword* 95).

This chapter aims to explore the genealogy of Madame Butterfly in Orientalist literature and its imbrications (and implications) to reality. In a second step I analyze D.H. Hwang’s *M. Butterfly*, a renewal of the Butterfly stereotype from a deconstructionist angle,

¹⁷ Adams groups Asian American stereotypes into two categories, yellow peril and Model Minority; Fu Manchu, Dragon Lady, and the Millionaire Businessman form yellow peril figures and Charlie Chan, Lotus Blossom/Madame Butterfly, and the Science Nerd/Asian geek are portraits of the Model Minority. (198/200)

¹⁸ Jessica Hagedorn, ed. Charlie Chan is Dead: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction (New York: Penguin Books, 1993)

highlighting its absurdity and yet its actuality. *M. Butterfly* blurs the concept of gender and power relations as it blurs the concept of Said's *Orientalism*; *M. Butterfly* extends Said's argument to both sides as it reprimands the subjugators and the subjugated by the same token, appealing to overcome all prejudice and misunderstandings to finally embrace Asian Americans into the national identity manifesto.

4.1 Madame Butterfly in Literature

The myth of Madame Butterfly goes back to the nineteenth century when the first Butterfly narratives appeared. Two novellas in particular, Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysantheme* and John Luther Long's *Madame Butterfly*, dominated the Western reception of Madame Butterfly. Published in 1887 and 1898 respectively, these stories laid the foundation of the modern myth that came to represent the 'doomed love' relationship of East and West. David Belasco adapted Long's version in his homonymous play first staged in 1900. In the same year, Giacomo Puccini attended Belasco's one-act play in London and "was immediately enchanted," writes Ping-Hui Liao. Elaborating on Puccini's response to *Madame Butterfly*, he remarks:

Though he [Puccini] understood no English [...] he rushed to the dramatist, embraced him, and begged him for permission to make an opera of his play. "I agreed at once," remembered Belasco later, "and told him he could do anything he liked with the play and make any sort of contract because it is not possible to discuss business arrangements with an impulsive Italian, who has tears in his eyes and both his arms around your neck."¹⁹ (37-8)

After many amendments and a flopped first version performed in 1904 in Milan, *Madama Butterfly* premiered again, three months later, and was an immediate success, proliferating the popularity of the Butterfly myth. Many cinematic adaptations followed suit, including Sidney Olcott's *Madame Butterfly* in 1915, Chester Franklin's *The Toll of the Sea* starring Anna May Wong in 1922, and Joshua Logan's *Sayonara* with Marlon Brando in 1957. Years later, it was Hwang who dared another adaptation with *M. Butterfly* in 1988, and almost simultaneously the Broadway musical hit *Miss Saigon* premiered in 1989. A more recent adaptation marks

¹⁹ Original quoted from: Masco Carner, *Madam Butterfly: A Guide to the Opera* (London: Barrie, 1979) 12.

Puccini's monopoly position as intertextual source for adaptations; in 2004 Masahiko Shimada and Shijeaki Saegusa staged the opera *Jr. Butterfly*, a sequel to *Madama Butterfly* telling the story of Pinkerton and his half-Japanese son, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*.

Although Hwang's adaptation at first seems the only one that was written to dwindle the myth of Madame Butterfly, the 'original' Butterfly narratives do not miss out to address then delicate issues on gender and sexuality under the cover of the Butterfly myth. In addition to Orientalist issues that are exemplified in their usage of language and one-sided character development – i.e. the round Western characters versus the flat, undeveloped Eastern characters – Loti's *Madame Chrysantheme* for instance introduces the question on masquerade and travesty, a much discussed topic in analyses on *M. Butterfly*.

It is highly appropriate to construct a travesty of the Butterfly narrative, for the story itself is in a way a myth of travesty. [...] It began in the dress of prose fiction and then changed to that of theatre, and then to opera, and then to early films, and then to drama, and then to more recent films. The media keep changing and so does the shape of the narrative itself. (Wisenthal 14-5)

Interesting in regards to the fabrication of the Butterfly myth, as Wisenthal indicates, is its development in the myriad versions and subsequently its different meanings and relations to reality. So is Butterfly's suicide, for instance, nowhere to be found in Loti's foundation text and only attempted in Long's version; it is Belasco, who finally decides to kill Cio-Cio-San.

The following segment aims to briefly sketch out the genealogy of the Butterfly myth as it developed since *M. Butterfly*. Additionally, I will attempt to place the creation of the Butterfly myth(s) into the historical realities in order to trace the development of Orientalism in Butterfly narratives.

4.1.1 Fabricating the Butterfly myth

When it comes to tracing the real-life incident that served as intertextual foil to Butterfly narratives, critics claim different muses for Loti's, Long's, and Puccini's 'Butterflies.' Joy James and Arthur Groos, respectively, investigate Loti's and Long's inspirations found in real-life experience. Loti's *Madame Chrysantheme* draws from his own experience as naval officer in Japan and his short-term liaison with a Japanese woman, whereas Long's *Madame*

Butterfly is based on a true story reported to the author by his sister, who lived in Japan as a missionary's wife.²⁰ Whether these claims are true or not is, I think, of secondary nature; decisive is why the tragic suicide of Butterfly, once introduced, came to dominate all adaptations of Butterfly narratives. The relation between reality and representation is important here:²¹ what Loti's and Long's story share is the depiction of a relationship between a foreign man, often a seaman in service of his navy (adding a political issue on national level to the relationship), and a Japanese woman. Groos examines the nature of these relationships as common practice "known as 'temporary' or 'Japanese' marriage" (148). He elaborates:

Desired by Western males living for extended periods in the Orient [...] temporary marriages existed for centuries for Dutch and Chinese residents of Nagasaki, the only port to retain limited contact with the West after the closing of Japan. The practice spread rapidly after the opening of the treaty ports in 1858. [...] Located somewhere between prostitution and concubinage, the custom [...] might be called term marriage or 'marriage-by-the-month' – a liaison of specified or renewable duration entered into by contractual agreement of both parties. In Yokohama, this arrangement could be made with an official at the custom house; in Nagasaki it was done with the help of an intermediary. (148-9)

This historical reality carries little to no meaning in the Butterfly narratives. What it does imply, however, is the hierarchical relationship between the dichotomies West-male and East-female. The exploitive and temporary nature of Orientalist West/East relationships is argued through historical facts. The depiction of Japanese women, which were based on such relationships, come from diaries and travel writings of the Western men involved in these

²⁰ Other critics name different sources, i.e. M. Cody Poulton, who argues Japanese actress Kawakami Sadayakko (1871-1946) as model for Puccini's and Belasco's heroine (104). There are studies that only concentrate on the search of the real Madame Butterfly; see for example Jan van Rij, Madame Butterfly: Japonism, Puccini, and the Search for the Real Cho-Cho-San (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2001).

²¹ If Groos and James can be believed, then there is no evidence that a Japanese woman killed herself for a foreign man. What seems to be 'true,' is that a naval officer left his Japanese wife and child in Japan. On departure, he had promised them to return, which of course he never did. Hence, the longing for the foreign man and the notion of unbridgeable gulfs between Eastern and Western culture were infused into the Butterfly myth.

temporary marriages and the colonialist attitude they maintained is best reflected in their lack of responsibility towards the women (Groos 152).

Susan McClary comments on the transformation of Butterfly from a flat character in Loti and Long's versions to a round, tragic figure in Puccini's opera. Ironically, the suicide-version that proliferated the Butterfly myth is marked by a tragic heroine that the audience sympathizes with. In Long and Loti's version, Cio-Cio-San is depicted as pidgin-English speaking, child-like geisha "conscripted to entertain foreign troops" (21), whereas the male characters are morally acting young men. In Loti's case, in fact, the focus is on the relationship between the two Western male protagonists. McClary extends her argument that Puccini not only introduced Butterfly-as-tragic-heroine, but in fact greatly contributed to the fabrication of the *Butterfly* metaphor: "It seems to have been Puccini and his collaborators who spun the web concerning mounted insects for symbolically trapping their hapless heroine" (21), whereas in Loti and Long's stories, only the narrator refers to Cio-Cio-San as 'Madame Butterfly,' echoing a "custom in *fin-de-siècle* literature of naming Japanese objects of desire after small creatures or flowers" (21).

The Madame Butterfly stereotype as we know it – a "lotus blossom pining away for a cruel Caucasian man, and dying for her love" (Hwang, *Afterword* 95) – is marked by a shift of narrative emphasis to the female Other. Although Madame Butterfly becomes the main character in the narratives based on Puccini's opera, the narration is still from a Western point of view. Similarly, the audience's sympathy that has reversed – Butterfly is the tragic heroine, whereas Pinkerton becomes the cruel chauvinist – remains within the borders of Orientalist perceptions. Because the narrative voice does not change its vantage point, the 'transformed' narratives do not condemn Orientalism or imperialism. Instead, by illustrating a tragic love story that has become the archetypal East/West romance, the Butterfly narratives that established the tragedy of Madam Butterfly warn against the seemingly unbridgeable discrepancies between East and West. The will to represent the Other is greater than the humanitarian will to depict reality as it is; it expresses, as cited above, a "certain *will* or *intention* to [...] control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different world" (Said, *Orientalism* 12).

It can be therefore observed that the fabricated Butterfly narratives carried an additional reference to Loti and Long's stories, which were a product of a craze over "everything Japanese" in the nineteenth century with the purpose to depict representative Japanese lives to entertain the American readership. I would like to claim that the twist in Puccini's opera added a political notion in so far as it helped take off the guilt from the West

by bestowing Butterfly with a voice and making her act on her own. This notion becomes more evident with time, as American economic and military interventions in Asia increase. The political dimensions of the archetypal East/West romance extend with America's growing presence in Asia. Subsequently, interactions between Americans and Asians are irrevocably accompanied with perceptions based on Butterfly narratives. The guilt-question arises again after the Vietnam War, when Americans question their politics in Asia, and the Butterfly myth is extended once again to a mutual suffering. Both, Americans and Asians are depicted as victims of Imperialist politics that base their judgment on Orientalist perceptions. It is at this point, where Hwang picks up the narrative maturation, when he fuses his new, real-life intertextual foil with the existing Butterfly myth.

4.2 *M. Butterfly*

The play *M. Butterfly* was conceived and written by David Henry Hwang, a second-generation Chinese American born in 1957. It premiered in Washington, DC at the National Theatre on 10 February 1988 and opened on Broadway at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre on 20 March 1988. The play received much appraisal; awarded for best play, best Broadway play, best American play and best new play, it is currently being staged at the Suzanne Roberts Theatre in Philadelphia.²²

The following analysis is based on the text version of *M. Butterfly* and therefore does not take stage setting, music, and performance reviews into consideration. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that staged performances of Butterfly stories incorporate another level of meaning that remains unexplored in narrative texts such as Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysantheme* and John L. Long's *Madame Butterfly*. Opera and theatre are important elements in Puccini's and Hwang's Butterfly narrative; the juxtaposition of Eastern and Western music and theatre

²² An interesting trivia that exemplifies the play's mainstream appeal and subsequently the racial hierarchy resulting from it: Anthony Hopkins played Gallimard in the London production at the Shaftesbury Theatre in 1989, but was replaced after one month. Ostrow remembers: "I had my doubts about Tony's [Anthony Hopkins] portrayal (and my hunch was so did he) I knew if Hopkins quit, the cast would follow and the production would close" (97). B.D. Wong auditioned for several months before he was cast as Song Liling and even after that was reprimanded by John Dexter, the director, for his poor performance: "I want you to know that since rehearsals and all through our Washington engagement and previews in New York, your performance has been a disgrace. You mince around the stage like the faggot that you are and have yet to follow my direction" (Ostrow 91). However, the role of Gallimard had been recast no less than four times, while Song Liling was always performed by B.D. Wong.

represent the “insurmountable discrepancies” between the two cultures. In an interview with John Louis DiGaetani David H. Hwang points out the main issue behind incorporating Asian theatre elements:

[I]n Asian theatre [...] men play women’s role. [...] Let’s look at that in kabuki terms because in kabuki it’s expressed much more clearly. In kabuki they say that a woman can only be a woman whereas a man can be the idealization of a woman. This is obscene, and it’s inherently sexist. What it’s saying is that only a man can be a man’s idealization of a woman. (146)

The misperceptions between East and West that Said’s *Orientalism* discusses, results in a misperception between male and female in Bernard Bouriscot’s case, who serves as Hwang’s real-life model for Rene Gallimard.

Another important element of opera and theatre is music, which Hwang deploys to contrast his play with Puccini’s opera. The core musical parts of the opera are transmitted through a tape recorder; the love duet appears most of all, including in the suicide scene (McClary 32). Interesting is that the music does not correspond to the actual scenes, inducing a comical effect; yet, Hwang deconstructs Puccini’s music even as he maintains its terms insisting “that his audience realize the lethal seductiveness of this ‘beautiful music’” (McClary 32). Comedy is the key to the audience’s relation to the play, of which Hwang says:

[F]irst of all I think that comedy is very theatrical. I am generally interested in ways to create total theatre, theatre which utilizes whatever the medium has to offer to create an effect – just to keep an audience interested – whether that’s dance or music or opera or comedy. [...] I think that, secondly, there’s the fact that this particular play, since we’re dealing with a number of important issues, it’s necessary to leaven those issues with some comedy in order for the play to be palatable [...] to an audience. (DiGaetani 152-3)

For Hwang’s version of *Madame Butterfly* to convey its message it is necessary to make use of all effects theatre offers. Misperception between East and West and men and women shall serve as the focus of this analysis, which is directed towards Orientalist elements in David H.

Hwang's *M. Butterfly*.²³ Furthermore, I aim to bed Hwang's play into the Asian American context that broaches the issues of identity and Orientalist stereotypes as their central themes. Critical responses to *M. Butterfly* as unrepresentative for Asian American Literature are also examined in this context.

4.2.1 Synopsis and Analysis

In *M. Butterfly*, a tragedy in three acts, Hwang weaves a complex tapestry of plotlines that include celebrated figures of classic opera along with several fictional or composite characters. The true love story of a French diplomat and a Chinese opera singer intermeshed with the telltale Orientalist chronicle of *Madame Butterfly*, form the basis of *M. Butterfly's* narrative.

The play unfolds in nonlinear sequence, marked with flashbacks and episodes from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. The characters move freely among multiple roles, most prominently the protagonists Rene Gallimard and Song Liling, who pivot from playing characters to acting as narrators supplying additional contextual commentary.

The love story between Gallimard and Song develops during Gallimard's tenure at the French embassy in Beijing and ends in Paris, where they are tried for treason against France, circling back to Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* in the final scene. Puccini's opera about Cio-Cio-San's unrequited love to an American naval officer named Pinkerton evolves around the insurmountable extremes of East/West relations. Hwang takes up the politics of East/West relations as his major theme, mainly reflecting on the characterization of "Butterfly" that became the most common blueprint for representing Asian women and by the same token the political relation between East and West. He projects this on issues of performing gender, race, and identity by deconstructing the Butterfly motif, questioning the nature of gender and sexuality, to finally intermesh all with Orientalist perceptions of the East. This is reflected by the title, "M." being an abbreviation of both male and monsieur.²⁴ By challenging stereotypes

²³ *M. Butterfly* can be read from other angles than Orientalism, for instance, Feminism, Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction, and Queer Studies. For analyses on these issues see especially Janet Haedicke. Karen Shimakawa and Dorinne K. Kondo also offer brief discussions of above-mentioned aspects. Andrew Shin places Orientalism into Queer Studies discussing Gallimard's and Song's masked homosexuality.

²⁴ I would like to add a varying interpretation by Dorinne Kondo who suggests the title "M." could be an abbreviation for Monsieur, Madame, Mr., or Ms. Butterfly. She reasons her interpretation: "If the play were written in French, the answer would be clear – Monsieur Butterfly. But since it is a play written in English by an Asian American, about a Frenchman,

of Asians created and popularized by and in the West, Hwang places *M. Butterfly* into the corpus of Asian American literature, treating issues on gender and sexuality from an Asian American point of view (Pao 205).

4.2.1.1 Act I

The love story of Song Liling and Rene Gallimard is told in flashback scenes from Gallimard's point of view, who at present is waiting for his trial. Act I.1 begins in a prison cell with a soliloquy introducing the audience to the trial's background. In the same scene Song appears upstage, whom Gallimard addresses his speech to, indicating that this "dialogue" is taking place in Gallimard's subconscious.

In I.2 Gallimard remains on stage as a commentator observing the scene from outside. This time Gallimard addresses the audience in an aside reflecting on the dialogue of the actual scene; the actual characters in the second scene, unnamed people at a party in Paris, recount Gallimard's unintentional homosexual relationship mocking his ignorance as pretense. The first conflict of information arises and introduces the main issue of the trial, as we will see by the end of Act III, and gives a prolepsis on Gallimard's apparent biggest misunderstanding: Song Liling's gender.

Corresponding to the previous scene, I.3 introduces the second narrative *M. Butterfly* is based on. In a monologue *ad spectatores* (Pfister 139) Gallimard justifies his actions through an Orientalist vantage point that from a dramaturgical angle should undermine the fictionality of the play.²⁵ The audience on the other hand makes the intellectual connection between the accusations of I.2 and the historical fiction of I.3. This irony becomes more absurd when Gallimard distinguishes between his ideal audience and the audience, claiming all accusations against him to be a misunderstanding. At this point it is clear that Gallimard is unreliable. Haedicke even calls this a forewarning to the audience of the impending confusions (30).

that utilizes an Italian opera as a narrative foil, the matter is rather more vexed and ambiguous." (6) Originally Hwang had conceived the title as *Monsieur Butterfly* abbreviating it later upon suggestion by his wife to make it more ambiguous. (Hwang 96) Important is, however, that both interpretations, Kondo's and mine, point towards the ambiguity of the title.

²⁵ In this context Janet Haedicke's analysis on the play's meta-theatrical, meta-psychological, and meta-linguistic level discusses the deconstructive elements of *M. Butterfly*, highlighting the audience's complicity with Gallimard (Haedicke 35-7).

GALLIMARD. [...] Can they really be so foolish? Men like that – they should be scratching at my door, begging to learn my secrets! For I, Rene Gallimard, you see, I have known, and been loved by...the Perfect Woman. Alone in this cell, I sit night after night, watching our story play through my head, always searching for a new ending, one which redeems my honor, where she returns at last to my arms. And I imagine you – my ideal audience – who come to understand and even, perhaps just a little, to envy me. (4)

According to the poetics of drama theory, dramatic texts hold an “absolute nature” that is conditioned by “[t]he absence of a mediating communication system – resulting in the unmediated overlapping of the internal and external communication systems” (Pfister 4). This implies that the plot is separated from its author and the audience, manifested in the so-called “fourth-wall.” The breakage of this wall through mediators that communicate between text and audience is understood by Ditor and Selman as transgression and blurring of boundaries (235). Similar to the blurring of gender and racial boundaries, expressed in Song and Gallimard’s ambivalent performances, the transgression of the fourth wall is achieved through performance – the successful interaction between actor and audience.²⁶

As the scene continues, Gallimard turns his tape recorder on and introduces the audience to Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*. He does not miss to place this narrative into the Orientalist literary corpus that is “beloved throughout the Western world,” (5) each sentence an Orientalist statement: “It’s true what they say about Oriental girls. They want to be treated bad!” (6) Gallimard and his school friend Marc improvise a scene from Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*; Pinkerton (played by Gallimard) tells Sharpless (played by Marc) about his “package deal” (5) – his new house and his new wife, both acquired at bargain prizes. The scene finishes with an aside, in which Gallimard steps out of his role as Pinkerton and translates a duet from Puccini’s opera to his audience. Gallimard’s conclusive remarks lead to the next scene on Gallimard’s youth, before he met Song Liling:

²⁶ In this context Rachel Ditor and Jan Selman conducted an experiment in which they had actors perform key scenes of *M. Butterfly* that are essential in conveying the “correct” message to the audience. In turns the actors impersonating Gallimard and Song were asked to keep or avoid eye contact with the audience. As expected, the audience received different messages about the characters. Consequently, they (when Song avoided eye contact with them) failed to decode the irony of the play and were fooled by Song’s deceit.

GALLIMARD. [...] In the preceding scene, I played Pinkerton, the womanizing cad, and my friend Marc from school [...] played Sharpless, the sensitive soul of reason. In life, however, our positions were usually – no, always – reversed. (7)

This early shifting of identities and roles indicate Gallimard's split character, or as Pfister calls it "Identitätsverlust"²⁷ – a breakup of the character into two or three characters representing his conflicting, myriad personas. This scene in particular probes the performance aspect of Gallimard's *Madame Butterfly*, which stands in contrast to Gallimard's reality (*M. Butterfly*) in so far as Gallimard is nowhere close to being Pinkerton. Similarly the equation of Song with Butterfly, Marc with Sharpless, and Chin with Suzuki inadvertently appear ironic (Haedicke 31).

I.4 is a flashback on Gallimard and Marc's student days in France. Marc tries to persuade his friend to join him in a party, luring him with the prospects of sexually compliant girls, but instead dissuades him from coming. To Gallimard's apprehension Marc retorts:

GALLIMARD. Marc, I can't...I'm afraid they'll say no – the girls. So I never ask.

MARC. You don't have to ask! That's the beauty – don't you see? They don't have to say yes. It's perfect for a guy like you, really. (8)

The variables, submissive and compliant, for Gallimard's perfect woman are set; in conjunction with Gallimard's following aside to his audience, the paradigm of the perfect woman has been equaled to "Butterflies."

GALLIMARD (*To us*). We now return to my version of *Madame Butterfly* and the events leading to my recent conviction for treason. (9; own emphasis)

²⁷ Manfred Pfister, *Das Drama* (München: Fink, 2001) 249.

The English edition *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* does not contain this chapter. Subsequent references to Pfister refer to the English edition and will be cited parenthetically.

The overlapping of Gallimard retelling Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* and his own past become more intertwined in I.5. Madame Butterfly is introduced and Gallimard explains the politics behind Pinkerton/Butterfly relations. Power, according to Gallimard, is the biggest lure to engage in such a relationship. The compliance of women, sexually, monetary, and intellectually, is how Gallimard describes his perfect woman, and subsequently justifies his actions.

GALLIMARD. In real life, women who put their total worth at less than sixty-six cents are quite hard to find. The closest we come is in the pages of these magazines [magazines featuring pinup girls]. [...] The first time I saw them [...] my body shook. Not with lust – no, with power. Here were women [...] who would do exactly as I wanted. (10)

Real life, as indicated in the preceding scene, is Gallimard's life - and manhood - in France, where he is called a "wimp," (9) "not handsome, nor brave, nor powerful" (10). In opposition to "real life" is Pinkerton's East where his power and manhood is restored, or rather fabricated. Yet, contrary to Butterflies, the pinup girls lack a vital quality: they fail to excite Gallimard. The girl's overt, lewd gestures appall Gallimard, who grows stiff in horror: "I can't believe it! She's getting excited!" (12).

In the second part of I.5 Gallimard continues with the second Act of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*: Butterfly's forlorn hope for Pinkerton's return. Strikingly, as Marc and Comrade Chin - a cadre member from the Chinese government who oversees Song Liling's undercover operation - act out their roles as Sharpless and Suzuki, Butterfly is absent. Instead, Gallimard communicates her role. Edward Said takes up the notion of being represented in the beginning of his work; he cites Karl Marx: "Sie können sich nicht vertreten, sie müssen vertreten werden" (*Orientalism* 21). This notion presupposes the Oriental's inability to represent himself, demeaning him to an inferior, a postulation that is lodged as accepted truth. Thus, by telling the audience how Butterfly acted and reacted, Gallimard gives the audience his Orientalist version of the truth. In the final part of I.5 Helga, Gallimard's wife appears; the parallels of Pinkerton and Gallimard are deepened with the analogy of *M. Butterfly's* characters with *Madame Butterfly* characters – Pinkerton/Gallimard, Butterfly/Song, Sharpless/Marc, Suzuki/Comrade Chin, Kate/Helga.

In I.6 Song recovers Butterfly's voice. It is Gallimard's first encounter with Song Liling, who is ironically acting the death scene of Puccini's opera. The different narrative strands, Gallimard's narration of *Madame Butterfly* from his prison cell and the flashback to his

past, merge into one level of narration. Song addresses Gallimard directly, who now becomes the Gallimard of the past. For the audience Gallimard is reduced from his position as interlocutor, which he loses completely in I.7. Song confronts Gallimard in reply to his admiration of Song's performance unveiling Gallimard's Orientalist point of view.

GALLIMARD. [...] You were utterly convincing. It's the first time-

SONG. 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.

[...]

GALLIMARD. [...] It's a very beautiful story.

SONG. For a Westerner.

GALLIMARD. Excuse me?

SONG. It's one of your favorite fantasies, isn't it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man. (17)

Such irony is indeed lost on Gallimard, who in I.7 concludes to his wife Helga that the Chinese cannot appreciate the opera as a piece of art, politicizing it. Song, on the other hand, identifies what Gallimard appreciates in *Madame Butterfly*, labeling it inextricably as a fetish of white men. Furthermore, Gallimard fails to distinguish between Chinese and Japanese, who were "able to construct Song's 'people' as so distinct from themselves, so totally other, that they became the appropriate subjects of medical experiments" (McInturff 78). The essentialist perception of Asia – or the Orient – is mirrored in Gallimard's discussion of *Madame Butterfly* in universal terms.

GALLIMARD. They hate it because the white man gets the girl. Sour grapes if you ask me.

HELGA. Politics again? Why can't they just hear it as a piece of beautiful music? [...] (19)

Helga expands the label from Orientalist white men that fantasize about submissive Oriental women: by disclaiming the political implications of *Madame Butterfly* Helga reduces it to a fictitious narrative without any relation to reality. The particulars, such as the characterization of Orientals may not correspond to reality, however, the narrative corresponds to its audience's real fantasies about the Orient, and as such carries political implications. Gallimard and Helga's perceptions about China are clearly Orientalist and stand under the influence of Orientalist literature of which *Madame Butterfly* is a classic.

In the next scene Gallimard encounters Song again, this time in a Chinese opera performance. After the show their incongruous conversation continues, relocating the Orientalist discourse to the East:

SONG. [...] We have always held a certain fascination for you Caucasian men,
have we not?

GALLIMARD. But...that fascination is imperialist, or so you tell me.

SONG. Do you believe everything I tell you? Yes. It is always imperialist. But
sometimes...sometimes, it is also mutual. [...] (22)

The mutuality of Orientalism is according to Said the false axiom that Orientalism is built upon and in essence grows from the belief that Orientals are the opposite of Europeans (*Orientalism* 39). Thus it has become the "white man's burden" as Kipling coined it, a duty to be performed, to represent the Oriental. On the other hand, mutuality does exist, which Hwang clearly criticizes; mutuality has developed in so far as neither "side" has made an effort to deconstruct Orientalist stereotypes today. Instead both parties continue to make usage of those to their benefit. Song tries to give Gallimard the impression of liking his Orientalist role, setting Western lifestyle over Eastern.

SONG. I love them for being my fans, I hate the smells they leave behind. I
too can distance myself from my people. [...] Be a gentleman, will you?
And light my cigarette. (21)

SONG. How I wish there were even a tiny café to sit in. With cappuccinos,
and men in tuxedos and bad expatriate jazz. (21)

SONG. [...] True, there were signs reading "No Dogs and Chinamen." But a
woman, especially a delicate Oriental woman - we always go where we

please. Could you imagine it otherwise? Clubs in China filled with pasty, big-thighed white women, while thousands of slender lotus blossoms wait just outside the door? Never. [...] (22)

Song also foreshadows on his deceit, which turns the trick due to Gallimard's Orientalist conceit. The deceit, albeit still unexpressed, of his identity conceals his gender and profession. However, the deceit itself is a matter of interpretation; in Chinese opera all roles are played by men and as such Song's fans in the Chinese opera are probably aware of his real gender. One could argue then, that it is Gallimard who feminizes Song. If we carry this thought a bit further then Gallimard chose the role for Song's undercover operation, imposing on him – in par with Orientalist tradition - the Butterfly masquerade.

The split identity of Gallimard is further complicated in I.9, in which Marc appears in Gallimard's dream. Although Marc is governing his speech it is also clear that this scene is happening in Gallimard's dream, in his subconscious. Marc's encouragement is technically Gallimard's subconscious.

MARC. Ah, yes, She cannot love you, it is taboo, but something deep inside her heart...she cannot help herself...she must surrender to you. It is her destiny.

GALLIMARD. How do you imagine all this?

MARC. The same way you do. It's an old story. It's in our blood. They fear us, Rene. Their women fear us. And their men – their men hate us. And, you know something? They are all correct. (25)

In dream-sequences the stage becomes the subconsciousness of the dreaming characters functioning as a decision guiding for Gallimard's pursuit of Song (Pfister 220). Marc gives Gallimard moral authorization arguing on the lines of the Orientalist relation between East and West, the dominance of the white male over the other. The dream-sequence has another function, too: while it serves as decision guidance for Gallimard, which he will choose after he wakes up, the dream-sequence reveals to the audience the predestination of the impending plot.²⁸

²⁸ Manfred Pfister differentiates the first function of decision guidance from the second as

I.10, Gallimard's first visit to Song's apartment, marks Gallimard's triumph over Song, who in Gallimard's eyes has succumbed to his Orientalness: "Did you hear the way she talked about Western women? Much differently than the first night. She does – she feels inferior to them – and to me" (31). Song's behavior incites Gallimard to test the typifications of Oriental women that *Madame Butterfly* imparts. I.11 opens with Gallimard's decision to consciously reincarnate Cio-Cio-San in Song.

GALLIMARD. Over the next five weeks, I worked like a dynamo. I stopped going to the opera, I didn't phone or write her. I knew this little flower was waiting for me to call, and, as I wickedly refused to do so, I felt for the first time that rush of power – the absolute power of a man. (32)

The idea of Song "turning on his needle" (36)²⁹ transforms Gallimard into Pinkerton, a successful, brave, and powerful man, although Gallimard is ashamed at his experiment's success on receiving Song's imploring love letters. However, his remorse feelings disappear as he gets promoted to vice-consul in I.12. The reason for his promotion is his apparent change in confidence and his relationship to Song, which he links "to the knowledge he has gained from the power structure embedded in *Madame Butterfly*" (McInturff 81).

In the final scene of Act I, Gallimard communicates this connection to Song and they consciously become Butterfly and Pinkerton.

GALLIMARD. I've been promoted. To vice-consul.

SONG. And what is that supposed to mean to me?

GALLIMARD. Are you my Butterfly?

SONG. What are you saying?

GALLIMARD. I've come tonight for an answer: are you my Butterfly? (38/9)

reincarnation of preceding events (Pfister 221-2). In *M. Butterfly*, I argue, that both functions of dream-sequences apply, one to Gallimard and the other to the audience.

²⁹ This quotation refers to Cio-Cio-San's remark in *Madame Butterfly* on Western men piercing a butterfly's heart with a needle after catching them and leaving them to die. ("They say that abroad, every butterfly – it falls into a man's hand – is transfixed with a pin and fastened to a table" (qtd. in McClary 21)). It also reveals the meaning behind the Butterfly metaphor: butterflies are collected because of their beauty and exoticism.

Song's confusion about his "role" is apparent. Unlike Gallimard Song does not see their relationship as a Pinkerton-Butterfly relationship; the disparity of information or rather interpretation exists between Song and Gallimard just as it does between the audience and Gallimard, whereas Gallimard tries to include the audience and "gain their complicity with his desires" (McInturff 81) translating Song's mimicry of Pinkerton's dialogue into English.

SONG. Yes, I am. I am your Butterfly.

[...]

SONG. Monsieur Gallimard?

GALLIMARD: Yes, Butterfly?

SONG. "Vieni, vieni!"

GALLIMARD. "Come, darling!"

SONG. "Ah! Dolce notte!"

GALLIMARD. "Beautiful night."

SONG. "Tutto estatico d'amor ride il ciel!"

GALLIMARD. "All ecstatic with love, the heavens are filled with laughter."

(40/1)

Act I closes, merging the two story lines of *Madame Butterfly* and *M. Butterfly*, embodied in the seemingly fusion of Gallimard to Pinkerton and Song to Butterfly. While Gallimard's transition to Pinkerton seems unfeigned, Song's transition appears concocted, as Song mimics Pinkerton's dialogue – instead of Butterfly's – heightening the ambiguity about who embodies Pinkerton and who Butterfly.

4.2.1.2 Act II

Act II promises another vantage point: that of Song Liling. Song, by profession an actor, reveals his actual gender to the audience. He is employed by the Chinese government to spy on Gallimard and gather information on the Vietnam War. Comrade Chin is introduced and stands in bright contrast to Song, who – as a man – performs the over-feminized role of

Butterfly. A new layer of topics is added to Orientalism and stereotyping: the question on sexuality, gender roles, and heteronormativity.

II.1 opens with Gallimard in his prison. He comments on a current critique of *Madame Butterfly* that condemns Pinkerton's behavior and sympathizes with the sufferings of Butterfly. Gallimard's conviction on his innocence remains unshaken: "I suggest that, while we men may all want to kick Pinkerton, very few of us would pass up the opportunity to *be* Pinkerton" (42). The act may be wrong in moral ways, but Gallimard's conclusion reverberates Marc's conclusion in 1.9: "It's an old story. It's in our blood" (25).

In II.2 and II.3 Song's undercover operation is set in motion. Gallimard perceives Song's questions about his work as "education" (43). Song couches his explanation to Gallimard's Orientalist opinion: "I want to know what you know. To be impressed by my man. It's not the particulars so much as the fact that you're making decisions which change the shape of the world" (43/4). In turn, Gallimard reveals to him America's plan of action in Vietnam, instantiated in II.3 in a dialogue between Gallimard and his superior at the French embassy Monsieur Toulon. While Toulon's statements on the war and on America's politics in Asia seem unobtrusive, Gallimard's analysis of the situation in Southeast Asia is clearly dominated by Orientalist misconceptions about Asians, or as he calls them Orientals.

GALLIMARD. The Orientals simply want to be associated with whoever shows the most strength and power. You live with the Chinese, sir. Do you think they like Communism? (45)

GALLIMARD. Deep down, they [the Chinese] miss the old days. You know, cappuccinos, men in tuxedos- (45)

GALLIMARD. Tell them [the Americans] there is a natural affinity between the West and the Orient. (46)

GALLIMARD. Orientals will always submit to a greater force. (46)

Gallimard's misinterpretation seems more anachronistic than his conceptions about Asian women. His imperialist view on Chinese and Vietnamese opportunism and the West's political and intellectual superiority are also a product of his Orientalist perceptions. However, I would like to argue, that these notions were not triggered by his relationship to Song. While he shows remorse in his disparaging behavior towards Song, his political analyses are firm statements that stem from a widespread belief in the "natural affinity between the West and

the Orient,” existing in reality, too. To the audience, given that the majority of the Broadway audience in 1989 was well aware of the outcome of the Vietnam War, Gallimard’s misrepresentation of Asia provides the framework to his “failure to ‘know’ Song” (McInturff 82). The scene concludes with another novelty for the audience. Song, who had been listening to their conversation upstage, joins Gallimard in his aside to the audience.

GALLIMARD (*To Song*). No! Why does she [Comrade Chin] have to come in?

SONG. Rene, be sensible. How can they understand the story without her?
Now, don’t embarrass yourself.

GALLIMARD (*To us*). Now, you will see why my story is so amusing to so many people. Why they snicker at parties in disbelief. Please – try to understand it from my point of view. We are all prisoners of our time and place. (47)

The shift between past and present within one scene and character blurs the concept of a non-existent narrator in a play. Song and Gallimard step out of their role as “themselves” and take on an intermediary function between audience and plot. This also raises the question of performing; Song summarizes his identity in one sentence: “I am an actor” (48). The notion of acting is spread on two conflicts, gender roles and racial roles.³⁰

In II.4 sexuality and gender roles are elaborated on in a dialogue between Comrade Chin and Song. Comrade Chin hints at Song’s physical relationship with Gallimard and reminds him that he is acting on behalf of Chairman Mao himself and any such act is denounced in China. Song comments to Comrade Chin’s instructions wryly:

CHIN. You’re not gathering information in any way that violates Communist
Party principles, are you?

SONG. Why would I do that?

CHIN. Just checking. Remember: When working for the Great Proletarian
State, you represent our Chairman Mao in every position you take.

³⁰ The issue on performance can be expanded to other issues, too. As indicated above Haedicke discusses Postmodern aspects of Deconstruction on the meta-theatrical level for instance.

SONG. I'll try to imagine the Chairman taking my positions.

CHIN. We all think of him this way. [...] Don't forget: there is no homosexuality in China!

SONG. Yes, I've heard. (48)

The scene concludes with Gallimard and Song on the stage. He inquires if Comrade Chin has left, to which Song replies: "Yes, Rene. Please continue in your own fashion" (49). Song's position in the whole narrative remains unclear; he neither succumbs to the Orientalist stereotype nor to the Communist reality of the 1960's. He is an actor, who is acting for both Gallimard and Comrade Chin, while his actual identity remains masked. But his betrayal to them – to Chin on his homosexual relationship and to Gallimard on his role as spy – are silently accepted by both in Act III, when Chin sends Song back to Gallimard to continue spying (albeit she knows about their homosexual relation) and Gallimard's tacit consent to pass information on to Song. Kate McInturff comments on their acquiescence:

These betrayals are acceptable to Gallimard and Chin only in so far as they treat Song's disguise as a screen that masks her true self and as one that she adopts in order to please them, not herself. In other words, Song can continue to sing as long as her song is her expression of her real desire to please her audience. (86)

Song does not perceive this as a result of his Divaness, instead is appalled when Gallimard voices his desire and preference for Butterfly. For Song his performance was an expression of his pleasure to perform both, an Oriental Butterfly and a Western male in an Armani suit, demonstrating his true self as actor.

In II.5 Gallimard's sexuality is at stake. His wife Helga has returned from a fertility checkup and suggests her husband to do the same. Gallimard refuses and in his despair turns to Song: "I'm a modern man, Butterfly. And yet, I don't want to go. It's the same old voodoo. I feel like God himself is laughing at me if I can't produce a child" (50). Although Gallimard questions his actions again, his assessment of the social norms varies from that of Song; Gallimard accepts these norms as god-given realities that are imposed on him by the "voodoo" into "our blood." He justifies his actions by claiming his impotence of decision. Song utilizes his immobility against him and lures him into having a child with him: "Who is

this Western quack to set himself as judge over the man I love? I know who is a man, and who is not” (51).

Gallimard’s emasculation continues in II.6 in which he meets Renee, a Danish student, and starts an affair with her. Renee is the epitome of a perfect woman. Yet, for Gallimard she is not.

GALLIMARD. [...] Renee was picture perfect. With a body like those girls in the magazines. [...] And it was exciting to be with someone who wasn’t afraid to be seen completely naked. But is it possible for a woman to be *too* uninhibited, *too* willing, so as to seem almost too...masculine? (54)

Renee confronts Gallimard with her theory on “weenies” that, she claims, are the cause for conflicts. Masculinity, embodied by the size of the penis, becomes the cohort against which men measure and define themselves. Her theory transposed on Gallimard’s case, singles out his infertility and lacking masculinity – masculinity as defined by social norms, such as bravery, machismo, and sexual intemperance as indicated through his youth scenes with Marc – as the driving factor for Gallimard’s transformation into Pinkerton.

Gallimard’s inner conflict reaches its climax: Toulon enters and informs him that the situation in Vietnam is developing the way Gallimard had predicted. On the other hand he also warns him that the outcome is yet unclear and subject of worry. Burdened with responsibility over the outcome of the Vietnam conflict, Gallimard rushes to Song and demands to see him naked: “I started for Renee’s. But no, that was all I needed. A schoolgirl who would question the role of the penis in modern society. What I wanted was revenge. A vessel to contain my humiliation. Though I hadn’t seen her in several weeks, I headed for Butterfly’s” (58). His experiment failed the test and Gallimard loses his Pinkertonness:

GALLIMARD. Did I not undress her because I knew, somewhere deep down, what I would find? Perhaps. [...] At the time, I only knew that I was seeing Pinkerton stalking towards his Butterfly, ready to reward her love with his lecherous hands. The image sickened me, pulled me to my knees, so I was crawling towards her like a worm. By the time I reached her, Pinkerton...had vanished from my heart. To be replaced by something new, something unnatural, that flew in the face of all I’d learned in the world - something very close to love. (60)

Song reveals to Gallimard that “she” is pregnant and he sounds his wish to marry him. Despite Gallimard’s claim of having shaken off Pinkerton as his role model, it becomes clear that Gallimard is not in love with Song as a person, but with his role as Butterfly. This is further exemplified in the end of II.7, in which Song orders Comrade Chin to provide him with a “Chinese baby with blond hair” (62).

GALLIMARD. [...] I could forget all that betrayal in an instant, you know. If you’d just come back and become Butterfly again.

SONG. Fat Chance. You’re here in prison, rotting in a cell. And I’m on a plane, winging my way back to China. Your President pardoned me of our treason, you know.

GALLIMARD. Yes, I read about that.

SONG. Must make you feel...lower than shit.

GALLIMARD. But don’t you, even a little bit, wish you were here with me?

SONG. I’m an artist, Rene. You were my greatest...acting challenge. (*She laughs*) It doesn’t matter how rotten I answer, does it? You still adore me. That’s why I love you, Rene. (63)

Once again Song’s claim to fame is underscored. While Gallimard is in love with the image of a Butterfly, Song is in love with the image of being adored. However, Song neglects the fact that Gallimard is not in awe of his acting as Butterfly, but simply in love with any Butterfly image that fits into his fantasy.

From now on *M. Butterfly* deviates from the original Butterfly story. In II.8, Song returns from the countryside with a child after several months of absence. Before leaving he rejected Gallimard’s proposal and tried to keep their story as close to the original as possible. To authenticate his willingness Song steps into Butterfly’s role and voices her part of the analogous scene in *Madame Butterfly*. Gallimard translates into English and comments on the deviances.

In II.9 and II.10, reality brings their relationship to an end. China’s Cultural Revolution and the defeat in Vietnam force Gallimard to return to Paris and Song to a rural labor camp for reeducation. Four years later, in 1970, Song is sent to France to continue his mission. Song resists at first, as he doubts that this “Orientalist relationship” will endure

outside its natural habitus: “Comrade Chin, he’s not going to support me! Not in France! He’s a white man! I was just his plaything -” (72). In the final scene of Act II, Gallimard and Song are united. Gallimard has divorced his wife Helga when Song enters: Gallimard, who at first thinks that he is dreaming, intends to continue the relationship the way it was in China with Song as his Butterfly. However, the pattern of *Madame Butterfly* is broken again and Song reveals his real identity in Act III.

GALLIMARD. Why do you run away? Can’t we show them how we embraced that evening?

SONG. Please. I’m talking.

GALLIMARD. You have to do what I say! I’m conjuring you up in *my* mind!

SONG. Rene, I’ve never done what you have said. Why should it be any different in your mind? Now split – the story moves on, and I must change.

GALLIMARD. I welcomed you into my home! I didn’t have to, you know! I could’ve left you penniless on the streets of Paris! But I took you in!

SONG. Thank you.

GALLIMARD. So...please...don’t change.

SONG. You know I have to. You know I will. And anyway, what difference does it make? No matter what your eyes tell you, you can’t ignore the truth. You already know too much. (78)

Song’s accusations on Gallimard’s knowledge of his actual identity are confirmed in Act III with the final confrontation between Song as himself and Gallimard.

4.2.1.3 Act III

Act III comprises of three scenes and begins with a courthouse trial in Paris. Song Liling is testifying in the courtroom, where the judge questions him on Gallimard’s awareness of Song’s real gender. It is noteworthy that the issue of Song’s gender is more important than that of espionage. Song is not spared to go into a detailed description of their physical

relationship and how he kept his gender – and genitals – hidden. Song elaborates on his theory of Western men, which argues along the lines of Orientalism:

SONG. [...] See, my mother was a prostitute along the Bundt before the Revolution. And, uh, I think it's fair to say she learned a few things about Western men. So I borrowed her knowledge. In service to my country.

[...]

SONG. Rule Two: As soon as a Western man comes into contact with the East – he's already confused. The West has sort of an international rape mentality towards the East. Do you know rape mentality?

JUDGE: Give us your definition, please.

SONG. Basically, "Her mouth says no, but her eyes say yes." The West thinks of itself as masculine – big guns, big industry, big money – so the East is feminine – weak, delicate, poor...but good at art, and full of inscrutable wisdom – the feminine mystique. [...] The West believes the East, deep down, *wants* to be dominated – because a woman can't think for herself.

JUDGE. What does this have to do with my question?

SONG. You expect Oriental countries to submit to your guns, and you expect Oriental women to be submissive to your men. That's why you say they make the best wives.

JUDGE. But why would that make it possible for you to fool Monsieur Gallimard? Please – get to the point.

SONG. One, because when he finally met his fantasy woman, he wanted more than anything to believe that she was, in fact, a woman. And second, I am an Oriental. And being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man. (82/3)

Song's revelation of Gallimard's Orientalist perceptions as his bait does not satisfy the judge, who repeatedly asks him if Gallimard knew he was a man. To this Song simply replies: "You know, Your Honor, I never asked" (83). The Orientalist perceptions are not regarded as Orientalist by the judge, who is played by Toulon. As shown in the preceding scenes Toulon envied Gallimard of his Chinese mistress, and as such can be ranked into the line of Orientalist, next to Pinkerton, Marc, and Gallimard. Song, however, is difficult to place; although he seems to have decoded Orientalist perceptions as a means of power and justification for domination, his patriotic dictum "In service to my country" seems hollow. Song is an artist and as such his actions are governed by his infatuation with acting. Additionally Song does not judge Gallimard's actions, he seems to perceive them as rather natural to his Westernness. Yet, Hwang does impart Song with the power to critique Western domination even as Song plays to Gallimard's fantasy; the "rape mentality" allows the West to speak for the East, a "notion that Gallimard has enacted in his attempts to force the opera's [Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*] character and the opera's voice into Song's mouth" (McInturff 85). By assigning Gallimard and Song both voices – both perform parts of Pinkerton and Butterfly – Hwang extends the "rape mentality" of the West to a mutual act. Orientalism, in Hwang's terms, works from both sides: "The East is guilty or complicit in this dual form of cultural stereotyping" (DiGaetani 141).

In III.2 Song's motivation to play Butterfly is unveiled. He takes Gallimard back to the Chinese opera, where Gallimard came to see Song. That night Song had lured him with his seeming love for a Western lifestyle and approval of the nature of relationships between Western men and Oriental women.³¹ In the present scene Song questions Gallimard on his intentions of that night, which Gallimard evades. Song is convinced of Gallimard's adoration towards him and does not understand his evasive behavior, confronting him:

SONG. [...] You think I could have pulled this off if I wasn't already full of pride when we met? No, not just pride. Arrogance. It takes arrogance, really – to believe you can will, with your eyes and your lips, the destiny of another. C'mon. Admit it. You still want me. Even in slacks and a button-down collar. (85)

³¹ Act I.8 (p. 53)

He continues his equivocal confrontation with Gallimard who does not respond to Song the way he did before. Song has to realize that his act only worked when Gallimard was unaware of it. Finally, he strips down to his briefs forcing Gallimard to look at him, who gives in:

GALLIMARD. Please. This is unnecessary. I know what you are.

SONG. Do you? What am I?

GALLIMARD. A – a man.

SONG. You don't really believe that.

GALLIMARD. Yes I do! I knew all the time somewhere that my happiness was temporary, my love a deception. But my mind kept the knowledge at bay. To make the wait bearable.

SONG. Monsieur Gallimard – the wait is over. (87/8)

Gallimard's reaction is not what Song anticipated who firmly believes that Gallimard's adoration was towards him and not just his act as Butterfly. Gallimard ridicules him and calls their relationship a waste of time. Visibly distraught with Gallimard's rejection, Song tries to convince him that it was he and not just Butterfly that he loved.

GALLIMARD. You showed me your true self. When all I loved was the lie. A perfect lie, which you let fall to the ground – and now, it's old and soiled.

SONG. So – you never really loved me? Only when I was playing a part?

GALLIMARD. I'm a man who loved a woman created by a man. Everything else – simply falls short. (89/90)

Gallimard was in love with an Orientalist stereotype of a woman that does not exist outside its fictional world. His experiment failed as his Butterfly revealed its artificiality when Song put down the masquerade. In fact both, Pinkerton and Butterfly, cannot exist in reality. That Gallimard's perception of the Orientals – and those of many others – is influenced by Orientalist literature is comprehensible; however, Gallimard chooses fiction over reality, rejecting Song over Butterfly. Another notion is touched upon here and repeated throughout

the play: the perfect woman is created by a man, just as the perfect Orient is created by the West. Said explains this phenomenon by means of Orientalist vocabulary and its relation to an Oriental reality as follows:

Underlying all the different units of Orientalist discourse [...] is a set of representative figures or tropes. These figures are to the actual Orient [...] as stylized costumes are to characters in a play [...]. In other words, we need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate. What it is trying to do [...] is at one and the same time to characterize the Other as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are *for* Europe, and only for Europe. (*Orientalism* 71/2)

Similarly, we should not look for a correspondence between Gallimard's Butterfly and Song; Gallimard wants to love a fabrication of his mind. Song, on the other hand, makes this mistake believing that Gallimard loves the impersonator of Butterfly and not simply the impersonation. In the final scene Gallimard realizes that his image of the perfect woman does not exist in reality, but only in his inner mind. He locates his Butterfly in himself and in the West, placing Orientalism in its actual habitus: "And I have found her at last. In a prison on the outskirts of Paris. My name is Rene Gallimard – also known as Madame Butterfly" (93).

The play ends with Gallimard's deathly transformation into Butterfly. Song watches his suicide from afar, dressed as a man, calling after Gallimard: "Butterfly? Butterfly?" (93). The tragic end of Puccini's opera is repeated in Hwang's version; Song's final dialogue mirrors Pinkerton's in *Madame Butterfly* disclosing the masquerade of the play. Hwang comments on the parallels between Song and Pinkerton:

The Song Liling character has enjoyed to some degree being able to perpetrate this deception, and being able to continue to stay adored by someone in spite of his sexual confusion. When Song Liling loses that, he realizes his narcissism is not as great as his need for the adoration which he has built over the last 20 years, so he realizes what he's lost in the same way that Pinkerton realizes too late at the end of the opera. (DiGaetani 152)

At the end, the roles are reversed, Gallimard is emasculated and transforms to Butterfly, and Song strips off his female role. Song and Gallimard do not rectify the misperceptions that are critiqued in *M. Butterfly*, instead they keep up the myths of the East and West, of men and women by choosing to stay in their constructed reality (Hwang 100). On another dimension, that between play and audience, however, the familiar conventions are dismantled and the unpredictable has happened: East wins over West and Asian man over White man. Although Butterfly dies, her real identity is exposed: the myth of an Orientalist creation located in the West is busted because the East does not comply with its designated role as submissive victim.

As for Gallimard's transformation into Butterfly, his desire to become Butterfly is just as much narcissistic as is Song's desire to be desired as actor. His choice to reject Song, where Grace locates the play's failed peripeteia as Gallimard chooses against a reversal or change in circumstances, is followed by Gallimard's withdrawal into his "enchanted space," his mind, his vision of the Orient (140). "The love that warps his judgment, blinds his eyes, and rearranges his face is narcissistic" (141). The irony in the failed peripeteia is that Gallimard's maxim of the "perfect woman," or as Grace calls it "Cartesian cogito," fails: "he *thinks* he is Butterfly, therefore he *is* Butterfly...and must kill himself" since he cannot accept its failure (141). With Gallimard's death, Cio-Cio-San got her revenge in so far that her honor has been restored³² and the "cruel white man" is taken to trial. Gallimard's suicide as Butterfly may have killed the Western myth of the submissive woman that dies for a white man. Nevertheless, its implications are more serious, since it also demonstrates the violence and danger behind Orientalist stereotypes and the narratives that propagate them. To Gallimard's impersonation of Butterfly, Grace offers another point of departure. Suggesting that Gallimard's refusal to see his true self, his Puccinian alter ego, has been hinted at throughout the play as Song has been repeatedly voicing Pinkerton's parts. His final masquerade is then, actually, not a deception. Grace explains: "[W]hen Song offers Gallimard his last chance to choose reality over fantasy and to 'become something more. More like...a woman,' Gallimard will refuse both his own and Song's reality." Nevertheless, she finally concludes: "He may kill himself dressed up as Butterfly rather than Pinkerton, but when he does so it is to maintain

³² This refers to a phrase from Cio-Cio-San's death scene in Puccini's opera and is reenacted in *M. Butterfly*: "Con onor muore/ chi non puo serbar/ vita con onore." ("Death with honor/ Is better than life/ Life with dishonor.")

masculine [Western] control over life and the subject in his own hands. Gallimard is still, and only, a man” (142).³³

4.2.2 Orientalism in *M. Butterfly*

Orientalist issues, which are dealt with in *M. Butterfly* trespass the borders set by Said in so far that Hwang’s play is a commentary on both, the Western attitude towards the East and the East’s misperceptions about the West (DiGaetani 141). Hwang’s motif to write such a play was ignited by a real incident of which he says:

[I]t seemed natural to me that it should have happened, that given the degree of misperceptions generally between East and West and between men and women, it seemed inevitable that a mistake of this magnitude would one day take place. [...] In retrospect, it seems to me that that was what really piqued my imagination. I felt the impossibility of the situation and the inevitability of it, both at the same time. (DiGaetani 143)

Hwang blurs the concepts of gender just as he blurs the concept of Orientalism. Through gender ambiguity and power reversals Hwang deconstructs socially constructed roles. Nevertheless, *M. Butterfly* remains in the tradition of *Madame Butterfly*, a tragic end awaits both characters as each fail to overcome their prejudice and misperceptions about each other. With their tragedy, Hwang appeals to the audience, for a reconciliation of those binary oppositions in question, “to cut through our respective layers of cultural and sexual misperceptions” (Hwang 100).

An Orientalist reading of *M. Butterfly* shall explore our assumptions on how gender and race construct identity, and how racial and sexual stereotypes are conducive to mythmaking (Kondo 6). In addition, the combination of gender and race is a core foundation on which Orientalism bases its legitimacy of domination and power. Power relations between

³³ Another way of reading Gallimard’s refusal is along the lines of sexuality. Rather than refusing to hand over the control to the East he ignores his homosexuality by heterosexualizing it. This has been the shared focus of many critics of *M. Butterfly* as Hwang fails to deconstruct the myth on heteronormativity. Since this topic has little relation to Orientalism it is not broached on in this thesis. Nevertheless, sexuality will be addressed briefly in chapter 4.2.3, in response to critiques about *M. Butterfly* as distorted representation of Asian Americans.

East/West are reflected in our perceptions on gender roles. Thus, the shifting of gender identity in *M. Butterfly* inevitably dismantles these international power relations.

4.2.2.1 (Mis)construction and (Mis)reading of Male and Female³⁴

The Orientalist axiom that underlies every Butterfly story is the gendered identity of East and West. Jonathan Wisenthal summarizes the foremost common factor of all Butterfly narratives: “In each of the stories the two principal Oriental characters are women, while the two principal Western characters are male” (5). In Hwang’s play the fabrication of the Orient as feminine is evident as the Butterfly character is a woman played by a man. Similarly the fabrication of the West as male is at the least illustrated if not spelled out, personified by Gallimard, who is quite the contrary of a womanizer as his encounters with Isabelle and Renee illustrate.

Karen Shimakawa discusses the notion of performed and constructed gender and gender roles. She calls into focus Baudrillard’s concept on “loss of space as an ordering principle” (349) (as a consequence of postmodernism) that Gallimard holds on to in regards to his perceptions on gender and sexuality. His vision of the perfect woman is reinforced by his “belief in the integrity of defined space ([...] male vs. female, East vs. West [...])” (350), a limited repertoire of acting patterns if you will, which he tries to uphold until the very end; his vision of the perfect woman is destroyed when Song transgresses the female space and reveals his true gender that does not comport with Gallimard’s perceptions.

Gallimard controls the separation of the gendered spaces male and female during Act One: he recounts his story intermeshing it with the narrative of Puccini’s opera, speaking for all characters including Song and Marc.³⁵ The narrative alters from Gallimard’s perspective juxtaposed with Song’s active participation as narrator in Act II, resulting in Gallimard’s “loss of authorial control over his own story” (Shimakawa 351). Gender boundaries are blurred when Song takes off his clothes, which function as separating shield, collapsing Gallimard’s

³⁴ The chapter titles of 4.2.3.1 and 4.2.3.2 are adapted from Hwang’s afterword to *M. Butterfly*, in which he explains the actuality of contemporary Orientalism: “From my point of view, the “impossible” story of a Frenchman duped by a Chinese man masquerading as a woman always seemed perfectly explicable; given the degree of misunderstanding between men and women and also between East and West, it seemed inevitable that a mistake of this magnitude would one day take place” (98).

³⁵ Compare Act I.5 (p. 51)

perception of femaleness, in particular Asian femaleness.³⁶ The gender spaces that the clothes mask, are not merely separated by biological differences between male and female but rather, as Gallimard's affair with Renee reveals, are defined by a composite of behavioral patterns on how to act. Renee, the epitome of femininity, is "too masculine" for Gallimard as she does not act feminine enough: she does not feel shame for her overtness of her naked body, as she, unlike Gallimard, does not perceive her behavior as wrong or false. Gender roles are toppled and with it the social normatives that set these roles. Closely linked to gender roles are gender identities: "Gallimard's identity as Western male [...] derived its contours in relief to Song's identity as Eastern female" (Shimakawa 352), and is defined and dependent on the stability of the Other. As Li points out, "identity seems to become an equivalent of garments, to be worn and discarded at ease" (*Nation* 159). Thus, when Song shakes off his female Butterfly identity, Gallimard imminently loses his constructed Western masculinity, resulting in Gallimard's metamorphosis into Butterfly.

Shimakawa points out that Gallimard and Song's roles are not simply reversed; both blur the boundaries of female and male gender roles, "mov[ing] between the seemingly poles, [...], in Judith Butler's, terms the *performativity of gender*" (353). To the shifting of gender Dorinne Kondo adds the shifting of ethnicity as a sequel, which will be dealt with in the following chapter. Gendered roles are projected onto gendered races that represent international power relations (7), fusing gender roles with Orientalist stereotypes. Shimakawa concludes that these constructs - gendered and racial or ethnic - though not stringently real, "are not entirely free-floating signifiers" either (353). Instead they derive and are "determined by a constitutive [...] history producing narrative conventions like *Madama Butterfly*" (Kondo 23), which shape our perceptions on gender and racial roles.

Hwang questions the staged identities that are performed in accordance to conventions that are more often than not fictional, as is the case with the Oriental submissive

³⁶ The function of clothes as separating shields is mentioned by Renee in Act II.6. She elaborates on her theory of men in power – who fight wars because they have an inferiority complex that stems from their penis' size – connecting the here discussed issues on gendered ethnicity in a different context: "But, like, it just hangs there. This little...flap of flesh. And there is so much fuss that we make about it. Like, I think the reason we fight wars is because we wear clothes. Because no one knows – between the men, I mean – who has the bigger...weenie. [...] But, see, it never really works, that's the problem. I mean, you conquer the country, or whatever, but you're still wearing clothes, so there's no way to prove absolutely who is bigger or smaller. And that's what we call a civilized society. The whole world run by a bunch of men with pricks the size of pins."

female stereotype. In order to do that *M. Butterfly* stages stereotypes of gender in operation displaying the negative images of Western male and Eastern female. This is most evident in Song's figure, who performs both his female and male gender, and in addition acts out Orientalist and Western stereotypes: "Song portrays the exotic lotus blossom" and "gives a correspondingly stereotypical performance of Western masculinity: cocky, crass, [...] making racist comments about the Chinese" (Shimakawa 356). However, his role as Butterfly is explicitly scripted as a paradox. Song Liling's role is that of a woman created by a man, and not simply a woman. The notion that only a man is capable of performing (maybe even being) an idealized woman is repeated throughout the play. At first by Gallimard, who finds his perfect woman in an "enchanted space,"³⁷ beyond reach so to say, suggesting that she exists (1) not in the East as one would suspect (2) not even in reality, hence enchanted and thus seemingly (3) in Gallimard's Western male mind only. Song, too, can be blamed for sharing the same image about the perfect women, as he tells Comrade Chin:

SONG. Miss Chin? Why, in the Peking Opera, are women's roles played by men?

CHIN. I don't know. Maybe a reactionary remnant of male -

SONG. No. Because only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act. (63)

Marjorie Garber draws on the Japanese *onnagata* tradition, wherein male actors are trained to perform female roles, to explain the controversy of only men being able to play or act as the ideal, perfect woman.³⁸

³⁷ The "enchanted place" is located in his prison cell as Gallimard says in Act I.1: "The limits of my cell are as such: four-and-a-half meters by five. There's one window against the far wall; a door, very strong, to protect me from autograph hounds. [...] When I want to eat, I'm marched off to the dining room – hot, steaming slop appears on my plate. When I want to sleep, the light bulb turns itself off – the work of fairies. It's an enchanted space I occupy. The French – we know how to run a prison" (1-2).

At the end of the play Gallimard locates his perfect woman in the cell: "And I have found her at last. In a prison on the outskirts of Paris. My name in Rene Gallimard – also known as Madame Butterfly" (93).

³⁸ Hwang also mentions Kabuki and *onnagata* explaining the tradition of transvestism in theatre (DiGaetani 146).

“Were a woman to attempt to play a Kabuki female role,” writes one scholar, “she would have to imitate the men who have so subtly and beautifully incarnated woman before her.” [...] The idea that women would inevitably play cross-dressed women’s parts less well than men [...] suggests [...] a reimposition of gender hierarchy. [...] The question seems to be [...] one of “ideal” and transcendent womanhood, an abstraction politically inflected so that it can only be conceptualized and embodied by men. (133-34)

The perfect woman is not only a produce of male fantasy, in fact she is beyond the reach of normal physical human experience that cannot be found in reality and ultimately not in a biological human woman. However, why women seem to lack perfection is justified in biological terms: because they are not male they do not know how to be or act perfectly feminine. The actual females in *M. Butterfly* - Comrade Chin, Helga, and Renee - further accentuate this; their roles “are presented in caricature” (Garber 141) and none of them embodies the perfect woman. The character of Comrade Chin, who stands in direct contrast to Song, adds another twist to gender(ed) politics, embodying the communist ideal as an androgyne. By doing so, Garber argues, David Hwang first demystifies to then remystify femininity (135), adding a new layer of fabrication to femaleness.

Song’s performance of the perfect woman is contrasted by his performance of a culturally tactless, narcissistic, and exploitive Western man dressed in an Armani suit. The dividing lines between East/West and male/female are blurred in one character. This adds another dimension of shifting, namely that of identity in general. This shifting, or conscious switching, of identities enables subjects in an in-between-stage to adapt themselves by choosing that identity, which serve them best for their current purposes. In the Asian American context, this in-between-ness can also be argued through Susan Koshy’s referral to Asian American identity and their “about-to-be-ness” suggesting a yet undefined vignette that describes Asian American identity. This subject will be broached in the following chapter.

The shifting of identities, “the possibility of manipulating the relationship between gender and sex” in our case, enables Song “to conceive of identity,” gender, and ethnicity “as mobile and [thus] manipulatable” (Shimakawa 358). Song, who can decode Orientalism’s mechanism as indicated in Act I.6, knowingly deconstructs socially constructed norms on gender (performance), repeating to Gallimard and the audience that his identity is performed. In this context, Garber points out the symbolism of make-up used in Chinese opera as opposed to Japanese theatre; in Japanese theatre white faces are associated with upper-class

women, whereas in Chinese opera white stands for treachery (135). Gallimard, who finds Song convincible as a Japanese woman, falls prey to this cultural misreading of Chinese opera and once again verifies Said's Orientalism and the notion of essentializing the East into one single entity.

It is Orientalism that keeps Gallimard's "enchanted space" intact, and it is Orientalist stereotypes that enable Song to deceive Gallimard. For Gallimard, clichéd images of gender and race constitute gender and racial identities, which he justifies through Orientalism in Act I.3: "Please try to understand it from my point of view. We are all prisoners of our time and place." Insisting "on reading a complex, shifting reality through the Orientalist texts of the past makes him the prisoner and, eventually, the willing sacrificial victim of his own culturally and historically produced conventions" (Kondo 15). Gallimard seems outdated as he fails "to accept the complexity and ambiguity of everyday life, [has] too little imagination to open himself to different cultural possibilities, blurred boundaries, and rearrangement of power" (Kondo 21). On the other hand Song's character, whose perceptions on gender also position men over women in so far as only men can be perfect women, defies any categorization. I would argue that although he is biologically male, his identity remains masked as both his personification of Butterfly and a man are performed. With Song's undisclosed identity that does not deliver a counter-image to Gallimard's Orientalized East, Hwang sets *M. Butterfly* into the contemporary Asian American context of transcultural identity that is composed of a range of identities that defy any static definition.

Furthermore, Song's comment on his masculinity ("And being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man." (83)) raises the issue on the emasculation of Asian American men. As Jinqi Ling points out, this particular gender issue has "long been a vexatious issue to the community [and is] used as a metaphorical expression of outrage over the humiliations historically suffered by Asian men in America" (*Identity Crisis* 313). Although the term unquestionably postulates a hierarchy of male over female, it should be analyzed in its "figurative history and its social components" and hence be distinguished from "its semantic substitute 'feminization'" (*Identity Crisis* 314). Therefore, Song's emasculation reflects the East's assumed political and military impotence against the West, rather than an actual lack of sexual vigor. Emasculation here stands for a social consequence that Asian American men faced regarding their position in American society, which reflected on East/West relations resulted in a feminization of the East:

[T]he traditional Western concepts of masculinity – which values men as embodiments of civilization, rationality, and aggressiveness and devalues

women as embodiment of primitiveness, emotion, and passivity – was extended to account for the West’s sense of economic and political superiority over Asia by projecting the latter as a diametrically opposed feminine Other. (Ling, *Identity Crisis* 314)

The domination of the West is dependant on emasculation of the East, as Hwang shows with the gendering of ethnicities. The political subjugation of Indochina and Vietnam is argued on these gendered relations between East and West as discussed in the following chapter.

4.2.2.2 (Mis)construction and (Mis)reading of East and West

On the flip side of Song’s masquerade stands racial identity that is interdependent with gendered identity, since in *Butterfly* narratives imperialism acts through gender. *M. Butterfly* addresses moments in history that fall under the category of East/West relations and were unquestionably affected by Orientalism.

The historical moments Hwang draws upon in *M. Butterfly* are the Indochina War and the Vietnam War. He questions Orientalist power relation by staging Eastern and Western stereotypes in their extreme forms personified by the protagonists: Gallimard as exploitive, ignorant Western diplomat and Song as treacherous, inscrutable Oriental. Although the question on gender roles is predominant in Act I and II the trial scene (Act III.1) elucidates the political notions under which Gallimard justifies his dominance and power over Song, who phrases it “international rape mentality.”³⁹ In this scene Song links gender inextricably with race and imperialist power relations, further politicizing the binary equations East/female and West/male. However, Song’s thematization of this issue exemplifies a resistance of the East to be essentialized “in a single, female character” (Wisenthal 10), although *M. Butterfly* does not offer any variation of Oriental characters as predecessor *Butterfly* narratives did.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the fact that Song has detected the roots of Orientalist power relations as Gallimard’s *modus operandi* on how to build a relationship with Song, proves on one hand his

³⁹ The trial scene is quoted in 4.2.1.3 (p. 63)

⁴⁰ Jonathan Wisenthal in fact singles out Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* as the most balanced narrative on the Orient, as it offers a variety of Oriental characters differing in their views and attitudes towards the West, “represent[ing] a continuum running from the highly assimilated [...] and the unassimilated” (10). For instance Cio-Cio-San’s father, who opposes to his daughter’s relationship with a foreigner, proves Gallimard’s assumption on the Oriental’s compliance to submit to the West wrong.

advantage (and advancement) over Gallimard, but by the same token reveals his complicity of and contribution to Orientalism. On the contrary, it can be argued that the West is essentialized in one single, male character since other Western characters (i.e. Marc, Toulon, and Helga) do not hold any alternative opinions of the East.

The marginality of Orientalism and power relations is further stressed in the judge's predominant interest on Song's gender deception (and not on the spying activity). In his speech of defense Song reasons his successful deception on the West's Orientalist mentality, which is so deeply engraved in their minds that Song concludes it as natural declaring it a rule: "Rule Two: As soon as a Western man comes in contact with the East – he's already confused" (82). Claiming that Gallimard could not help but to essentialize the East and Song in *Butterfly*, Song voices another contemporary (mis)conception frequently addressed in Asian American context: "[Y]ou expect Oriental women to be submissive to your men. That's why you say they make the best wives" (83). "Yellow Fever" is how Hwang calls Caucasian men's fetish for Oriental women (*Afterword* 98); a myth that I would assume results from America's post-war relations to and military interventions in Asia.⁴¹ Other stereotypes such as 'Rice Queens' – homosexual Caucasian men attracted to Asians only, mail-order brides, and Hollywood's portrayal of supporting Asian females that are either good or evil, can also be linked to political power relations between East and West. Hwang concludes:

Now our considerations of race and sex intersect the issue of imperialism. For this formula – good natives serve Whites, bad natives rebel – is consistent with the mentality of colonialism. [...] It is reasonable to assume that influences and attitudes so pervasively displayed in popular culture might also influence our policymakers as they consider the world. The neo-Colonialist notion that good elements of a native society, like a good woman, desire submission to the masculine West speaks precisely to the heart of our foreign policy blunders in Asia and elsewhere. (*Afterword* 99)

⁴¹ In a related context, Misha Berson sketches out the history of Asian American theatre and with it, Asian American stereotypes in American theatre. An accountable caesura in theatre history is indeed WW II, after which stereotypes changed to the "better": "You could not even find sympathetic or sizable Asiatic *roles* in Broadway shows until after World War II. A shift began when U.S. soldiers returned from long stints in the Pacific, sometimes bringing Asian war brides home with them." (xi)

In this statement Hwang gives an interpretation of Gallimard's faulty prediction of the Vietnam War and subsequently that of the "real" West, claiming that political decisions are based on popular caricatures of Asians. As discussed in chapter 4.2.1.2 Act II.3, Gallimard's analysis on the political situation in Vietnam is justified by his conclusion of French failure in Indochina: "With all due respect, sir, why should the Americans have won the war for us back in '54 if we didn't have the will to win it ourselves" (45). The French failed in Indochina because they did not continue to execute their will to dominate. As Said repeatedly describes it, Orientalism serves as a blueprint for the West's policy on how to deal with the East:

It is quite common to hear high officials in Washington and elsewhere speak of changing the map of the [...] East, as if ancient societies and myriad peoples can be shaken up like so many peanuts in a jar. But this has often happened with the "Orient," that semi-mythical construct which since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in the late eighteenth century has been made and re-made countless times by power acting through an expedient form of knowledge to assert that this is the Orient's nature, and we must deal with it accordingly. (*Orientalism* xiii)

Just as Song regards Gallimard's perceptions on the East as natural, so does Gallimard. His Orientalist analysis based on historical myths created by fictional narratives, such as the myriad Butterfly narratives, proves Said's main argument. Additionally, Gallimard also links racial identity with gendered identity "align[ing] the Vietnamese with female masochism" (Shin 186) judging that "Orientals with always submit to a greater force" (46).

As briefly mentioned above, Song utilizes Orientalism as an instrument to exercise mastery over Gallimard and his Oriental gaze through which he perceives Song. By doing so Hwang "turns Orientalism against the West's own interests," working against its natural purpose so to speak, as Gallimard tries to reinvent himself by "donning the personae of the East" (Shin 181). His display of cultural stereotypes is subverted at the end, marked by a critique of both, the East and the West. "The West is taken to task for its patronizing and mistaken attitudes of masculine superiority over a feminine East which is weak and helpless to resist. The East [...] is implicitly criticized for its complicity in sustaining this stereotype by reproducing images of the delicate, the dainty, the subservient, the polite, and the apologetic" (Deeney 27). Although one could argue that Song merely took advantage of the possibility Gallimard was offering him, Hwang and Deeney both argue that on a cultural level Hwang's criticism is justified in so far, that contemporary Orientalism in popular culture works both

ways: the East not only holds corresponding stereotypical prejudice on Westerners, they actively slip into Orientalist roles. Never mind that their motifs may be self-serving, they still contribute to uphold these images of Asians in the West, especially in contemporary popular culture. In an interview with DiGaetani Hwang highlights this mutual guilt:

HWANG: [...] [T]he play is fairly even-handed in saying that the East also misperceives the West. [...] The West, having the advantage of being the colonial power and of being the more powerful of the two over the past couple of hundred years, has an attitude of condescension toward the East. But the East has played up to that to its short-term advantage without thinking of the long-term ill effects that reinforce those racial stereotypes causes. [...]

DIGAETANI: Well, an aspect of the Puccini opera that I think is often overlooked is its attack on that Western view. [...] Puccini presents the West as oafish and insensitive.

HWANG: Puccini presents that view at the same time that he presents a view of the East as helpless to resist. I think that the East has played into that stereotype by saying, “Oh, yes, we are helpless” and therefore trying to manipulate the situation to its own advantage. (141-143)

Deeney follows a similar pattern of argumentation projecting the metamorphoses of Song and Gallimard on the cultural and geo-political level (29). However, both fail to explain their judgments on the East’s complicity. I do not agree with Hwang and Deeney in this point that Song is contributing to uphold the Butterfly stereotype, since it was not Song, who willingly convinced Gallimard of his Butterfly-ness. I would argue that it was Gallimard who read Butterfly into Song. Orientalism and Orientalist stereotypes are a produce of the West, and thus, Gallimard had his notions about Butterfly before he saw Song’s performance of *Madama Butterfly*. However, Song complies with Gallimard in so far as he, too, upholds the binaries of East/West, stereotyping Western men and their attitude towards the East, which for him are natural. In other words, Song also upholds the separation of spaces of East and West, but he does so by misperceiving the West and not by contributing to the West’s misperception. That he instrumentalizes the Butterfly stereotype to spy on Gallimard and serve his purposes may be criticizable, but Hwang’s and Deeney’s argument that the East in general is complicit in holding up Asian stereotypes is, according to me, not valid outside the fictionalities of the narrative. In fact, I would argue that Asian Americans suffer under contemporary stereotypes,

such as mail-order brides, emasculated men, or the Model Minority myth, rather than utilizing these for “short-term advantages.”

4.2.3 *M. Butterfly* in the Asian American context

As we have discerned misperceived notions of gender and international power relations as the core issues *M. Butterfly* addresses, it is important to distillate *M. Butterfly*'s relevance within the Asian American context. To this, David Li points out, readings of gender and power relations in *M. Butterfly* “may stop short of unmasking what the play at once conceals and reveals: racism within the borders of the United States” (*Nation* 156). The acceptance and rejection of the Orientalist stereotype personified by Song demonstrate the Asian American identity conflict within American national identity discourse, marking the play as exemplary contemporary Asian American. Although the actualities in the play are not American (the only American point of reference is Puccini's Pinkerton) the language used by all characters is tellingly American, and so are the Orientalist stereotypes that are employed and exploited. Just as Kingston adamantly defended her novel, Hwang could have argued against his critics that (mis)placed *M. Butterfly* outside the (Asian) American trope: “No. No. No. Don't you hear the American slang? Don't you see the American settings? Don't you see the way the Chinese myths have been transmuted to America.” As Hwang puts it, the conscious choice of speaking in American slang tags *M. Butterfly* as “a very American play” (DiGaetani 152), locating its implied criticism on race and international power relations “not [in] the simple opposition between East and West, women and men, but a context that approximates David Henry Hwang's own living and writing” (Li, *Nation* 156).⁴²

Rectification of Asian representation in mainstream literature initiated Asian American literature and has since occupied a primary role. With the drive to represent oneself correctly arise issues on defining one's identity and identification with mainstream culture and society. As stated at the end of the chapter on Asian American identity, David H. Hwang's *M. Butterfly* employs this technique of re-representing by (1) negating Orientalist stereotypes imposed on

⁴² David Li's explanation on this argument is quite interesting. He draws a connection to Song and Hwang, who said: “As an Asian, I identify with Song. As a man, I identify with Gallimard” (qtd. in Li *Nation* 156). Hwang's description of himself as “Asian” allies him, according to Li, with the 1960s Asian American movement, making “Hwang's lexicon distinctively ethnic nationalist [the same Asian American generation Frank Chin belongs to]” and ultimately placing his work in a U.S. national context. He goes on to interpret Song's usage of “Oriental” instead of “Asian” as disguise “tactically aimed [...] to infiltrate the white-male-dominated stage of Broadway.” (*Nation* 157)

Asian Americans and (2) confronting those stereotypes with postmodern approaches to issues on gender and race in an age of transnationalism. Another main leitmotif listed in the summary chapter of Asian American literature, is the fear to be misunderstood. In order to counteract misunderstandings, Asian American writers made sure to explain themselves and at parts add historical passages to their narratives. Although Hwang's audience should be well versed in Asian American history, it is notable that – as Hwang's critics prove – *M. Butterfly* is misinterpreted by both Western and Asian American critics. As addressed by post-war Asian American literature, the image of perpetual foreignness needed to be combated in addition to the lingering stereotypification of Orientals. The new stereotypes on their perpetual foreignness, as model example for other minorities are as Misha Berson suggests, “familiar Asian stereotypes dressed up in new clothes” (xi), Americanized versions adapted to the new faces of the immigrants. *M. Butterfly's* criticism of the Butterfly stereotype implies all these issues and can subsequently be rightly placed into Asian American literature.

4.2.3.1 Voicing Criticism in Orientalist Codes

Hwang tackles dominant racial hierarchy by subverting the one-way interracial relationship between a white man and an Asian woman. Nevertheless, his subversion is limited to a (rejected) same-sex interracial relationship. Rather than reversing the conventional roles – staging a relationship of a “blonde homecoming queen [...] with a short Japanese businessman” as Song suggests (17) – Hwang chooses the lesser evil it seems. His predicament seems similar to the critique Edward Said faced; on the one hand, he was accused to be anti-Western or pro-Arab, and on the other, *Orientalism* was demonized as produce of Western scholarship that claims authority over the East. Hwang's emasculation of Gallimard can be viewed as anti-Western, while the negative portrayal of Song as anti-Asian American.⁴³

⁴³ In a footnote David Li recapitulates an incident at the 1989 convention of the Association for Asian American Studies, which David Hwang also attended: “One female Asian student from U.C. Berkeley tearfully asked Hwang how he could ‘do this [pander] to us,’ leaving the genuinely troubled playwright frantic to clear away ‘misreadings.’ A law professor from the University of Hawaii agreed with other negative readings when he accused the play of promoting invisible-turned-devious Asian American maleness. Aware of the inherent irony of his proposal, he nevertheless chanted, ‘Give me Bruce Lee or Give me Death.’ ‘If it comes down to Bruce Lee or Song Liling, I’ll take Bruce any day [because] at least Bruce was up front with his enemies – it was not his style to masquerade.’” (*Nation* 228)

The punch line for Hwang, so argues Adams, is not a simple subversion of existing stereotypes nor is his intention to defend America against Asian America or vice versa. In the real-life incident that Hwang utilizes as intertextual foil, Bernard Bouriscot's 'yellow fever' for an Oriental woman becomes a 'Rice Queen' fantasy. The essentializing of Orientalist stereotypes in real life, then, is what concerns Hwang; the differences between Song and his predecessor Butterflies "hardly seem to matter since he operates in the world of fantasy, specifically Orientalist fantasy" (119).

The perpetual foreignness of Asian Americans and their claim on their American identity is implicitly reconsidered here. Although the subversion of the Oriental representation is achieved by the emasculation of a Western representation, the subversion remains incomplete; Gallimard is emasculated and dies as Butterfly, killing only the Oriental fantasy about the Asian woman – the masculine and powerful West is left untouched, since Song appropriates his masculinity through the Western ideal in an Armani suit. Suggesting that one can be either Western or Oriental, "everything else – simply falls short" (Hwang, *M. Butterfly* 90).

The critique on Hwang's (mis)directed message seems valid at first, since it does both, subvert and uphold, negate and contend to. In this sense then, Hwang's intended critique on the mutuality of Orientalism also applies to his own work *M. Butterfly*. Bearing Frank Chin's criticism on Kingston in mind, Hwang employs Orientalist vocabulary to infiltrate into a white, mainstream market. In order to be heard, Hwang is forced to remain in the paradox tradition of his literary forefathers: he has to couch his criticism into the Other's language to avoid misunderstanding. This is further reinforced, Adams argues, by the dramatic attention Gallimard gains in the end of the play. Song is stripped off his audience's sympathy. Instead, Hwang directs their attention on a Western man "that is privileged in terms of class, gender and sexuality" (121).

David Li advances my last argument into a general Asian American trope. He draws on Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey*, in which the character Nancy Lee, an aspiring actress, is reduced on her race: "Can't you act more oriental? Act oriental," demands the director (24). From this Li concludes that Asian American representation also implies "gaining control of ethnic cultural intelligibility" (*Nation* 153). In order to make one's criticism more 'user-friendly' to the public, Hwang is forced to comply with what Li calls the "normative correspondence between the look and the act" that is expected of Asians in the United States (*Nation* 153). The paradox lies in the Asian American representation, or if we put the cart before the horse, mainstream cultural recognition of Asian Americans and its necessity "in the

lived social actuality of Asian America” (*Nation* 156). As expressed in chapter two, Asian American identity is measured and evaluated against mainstream culture and subsequently is formed in relation to the Other. Bearing this in mind, the criticism voiced by a number of Asian Americans seems understandable.⁴⁴ In Song’s case, who implicitly embodies Asian American representation, the audience reads another Orientalist stereotype into him: “a version of *femme fatale*, a dragon lady – or lady in drag – who attempts to evade white patriarchal law and order through disguise” (Li, *Nation* 160). Song’s invisible true self portrays David Palumbo-Liu’s fear of the vanishing minority. At first marginalized through stereotypification, Asian Americans were outcast as perpetual foreigners. Contemporary Asian America is faced with a new threat: invisibility. The American national identity manifesto does not adapt its subject’s normativity, instead those who wish to be legitimately incorporated need to take off their genetic makeup and thus “sacrifice their bodily intactness in order to participate in public culture” (*Nation* 173). Hwang’s vacillation between deconstruction of Orientalist stereotypes and reconstruction of new gender and racial stereotypes, illustrates the Asian American multiple identity self. What W.E.B. DuBois called “double consciousness” is the Asian American identity mosaic that is not only generated by growing inner-Asian American diversity. The struggle for complete integration into the American national identity manifesto is barred by notions of “racial/social boundary” that are inbred (Orientalism being one factor) and the “trepidation about consequent reprisal so internalized, that any offensive action is necessarily doubled with defensive reactions, de-masquerade coupled with re-masquerade” (Li, *Nation* 164). The alternative, to be visible, is to risk being essentialized with Asians and thus not be seen as American representatives. Although contemporary Asian American literature has taken the road of transculturalism, a cultural construct such as the American national identity has not yet embraced the thought of multiethnic representation. In this sense then, Hwang’s “failed representation” was ahead of its time projecting today’s identity crisis of Asian Americans. As I will try to sketch out in the following chapter, contemporary Asian American artists call for inclusion into American history, however, not in the past but rather in the future of American history.

⁴⁴ i.e. Frank Chin in The Big Aiiieeee and James Moy in “Flawed Self-Representations,” who both argue that the mainstream appeal *M. Butterfly* enjoyed, is evidence for its contribution to uphold Orientalist stereotypes.

5. Orientalism in 21st Century Asian America

Numerous successful Asian American artists continue on David Hwang's path instrumentalizing their mainstream appeal to point out weak points of racial equality and national integration in the United States. The narrative forms have adapted to contemporary youth culture taking up new art performances like stand-up comedy, spoken word poetry, and hip hop music. With the narrative forms, the intended audience has changed, too. Many contemporary artists address their art to a multi-race audience, spreading awareness in a generation that was always 'racially equal' and free. Nevertheless, society has not achieved color-blindness and latent racism hidden in Orientalist stereotypes lives on. Racial and ethnic quotas to ensure diversity backfired on minorities, who are subjected to a new kind of racism; they are burdened with a visible, weighty knapsack of unearned discriminations that are held against them on a daily basis, but about which they are meant to remain oblivious.⁴⁵ As McIntosh suggests, people of color are marginalized because of their apportioned privileges advocated for racial diversity; by the same token a white person can get a job "with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that [he] got it because of [his] race, or keep[s] it because of [his] race, or will be promoted because of [his] race" (qtd. in Houston xix).

Asian American writers and artists have been concerned with a number of issues on identity and representation. The twenty-first century has introduced new art platforms for Asian Americans and contributed to collaboration with people of other races, including white. They are concerned with the future rather than their past, which had been the focus of former Asian American generations. Their appeal for inclusion into the national identity manifesto remains true to the tradition of Asian American literature; however, it is geared towards a transnational concept of nationalism that is non-exclusive, non-biased, and non-confining. Orientalist stereotypes continue to be a motif for Asian American artists that they aim to

⁴⁵ Adapted and paraphrased from Velina H. Houston, who writes about the rigidity of cultural hierarchy in the United States. Discussing "over-entitlement as an aspect of systematic oppression" (xviii-xix) Houston draws on Peggy McIntosh's study *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account on coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies*. In this context she writes: "McIntosh presents a metaphor for systems that ensure the sustenance of privilege, stating that she as a white woman possesses an invisible, weightless knapsack of 'unearned privileges' that she can take advantage of on a daily basis, but about which she is 'meant' to remain oblivious." (xix)

dismantle, laying a claim on their Americanness and, by the same token, celebrating their diversity. As McIntosh's study urges, race and culture have to be tackled from a different angle; history has proven that race and culture cannot be obliterated and society is not color-blind. The artists discussed in this chapter, Beau Sia and Margaret Cho, have different approaches on Asian American stereotypes, racial profiling, and national identity. Beau Sia, for example, following Fran Chin's critique on Asian American writer's self-Orientalization, condemns Margaret Cho's blatant portrayal of stereotypes. On the other hand, Cho moves away from addressing merely Asian American issues to voicing criticism on many types of discrimination, including racism, sexism, heteronormativity, obesity and beauty craze. Her field of topics is wide as are the operating modes of gearing Asian American identity from an "about-to-be-ness" to a "coming to rest."

5.1 Beau Sia

Spoken word artist, poet, actor, and writer Beau Sia, born 1976, is a second generation Chinese American who grew up in Oklahoma City. After graduating from high school, he went to New York to pursue a degree at the New York University's Dramatic Writing program, which is when he got into contact with spoken word and slam poetry at the "Nuyorican Poets Café." Slams are events at which spoken word artists act out their poetry that are judged by the audience. First conceived in Chicago in the 1980s, spoken word is influenced by rap music and Beat poetry. The movement holds an annual "National Poetry Slam," where teams from various cities compete for the championship title. The performance aspect is paramount. Paul Devlin, director of *SlamNation*,⁴⁶ points out the reasons: "The people who do best are expert in both [writing poetry and performing it] But in slam, the performance is starting to take precedence because of the nature of the competition. You have to be able to engage an audience [...] so when you put in on page, it's missing an important element" (qtd. in Beale).

Sia won the team championship title at the "National Poetry Slam" in 1996 and 2000, and was runner-up for the individual championship title in 2001. He belongs to the original cast of HBO's *Russell Simmons presents Def Poetry Jam* and appeared in all seasons. He was also

⁴⁶ *SlamNation* is a documentary film that covers the finals of the "National Poetry Slam" in 1996, where Beau Sia competed for the "Nuyorican Poets Café."

SlamNation. Dir. Paul Devin. Cinema Guild, 1998.

co-writer and actor in *Def Poetry Jam on Broadway*, a theatrical adaptation and sequel to the HBO version, for which he received the Special Event Tony Award in 2003.

5.1.1 Issues

Sia's works cover issues from racial profiling and Asian American stereotyping to national and historic representation within the American context. On 17 May 2008, Sia expressed his thoughts on political representation of Asian Americans at an APIA event.⁴⁷ He addressed his spoken word to the presidential candidates John McCain, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton. Although none of the candidates were available to attend the APIA Vote event, Clinton sent a pre-recorded message and Obama even joined in live via videoconference to take questions, whereas McCain was completely absent. It seems Asian Americans are still partly perceived as neither important enough nor American enough to be (1) decisive in presidential elections and (2) part of the American democratic vista in par with other Americans, and are hence disenfranchised into national non-existence.

In his appeal Sia clearly stakes a claim to be part of America. "Include us!" (1:44) he demands, "This nation was built with us" (0:40). The invisibility Asian Americans suffer since their 'upgrade' to the Model Minority status, as a group of well-assimilated people that do not require (integrational) attention any longer, is reflected in Sia's text. But rather than drawing on the past, Sia's emphasis lies on the present, on contributions of Asian Americans and their concerns for America: "There must be a sergeant Tanaka, World War II veteran, concerned about health care. A Janet Yang wondering if there will be enough financial aid for her to go to college. A Louis Lee praying in church that his company doesn't ship his job overseas" (1:46). Orientalist stereotypes of pidgin-English speaking Orientals are superseded by images of common man Americans conjoining the American minority with the majority.

Sia, who firmly believes in an anti-assimilation process, in a balance of Asian and American, realizes the mutuality of Asian American inclusion into the American national identity manifesto: "Inspire us to embrace what must be done, in order for you to embrace us," (1:07) he says reproaching "special treatment" (1:15) that marginalizes Asian Americans as "category in a list" (1:37) excluding them from the American majority. By focusing on the

⁴⁷ APIA (Asian and Pacific Islander American); APIAVote is a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that encourages and promotes civic participation of Asian Pacific Islander Americans in electoral and public policy processes at national, state and local level.

present with an outlook to the future, Sia extends the minority hand towards, rather than pointing his finger at, the excluding majority.

The importance of a joint identity in the future is also stressed in his poem “Generations of Lost Angels Found,” which was conceived for an anthology on the Declaration of Independence. Sia’s poem is a plea to uphold the ideals manifested in the Declaration while looking towards the future, “to ask that/We become involved with history” (347). In order to become part of American history, Sia realizes he has to draw on the national history of the United States, calling for the beliefs and values that America was built upon. A joint history from now on is the key to provide a brighter future for the generations to come, “to show/Your children/How far we’ve come/And how much further/They will have to take us” (350). Sia’s appeal is geared at all Americans, Asian Americans and non-Asian Americans, with the hope that the coming generations will have other joint historical moments to look back at than “angel island,” “immigrant station,” and “Chinese exclusion” (348).

Orientalist stereotypes and misrepresentations of Asian Americans is the other major issue Sia deals with in his spoken word performances, often imbued with a plea to recognize Asian American culture as offshoot of American culture. As an actor and performer Sia is repeatedly faced with racial profiling in the entertainment industry that seeks to emphasize the exoticness of Asians. He points out the stereotyped portrayals of Asian Americans in Hollywood, which fails to recognize Asian Americans as their viewers. In an interview Sia states: “Asians are depicted in TV and film as either martial artists, bad guys, or cooks. Asian American female actors have more opportunities than Asian male actors. But female actors are still primarily offered roles that require them to portray sexiness, exoticness, and little else” (*Asian Writes*). The resilience of nineteenth-century Orientalist stereotypes to Asian American refutation is striking, as is the notion of Asian Americans as perpetual aliens that are not even considered as prospective consumers of American movie culture.

Sia’s position on these conditions in the entertainment industry is legitimate; in his performance “I am Beau Sia” he rants about racism in the entertainment industry and the dilemma of Asian American artists, who are obliged to comply with their ever-imposed stereotypes. “It’s been twenty-three months and fourteen days since my art has done anything for me,” (1:16) “so if you’re casting any films and you need a Korean grocery store owner, a computer expert, or the random thug of a Yakuza gang, then I’m your man” (0:22). He goes on, “and I will broken-English my way to sidekick status if that’s what expected of me” (1:02).

In the more rage-filled performance “Asian Invasion” Sia amplifies the effects on Asian American exclusion: “I don’t mean to sound upidy,⁴⁸ but *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* wasn’t a one-shot at love. It’s the precursor of what’s to come” (0:22). Sia illustrates the invisibility of Asian Americans in reality: “We are not just on the big screen in the Kung-fu flicks you adore. We are everywhere. We are programming your websites, making your executives look smart, and getting into your schools for free. That’s right, raise the bar and we’ll meet it,” (0:54) concluding, “you’re not shutting me up until the egg roll is recognized as an American food” (2:12).

5.2 Margaret Cho

Margaret Cho’s career legitimates Sia’s criticism of the entertainment industry and the disenfranchisement of Asian Americans into invisibility. Cho, born in 1968 in San Francisco, had an unusual childhood; unusual for Asian American children that are thought to be maneuvered through school, college and university by their parents, who attach great importance to education and conformity to their community’s lifestyle. Cho explains: “Asians put a high emphasis on education and conservative careers because of fear; then we, their children, end up not pursuing our dreams because of our parents’ racial vision” (qtd. in Tiger 29). The fear, I think, is a paranoid result from the Model Minority label. On the one hand, Asian Americans are obliged to live up to be a model immigrant group that have seemingly assimilated into American mainstream culture, exemplified by their economic and educational standard. On the other hand, they fear punishment for unexpected behavior by their own community that functions as a controlling authority to ensure that every Asian American is living up to the Model Minority.

Cho’s topics range wider than the usual repertoire of Asian American artists. She is concerned with race, gender, sexuality, and anything that complies with the rigid definition of mainstream culture and its claim to normativity prototyped by the media. Cho, who was expelled from high school at an early age, was repeatedly told off by her parents for not being Korean enough. As teenager she was overweight and made fun of at high school and at church, where she met other Korean Americans. The lack of being able to relate to other teenagers, Korean Americans, or her parents drove her into drug abuse. The only refuge she found as ‘outcast’ was amongst other marginalized people; her parents owned a book store on

⁴⁸ upidy (adj.): to make a fuss and get worked up over nothing
<<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=upidy>>

Polk Street, which, Cho writes: “was the Promised land for homosexual men from all over the world” (qtd. in Tiger 22). Cho shared the feeling of otherness with the marginalized homosexuals, which inspired her to pursue her dream: being on stage. Cho joined the SOTA (School of the Arts) class of ’87, a high school for children “who want to pursue a career in the visual and performing arts” (Tiger 10) that paved her way to stand-up comedy.

Adolescent issues on anorexia and popularity among peers to political issues on gay and lesbian rights and racial profiling spring from Cho’s own experience, casting a new light on Asian American identity. Being so atypically Asian American, Cho’s work raises the question whether race inadvertently bestows an artist with a duty to act as spokesperson for the community.

5.2.1 Issues

In her own way, Cho deconstructs this bestowed role, which is often imposed by other Asian Americans. Beau Sia for instance accuses Cho of self-Orientalizing “with her use of her mother’s accent and difficulty of understanding American culture as a focus of her humor.” Aware of the inherent contradictions of his proposal he goes on: “I don’t like what Margaret Cho has done. [...] I don’t want to say it is her duty to enlighten the public about contemporary Asian American culture. [...] As a high profile performer she gets more publicity” (*Asian Writes*). It seems that Sia is missing his own point here; he, who realized that dwelling on the past does not contribute to a joint future of a mixed-race America, fails to discern Cho’s attempt to become visible in an industry through her talent and not through “special treatment” that forces racial diversity. Cho’s aim is to achieve mainstream appeal by addressing issues that concern her as American and as Asian American.

Invisibility of Asian Americans in media is an often-lamented topic by Cho. In an October 2005 blog entry she writes: “America is supposed to be for everyone, and people are supposed to treat me like I belong here, and yet you would never know that from watching TV or movies. [...] Then when I try to explain this feeling of invisibility to those whose every move and moment is entirely visible, they come back at me with, ‘Maybe Asian Americans don’t want to be in entertainment!’” (qtd. in Tiger 42). In her stand-up show *Revolution* Cho lists Orientalist stereotypes in media that Asian American artists are offered concluding with the simple statement: “See, what it comes down to is that I cannot run up a wall!” (*Revolution* 3/8 4:30-8:34). She juxtaposes the fictive Orientalist stereotypes that Cho and other Asian Americans could not relate to with the only other visible representation of Asians in American culture: Hello Kitty, a voiceless mute that is “just a pussy with a bow on it” (8:46 – 9:46).

Cho also addresses invisibility in real life or the essentializing of all Asians and Asian Americans to one entity (*Revolution 4/8* 0:03 – 0:25). Faced with racial ignorance during her own career as an aspiring actress the director of *Star Search*, a television show that featured contestants of different genres including comedy, asked her to act more Chinese (Tiger 33-4). Nevertheless, Cho also shows the other side of the racial coin with her impersonation of her Korean mother (*Asian American* 0:59-1:28). Stereotypes about white Americans are part of Asian American perception as are Orientalist stereotypes to Americans (*Asian American* 3:02-4:08). By juxtaposing both sides Cho aims to bridge cultural misunderstandings, which when seen from both vantage points strike as being nothing else but simple misperceptions.

6. Conclusion

The works of David Hwang, Margaret Cho, and Beau Sia are held in the tradition of Asian American literature. Although the issues and the scope of their criticism differ widely, they share the common plea of integration into the greater American national identity manifesto; their declared intention is to be recognized as products of American culture. To this end, Orientalist stereotypes work as medium of contestation against racist and exclusionary notions in contemporary American culture. By evoking these stereotypes, to deconstruct, ridicule, or juxtapose against counter-images these three Asian American artists also instrumentalize Orientalist stereotypes to penetrate their criticism into mainstream American culture. Nevertheless, the attitude and the modulation of their criticism differ strongly and determine their motivations, which often stem from personal experience.

Concerned about the seductive aspect of Orientalist stereotypes, Hwang sets the fabrication of the Madame Butterfly myth into focus. The purpose of *Butterfly*, he believes, mirrors the self-serving imperialist nature of Orientalism: subjection of the East through political feminization. The Butterfly myth, the most prevalent misrepresentation of Asian Americans, planted a widely held misperception about 'Oriental' women, which in Bernard Boursicot's case even led to a blurring of fact and fantasy. Infatuated by the thought to be seduced by the perfect woman Boursicot's fantasy is self-acting enough to project his imagined Madame Butterfly onto a man. In addition, Hwang extends his criticism to a broader scale, conjoining Asian American with mainstream American issues. By projecting the misperceptions between East and West onto male and female Hwang transgresses the border of minority issues, pointing out the commonalities between the constructed splinter groups. He exemplifies his point through Song's character; Song and Gallimard may not be sharing a common vision of the Orient, nevertheless, what they share is the vision of the perfect woman. This, as it turns out, becomes the disastrous axis of their tragedies.

Throughout his play *M. Butterfly* Hwang calls into attention the "deathly embrace" of Orientalist stereotypes to reality; the other actual event *M. Butterfly* relates to is the Vietnam War. Focusing on a white character, Asian American writer Hwang highlights the dangers inherent in American Orientalism that backfire onto the subjugators. Backfiring theories are also addressed by Sia and Cho; in the age of racial and cultural diversity contemporary, twenty-first century, Asian American artists have come to the realization that radical equation and essentialization of what constitutes Americanness is not the key to national and cultural integration. Gearing towards cultural diversity and acceptance of it, Cho and Sia call for visibility and representation beyond race and ethnic background.

Having said this, the relevance of a restatement of what Asian American artists should be concerned with seems imperative. The notions discussed in chapter two that hold true for David Hwang's play, do not cover the scale of today's artists. It would be too superficial and tempting to reduce Cho's usage of her mother's accent as an attempt to take up a white mask and conform to Orientalist stereotypes in order to be successful. This generalized interpretation namely fails to recognize the changing notion of constructed concepts such as identity or race. As the concept of race developed from natural phenomenon, over socio-historical construct, to the idea of race being an illusion, the construct of American National Identity carries the possibilities of transformation and expansion; in the wake of the twenty-first century a growing global identity has enforced the image of a quilt-ed or mosaic-ed identity.

Bearing this in mind, is it really necessary (and in fact possible) for Asian American artists to italicize on Asian Americans? Does their race and ethnicity bar them to concern with whites, blacks, or even non-race related issues?

With the growing diversity in American national identity, grows the diversity of Asian American identity. As white Americans from the Northeast differ from – speaking of stereotypes – “Hockey-moms” and “Joe the Plumber” so do Asian American lives differ from one another. In order to come to terms with their identity, Asian American artists will have to embrace their individuality; else it will be very likely that they'll end up representing their (mis)perceptions on Asian American identity.

To complete my thesis I would like to once again call into attention the pertaining resilience of Orientalism in our mindsets, drawing the reader's final consideration on to this rather amusing example of Madame Butterfly as perfect woman taken from *Zeit Magazin*.⁴⁹

Oháyo gozaimas ! Kón'nichi wá ! Kónban wá !
 Doitsu, 56, 1,72m - widower - cosmopolit, businessman - with contacts also to Tokio ... wants to learn beautiful japanese Lady here in Germany which is speaking engl. or german language. Want to invite you to South Germany in my nice castle to spend Christmas days with me and my son, 18. Want to fall in love with you, that you stay here - forever. In case of home sickness , of course we will travelling all the years -also to Tokio. Jingle bells, jingle all the way ... and we are dreaming of a white Christmas.
 ZA 55627 DIE ZEIT, 20079 Hamburg

⁴⁹ It is noteworthy pointing out the faulty Japanese (in addition to the faulty English): with *Doitsu*, which should actually be *Doitsu jin*, the gentlemen refers to his nationality, German. The cosmopolitan sounding (not!) *Oháyo gozaimas! Kón'nichi wá! Kónban wá!*, meaning Good Morning! Good Afternoon! Good Evening!, is a poor attempt of writing Romanized Japanese. The correct form would be: *Ohayou gozaimasu! Konnichi wa! Konban wa!* Unfortunately every attempt to find out if anyone, male or female, answered this lonely heart ad, got nowhere.

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Zusammenfassung

Asiatisch Amerikanische Literatur und Orientalismus haben vieles gemeinsam, und zwar ist das Letztere der schöpferische Ursprung des Ersteren, so meint zumindest Sheng-mei Ma (xv). Auch wenn man diese Aussage nicht ohne Weiteres für sich selbst sprechen lassen kann und sollte, würde ich dennoch behaupten, dass es die Asiatisch Amerikanische Literatur so in ihrer Form nicht geben würde, wären Orientalistische Vorstellungen und Darstellungen über Asiaten in Angelsächsischer Literatur den ersten Asiatisch Amerikanischen Schriftstellern kein Dorn im Auge gewesen.

Orientalismus, so Said, beschreibt eine Vorstellung des Westens über den sogenannten Orient; diese Vorstellungen gehen über die realistische Berichterstattung weit hinaus, und sind durchsicht von subjektiven Wahrnehmungen und Empfindungen westlicher Künstler, Abenteurer, und Gelehrter des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts. Als Abkömmling imperialistischer Eltern hat der Amerikanische Orientalismus seine Wurzeln tief in die Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts geschlagen und gedeiht seither in unterschiedlichen Formen; Hollywood und amerikanische Außenpolitik bilden die jüngsten Glieder Orientalistisch geprägter Darstellungen von Amerikanern asiatischer Abstammung.⁵⁰ Der geographische, nicht zu verwechseln mit dem tatsächlichen, Rahmen des Orients läuft von Vorderasien (Nordafrika mit einbeziehend) bis fast an die Hintertüren Amerikas. Immerhin sind auch Asiatische Pazifik Amerikaner, im englischen Asian Pacific Islander Americans, von Orientalistischer Stereotypisierung nicht ausgenommen. Die Mehrzahl der amerikanischen Darstellungen bezieht sich aber vorwiegend auf Ost- und Südasiaten, also die historischen Hauptakteure (rein figurativ zu verstehen) des amerikanischen Imperialismus.

Orientalistische Darstellungen von Amerikanern asiatischer Abstammung lassen sich im Wesentlichen auf vier literarische Figuren zusammenfassen: Madame Butterfly bzw. China Doll, Dr. Fu Manchu, Dragon Lady und Charlie Chan. Diese ausschließlich schwarz-weiß gemalten Charaktere unterliegen wiederum zwei sozialpolitischen Stimmungsbildern, dem so genannten ‚yellow peril‘, der die Negativ-Figuren Fu Manchu und Dragon Lady beschreibt, und die so genannte ‚Model Minority‘ zu der Madame Butterfly und Charlie Chan gehören. Neumodischere Figuren, wie z.B. der sozialinkompetente Super-Student und der arglistige

⁵⁰ Während der amerikanische Begriff *Asian American* relativ eindeutig ist, gibt es mehrere deutsche Übersetzungen, die sich auch inhaltlich voneinander differenzieren. Ich ziehe *Amerikaner asiatischer Abstammung* dem in Deutschland gängigen Begriff angelehnten *Amerikaner mit asiatischem Migrationshintergrund* aus politischen Gründen vor.

Geschäftsmann können ebenfalls unter die Überkategorien ‚Model Minority‘ und ‚yellow peril‘ eingegliedert werden.

Bei dieser schwarz-weiß Malerei ist es nicht weiter verwunderlich, dass sich die betroffenen Amerikaner asiatischer Abstammung gegen diese konstruierten Repräsentationen wehrten. Die Widerlegung dieser Orientalistischen Stereotypen wurde zum Leitmotiv Asiatisch Amerikanischer Literatur und bestimmt diese seit heute. Die Botschaft die aus diesem Widerstand heraus entstand, ist die Aufforderung an nationale Anerkennung und Eingliederung in den Identitätskonstrukt Amerikas. So ist doch Asiatisch Amerikanische Identität ein Produkt Amerikas und somit auch Teil der Amerikanischen Geschichte, Kultur, und Gegenwart – all jener Aspekte die die Identität eines Landes bestimmen.

Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich zum größten Teil mit David Henry Hwangs Drama *M. Butterfly*, einer dekonstruktivistischen Wiederaufnahme von Puccinis Oper *Madama Butterfly*. Der Plot, von einem wahrhaftigen Fall inspiriert, handelt von Rene Gallimard und seiner Beziehung zu einem chinesischen Opersänger namens Song Liling, den er zwanzig Jahre lang für eine Frau hält. Dieser Sommernachtsverwechslungstraum, indem Geschlechter und Nationalitäten durcheinandergebracht werden, rührt von Gallimards Vorstellung bzw. Phantasie über die perfekte Frau aus dem fernen Orient. Seine Phantasie entpuppt sich schnell als Trugbild, nicht nur weil Song Liling ein Mann ist, sondern weil seine Einbildung der perfekten Frau, eine die bereit ist ihr Leben für einen Mann zu opfern (und zudem ungebildet und kindhaft ist, und ihm im Miniaturschritt auf Zehenspitzen folgt), eben ausschließlich eine (perverse) Wahnvorstellung eines Mannes ist. Projiziert man diese ungleiche Beziehung zwischen einem französischen Diplomaten und einem chinesischen Mann auf die politische Ebene, so scheint zunächst nur ein verzerrtes Scheinbild zu entstehen; denn wann ist schon, im Laufe der Geschichte der Menschheit, den Chinesen gelungen die Franzosen mit ihren eigenen Waffen zu besiegen? Gelungen ist es ihnen tatsächlich noch nie, doch versucht haben sie es schon im 19. Jahrhundert im Rahmen der Selbststärkebewegung.⁵¹ Hwangs zeitlicher Rahmen spannt von den 1960ern in die 1990er. Die Niederlage Amerikas gegen Nordvietnam und die 1966 anbrechende Kulturrevolution in China zwingen Gallimard China zu verlassen; seine politischen Bewertung zur Lage des

⁵¹ Als Anlass hierfür dienten die zwei verlorenen Opiumkriege, die, so schlussfolgerte man am kaiserlichen Hof, der Westen ausschließlich auf Grund seiner technologischen und militärischen Vorzugsstellung gewann. Daraus schloss man, dass China durch Aneignung des Wissens der „Barbaren“ und seiner eigenen geistigen Überlegenheit die Fremdherrschaft beseitigen könne.

Westen im Asien des Kalten Krieges war deutlich beeinflusst von seiner Fehleinschätzung der asiatischen Kultur, die wiederum von Orientalistischen Vorstellungen vorgeformt war. Durch diese Gleichsetzung von Orientalismus und Gegenwartspolitik mit einer gescheiterten Mischehe und einer politischen Niederlage, warnt Hwang gleichzeitig die Amerikaner, inklusive sich selbst, vor dem blinden Orientalismus, der eine selbstzerstörerische Eigendynamik entwickelt. Er zeigt also kein „was-wäre-wenn“ Bild, sondern eine andere mögliche Sichtweise auf die Realität.

Mit einem kurzen Ausblick auf die Entwicklung von Asiatisch Amerikanischer Literatur und ihrer Beziehung zum Amerikanischen Orientalismus im 21. Jahrhundert wirft das letzte Kapitel dieser Magisterarbeit die Fragen einer Neudefinierung der Konzepte Asiatisch Amerikanischer und Amerikanischer Identität auf. Die Werke Beau Sias und Margaret Chos, zum größten Teil unverkennbar in der Tradition ihrer literarischen „Vorfahren“ gehalten, appellieren an eine Verflechtung dieser zwei Konzepte mit einem Fernblick auf ein globaleres Konzept von nationaler Identität jenseits von Rasse, Ethnie und uniformer Kultur.

Erklärung

Hiermit erkläre ich, Shruti Bahety, geboren am 14.05.1985 in Kalkutta, dass die vorgelegte Magisterarbeit mit dem Titel *Orientalism in Contemporary Asian American Literature – Mounting Madame Butterfly on the Asian American Needle* von mir selbstständig verfasst wurde. Ich habe keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel benutzt sowie die Stellen der Arbeit, die anderen Werken dem Wortlaut oder dem Sinn nach entnommen sind, durch Angabe der Quellen kenntlich gemacht. Des Weiteren versichere ich, dass die Magisterarbeit nicht bereits in derselben oder einer ähnlichen Fassung an einer anderen Fakultät oder einem anderen Fachbereich zur Erlangung eines akademischen Grades eingereicht worden ist.

Shruti Bahety

Oberursel, 10. Februar 2009

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