

# THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE MIRROR: A LACANIAN READING OF DAVID HENRY HWANG'S PLAYWRITING

## 鏡像之旅：以拉康的精神分析理論 探討黃哲倫劇作風格之轉變

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### 摘要：

本論文主要探究美國華裔劇作家黃哲倫不同時期的作品中所呈現之不同的特色及議題，並以拉康的鏡像理論與黃哲倫劇作風格之轉變做一類比，說明黃哲倫透過劇本創作的過程，得以重新檢視及建構身份認同。其作品中對身份認同之定義和種族議題的處理，在不同時期呈現出迥然不同的風格。筆者企圖辯證黃哲倫在劇作中所呈現的心理轉變過程，與拉康之鏡像階段中的孩童所展現的主要特徵，確實有其不謀而合之處。

本論文以拉康討論孩童早期建構主體性的過程為經，將黃哲倫的作品分為三階段為緯，互為區別、對比，呈現黃哲倫在劇作中的成長軌跡。本文分析每個時期之代表作品：<<剛下船的中國人>>-前鏡像階段，<<蝴蝶君>>-鏡像階段，<<尋找中國城>>及<<金孩童>>-伊底帕斯階段。除此，黃哲倫的其它作品和相關的訪談及演說也一併在討論的範疇內，希冀提供一客觀及具說服力的論述。

## Abstract

This thesis attempts to make a penetrating analysis of playwright David Henry Hwang's psychological progress revealed in his plays in the light of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. Lacan's classification of the three stages of human psychological development is employed here to help peep into David Henry Hwang's inner world and exemplify that Hwang indeed has re-examined and reconstructed his self-identity through the playwriting. In the plays of different stages of Hwang's playwriting career, various styles of playwriting and attitudes toward the ethnic issues are clearly sketched within his works.

The main structure of the thesis lies in the analogy between Lacan's formulation of the three stages of the child's development of growth and David Henry Hwang's three stages that I have categorized. In comparison with Lacan's formulation of the pre-mirror stage, the mirror stage, the Oedipal stage, Hwang's three stages of mental development can be traced and well-reasoned. The main texts that support the analysis are as follows: *FOB* (1979)—the pre-mirror stage, *M. Butterfly* (1988)—the mirror stage, and *Trying to Find Chinatown* (1996), *Golden Child* (1997)—the Oedipal stage. Many other works of Hwang's, interviews as well as addresses made by Hwang will also be brought up for discussion with the regard to offering a critical and persuasive analysis.

The thesis consists of five chapters. Part One is the introduction of the whole thesis, including three parts: the introduction to the early history of Asian American literature, a brief introduction to David Henry Hwang's works and biographical background, and the illustration of the appliance of Lacanian theory in the thesis. Part Two is the chapter for Lacanian theory. For the purpose of providing the reader with the preliminary knowledge of the theory which in the latter chapters will be encountered, the mirror stage and the Oedipal stage are painstakingly penetrated and demonstrated. Many theoretical terms are singled out to make an even more detailed illustration only with the hope to help the reader peep into Lacan's profound theories. Part Three and Part Four are the body of the thesis. The main scheme of the two chapters rests upon the exploration of David Henry Hwang's psychological development revealed through his works in the light of Lacanian theory of the mirror stage and the Oedipal stage. The last part of this essay, the concluding part of the thesis, includes three sections: the affirmation of the employment of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to read David Henry Hwang's psychological development, the discussion of Hwang's brilliant intelligence as a playwright as well as the limitation and the space for him to improve, and the settlement of the optimistic prospect of the Asian American literature.

## Contents

I. Introduction
II. The Lacanian Theory: The Mirror Stage and the Oedipal Stage
III. The Journey through the Mirror
IV. From Fantasy to Reality
V. Conclusion
VI. References

**Keywords:** Asian-American literature, transitivity, the Mirror stage, the Oedipal stage, the reformation of subjectivity

### **I. Introduction**

During the recent decades, the issue of ethnicity has been paid tremendous attention to in the European academic field. More and more writers of different colors have attempted to articulate their voices amid the European mainstream. Nowadays, the multi-ethnic culture has become a crucial part of American society. Black representation belongs to nobody else but Toni Morrison, who has brought the literary field a fashion of black literature which mostly focuses on the pursuit of black roots and identity. Much like Morrison who reclaims the identity not only for herself but for her people, Asian American writers living on the land of America have also made great efforts to pursue their roots and strive for their self-identity or in a way, reclaim it. Since the 1980s, a golden age of Asian American cultural production has started. These Asian American authors have endeavored to make their writing as accessible to as broad an audience as possible, “experimenting with colloquial language and combining genre forms that blend drama and music with poetry, fiction with nonfiction, and literature with history.”<sup>1</sup> They intend to gain a possible space for the minority in the literary field, which is difficult, of course, especially when the racial stereotype is still deep-rooted in people’s minds. What’s more difficult for these Asian American writers to subvert the long-existing ideology is that in the nineteenth-century European genre, Asian American literature is taken as the model to be appropriated and cast as “imitation, mimicry, the underdeveloped Other” (Lowe 55). For all these reasons, Asian American writers seek for a revolution in reconstructing a new vision, one that Asian Americans are no more erased or looked upon as the role of a supplement or corollary to the Anglo-American literature.

### **II. The Lacanian Theory: The Mirror Stage and the Oedipal Stage**

Lacan’s foregrounding theory of the mirror stage has been widely applied and discussed

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<sup>1</sup>See Elaine H. Kim’s “Asian American Literature and the Importance of Social Context,” cited from World Wide Web. <http://www.adfl.org/ade/bulletin/N080/080034.HTM>.

in many fields, with regard to one's psychological developmental process. According to Lacan, the child's psychological development of growth can be divided into three stages—the pre-mirror stage, the mirror stage, and the post-mirror stage (the Oedipal stage).

### **i. The Pre-Mirror Stage**

The first six months of human life is called the pre-mirror stage according to Lacan. It is a stage in which the infant does not have a complete sense of the self but possesses only fragmented parts and images of itself. In other words, at this point of time, the infant has no ability to distinguish the self and the other. Elizabeth Grosz's statement serves as a lucid illustration of the child within this period:

For many months, the child remains physiologically incapable of controlling its bodily movements and behaviour, 'stuck in his motor incapacity and nurseling dependency' (Lacan 1977 a : 2). Its body is an unco-ordinated *aggregate*, a series of parts, zones, organs, sensations, needs, and impulses rather than an integrated totality. Each part strives for its own satisfaction with no concern for the body as a whole. It has no experience of corporeal or psychical unity or of occupying a stable position within a corporeally delimited space. (*Ecrits* 33-34; italics original)

Owing to the lack of individuality and subjectivity, the new-born child is regarded as a zero, or a blank. For the child, the world before the mirror stage is full of disorder and fragments. The infant at this stage explores the world mainly by gazing and hearing for he still can neither walk nor talk. Therefore, Lacan has emphasized "that earliest perception is inseparable from the effects of the outside world, both linguistic and visual" (Ragland- Sullivan 18). Since the infant fails to distinguish between itself and the environment, it constructs a unity with the object he perceives. The object here is often referred to the mother because the mother is always the first image that the child grasps. Hence, the child tends to build a unity with the mother without being aware of the boundaries between them. That is to say, the child is fused with the mother at the pre-mirror stage.

### **ii. The Mirror Stage**

The mirror stage occurs between the ages of six and eighteen months of an infant. The most distinguished point between the pre-mirror stage and the mirror stage is that the infant becomes aware of the distance between itself and the mother. At this stage, the infant can recognize the absence of the mother. Through the mirror, the child holds an image of its own for the first time, and thus shows "a flutter of jubilant activity," which serves to illustrate the child's ecstasy at the first sight of "itself."<sup>1</sup> With the recognition of the distance between itself and the mother; therefore the infant is, according to Elizabeth Grosz, "propelled into its identificatory relations by this first acknowledgement of lack or loss"(34-35). "Only at this

moment does it become capable of distinguishing itself from the ‘outside’ world, and thus of locating itself *in* the world”(Grosz 35). Then, the child is no more in the state of satisfaction for the relationship merged with the maternal supplementation is obstructed by this lack. This is the most crucial moment for an infant in terms of at least two aspects. One is that the child forms an “ideal ego” from the mirror, derived from other objects, which the ego tries to achieve. The other aspect is that, since the child can recognize the absence of the mother, he is aware of the loss or the lack. Owing to the lack, the child turns to identify with an ideal ego, or, *imago*<sup>1</sup>, for the purpose of filling the void. The ego formed here is based on “an imaginary relationship of the subject with his or her own body”(Sarup 83). Nevertheless, the ego “has the illusion of autonomy,” as Sarup suggests, “but is only an illusion, and the subject moves from fragmentation and insufficiency to illusory unity”(83). In Elizabeth Grosz’s summary of Lacan’s account of the mirror stage, she remarks that “the specular image is a totalized, complete, external image – a *gestalt*<sup>2</sup> – of the subject as seen from outside”(48). For Lacan, the formation of the image is actually narcissistic and belongs to the Imaginary.<sup>3</sup> In Lacan’s formulation, the primary identification occurs with projection in the realm of the mirror stage while the second identification takes place in the Oedipal stage, the introduction into the Symbolic realm in which the child perceives the world mainly through introjection. .

Although it realizes the absence of the mother, the child still strives to attach the maternal relationship which provides it with satisfaction and completeness. Here arises the desire. The child wishes to be the object of the mother’s desire—the Phallus. In this vein, the mother becomes the child’s desire-object. In other words, during this period, the child identifies with both the *Gestalt* and the mother’s image as if it were its own.

### iii. The Oedipal Stage

<sup>1</sup> The ancient term for the ideal ego, the image.

<sup>2</sup> *Gestalt* means the child’s very early perception of the human form. Lacan, *Ecrits*, 18.

<sup>3</sup> According to Lacanian conception, the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real are the three registers of human reality. This Lacanian thought appeared first in the 1953 conference of which the title is *The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real*. In this theory, Lacan shows his influence of Levi-Strauss. Levi-Strauss applied the structure of language as a model to explain all human facts. It is believed that Levi-Strauss has made the Lacanian use of the concept of the unconscious possible, for he is the one who first suggests the link between the unconscious and language on the one hand, and language and formalization on the other. On the simplest interpretative level, the Imaginary is the order of mirror-images, identifications and reciprocities. By way of the Imaginary, the original identificatory procedures which produce the ego keep repeating and is reinforced by the subject in his relationship with the external world. On the other hand, the Symbolic order, is contrasting and interdependent to the Imaginary to a certain extent. Every person is born into a predetermined linguistic network, which builds identity and mind in the process of mimetic identification. And language enters the subject to form a primary symbolized unconscious, and later, second unconscious. This unconscious is a Symbolic order. In the Symbolic order, nothing really exists except on an assumed foundation of absence. As to the definition of the Real, Lacan himself has altered his interpretation of the term for many times and in his writing there is no definite answer to that. The only picture we can grasp from what Lacan has remarked of the term is that, it is an order which resists symbolization. But like the symbol, the Real both exists outside the psychic economy and witness to an inner conjuncture between the personal and diachronic domain and the verbal synchronic one. In an interview, Lacan adds that the Real has nothing to do with reality because the Real is not a whole. Within the Lacanian psychic theory, the Real is the void, the impossible since reality depends on the intervention of the Symbolic and the Imaginary. All these three orders possess an inter-relationship to one another. See Lacan’s *Ecrits*, Malcolm Bowie’s *Lacan*, Claude Levi-Strauss’ *Structural Anthropology*, Roustang’s *The Lacanian Delusion* and Marcelle Marini’s *Jacques Lacan*.

The mirror stage comes to an end when the child enters into the Oedipal stage. Around eighteen months of age, when the child ceases trying to possess or be the object in the mirror, the specular subject of identification has become a social one. To return to its basic terms, the Oedipal stage is a shift from “unity to complexity, from identity to difference” (Boothby 151). Traditionally, the Oedipus Complex means the genesis of man’s primordial desire—an incestuous love for the mother and a jealous hostility toward the father. However, Lacan revises the Oedipal mythic reference by asserting that:

The triangular structure ...is not the simple psychological triangle of love and rivalry, but a socio-symbolic structural positioning of the child in a complex constellation of alliance (family, elementary social cell) in which the combination of desire and a Law prohibiting desire is regulated, through a linguistic structure of exchange, into a repetitive process of replacement—of substitution—of symbolic objects (substitutes) of desire.  
(Felman 104)

To put it plainly, the function of the Oedipal phase, in terms of Lacanian theory, is to subvert the mirroring illusion through the introduction of a difference in the position of a Third: Father, Law, Language, the reality of death, all of which Lacan designates as the Other.

### III. The Journey through the Mirror

Writing for me tends to be closely bound up in the exploration of my identity as an Asian American. It has been my way of accessing the unconscious, and when I started doing so, many of the issues and concerns that emerged—racism, the cultural issue—were things that I didn’t necessarily know that I was concerned with.

--- David Henry Hwang<sup>1</sup>

In his early plays, David Hwang has exhibited his influence from some Chinese American forerunners. Careful readers may readily detect that there are some mutual characteristics among the early Chinese American literary works. Frank Chin, for example, in his influential introduction to *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1974), has acclaimed that this is the book for all the Asian American writers. Between the lines in the book, the anger and discontent are strongly expressed and felt. Therefore, we see that anger is one of the characteristics fused in the early Asian American literary works.

The second characteristic of the early Asian American literary works goes to the focus upon the root culture. The most representative writers should be Maxine Hong Kingston,

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<sup>1</sup> See *Speaking on Stage: Interviews with Contemporary American Playwrights*. Interviewed by Marty Moss-Coane. Edited with an introduction by John Timpane, 289.

who is generally regarded as the godmother of the Asian American writers. Using the genre of autobiography Kingston succeeds in opening a gate both for the Americans to approach the East and for the Asian American people to regain a sense of self-confidence over their ancient root. Though she has been disputed over the inaccuracy of her use of the ancient Chinese mythology, Kingston has also received a lot of applause for creating a new kind of “Asian American myth.”

In Kingston’s case, she clearly demonstrates that “Asian American writers can depict with compassion and skill the experience of both sexes,” as Elaine Kim announces (“Visions” 159). These forerunning writers do bring a significant impact on David Henry Hwang in his reforming of self-identity through playwriting. The most significant one should be Maxine Hong Kingston since Hwang has once talked about the influence of these forerunners for him: “It was reading *Woman Warrior* that made me feel that I could find my own voice. As an Asian-American, she [Kingston] was the first author who spoke in a voice that seemed special, directly related to me”(Lyons 241). In my view, it is exactly this trend of claiming Asian American’s identity in literature that serves a stimulant, a mirror for young Hwang. Only with the help of these predecessors does he hold a model to follow so as to solve the self-doubt over the racial difference within him.

As much as these writers who have doubts in their self-identity, Hwang bears the same doubts, and therefore, begins to seek his own identity in his playwriting. That is to say, the trend of claiming America in the Asian American literary field plays the role as the mirror for Hwang to have a chance to reconsider and reform his self-identity. Through the mirror Hwang grasps a vague image which he identifies himself with in his early twenties. In other words, it is through the playwriting that David Henry Hwang starts to research his own root culture to help him rebuild his self-identity.

In David Hwang’s childhood, he had been feeling ashamed whenever people talked of the Asian American characters in movies or television shows. Deep inside his heart he felt “those people were not me.”<sup>2</sup> Besides, Hwang’s parents were not very typically traditional Chinese immigrants who would hold onto their root culture; on the contrary, they were keen to create a new identity of their own by being assimilated into the American mainstream culture. However, for the child Hwang, the appearance of the yellow skin and black hair does arouse his desire to go back to his root culture. Just as Lacan has proposed, desire springs from lack. Perhaps it is due to the alienation from his ancient root that Hwang becomes even more eager to unveil the fact as to where he belongs. As he himself analyzed, “I think what I was trying to do was find a context for myself, find some way in which my identity, my existence as an Asian-American could be validated, could be made authentic.”<sup>3</sup> Apart from the desire of unveiling the truth of his root culture, the want of unity is perhaps the most central motive that

<sup>2</sup> In the speech addressed for the 1994 William L. Abramowitz Guest Artist Program of MIT, David Henry Hwang had made a thorough confession of his ambiguous feelings toward being an Asian American.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

inspires Hwang in pursuing his career and realizing his ambition.

Swimming in the pool of clarifying his own identity through the playwriting, Hwang enters the mirror stage, in the words of Lacan. In the very beginning of the stage, Hwang's sense of self-identity is not quite clearly organized. It appears fragmental and lacks of unity. As I have mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the blooming atmosphere in the ethnic writing has served as a mirror which offers Hwang a medium to get closer and most honestly to himself. He holds an image and has thus built a sense of ego. Nevertheless, the image he identifies with from the outset is actually an image of another. "The child invests the specular image of itself or another with all the hostility directed towards its own lack of satisfaction, the very motivation for internalizing the image in the first place"(Grosz 41). Henceforth, the image here that Hwang identifies with only resembles him in many aspects but is essentially different from the child itself. Then, what is the image that Hwang first identifies himself with in the mirror stage? To get a rational answer to this question, we have to delve into David Hwang's early plays.

David Hwang's first play, *FOB (Fresh Off the Boat)*, was produced in 1973 while Hwang was an undergraduate at Stanford University. This play introduces three characters with different backgrounds which represent the different stages of Chinese immigration to the West. Dale, who is the ABC, that is, American-born Chinese, is completely committed to wiping out his Chinese root. His abhorrence toward the Chinese immigrants is completely exhibited in the opening of the play:

F-O-B. Fresh Off the Boat. FOB. What words can you think of that characterize the FOB? Clumsy, ugly, greasy FOB. Loud, stupid, four-eyed FOB. Big feet. Horny. Like Lenny in *Of Mice and Men*. Very good. A literary reference. High-water pants. Floods, to be exact. Someone you wouldn't want your sister to marry. If you are a sister, someone you wouldn't want to marry. That assumes we're talking about boy FOBs, of course. But girl FOBs aren't really as ...FOBish. Boy FOBs are the worst, the ...pits. They are the sworn enemies of all ABC—oh, that's "American Born Chinese"—of all ABC girls. (*FOB* 13)

It is obvious that Steve is rightly the nightmare version of Dale's self, who tries hard to smash his relationship with the Chinese culture in order to become a "real" white. Hwang symbolically puts these three different representative characters together and have them face a conflict which is almost the same as the one experienced by the playwright himself. As he finely crafts the conflict into the play, in a parallel vein, he is also undergoing a tangled fight and inner struggle within his multi-cultural background. However, Hwang has also been attacked by many critics for the portrayal of his character, Steve, who runs the risk of reinforcing the false stereotypes for Asian Americans. In point of fact, these attacks tend to be too over-reactive. If we closely examine the whole play, we can find out that the way Hwang



presents Dale is perhaps more downgrading than that of Steven. In all likelihood, David Hwang is simply portraying the ABC and the FOB according to what he has observed, though that doesn't mean all the ABC or the FOB are one-hundred percent like the ones he has depicted in his plays. It is apparent that young Hwang at the beginning of his playwriting career is also in search of his answer to where he belongs.

Secondly, Hwang's positive attitude toward the FOB is also underscored and demonstrated in the final scene of this play, in which Grace, the sort of mediation of Dale and Steve, shows a more generous attitude toward Steve than Dale by accepting Steve's invitation for dance rather than Dale's. Critics have generally agreed that "it is in the character of Grace that cultures can successfully merge"(Cooperman, "New Theatrical Statements" 203).

Another significant clue which proves that young Hwang has been influenced by his predecessors is his frequent use of Chinese mythological stories in the plays. In *FOB*, for instance, Hwang has his characters impersonate the Chinese mythological figures. The FOB—Steve—plays the role of Gwan Gung, the adopted god of the first Chinese Americans, and Grace, the woman warrior—Fa Mulan. Hwang audaciously arranges the two persons to have a quarrel, that is, Gwan Gung is having a fight with Fa Mulan. The use of intervening the Chinese myth and juxtaposing characters of different periods in one's works cannot be regarded as originitive, for in Frank Chin's and Maxine Hong Kingston's works, this technique has already surfaced. It is worth noting that these uses of legends are specifically Asian American rather than the traditional Asian versions of Fa Mulan and Gwan Gung (Lee 180). He nevertheless follows Kingston's model on the myth-revision, which grants the possibility of representing a certain culture by means of reconstructing and reinterpreting the original texts or history within a culture. This is exactly one of the features that the works of the (post)colonized culture share.

The same conflict over the cultural identity is portrayed in *The Dance and the Railroad* through the mythic figure of Gwan Gung. Set in 1876 in somewhere the west where the railroad is not yet completed, the only two characters, Ma and Lone, both of whom are Chinese immigrants, work under the oppressive working condition in a way to fulfill the westerners' dream of extending the continent. The two men build a kind of master-apprentice relationship and in the process of interchanging mutual ideas they get to re-examine themselves in a more profound sense. Lone is "the rebel artist who denigrates his 'dead' compatriots who lack goals," and is an actor in the old country until forced abroad, solitarily practicing his demanding craft on a secluded mountaintop (Rabkin 101). Ma sees that it is Lone who can be a wise mentor for him. After several defeats, Ma has finally gained the opportunity to act in Lone's directing play as Gwan Gung, the favorite god among the immigrants.

David Hwang again pits the characters against each other in a battle of re-examining themselves by involving the spirit of the ancient Chinese mythic figures which represent the cultural roots. In both of his early plays he has admitted to the tremendous influences from such predecessors as Hong Kingston and Frank Chin by using the same techniques which, in

my argument, are grouped into “transitivism,” one of the symptoms that the infant will have in the early period of the mirror stage. Lacan has pointed out during the mirror stage, the child tends to imitate other children’s behaviors. This is mainly because the borderline between them is still vague to the child during this period. And like Melanie Klien, Lacan thinks that in the early months of the child’s life, the root of aggressivity is prospering. Moreover, the aggressivity never goes without the appearance of narcissism in Lacanian account.

As I have explained in the second chapter, the child during the mirror phase will form an ambivalent relationship—identification and rivalry—with his own counterpart, the image he perceives in the mirror. David Hwang, in his early works does reveal all these symptoms. At the stage, like Frank Chin, Hwang has shown his aggressiveness in both *FOB* and *The Dance and the Railroad* with his sarcastic tone over the description of the stereotypes which have long existed in the western culture. Notwithstanding, the discontent and anger is somewhat too obvious to lose its original concern. The discontent and wrath through the persona well illustrates the eagerness to claim a space for themselves among the Chinese immigrants, perhaps most obviously, for Hwang himself. The FOB, Steve, is portrayed as a low-raised Chinese immigrant who innocently believes the fairy tale of the land of gold. Again, Hwang is truthfully running the risk of parroting the false stereotype of Chinese immigrants as a self-hatred and simple-minded race. Therefore, as I have just mentioned, the young playwright tends to fall into the trap of fusing too much severe personal discontent into his plays without careful examination and to end with obscuring his main concern.

Having explained the symptoms that Hwang has displayed with regard to entering the mirror stage, the answer to the image that he identifies with is getting crystal clear. If, as Lacan states, the image that the child identifies with through the mirror is only a mirage, then, what on earth is “it”? Perhaps the image Hwang identifies with at this period should be one which resembles his predecessors who have also acted as an inspiration for Hwang.

Through the trend of playwriting (the mirror), David Hwang (the child) holds an image of himself (the image resembling predecessors of Asian American writers), and therefore builds up a sense of ego which, in Lacan’s notion, is purely as an imaginary function of the self, as a unity of the subject alienated from itself. The (m)other here Hwang tries to cling to is his rootedness, or to be more precise, the Chinese culture. Like an infant within the mirror stage, Hwang possesses the recognition of the distance between himself and the (m)other. Realizing the absence of the (m)other, a void appears and this void results in a series of actions that the infant takes in order to fill the void. According to Lacan, the formation of the subjectivity stems only from the experience of lack and absence; in this vein, it is not until he works on the playwriting that Hwang initiates the re-formation of his subjectivity in terms of his Asian American identity.

Within this context, the Asian root is the *object a* (the desired object) for Hwang to pursue. The deep-rooted stereotypes which degrade the image of Asian people hinders Hwang from having a real picture of the people of his root culture. The conventional

ideology that the eastern people are inferior to the westerners has been long spread and practiced in the western society. In addition, both Hwang's parents are not so much interested in their Chinese ancestry; instead, they have tried to become real Americans. Therefore, his parents fail to grant Hwang's satisfaction for the desire to know the past history of his ancient roots to a great extent. However, it is all the hindrances that contribute to his attempt to go back into the Chinese culture so as to satisfy his earnest desire. This well demonstrates what Bruce Fink has argued: prohibition creates desire. Being a person with two types of cultural heritage, Hwang honestly bears a feeling of inbetweenness and disconnectedness.

In his third play, *Family Devotions* (1981), Hwang has even delved into his family history and reproduced it into the play. The background of the family of the play is typically Hwang's: his mother's family is converted into Christianity several generations ago back in China and there are a lot of pastors in his family. In this play, Hwang has clearly presented his attack on the total assimilation by the Asians into the American ways of life. Di-gou is the one who can save Chester, the grandson of Popo, from his parents' corruption. Here Hwang has shown his stance over the concern of where he belongs. The link-up between Chester and Di-gou externalizes Hwang's manifest implication: the necessity of connecting the past even after the adoption of the western culture.

In comparison with the first two plays, in this third play, Hwang immerses himself to the family history and rewrites it with a hope of helping clarify his own doubts over his identity. In this play, Hwang unquestionably presents his anxiety to examine his Chinese ancestral history and approach the authenticity behind the false stereotype of his Chinese fellow people. In the previous two, Hwang tends to reveal too plainly his anxiety over the identity issue and his aggressiveness in clarifying his self doubts with all too simple plots and characters. Nevertheless, all these three early plays do offer crucial evidence which represents his first look into the mirror and holds a vague picture of himself, which, however, is actually not the exact image of his own. During this period of time, Hwang has maintained an imaginary relationship with the Chinese root culture—the (m)other. He mistakes himself for the image revealed from the mirror. In other words, he leans forward to the Chinese party, for he identifies himself with those aggressive, enraged Asian American writers. By imitating and appropriating the writing technique and attitude toward the ethnic issue from the predecessors, David Hwang, in his process of reconstructing and researching his identity, has achieved a certain kind of recognition and awareness. This is the “primary identification,” of which the subject erects his identification by projection. This primitive identification may later prove it wrong; however, this new discovery has taken him a step further in his own constitution of subjectivity within the racial difference. By looking into the mirror, he has set out on his journey into another world of desire.

#### **IV. From Fantasy to Reality**

Fantasy provides the pleasure peculiar to desire.

---Lacan, *Ecrits*, 773.

For Lacan, the formation of the drives is crucial to the constitution of the subject mainly for there is no subjectivity without desire. And the desire is caused right by the separation of the subject from its first object—the mother.<sup>1</sup> In the discourse of the obsession and hysteric, Lacan points out that the emphasis of this period is “on the primacy of the division of the subject over his or her relationship to the object of fantasy” (Mellard 83). Owing to the fixation on the desire of the other, the subject tends to re-create his or her fantasized situation in relation to the desiring other.

Having undergone the desire of pursuing the (m)other, Hwang intends to seek satisfaction for his desire by kneading his own fantasized stories into his plays. This phenomenon occurs in the second stage of Hwang’s playwriting which I have categorized. The representative works of this stage are *The House of Sleeping Beauties*(1983), *The Sound of a Voice*(1983), and the Tony Award play, *M. Butterfly*(1988). The main features of the plays at this stage rest on two aspects: reversal of the adapted stories from foreign literary works to fantasized ones, and more significantly, the playwright’s first turning away from Asian-American subject matter. Both *The House of Sleeping Beauties*, and *The Sound of a Voice* have exhibited an exotic world in which mythic and fantastic elements are closely interwoven. Deriving his materials from Japanese sources, Hwang explores the very essence of humans in dream-like plots with simple characters and brief dialogues. Moreover, both plays share a common feature—both ending with the most human closure—death. In conformity with the themes displayed within the two Japanese plays, one may wonder if Hwang is revealing his reflection that all the human conflicts can only end up in death. However, this statement is insufficient to explain why he moves away from the Asian subject. He is, as a matter of fact, never away from his desire of exploring his root culture at all. The switch to Japanese resources is only another means for fulfilling his desire. Hwang simply turns his focus to objects for the purpose of mediating his anxiety and frustration, both of which result from his acute desire to write about his ancestry in the beginning of his playwriting career. Judging from his aggressive attitude in dealing with the Asian-American issues in his first three plays, Hwang is considered an ethnic writer, but he is not quite comfortable about such a label. The western audience apparently do not favor Hwang’s merger of the East and the West issues in *Family Devotions*. Therefore, my hypothesis goes like this: Hwang’s shift from the eagerness of the Asian-American matter to the Japanese stories is a reaction right after his desire to write about his Asian roots is refused by the western audience. He turns to write about another Eastern race, the Japanese, and rebuilds his idealistic world within the Japanese legends.

With regard to the death theme addressed by the plays of this period, it serves a good illustration of what Lacan has proposed, the death instinct—*jouissance*. It is an unconscious

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<sup>1</sup>See Mellard, 73.

pleasure mixed with pain, a mixture of extreme pleasure and pain. As I have explained previously, Desire, void, and *jouissance* share an intricate relationship with one another for Desire arises from void, whereas *jouissance* appears because of Desire. Then this is indisputably in accordance with my hypothesis. It is the desire of exploring his Chineseness that has plagued Hwang from the very beginning of his playwriting. The second period that I have categorized is the stage in which he channels his desire for satisfaction into the fantastic world that he creates in which he portrays a harmony within human beings. In disguise of his moving away from the Chinese topic, Hwang's desire is repressed and transformed into a not-so-aggressive condition. However, as the subject's desire is repressed, he or she is undergoing a certain form of castration.

If the two Japanese plays are reminiscences of his fantastic dreams over the subtlety within the human beings, then in *M. Butterfly*, Hwang exhibits an even more fruitful imagination by deconstructing the myth of Giacomo Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* into his own version. With a parallel to Puccini's text, Hwang intentionally reverses the Western myth. ; Quite obviously, Hwang bounces back with his inseparable desire to write on Asian American matter in this play. It is the play that puts David Hwang into international spotlight. The various binary oppositions presented in this play, such as East/West, male/female, fantasy/reality, gay/straight, innocence/knowledge, succeed in winning the reader's favor, but, on the opposite side of the popularity, the controversial and paradoxical issues inevitably form the target for attack. To all intents and purposes, his main concern still rests on the Asian Americans. This well illustrates that he is never away from the Asian subject matter. His simple wish is only to explore the Asian-American issues in his writings in order to reach the authenticity of his root culture.

Perhaps just as Hwang has said, "we prefer the fantasy over the reality," people tend to find consolation and laughter in fantasized stories (DiGaetani 143). Comparing the treatment of the binaries of East and West in *M. Butterfly* with that in his early plays, the reader may easily discover his change and progress in the process of shaping his self-identity. In the first period we see from his plays that Hwang has been aggressive in identifying himself with the Asian Americans; however, in the series of fantasized plays, his previous attitude has been altered. The plays of this period herald his entrance to the post-mirror stage. During this stage, realizing that the *object a*—the (m)other—does not possess the Phallus, the signifier of power, the subject (Hwang) strives to empower the (m)other, to fill the lack. In *The House of Sleeping Beauties* and *The Sound of a Voice*, Hwang simply immerses himself in Japanese fantasies like an infant seeking the original comfort and satisfaction which he has been gratified from the (m)other during the early mirror stage. This act implies that he already recognizes the distance between himself and the *object a*, the (m)other, and also gains the notion that he is forever alienated from the (m)other. It is this sense of alienation that provokes his desire. The acknowledgement of the perpetual alienation from the (m)other leads to Hwang's turning to fantasy, and this fact involves the subject's assumption of a new

position of which he respects the authority of the Symbolic Father and at the same time, keeps his desire for the (m)other deep inside his heart. Having this kind of recognition, the child then suffers a ritual of castration and enters into the realm of the pre-Oedipal stage.

Based on this recognition, the child (Hwang) returns to work on the merger of both Eastern and Western cultures in the fantasized version of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, *M. Butterfly*. Due to the recognition of the lack of the Phallus in the (m)other and an interruption of the Law of the Father, Hwang shows an ambivalent attitude toward the (m)other—Asian heritage, and the Symbolic Father—American culture. He juxtaposes these two symbolic structures in his plays and invites the reader to see what will happen. The reason why I take the West as the symbolic Father is that the Asian Americans are minorities in the West, and owing to the deep-rooted images of false stereotypical Asians in the Western society, the West seems to be the one dominating everything. Thus the West symbolically has the Phallus—the signifier of the power. The Western dogma of viewing Asian men as powerless, shrewd, and woman-like can be seen everywhere on TV or in the magazine in the West culture. This signifies a Law prohibiting Hwang from identifying, or recuperating the Asian root. With the yellow skin and black hair, Hwang is no doubt being grouped into Asian men; henceforth, he is undergoing the second level of castration, which involves the racial background. Perhaps Song Liling's indictment, "I am an Oriental. And being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man" (*M. Butterfly* 83), serves a good illustration for Hwang's pressure from castration anxiety.

After the success of *M. Butterfly*, Hwang has tried hard to reach another climax in his playwriting, but in vain. His *Bondage* (1992) and *Face Value* (1993) do not receive a rational attention, for people still miss the fantastic love in *M. Butterfly*.

The two totally different attitudes presented here bring out the main concern of Hwang's plays of the third stage. One of the characteristics of his plays of this stage, and perhaps, the most notable one, is that his tone in treating the identity issue has become softer, more generous and rational. His attitude toward his Asian root culture at this point is positive and magnanimous. Though even with blond hair and blue eyes, Benjamin still identifies himself with Chinese Americans by asserting that "You can't judge my race by my genetic heritage alone" (*Trying* 290). He employs Benjamin's case to demonstrate that even a Caucasian could transcend his congenital appearance and identify himself with Chinese Americans. Hwang intentionally breaks the fixed ideology that race determines one's identity. This is the third-stage Hwang, being full of generosity and mellowness in treating the identity issue and believing that one's identity should admit of more flexibility instead of determining it with appearance or race.

The next years after *Trying to Find Chinatown*, Hwang presents another play in which the style as well as the material is distinctive from the previous ones, that is, *Golden Child*, his most recent play. In accordance with *Trying to Find Chinatown*, the technique of treating identity issue shows pliability as well.

To sum up, it is obvious that in two of his most recent plays--*Trying to Find Chinatown*

and *Golden Child*-- Hwang's attitude toward the merger of West and East culture has become a more tolerant one, showing the baptism within wisdom. Using Lacan's notion of the intimate relationships of repression, regression, and repetition to explain David Hwang's playwriting characteristic of the third stage is probably coincidentally agreeable. As I have explicated that when the child suffers castration, he turns to repress his desire and unconsciously or consciously fulfill his desire through other means. Although receiving the Law of the Father, the child will repeat his behavior which symbolizes his nostalgia over the past constancy with the (m)other during the mirror stage. The term "nostalgia" is not recognized in the Lacanian lexicon. However, in "The Signification of the Phallus" Lacan has appropriated this term from Freud as the notion that the phallic phase is a fit object for nostalgia since it is irretrievably past for the child (Gallop 146-47).

Symbolically, Hwang is the case under castration, and to put it straight-forwardly, a victim of the castration of racism. Being frustrated and self-doubted, he chooses to gratify his desire through the playwriting, the only world created by him. The world, if examined carefully, shows variety, too. It has gone from the fantasized one to a more realistic one which illustrates Hwang's journey into the Oedipal phase. According to Lacanian perception, the Oedipal structure serves the function of sublimation because it leads to a refashioning of the subject's identification (Lemaire 179). Within the Oedipal structure, Hwang has shaped his previous attitudes and definitions toward self-identity, and formed it into a more mellow, generous one. This is perhaps what Lacan means: after the acceptance of the Name-of-the-Father in the Oedipal phase, the subject will achieve a ritual of socialization. If failing to receive socialization, the subject will turn into a pervert. Having the symbolic adventure of the journey from the fantastic world to the real in playwriting, David Hwang has, to a great extent, achieved his maturation psychologically as entirely revealed in his works at the third stage of my category.

## V. Conclusion

A close examination of David Henry Hwang's playwriting would enable the reader to capture the developmental stages in the process of his substitution of identity. By means of playwriting, he unfolds the journey of reaching the authenticity of his ancestral roots which he has long been obsessed with. In other words, it is through the medium of playwriting that enlightens him to make an investigation of his Asian rootedness as well as constructing a global view of identity-defining. It might be true that articulating the voice of Asia within the Anglo-American audience is a tough task. However, through the recently successful works of such writers as Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan and David Henry Hwang, the Chinese culture has been successfully introduced to the Western audience, and has sustained a prominent space for Asian American literature. Then, we come to a crucial question: Is death or self-effacement still the only way to represent Asia? The answer cannot be clearer.

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