



北京外国语大学2007年学术著作系列

全球视野下的亚裔美国文学

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON
ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

主编：黄桂友 (Guiyou Huang)
吴 冰 (Wu Bing)

外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

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北京 BEIJING

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

全球视野下的亚裔美国文学 = Global Perspectives on Asian American Literature: 英文 / 黄桂友, 吴冰主编. — 北京: 外语教学与研究出版社, 2008.11
(北京外国语大学 2007 年学术著作系列)
ISBN 978-7-5600-7954-7

I. 全… II. ①黄… ②吴… III. 文学研究—美国—国际学术会议—文集—英文 IV. I712.06-53

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2008) 第 177284 号

出 版 人: 于春迟

责任编辑: 蓝小雯

封面设计: 袁 璐

出版发行: 外语教学与研究出版社

社 址: 北京市西三环北路 19 号 (100089)

网 址: <http://www.fltrp.com>

印 刷: 北京双青印刷厂

开 本: 850×1168 1/32

印 张: 10.375

版 次: 2008 年 11 月第 1 版 2008 年 11 月第 1 次印刷

书 号: ISBN 978-7-5600-7954-7

定 价: 32.90 元

* * *

如有印刷、装订质量问题出版社负责调换

制售盗版必究 举报查实奖励

版权保护办公室举报电话: (010)88817519

物料号: 179540001

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The East, the West, and the Global in Asian American Literature

Guiyou Huang & Wu Bing

The Indian-born English poet Rudyard Kipling garnered both fame and controversy with his 1889 “Ballad of the East and West”; in fact even today he remains among the most misunderstood and most criticized British poets of the 19th and 20th centuries,¹ for saying, among other things, “*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.*” Often, though, Kipling is quoted just for the first memorable line at the expense of the latter three of the quatrain: “*Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgment Seat. / But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, tho’ they come from the ends of the earth!*” (117). Such a clear-cut bifurcation of the globe as stated in the above lines seems to suggest an impassable divide vastly separated by the open spaces of continental landmasses and oceanic distances. Implicit in this tacit and seemingly confident assertion is an uncertainty about whether the “two strong men” should and could meet.

The italicized quatrain both starts and ends Kipling's ballad; in between the poet narrates an adventure that actually deals with the theft and recovery of a prized mare that occurred at the North-West Frontier of India in 1885. The two major characters are Kamal, an Afghan, and the Colonel's son, a White Englishman. Kamal took the Colonel's mare and the latter chased him to Khyber Pass in Peshawar to recover the horse. The true power and beauty of the ballad lies in the eventual reconciliation of the "two strong men" – Kamal and the Colonel's son – with the former not only returning the mare to her rightful owner but also sending his own son to join the British Guides. This reconciliation indicates that at India's North-West Frontier of the 1880s, the East (represented by the Afghan Kamal) and the West (symbolized by the English Colonel's son) met and reconciled, as one instance, clearly refuting the notion that "never the twain shall meet." This meeting supposedly took place in the heydays of British colonial activities in India and other quarters of the world. But long before that, individuals from the West (Europe) and from the East (the Middle East and the Far East) have made continuous efforts to connect with the Other, notably since Marco Polo's and Mateo Ricci's times. Genkis Khan, the Mongol conqueror of Europe, made his connection to the West through force, a conquest that was both feared and despised by the nations and peoples he subjugated and that was responsible, among other things, for the early stereotyping of Asians as the "Yellow Peril." Whether meetings of the East and the West as personal contacts or official envoys represented innocent curiosity or sinister motives, they have occurred and have left a trail of literary and travel writings that depict many kinds of meetings and different levels of understanding between the two hemispheres.

Globalization and modern technology have shrunken the time-space between hemispheres of the world that Thomas Friedman now

asserts is flat,² with China and India both being among the ten forces (flatteners) that flattened the world in a matter of a better decade. China has contributed to the flattening because “China’s leaders are much more focused than many of their Western counterparts on how to train their young people in the math, science, and computer skills required for success in the flat world” (Friedman 142). Friedman’s perception of the world as flat seems increasingly recognized and is given new meanings every time a crossing occurs between the East and the West. The effects of these meetings/crossings are very difficult to measure or quantify, considering the length and density of history of the nations/peoples involved, but they have been portrayed and described from varying perspectives by travelers, immigrants, and writers. Edward Said has very ably captured the effects of Orientalism in his study of the Occident’s complex relations with the Orient. We would like to consider the dichotomy of the East and the West by analyzing a famous metaphor that has been used and interpreted in China for as long as *Zhuangzi* has been read. Zhuang Zi (Chuang Tzu) describes a dream in his eponymous work where the dreamer metamorphoses into a butterfly only to wake up confused about his human identity and about the easy and flimsy exchange of identity with a butterfly (92), which in itself is an evolved form of a caterpillar.

The second, equally famous, example of the adaptation of the butterfly metaphor is the Chinese folkloric – almost mythical – story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai that occurred over 1,600 years ago. Unable to consummate their deep love for each other, Liang died from love-sickness and later, Zhu ended her own life by throwing herself onto the willow tree near Liang’s grave. But their determination to be together finally created miracles when out of a huge storm flew two butterflies in each other’s loving company. The story of Liang/Zhu is about togetherness, not forced separation. Very

appropriately, when the People's Republic of China just emerged as a new nation confronted by embargos and non-recognitions by the West, at an international convention in the early 1950s the Chinese delegation led by then premier and foreign minister Zhou Enlai faced literal isolation by the West represented by its delegations. Zhou thought up a brilliant idea of showing foreign delegations the Chinese movie *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* as a way to bring attention to the Chinese delegation and therefore to win friendship and ultimately, political alliance and international cooperation. Suspecting very precisely that no Western diplomats would know what the Chinese movie was about, Zhou told his Western counterparts that *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* was the Chinese *Romeo and Juliet*. Zhou's strategy worked – he not only made the presence of New China felt and seen at the convention, he also won over a few Western hearts, thereby shortening the distance between the East and the West. While Liang/Zhu and Romeo/Juliet were representatives of the East and the West, respectively, they were not that different after all: they all pursued love and died for love, much like Kipling's Kamal and the Colonel's son who were reconciled by righteousness, despite their racial and cultural differences. But the Chinese folkloric story provides a vital twist to the tragedy by reviving the two lovers to live on as butterflies. The ability of butterflies to fly – a physical talent humans do not have – enables the lovers to reunite and enjoy the physical and spatial freedom they never had as humans.

But Zhuang Zi, Liang/Zhu, and Romeo/Juliet are stories of the antiquity – Zhou Enlai evokes the latter in an effort to pull China out of isolation from the rest of the world, notably Western Europe and the United States. More recent evocations of the image of the butterfly occurred several times in the course of the twentieth century involving both the East and the West, specifically, China and Japan

of the East, and the United States and France of the West. While the image of the butterfly was not exactly gendered in the above-mentioned cases, the twentieth-century use of the image in the works to be briefly discussed here is replete with gender and international tensions. Zhuang Zi, an early proponent of the concepts of *yin* and *yang*, in his dream became a butterfly that was not gendered; Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai BOTH transformed into butterflies whose respective gender is an easy guess as the two wanted to be husband and wife. In other words, the gender issue involving them is not critically problematized. In the twentieth-century works under discussion here, the butterfly is undoubtedly both female and feminine, or at least it is intended to be, especially when the image is employed to characterize the weak, the submissive, and the Oriental. The Occidental, needless to say, appeared or was portrayed to be the opposite of its Eastern counterpart.

The earliest fiction using the image of the butterfly to dramatize East/West encounters, titled "Madame Butterfly," was written by the Westerner John Luther Long and published in 1898, obviously at the close of the nineteenth century when what is now known as Asian American literature was just starting with short fiction by Edith Eaton (Sui Sin Far). David Belasco, fascinated by Long's story, wrote a tragedy of the same title with a subtitle "A Tragedy of Japan in One Act," naming Japan, specifically a Japanese woman, the victim in the East/West entanglement. But neither the short story nor the one-act play became as famous to the Western audience as *Madama Butterfly*, the Italian opera written by Signor Giacomo Puccini, the powerful music and sad beauty of which jerked many tears from its audience. *Madame Butterfly* and *Madama Butterfly* unmistakably emphasize the femininity and sexuality of their woman protagonists, promoting the sexually attractive, temperamentally submissive stereotype of the Japanese woman that would remain

an object of fascination and temptation to the Western man, in this case a White man. This is the stereotype that many Asian American writers have attempted to subvert, most notably by Frank Chin and David Henry Hwang, though Chin casts Hwang in a very different light than himself with regards to the way they respectively dealt with the subject matter.

Contrary to his predecessors who exploited the metaphor of the butterfly from a sheer male and Western (American and Italian) perspective, Hwang smartly altered the already familiar title *Madame Butterfly* by dropping the letters that would indicate gender to inject complete ambiguity and suspense into the title by naming his play *M. Butterfly*. Without a reading or viewing of the play, whether M is for Madame or Messieur is truly anyone's guess; the M literally leaves a reader/viewer doubting whether a real distinction can be achieved when masking and role-playing, coupled with homosexual innuendos, converge across cultures and races. The East, in the eyes of the Orientalists that Said scrutinizes in his *Orientalism*, is portrayed and perceived to be feminine, as opposed to the West that has traditionally flaunted itself as physically strong and therefore masculine. Little wonder, then, the female protagonist in Belasco's *Madame Butterfly* has to be an Oriental woman (a Japanese), and her male counterpart must be an Occidental man (an American). Yet the victim of this East/West romantic relationship must be the Oriental woman and not the Occidental man. The self-sacrifice the Japanese woman made for her American man was celebrated in Puccini's opera. Yet no challenge was mounted by an Asian or Asian American writer to counter such condescending portrayals of Asian women for nearly a century. Indeed, it took ninety years for Asian American literature to respond to this stereotype: John Luther Long's short story appeared in 1898, followed by Belasco's dramatization in New York in 1900. ("Its success was instantaneous, not only in the

United States but in London and on the Continent. ... It ... through his [Puccini's] inspired music has become a classic all the world over."³) Puccini's opera premiered in Milan, Italy in 1904, and was staged at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in 1907. By the time Hwang wrote and produced *M. Butterfly*, it was already 1988, exactly nine decades after Long's story first appeared. In the interim, numerous landmark events took place that considerably shaped the course of Asian American literature, including World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Civil Rights movement, women's liberation movements, and the Viet Nam War of the 1960s-1970s.

Hwang admits that his play "was suggested by international newspaper accounts of a recent espionage trial" (741), and that newspaper was *The New York Times* that contained journalist Richard Bernstein's account of "a story of clandestine love and mistaken sexual identity" (7) involving a French diplomat Bernard Boursicot [sic] and a popular Chinese opera singer Shi Peipu, both being male.⁴ Hwang reconstructed the characters and plot by building on and then subverting the Orientalistic stereotype that the Asian woman is submissive and therefore an easy target of conquest, an object to manipulate and therefore always at the disposal of the Western man. Hwang resorts to the Chinese operatic tradition of using males to cast the roles of females, like in Peking Opera, in which, until the latter half of the twentieth century, men had traditionally acted, or shall we say monopolized, women's parts (no pun intended). Shi Peipu, or Song Liling in *M. Butterfly*, in the early 1960s Beijing, led such a professional life that afforded him opportunities to meet with foreign diplomats that in turn resulted in a transnational, interracial, and presumably heterosexual liaison. This relationship unfolds amidst a web of international entanglements that involve France, the United States, China, and Indochina in the

height of the Cold War that warranted clandestine activities such as espionage and on a personal level, covert interactions between a local Chinese actor and a French diplomat. To quote Kipling yet again, “two strong men stand face to face, tho’ they come from the ends of the earth!” Song Liling may or may not have been willing to role-play as a woman, but he lets himself be used through acting as a woman, both on and off stage, as an object of the Western gaze that fantasizes about the perfect Oriental woman. Thus another meeting of the East and the West took place, albeit of a very odd kind and under unlikely circumstances.

The nineteenth and even early twentieth-century partial dominance of the East by the West changed greatly since the mid-twentieth century when populous countries like China and India and numerous African countries gained control of their own political and territorial sovereignty, upon which the dynamics of East/West relations also took a quick turn towards self-governance and less or no foreign control. In such an international milieu, the nation/state’s self-governance enabled more critical self-examinations and self-assessment of international relations among countries; in the process a refusal to be cast and played as the weak and vulnerable Other is reflected in literary works and film productions; *M Butterfly* is an example in point. In the twenty-first century, argues Friedman, due to globalization, “It is now possible for more people than ever to collaborate and compete in real time with more other people on more different kinds of work from more different corners of the planet and on a more equal footing than at any previous time in the history of the world” (8). “More equal footing” is the new model of collaboration not only in industry and technology but also in education and scholarly research around the world. In academic circles, the eagerness of Eastern scholars to have dialogues on an equal footing with their Western counterparts also became

highly evident. Other than programs of exchange scholars/visitors on university campuses across both the Pacific and the Atlantic, multinational collaborations between scientists in fields such as nanotechnology, genome projects, space explorations, and so on, international conferences have become the site of meetings of the East and the West; even the North and the South, as geo-political entities, have been emerging as fields of study, like at the University of Miami, Florida where scholars have been synergizing to study the impact of North and South Americas at the North-South Center, as opposed to the traditional dichotomy of the East and the West, like the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii.

It is important to remember that Kipling's ballad also states, "But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!" With a double negation expressed by "neither/nor" the poet abruptly erases the division between the East and the West, making the earth a global whole again – maybe he was anticipating global unity after all: the two strong men may have come from the East and the West respectively, the point is now they meet "face to face," ready to negotiate peace as residents of the same globe. Global issues like war and peace – which affect everybody in every corner of the increasingly smaller world – can only be effectively dealt with globally. Indeed every global issue is local: the economy, the environment, wars, AIDS, drugs, poverty; even cultures and literatures that used to bear national names proudly can no longer claim to be immune to global or foreign influences or remain utterly Canadian or just Indian or purely Italian. In the United States, the branches of literature that best represent such global trends are ethnic literatures: Latino American literature finds its roots and branches reaching into North and South Americas; Asian American literature sees itself reflecting both American and

Asian cultural values and ethnic heritages. Indeed, American ethnic literatures are at once global literature and comparative literature. The thematic scope, the foreign settings, and even linguistic richness of such literatures create a broad appeal to scholars around the world, regardless of whether those scholars are ethnically related to the literatures they study. The globalization of literature and culture and the competing perspectives on the literature that concerns the East and the West provided the primary reason why an international conference – to be held in an Asian country – would be meaningful to interested scholars of Asian American literature around the world. Thus, the ancient and modern city of Beijing became the chosen venue.

The following is the brief speech that Guiyou gave at the opening ceremony of the conference at Beijing Foreign Studies University on May 27, 2006:

Good Morning, Ladies & Gentlemen:

Welcome to Beijing, China! And welcome to the International Conference on Asian American Literature in the 21st Century!

Asian American literature is American literature with profound historical, philosophical, and literary roots in Asian cultures, but never has an international conference on this topic been held in an Asian country until today! The idea to do a conference in China was first conceived two years ago. Russell Leong, editor of *Amerasia Journal* at UCLA, told me in a phone conversation about the Chinese American Literature Research Center at Beijing Foreign Studies University, upon which I made contact with Dr. Liu Kuilan, who in turn notified Prof. Wu Bing, Director of the Center, about my proposal for a conference. In May 2005 I had a

meeting with then Dean Jin Li and Prof. Wu Bing, and they warmly endorsed the idea of an international conference at BFSU.

When I joined St. Thomas University in July 2005, I brought the idea to Miami, Florida, and discussed it with Dr. Gregory Chan, Provost of the university, who not only approved it but also offered a great deal of support, both moral and financial. The University President, Msgr. Franklyn Casale, also supported this initiative; in fact he was so enthusiastic that he showed up in person. I thank them both for being here. I would also like to extend a personal thank-you to the BFSU leadership for making their distinguished university the site for this international event. Obviously, Prof. Wu Bing and Dr. Liu Kuilan made extraordinary efforts as local hosts. I want to take this opportunity to also express my gratitude to a friend and respected scholar, Prof. Tatsushi Narita of Nagoya City University, Japan, for his generous financial contribution to the conference.

Thanks also go to Prof. Elaine Kim, of the University of California at Berkeley, Prof. Shawn Wong, of the University of Washington at Seattle, and Prof. Wu Bing of Beijing Foreign Studies University, who kindly accepted my invitation to keynote this conference.

Three other people need to be recognized. Fabrina Leach, my former administrative assistant, Mary Yeh, my current administrative assistant, and Luisely Melecio-Zambrano, student assistant in my office, all worked diligently on the programming of the conference. Without their efforts, this conference would not have materialized.

Last but not the least, all the conference speakers deserve kudos for submitting fine paper proposals and for

taking transpacific or transatlantic flights to travel to Beijing at this exciting time in China – in a mere three years, Beijing will host the next Olympic Games. Because of your enthused participation, this conference cannot but be a success!

Beijing is known for many, many things, among them, the Great Wall and Peking Duck. I want you to not only have a memorable professional experience with the conference but also to enjoy the sights and sounds of Beijing, certainly its authentic, delectable food. Thank you.

The conference indeed turned out to be a real success. It attracted over seventy scholars representing forty-four universities in ten countries. Soon after the conference ended we received many generous comments from participants and we were humbled by their kind remarks. We read through the conference papers and selected nineteen of them that would cohere well for a critical collection. We invited the authors to revise and expand their work for publication and they did. While it is always tempting to want to make editorial comments on the fine essays included herein, we thought it would be best for the reader to read and conclude on their own about the quality of the scholarship represented. A considerable number of monographs and many article-length studies in Asian American literature have been written and published in English and Chinese in China, but we are very pleased to report that *Global Perspectives on Asian American Literature* may well be the first major collection of critical essays written by a group of internationally acclaimed scholars from North America, Asia, and Europe.

Once again, we'd like to express our gratitude to the leaderships of both St. Thomas University and Beijing Foreign Studies University, notably President Hao Ping and Vice President Jin Li at BFSU, and President Franklyn Casale and Provost Gregory Chan of St. Thomas.