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Sinoglossia Incarnate: The Entanglements of Castration across the Pacific

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Introduction

Sinophone studies emerged in the early twenty-first century as a long overdue analytical framework to overcome the disciplinary limitations of Chinese studies. According to Shu-mei Shih, whose work has pioneered the field, the Sinophone world refers to Sinitic-language communities and cultures outside of China or on the margins of China and Chineseness

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(Shih 2007). Conceived as such, the concept of the Sinophone disrupts the chain of equivalence—established since the rise of modern nation-states—between language, culture, ethnicity, and nationality. This innovative framework demands a rethinking of what the word "Chinese" encompasses and signifies, which often goes unquestioned in Sinological, transnational, and diaspora studies (Chiang and Heinrich 2013; Shih et al. 2013; Yue and Khoo 2014). With an analytic calculus that is at once global and local in focus, Sinophone studies represent a systematic attempt in taking modern China seriously as a growing global superpower.

The theorization of the Sinophone concept has attracted various criticisms to date, but perhaps the two most popular strands concern its language-centrism and its apathy towards translation (or deferral of translational issues, challenges, and problems). In order to wrestle with these two sets of limitations, this essay proposes Sinoglossia as an alternative but complementary theory that is defined by culture in the way that the Sinophone is defined by language.[1] The concept of Sinoglossia thus combines a heteroglossiac and heterotopian approach to the critical study of mediated discourses of China and Chineseness (Bakhtin 1981; Foucault 1970 [1966]). It is interesting to note at the outset that since both Sinoglossia and the Sinophone contain the prefix "Sino," for better or worse, one of the recurring motifs that cut across both theoretical frameworks is their consistent bind to, despite their resistance towards, the symbolic seduction of "Chinese." As we will see, this motif brings to light the productive power of Sinoglossia as the site of transmedial possibility for translating meanings of embodiment across different language-based cultures. This essay exposes the heuristic appeal of Sinoglossia by situating a series of Sinophone martial arts (*wuxia*) films and the Anglophone film *M. Butterfly* (1993) within a broader framework of "entangled analysis." This comparison, or modular analysis as the case may be, is informed by Rey Chow's (2012) recent work on "entanglements" as enmeshments of topics, and as partition and disparity rather than conjunction and similarity.

[1] I first embarked on the theorization of Sinoglossia together with Chien-hsin Tsai and Andrea Bachner in preparation for the conference in Austin in 2014.

Specifically, I draw on transgender theory to examine the representations and meanings of castration as a ground for comparing a body of works that tend to be considered separately. In Sinophone cinema, martial arts prowess denotes a crucial marker of the resulting embodiment of castration, a specific narrative technique employed to distinguish the gender liminality of eunuchs. Because the immense physical power associated with eunuchs in these films exceeds the actual physical strength of eunuchs in China's past, this depiction of exceptional castrated corporeality reveals a highly original expression in queer Sinophone cultural formation, contrasting contemporary *peripheral* adaptations with historical *mainland* Chinese culture.[2] On the other hand, whereas critics have tended to analyze *M. Butterfly* from the viewpoints of Asian-American identity politics and, by extension, of anti-Orientalism, I resituate the film in a global transfeminist framework by arguing that despite its popular reception, its ultimate object of critique is actually China. If *M. Butterfly* is contextualized in the global politics of the 1960s, China emerges as the Lacanian phallus embodied by the supposed Oriental "Butterfly"—as a phantom of the colonial project whose detachment from the French white man signals its own demise. Read in this way, the martial arts films and *M. Butterfly* loosen representational claims about China from earnest ties to Sinitic languages, scripts, or texts, make room for multi- and extra-linguistic comparisons across shifting parameters of translation, and strategically position Chinese culture at the center of the Sinoglossiac theoretical critique.

Monstrous Transmogrification

In my previous work on Chinese transgender history, I posited a genealogy of sex change: from the demise of eunuchism in the late Qing to the emergence of transsexuality in postwar Taiwan (Chiang 2011; Chiang forthcoming). This narrative rests on the extinction of Chinese eunuchs in the last century. Indeed, the historical demise of eunuchism in the early twentieth century marked a transitional phase, when the castrated

[2] On queer Sinophone production, see Chiang (2013).

male body, women's bound feet, and the leper's crippled body all seemed out of sync with the Chinese body politic at large (Ko 2005; Leung 2009; Chiang 2012). The transcultural traffic of these corporeal "types" culminated from a longer historical process, whereby the Chinese empire and body came to be associated with a distinctively pathological identity, as captured in the label of "the Sick Man of Asia" that China appropriated from the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century (Heinrich 2008). The last Chinese eunuch, Sun Yaoting, died in 1996, and his biography—translated into English in 2008—has made possible the global circulation of stories about the eunuchs of the last Chinese dynasty (Jia 2008). Despite the physical death of Qing eunuchs, castrated figures continue to fascinate popular cultural producers and consumers, and contemporary Sinophone cinema presents many examples of their cultural imagery, especially in *wuxia* films. Focusing on some of the best-known Sinophone films featuring castrated protagonists, this part of the essay utilizes transgender theory to analyze the representations and historicity of castration. By pinning extraordinary martial arts strength as a staple feature of castrated subjects, Sinophone filmic production features an innovative technique that enables the queer articulation of eunuchism in the Sinophone peripheries, even as the practice of castration itself has long disappeared from the center of Han Chinese culture.

In order to analyze the various bodily and subjective transformations in Sinophone films, I find the concept of "transmogrification" proposed by Nikki Sullivan (2006) particularly helpful. By assigning the term a new critical theoretical edge, Sullivan undermines the exceptionality of any given type of body modification and, by extension, the moralistic tendency to dichotomize forms of embodiment by which oppositions are set up between, for instance, transsexualism and transgenderism, cosmetic surgery and "non-mainstream" body modification, conforming and subversive corporeal changes, or "bad" and "good" practices. In considering all forms of body modification as distinct manifestations of "transmogrification," which she defines as "a process of (un)becoming strange and/or grotesque, of (un)becoming other," Sullivan (2006) makes room for acknowledging "important similarities, overlaps, resonances, and intersections between a range of modified bodies" (p. 561). The trope of transmogrification helps shed light on the connections across a range

of corporeal transformations in Sinophone films, immersing the signification of castration in a web of relations to other examples of embodied and experiential change.

Some of the earliest examples of transmogrification can be found in films such as Chen Kaige's *Farewell, My Concubine* (霸王別姬 1993) and Tsui Hark's *Swordsman 2* (東方不敗 1992). In her essay, "Trans on Screen," Helen Leung (2012) offers a refreshing reading of the character of Cheng Dieyi in *Farewell, My Concubine* precisely through the prism of transmogrification. Although the film does not belong to the *wuxia* genre per se, and has raised all sorts of problems for critics who try to identify a contemporary gay subjectivity in Dieyi's character, it merits some discussion in light of its unique deployments of gender (un)becoming. Leung follows Sullivan's ethical imperative to bracket concerns about the "positive" versus "negative" representational effects of Dieyi's gender and sexual semiotics. Instead, Leung (2012) considers Beijing opera training itself as a historically specific mode of transmogrification: "a life-long physical training that molds pliant bodies into stylized theatrical role-types" (p. 194). In Dieyi's physical transformation from an untrained boy to a perfect *dan* actor, his extra finger is chopped off by his mother so that he can be accepted into and trained properly in the troupe; he endures recurrent merciless beating for the perfection of theatrical form and movement; and his body *transgenders* with the successful enunciation of the line "I am by nature born a girl" after repeated mistakes and corporal punishments (Fig. 6.1). Dieyi essentially exemplifies, quoting Susan Stryker's terminology (1994), a "monstrous" trans subject, "not in the conventional identity sense but more provocatively in the sense that he assembles gender and constitutes his self within the contingent structure of power that produces him" (Leung 2012, pp. 196–7). Not surprisingly, the film's closure seals the fate of such a doomed subject with the onstage realization of Dieyi's suicidal imitation.

Whereas Dieyi's transformation into a feminine subject unfolds in a series of corporeal changes that do not involve castration, the most direct example of male-to-female transmogrification can be found in the Dongfang Bubai character in *Swordsman 2*. The arch villain in the film, Dongfang Bubai, castrates himself to practice a lethal form of martial art (documented in *The Precious Sunflower Scripture* [葵花寶典]) that

Fig. 6.1 Cheng Dieyi enunciates the line "I am by nature born a girl" after repeated mistakes and corporal punishments. Chen Kaige, *Farewell, My Concubine*, 1993

elevates him to the top of the common martial world (*jianghu*). This accomplishment earns him the assignation of the "undefeated in the East," the literal meaning of his name (and an unambiguous allusion to Mao Zedong's pompous appetite for power at the time when the original novel was written). Leung (2008) has argued that in this loose filmic adaptation of Jin Yong's 1963 novel, *The Smiling, Proud Wanderer* (笑傲江湖), the casting of Brigitte Lin, an actress famous for her immense beauty, exemplifies a genuine attempt to enable certain aspects of transsexual subjectivity to emerge on the screen (pp. 71–77). Above all, the telling differences between the novel (written in the Maoist era) and its cinematic rendering (produced in the context of increasing queer visibility in Hong Kong) challenge other homonormative critiques of the film (Chou 1995, p. 300; Yau 1996, p. 165). Whereas Dongfang Bubai dies within a chapter in the four-volume novel, she becomes the most prominent character in the movie, usurping even the limelight of the male protagonist Linghu Chong. With its plot revolving around Dongfang Bubai's transmogrification, *Swordsman 2* also departs from the original novel by orchestrating an erotically charged relationship between Dongfang Bubai and Linghu Chong. The casting of Brigitte Lin is significant in this regard, because it

allows Dongfang Bubai to re-emerge on screen as a beautiful *woman*, no longer a half-castrated man (Fig. 6.2).

In a later reading, Leung highlights the negative connotations of Dongfang Bubai's transformation. According to Leung's reassessment (2012), Dongfang Bubai's transsexuality "is explicitly figured in the film as evidence of the character's ruthless ambition, destructive power, and monstrosity. By intimately linking Dongfang Bubai's will to dominate the world with the transformation of her body from male to female, the film has displaced anxiety about totalitarian rule onto the sex-changed body, which it portrays to be both dangerously seductive and violently destructive" (p. 188). For our purposes, it is worth noting that this displacement works only because Dongfang Bubai has been assigned an unrivaled measure of martial art skill. Her self-inflicted sex change, then, mimics not only the castration experience of Chinese eunuchs, but also their infamous image of being politically threatening agents. This personification of insubordination enables castrated men to exhibit extraordinary skills superior to other gender "normal" characters in the film, but, at the same time, conditions the demonization of their social role and significance. In this regard, eunuchs and castrated figures in Sinophone cinema represent

Fig. 6.2 Dongfang Bubai's first encounter with Linghu Chong, already appearing as a beautiful woman rather than a half-castrated man. Tsui Hark, *Swordsman 2*, 1992

subjects of what Stryker (1994) calls "transsexual monstrosity" and "transgender rage."

More recently, two films have appropriated and reinvented this image of eunuchs as at once powerful and demonic: Su Chao-Bin and John Woo's *Reign of Assassins* (劍雨 2010) and Tsui Hark's *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* (龍門飛甲 2011). Set in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the *Reign of Assassins* tells the story of an assassin gang called the Dark Stone, whose goal is to collect all of the mummified remains of an Indian Buddhist monk, Bodhi. In one of the most climatic and shocking moments in the film, the Dark Stone gang's leader and an accomplished martial artist, Cao Feng, is revealed to be a eunuch who has served the imperial palace for over five decades, but remains the lowest rank of the nine-grade system of public servants. Throughout the film, Cao embodies two opposing social statuses, standing at both the top of the Dark Stone gang and the bottom of the Chinese imperial court. His intention in tracking down and unifying the two halves of Bodhi's mummified remains is to stimulate the re-growth of his phallic organ by way of acquiring the mystical power promised by Bodhi's cadaver—in short, to reverse his castration permanently through an ultimate one-time transmogrification. Incidentally, Ming China is notorious for being one of the historical epochs during which eunuchs wielded an unprecedented, enormous measure of political power (Tsai 1996). When mapped onto Cao's martial art invincibility, this form of political threat to the Chinese world order symbolized the historical backdrop against which the nationalist condemning rhetoric of eunuchs began to accumulate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Chiang 2012). The demonization of Cao in the *Reign of Assassins*, therefore, strikes resonance with the culmination of an anti-eunuch sentiment emerging from the waning decades of the Qing imperium (Chiang and Wong 2016). Like Dongfang Bubai in *Swordsman 2*, Cao Feng exhibits a form of "transsexual monstrosity", underpinned by martial art prowess that surpasses all other gender "normal" characters, at the same time being portrayed as the most malicious fighter in the film. Like Cheng Dieyi in *Farewell, My Concubine*, Cao Feng's death serves as a vigorous reminder of the ultimate fate of eunuchs in the despotic past: to physically disappear from the world, but posing an abiding phantasmic presence in our cultural consciousness.

Also set in the Ming dynasty, but more precisely during the reign of Emperor Chenghua (1464–1487), the *Flying Swords* is in fact a sequel to the *New Dragon Gate Inn* (龍門客棧 1992). By drawing again on the historical context of the Ming dynasty, the film unambiguously uses the infamous manipulative power of Ming eunuchs as a concrete cultural resource for demarcating the gender alterity of eunuchs in the film. As is well known, Emperor Chenghua (1447–1487) established the secret service Western Depot (西廠) in 1477 under the directorship of the ruthless eunuch Wang Zhi (汪直), who, according to the historian Henry Tsai (1996), "practiced the worst aspects of terror during his tenure" (p. 115). It is reasonable to assume, then, that Yu Huatian (雨化田), the most powerful eunuch character presiding over the Western Depot in the *Flying Swords*, is a fictional representation of Wang. Identical to Wang's reputation, the Western Depot under Yu's leadership offends many influential ministers, especially those working for the Eastern Depot. To paraphrase Tsai's (1996) depiction of Wang, "officials and ordinary were so frightened by [Yu's] entourage that everyone hid as soon as they heard the depot agents coming to their vicinity" (p. 115). In fact, the storyline of the *Flying Swords* mirrors the fate of the Western Depot and its leaders—their eventual elimination. However, there is one notable difference between Yu in fictive construction and Wang in real life: martial art prowess. Although there is evidence to suggest that Wang loved martial arts and military science as a child, the physical power of Yu surpasses any imaginable measure of reality that can be associated with Wang's military skill in terms of both degree and quality (Tsai 1996, p. 116). In short, by being Wang Zhi's Sinophone reincarnation, Yu exhibits "transsexual monstrosity" in ways similar to Cheng Dieyi, Dongfang Bubai, and Cao Feng. Despite of, or precisely because of, their invincible martial art strength, all of these characters take on the arch enemy role in Sinophone films. Captured in the structural correlations of the body biopolitical and the body geopolitical, the transnational traffic of governmentality in queer Sinophone cultural production precipitates from the *peripheral* adaptation of historical *mainland* Chinese culture—a chronological leap in appropriation of an anti-eunuch mentality that first emerged in late Qing China but continues to linger and define the global cultural imaginary.

The Transfeminist Butterfly

David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (1989) and its cinematic adaptation directed by David Cronenberg (1993) have attracted significant scholarly attention, but no critic has approached them from a decisively transfeminist perspective. That is hardly suggesting, of course, that the transgender elements of the story—notably the gender transformations of the two protagonists Song Liling and René Gallimard—have escaped much of the existing critical analyses of *M. Butterfly*. Nonetheless, most serious commentaries on the play or the film tend to center on the primacy of a *mimetic displacement* between gender, on the one hand, and other indexes of social identity on the other. Thus Dorinne Kondo's (1990) astute deconstruction of the mutual imbrication of racial and gender stereotypes, and David Eng's (1994, 2001, pp. 137–166) extension of such method by way of incorporating sexuality, often look *through* rather than *at* transgenderism as the epistemological tenor of political change. Marjorie Garber's (1992) otherwise compelling reading highlights this potential pitfall more carefully, claiming that transvestism operates in the story as symptomatic of what she calls a "category crisis"—since it is "once again, something to be looked *through* on the way to a story about men or women, Asian or European" (p. 17).

Yet, the kind of transfeminist inquiry I propose here far exceeds a mere polemic about the cultural anxiety of cross-dressing. In extending other scholars' critiques of the essentialist and overlapping constructions of gender, racial, and sexual identities, I argue that the category of transgenderism itself reorients the political agenda of feminism beyond a sheer intersection of gender with other identitarian grids in a confined geopolitical context. This globalization of feminist politics subverts a quintessential root of cultural (dis)identification that has heretofore garnered insufficient attention in deep interpretations of *M. Butterfly*: the governing hegemony of cultural nationalism.[3] By incorporating *M. Butterfly* into the remit of Sinoglossiac production, my following analysis asks questions that are meant to acquire valence across different medial contexts: How does class revolution matter to *M. Butterfly*? Is the story a critique of

[3] On minority subjects' negotiation with mainstream culture, see Muñoz (1999).

Orientalism or the East, or more specifically, of American society, French politics, or China? Is the butterfly a metaphor for displacing the boundaries of being human and, ultimately, embodiment itself?[4] Extending my analysis in the previous section, we might also add: In what ways can we map the cultural politics of life onto the geopolitics of history? How to approach the shifting grounds of imperial hegemony through the lens of gender and (trans)national entanglements? By making transfeminism the basis of a multidirectional critique, my goal is not to offer an inclusive, singular response to these questions (Enke 2012). Rather, I aim to enunciate a set of Sinoglossiac feminist modulations that centralizes the category of transgenderism in order to re-present the political ambition of *M. Butterfly* in a robust transcultural frame. These modulations develop a critique of the symbolic phallus in its imbrication with the cultural reach of China's geopolitical rise.

A lasting legacy of *M. Butterfly* stems from its staging of a psychoanalytic catharsis, culminating in the climax of its finale. This cathartic surprise would not have worked without a longstanding motif lurking in the popular imagination about cross-cultural romance, especially one between a Western man and an Asian woman (de Lauretis 1999). In fact, the title of *M. Butterfly* proclaims itself unambiguously as a descendent of Puccini's infamous opera, *Madame Butterfly*, one of the few well-known Italian operas that actually casted an eye on Asia (Tarling 2015). As the love story between Gallimard, a French accountant working in China, and Song, a Chinese opera singer, builds up its momentum, the audience is suddenly shocked by a dual gender inversion: not only does Song turn out to be a male spy working for the Chinese Communist Party, but after finding out Song's actual identity, Gallimard decides to transform himself into the Oriental butterfly that he has always fantasized about. This reciprocal inversion calls into question the very realness of their mutual affection. Instead of the Asian heroine committing a suicide, a familiar ending in such tragedies as *Madame Butterfly* and its Broadway variant *Miss Saigon*, the white male protagonist succumbs to his own death, an ironic sign of liberation (Clement 1988, pp. 43–47). The cathartic twist is only a twist insofar as it redirects dominant assumptions about

[4] On the history of being human, see Smith (2007).

cross-cultural sexual fantasy and the reciprocal intersections of gender and race in contemporary Western society.

Rather than seeking to uncover a "repressed truth" (the real penis, the real Whiteness, the real homosexual, the real lover, and so forth) behind this double gender reversal, it is perhaps more promising to view the gender transformations themselves as occupying some metaphysical primacy (Chow 1996, p. 70). By this, I mean to consider gender as constitutive of the core parameters of being human and, accordingly, the transgender metamorphosis of the two protagonists as representing a more foundational political outlook of human lifehood. This echoes Stryker's (1998) insight that the analytic power of transgenderism "promises to offer important new insights into such fundamental questions as how bodies mean or what constitutes human personhood" (p. 155). Focusing transfeminism back on to the question of gender, Gayle Salamon (2008) has argued that "the transgendered subject is the constitutive outside of binary gender" (p. 118). In order to bring in the relevance of class conflict, for example, or the cognate question of human endeavor into our reading, we must tackle the historical background of the 1960s, the communist fervour that fuelled Maoist inclinations in Paris in particular, as the larger context for rethinking the transcultural critique of *M. Butterfly* (Bourg 2004).

It is important to bear in mind that while the play *M. Butterfly* quickly built up its fame in New York City between 20 March 1988 and 27 January 1990 (and eventually around the world), a similar Broadway musical adaptation of Puccini's opera was premiered in London in September 1989: Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil's *Miss Saigon*. Evidently, there is a stark contrast in the geographical settings between the original opera, on the one hand, and the subsequent dramatic and musical adaptations on the other. Whereas *Madame Butterfly* tells a story between an American naval officer and a Japanese well-to-do lady, in both *M. Butterfly* and *Miss Saigon*, the settings are relocated to a communist country: China and Vietnam respectively. Moreover, the lead female character in *M. Butterfly* turns out to be a transvestite secret agent, whereas Miss Saigon is crowned as such only at the place where she works as a prostitute. There is one more notable difference in the *M. Butterfly* variant: the Western man no longer comes from America, but France,

where the May 1968 movement serves as the backdrop for the story. In a different way, *Miss Saigon* also picks up on the theme of communism in Cold War Asia by building on the Vietnam War and the Fall of Saigon as its main historical stage. If *M. Butterfly* presents a genuine critique of *Madame Butterfly*, one of its chief mechanisms comprises the narrative positioning of class struggle at the center of world revolutionary politics.

The centrality of global economic systems to the plot (un)layering of *M. Butterfly* embeds a different, perhaps more universal, sediment of social strife: the question of being human itself. As Kristin Ross (2002), Richard Wolin (2010), and others have convincingly demonstrated, French interest in Maoism reached a peak in the May 1968 movement, after which it evolved into a new vision of social democracy, grounded in a language of "human rights" for which French citizens have always prided themselves since its invention in the Enlightenment (Robcis 2012). High-profile public intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva weighed in, and their brief political allegiance with Maoism in the late 1960s was quite pivotal for their subsequent intellectual reorientation (e.g., resulting in, most notably, Foucault's conceptualization of biopolitics) (Wolin 2010, 288–349). The French discourse of human rights as an axiom of human life, connected as it was to a communist rhetoric and more specifically to an ideological Sinophilia at the time, casts light on the mirroring of gender and cross-national mimicries between Song and Gallimard. This demands a rethinking of their transgender subjectivity on its own terms: not as conditional of appending other social objectives, but as expressive of a broader historical struggle over the meaning and legitimacy of human organization.

The global politics of the 1960s, then, provides a key ingredient to our contextualization of the Song-Gallimard love story. This is a time in China when both the Peking Opera and European operas are considered "bourgeois" and relics of the past. In 1968, at the peak of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Song is sent to a labor camp for "re-education." While the camp's loudspeaker is gradually replaced by the familiar music of *Madame Butterfly*, the scene of Song in the camp fades and the camera shifts to Paris 1968, where Gallimard is watching a performance of the opera in tears. Afterward, Gallimard reminisces about China in a bar, and the man sitting next to him looks out of the

window and remarks that Paris is looking more like Beijing, with students shouting Maoist slogans and rioting in the streets. As we know from the work of Wolin and others, this initial upsurge of mass student interest in Maoism actually emerged from French students' decisive *lack* of concrete engagement with Chinese culture. The meaning of "cultural revolution" in Paris changed over time as the educated class became disillusioned with Maoism, but here it unveils the ugly side of the Butterfly fantasy. As Rey Chow (1996) puts it,

> "Is "revolution" itself, the film seems to say, not simply another type of "fantasy stereotype"—the fantasy stereotype that exploits in the name of the collective, the people? If we mobilize, as we must, criticism against Western "orientalist" and "imperialist" fantasies about the East, then should the cruelties committed by way of this other fantasy stereotype not also be under attack? The pro-Chinese Communist fervor in France of the 1960s—is it an awakening from Western imperialism and orientalism, or is it not simply the other side of that dream called Butterfly, which fetishizes the East this time not in the form of an erotic object but in the form of a political object, not in the form of the beautiful "oriental woman" but in the form of the virile oriental man, the Great Helmsman, Mao Zedong? (pp. 79–80)"

Perhaps the dream of the Western masculine subject has never been of a submissive butterfly, but of a revolutionary prototype (from the Middle Kingdom) with the vision and power to overthrow the conditional present and to inculcate a utopian future.

This connection between Paris and Beijing, therefore, suggests that the gender crossings of Song and Gallimard represent a deeper yearning for cross-national politicization. This conflation, convergence, and confluence between gender transgression and interregional mimesis is driven home most forcefully by the most famous and yet controversial scene in *M. Butterfly*, when Gallimard decides to transform himself from a white middle-class male subject into an Oriental butterfly (in this concluding scene, he announces "My name is René Gallimard, also known as Madame Butterfly"). After putting on a wig, applying thick layers of lipstick and facial powder, and wearing a kimono, Gallimard

Fig. 6.3 After transforming himself into Madame Butterfly, René Gallimard looks into the mirror with which he eventually takes his life. David Cronenberg, *M. Butterfly*, 1993

commits suicide by cutting his throat with a piece of mirror (allusion to the "mirror stage" in Lacanian psychoanalysis; Fig. 6.3). Different critics have approached Gallimard's fate differently, but there seems to be a general consensus that his suicidal transgenderism symbolizes an abrupt about-face of the processual manifestations of castration. Whereas throughout the bulk of the story, Song is depicted as the "castrated" (wo)man, *M. Butterfly* actually concludes with Gallimard castrating himself. However, what Gallimard castrates is not his sex, race, or gender. These readings would lure themselves into the myth of a "repressed truth," because they merely reify the normativity of the real penis, the real Whiteness, and the real androcentric manhood. Rather, borrowing from Chow's (1996) description of Gallimard's final gesture as exemplifying the visible painting of fantasy, I consider what he castrates in the very act of slashing his throat to be *the projection of political and erotic fantasy* (pp. 84–85).[5] The cut signals the white man's death, but it also represents an act of removing the symbolic phallus—the quintessential ground of white masculine identity.

[5] Here, Chow is drawing on Lacan (1981, pp. 91–104).

If *M. Butterfly* is historicized vis-à-vis the global politics of the 1960s, China emerges as the Lacanian phallus embodied by the supposed Oriental butterfly—an ontological symbol that signals its detachment from the French white man (the real Oriental woman, however ironically) the moment such relinquishment defines his death.[6] China, it seems, carries the seat of hyper-virile masculinity, having long been considered the historical origins of all things "under heaven" (天下) through and beyond the Maoist period (Chen 2001). Indeed, the film ends with the "butterfly" (Song) flying back to China. With that, France is left in a vacuum—a dispossession—of Maoist passion, and we are left not with the Western misperception of the East, but with the decolonizing traces of communist China itself.

As I have been suggesting, Gallimard's transmogrification is a form of castration, compounding aesthetics and ethics, but it is not simply a sexual, racial, or gender castration on the level of bodily erasure. Instead, his self-slashing castrates the promise of projecting a political and sexual fantasy. This is mirrored in Song's double inversion (from a man into a woman and back into a man). Again, at the end of the film the butterfly flies back to China. But we must also not forget that Song is no longer the "butterfly" by this point; rather, Song's very presence implies the symbolic status of China as the phallus that has been cut off from the white man's identity constitution. In other words, this ending makes a powerful statement about China itself: that Gallimard's death also resembles the death of China's own projection of political fantasy. Much like the way that scholars have understood empires to contain the origins of their own decline, Song's homecoming to China echoes the demise of Maoism in Paris in the late 1960s: a political formation that is ingrained with the ground of its own undoing. The colonial phallus, after all, retracts back to its homeland under a different guise and relinquishes its project(ion) of political desire.

[6] Although de Lauretis (1999, p. 330) calls attention to Song's yearning in intriguing ways, her reading tends to take for granted the homosexual nature of Song's desire and inadvertently risks ontologizing the myth of a "repressed truth" about the normativity of the real penis—Song's penis. Regardless of their physical make-up, the butterfly fantasy can easily operate in a reciprocal fashion between Song and Gallimard, making a primordial presupposition of homosexuality always volatile.

Whereas most critics have construed Hwang's play as an effort to challenge Orientalism from the viewpoint of disenfranchized minorities, my rendering of Song and Gallimard's gender transitions as a political end per se, rather than a means through which to look, makes possible understanding *M. Butterfly* as a critique of global "China" as much as it is of late capitalist America. The different crossovers featured in the film oftentimes subvert wider national and geopolitical frameworks at the same time that they trouble gender. Gallimard's transformation into a Japanese butterfly makes the Orient all the more opaque than a simple citation of the beauty of Chinese operatic arts; Song's conversion into a powerful communist spy highlights the trope of class struggle (as political struggle) absent in Puccini's opera, from which the power of his romance narrative with Gallimard originally derived; and Hwang's rerouting of the racial and gender oppression of Asian Americans through a historical context rooted in both an European genealogy of human rights and a revolutionary modularity of Sinocentrism undermines any subsidiary articulation of nationalism for anchoring a story about, above all, transgenderism itself.

Conclusion: Entangled Fate

Rey Chow (2012) has recently defined "entanglements" as "the linkages and enmeshments that keep things apart; the voidings and uncoverings that hold things together" (p. 12). This essay highlights the fate of transmogrified subjects as the common ground around which the "entangled" meanings of castration cohere in cultural Sinoglossia across the Pacific. In presenting *M. Butterfly* as a "Sinoglossiac" rather than a "Sinophone" film, my aim has been to supersede the lingo-centric and translational limitations of Sinophone theory. The representation of castration in Sinophone *wuxia* films tends to be routed through the embodied experience of martial art prowess, a cinematic technique that foregrounds the gender liminality of eunuchs. Yet, this unorthodox personification functions as a convenient rationale for the social denigration of castrated subjects—taken as symptomatic of their "transsexual monstrosity." The Sinophone filmic articulation of castration thus emanates from a contemporary

adaptation in the cultural periphery of an earlier anti-eunuch sentiment that epitomized the heart of fin-de-siècle revolutionary Chinese consciousness. On the other hand, castration in *M. Butterfly* is depicted most colorfully in Gallimard's transmogrification from a French white male accountant into an Oriental Butterfly. Yet his transformation climaxes at the enactment of his suicidal outro, representing the eradication of the possibility to project a political and sexual ambition, a resisting denunciation, if you will, of Maoist colonial fantasy. The kaleidoscopic operations of "castration" converge in its fatal excess—death as the common destiny of feminine subjects, whether it is Cheng Dieyi or René Gallimard—across different medial contexts within and beyond the cultural signifier "China." Sinoglossia theory therefore brings Sinophone martial arts films and *M. Butterfly* together by construing the global Chinese cultural imaginary as the fulcrum of its critical vitality.

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