



# PLAY GUIDE



by  
DAVID HENRY  
HWANG

directed by  
PETER  
ROTHSTEIN

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# PLOT SYNOPSIS AND CHARACTERS

In 1986, a French diplomat fell in love with a Chinese actress who turned out to be not only a spy but a man. The Frenchman had never seen his lover naked, because he believed her modesty was a “Chinese custom.” From this intriguing news story, David Henry Hwang has crafted *M. Butterfly*, an epic play tracing lines of race, gender and power through love and deception.

An evocative and beautiful blend of theatrical styles and voices, *M. Butterfly* is a tour de force that cuts to the heart of the distortions that pollute cross-cultural interactions. It has become a modern classic, beautifully blending the power and politics of *Madame Butterfly* and a contemporary world in which sexuality identity issues have become a topic of open discussion and dialogue. This landmark play has become a contemporary classic and launched David Henry Hwang to the forefront of the new American theater.

## CHARACTERS

**Rene Gallimard**, a former French diplomat who has been imprisoned for treason. His crime was passing classified documents to the Chinese, through his lover, Song. Gallimard is an unimpressive man, who by his own admission is not “witty or clever.” At high school, he was voted “least likely to be invited to a party.” He is uncomfortable in his relations with the opposite sex, and has had little success in romance. He married for practical reasons rather than for love. However, he still longs for a beautiful woman who will be completely devoted to him. When he thinks he has found such a woman in Song, he gains pleasure in dominating her, and behaves arrogantly and cruelly towards her. This makes him feel for the first time that he is a real man. Eventually, however, he does develop a genuine love for Song. As a diplomat, Gallimard is a failure, and is ordered back to France for giving poor advice to the French ambassador. Gallimard’s greatest mistake, however, is that he fails to realize that Song, his long-time lover, is, in fact, a man. When his error is revealed at his trial, he becomes a laughingstock in France and around the world.

**Song Liling**, a Chinese singer and actor. Although he is a man, he plays female roles in Chinese opera, which is a traditional practice in China. When Song and Gallimard first meet, Song allows him to think that he, Song, is really a woman. Song pretends to fit the stereotype that Western men have of the submissive Oriental woman: he appears modest and retiring in a way that Gallimard finds enticing. However, Song can also be assertive in his views about how women are treated in Chinese society and of the West’s prejudiced attitude to China. But all the time he is with Gallimard, Song is merely acting a part. In reality, he is using Gallimard to obtain sensitive political information, which he passes on to the Chinese government. Song shows no qualms about his deception of Gallimard, and even goes as far as acquiring a baby (supplied for him by his communist masters) and telling Gallimard the baby is theirs. When Song reveals himself as a man and testifies against Gallimard at the trial, he relates his story in a detached and unemotional manner, as if he has no real feelings in the matter. At the end of the play, he toys with the distressed Gallimard and tries to reassert his control over him.

**Marc**, an old school friend of Gallimard’s, and his complete opposite. Whereas Gallimard was socially withdrawn in high school, Marc was

the most popular student. Gallimard lacks confidence with women, but Marc has been a shameless womanizer all his life. He is married, but boasts that he cheated on his wife only six months after their wedding and has had three hundred sexual conquests in twelve years. He urges Gallimard to be aggressive in his pursuit of Song.

**M. Toulon**, the French Ambassador in Beijing. He is a man of the world as far as sexual liaisons are concerned, and he seems impressed when he learns of Gallimard’s affair with Song. In his conversations with Gallimard about state business, however, he expresses disdain for both the Chinese and the Americans. Gallimard thinks Toulon has a paternalistic attitude to his employees, regarding them all as his children.

**Comrade Chin**, the Chinese Communist Party official who instructs Song to spy. Chin unthinkingly accepts communist doctrine. As the representative of the Communist Party during the revolutionary upheavals in the 1960s, she supervises Song’s confession of his offenses against party dogma.

**Helga**, Gallimard’s wife. While the couple lives in Beijing, she remains ignorant of Chinese culture and appears to dislike the Chinese. She is concerned that she and Gallimard seem unable to produce a child. When the couple returns to Paris, Helga is upset by the demonstrations in the street and realizes that she was happier in Beijing.

**Renee**, a student from Denmark with whom Gallimard has an affair. She is physically attractive and sexually uninhibited. She engages Gallimard in explicit discussions about the male sexual organ.

**Shu-Fang**, Song’s servant

**Consul Sharpless**, Lt. Pinkerton’s friend in *Madame Butterfly*

**Suzuki**, Cio-Cio-San’s servant in *Madame Butterfly*

**Men, Woman at Party, Girl in Magazine, Judge**

## SYNOPSIS

**R**ene Gallimard is a low level French diplomat, unlucky in life, inept in love, and a laughingstock the whole world over. From his prison cell, he tells us the story of his life and how he came to be loved by “the perfect woman”: Song Liling, a performer with the Peking Opera. Using flashbacks to his time in China, Gallimard takes us on a journey through his mind and his heart and the fantasy world he inhabits.

While stationed in Beijing, Gallimard happens to see Song Liling perform *Madame Butterfly* and he is utterly transfixed. “I believed this girl,” he says. “I wanted to take her in my arms – so delicate, even I could protect her...” After the show, he speaks to Song about the beauty of the story and she rebukes him, calling it a cruel and ridiculous fantasy. He meets her again after she invites him to the Chinese opera and again finds her bold and proud, but believes that underneath, her heart is shy and afraid. Gallimard decides to possess her. Through a series of cruel experiments, he wears down her spirit, piercing her heart like a butterfly caught on a needle and letting her writhe. In the middle of the night, he comes to Song’s apartment and asks her if she is his Butterfly. She says that she is, and citing her modesty as a Chinese girl, turns out the lights as they make love.

The second act opens with Song and Gallimard having lived together for some time. Song tells Gallimard of contemporary Chinese politics and asks what he has learned from the embassy. Now a higher ranking diplomat, Gallimard has gained the confidence of the French

ambassador and the envy of his peers for his conquest of a “native mistress.” As he is about to share his success with the audience, Comrade Chin enters and Song briefly takes over the narration. Comrade Chin, a Chinese Communist Party official, grills Song about the information obtained from Gallimard and reveals that Song is not only a spy, but a man.

After Chin leaves, Song allows Gallimard to take back his story.

At a party, he is seduced by a forward student named Renee and is disconcerted by her confidence, a trait he sees as masculine. They continue the affair, but only because Gallimard is excited by the pain it could cause Song. When he goes back to his distraught Butterfly, he orders her to strip. This time, Gallimard is unrelenting, until Song “reveals” that she is pregnant.

Song tells Comrade Chin to find a baby or the entire mission will be compromised. She returns several months later with a son.

But China is changing. As the Cultural Revolution gains force, Gallimard moves back to France and Song is beaten and taken to work in a labor camp as punishment for his decadent ways. Years pass; Gallimard laments his life in the West when Song turns up on his doorstep. But this time, Song does not turn the story back over to Gallimard. Instead, he sits down and undresses. Under his kimono, he wears a well-cut suit. The action moves to a courtroom many years later where Song is testifying at Gallimard’s treason hearing. Gallimard enters looking for his Butterfly and rejects the man he sees at the witness stand. To make Gallimard confront the truth, Song begins to strip. As he stands in front of him, naked, Song tries to convince Gallimard that there are still feelings between them. But Gallimard laughs, saying that he does not want the truth, because everything he loved was the fantasy. Having thrown Song offstage, Gallimard begins to apply makeup and costume as if preparing for a role in the opera. He tells us of his fantasy world, where the Orient is full of perfect women ready to die for the love of unworthy men like him. Transforming himself into Cio-Cio-San, Gallimard kills himself with a ceremonial dagger as the Love Duet from *Madame Butterfly* plays. The final image is of Song in his well-cut suit, standing over Gallimard’s body, smoking a cigarette and asking, “Butterfly? Butterfly?”

# COMMENTS ON THE PLAY

**I**t all started in May of 1986, over casual dinner conversation. A friend asked, had I heard about the French diplomat who'd fallen in love with a Chinese actress, who subsequently turned out to be not only a spy, but a man? I later found a two paragraph story in the *New York Times*. The diplomat – Bernard Boursicot, attempting to account for the fact that he had never seen his “girlfriend” naked, was quoted as saying, “I thought she was very modest. I thought it was a Chinese custom.”

Now, I am aware that this is *not* a Chinese custom, that Asian women are no more shy with their lovers than are women of the West. I am also aware, however, that Boursicot's assumption was consistent with a certain stereotyped view of Asians as blushing flowers. I therefore concluded that the diplomat must have fallen in love, not with a person, but with a fantasy stereotype. I also inferred that, to the extent the Chinese spy encouraged these misperceptions, he must have played up to an exploited this image of the Oriental woman as demure and submissive. (In general, the way we use the term “Asian” to “Oriental,” in the same way “Black” is superior to “Negro.” I use the term “Oriental” specifically to denote an exotic or imperialistic view of the East.)

I suspected there was a play here. I purposely refrained from further research, for I was not interested in writing docu-drama. Frankly, I didn't want the “truth” to interfere with my own speculations. ... I envisioned the story as a musical. I remember going so far as to speculate that it could be some “great *Madame Butterfly*-like tragedy.” ...

Before I can begin writing, I must “break the back of the story,” and find some angle which compels me to set pen to paper. ... [I] asked myself, “What did Boursicot think he was getting in this Chinese actress?” The answer came to me clearly: “He probably thought he had found *Madame Butterfly*.”

The idea of doing a deconstructivist *Madama Butterfly* immediately appealed to me. This, despite the fact that I didn't even know the plot of the opera! I knew *Butterfly* only as a cultural stereotype; speaking of an Asian woman, we would sometimes say, “She's pulling a *Butterfly*,” which meant playing the submissive Oriental number. I felt convinced that the libretto would include yet another lotus blossom pining away for a cruel Caucasian man, and dying for her love. Such a story has become too much of a cliché not to be included in the archetypal East-West romance that started it all. Sure enough, when I purchased the record, I discovered it contained a wealth sexist and racist clichés, reaffirming my faith in Western culture.

Very soon I came up with the basic “arc” of my play: the Frenchman fantasizes that he is Pinkerton and his lover is *Butterfly*. By the end of the piece, he realizes that it is he who has been *Butterfly*, in that the Frenchman has been duped by love; the Chinese spy, who exploited that love, is therefore the real Pinkerton. ...

*M. Butterfly* has sometimes been regarded as an anti-American play, a diatribe against the stereotyping of the East by the West, of women by men. Quite to the contrary, I consider it a plea to all sides to cut through our respective layers of cultural and sexual misperception, to deal with one another truthfully for our mutual good, from the common and equal ground we share as human beings.

For the myths of the East, the myths of the West, the myths of men, and the myths of women – these have so saturated our consciousness that truthful contact between nations and lovers can only be the result of heroic effort. Those who prefer to bypass the work involved will remain in a world of surfaces, misperceptions running rampant. This is, to me, the convenient world in which the French diplomat and the Chinese spy lived. This is why, after twenty years, he had learned nothing at all about his lover, not even the truth of his sex.

*M. Butterfly*, Author's Notes (excerpts), David Henry Hwang, 1988

**I**t didn't require genius for David Henry Hwang to see that there were the makings of a compelling play in the 1986 newspaper story that prompted him to write “*M. Butterfly*.” Here was the incredible true-life tale of a career French foreign service officer brought to ruin – conviction for espionage – by a bizarre 20-year affair with a Beijing Opera diva. Not only had the French diplomat failed to recognize that his lover was a spy; he'd also failed to figure out that “she” was a he in drag. “It was dark, and she was very modest,” says Gallimard ..., Mr. Hwang's fictionalized protagonist, by half-joking way of explanation. When we meet him in the prison cell where he reviews his life, Gallimard has become, according to own understatement, “the patron saint of the socially inept.” But if this story is a corker, what is it about, exactly? That's where Mr. Hwang's imagination, one of the most striking to emerge in the American theater in this decade, comes in, and his answer has nothing to do with journalism. This playwright ... does not tease us with obvious questions such as is she or isn't she?, or does he know or doesn't he? Mr. Hwang isn't overly concerned with how the opera singer, named Song Liling ..., pulled his hocus-pocus in the boudoir, and he refuses to explain away Gallimard by making him a closeted, self-denying homosexual. An inversion of Puccini's “*Madama Butterfly*,” “*M. Butterfly*” is also the inverse of most American plays. Instead of reducing the world to an easily digested cluster of sexual or familial relationships, Mr. Hwang cracks open a liaison to reveal a sweeping, universal meditation on two of the most heated conflicts – men versus women, East versus West – of this or any other time.

Frank Rich, “‘*M. Butterfly*,’ a Story of a Strange Love, Conflict and Betrayal,” *The New York Times*, March 21, 1988

During the last ironic moments of “M. Butterfly” the fascination David Henry Hwang has built into his remarkable play settles into [the theater] like a dangerous electrical charge. Having been titillated by the gossip behind Hwang’s dramatic retelling of a documented 20-year relationship between a French diplomat and his Chinese male lover who all the while pretended to be female, the audience is suddenly confronted with the “truth.” The truth, it turns out, is as many-sided as the relationship itself. Further, in Hwang’s brilliant interpretative scheme, it owes as much to fantasy as it does to fact. The final provocative message ... hums you out of the theater.

Kevin Kelly, *Boston Globe*, September 20, 1990

Some of the most tenacious myths of the modern world confront the audience keenly in David Henry Hwang’s powerful study of sex, mystery, treason, obsession, delusion and deception. *M. Butterfly* looks deeply and with great theatrical imagination and effect at a strange, dangerous liaison between two individuals, thereby raising collective questions about how we see ourselves and each other, exemplified in the play by elements of East and West, and male and female. What makes the piece particularly strong – apart from its origin in a true story – is its attempt to embrace us all with its concerns. By pushing us through the attitude boundaries of male and female sexuality, by challenging our concepts of the meaning of love, its issues become universal.

John Larkin, *Sunday Age* (Melbourne, Australia), April 4, 1993

We probably shouldn’t be surprised that David Henry Hwang’s “M Butterfly” feels more relevant than ever. The 1988 drama is about so many things - men vs. women, East vs. West, gender vs. stereotype - but what comes through most powerfully ... is fantasy vs. reality. ... Hwang’s incisive drama takes its cue from a real-life incident involving a French diplomat and his 20-year affair with a Chinese spy, who happened to be a Beijing opera performer and who also, unbeknownst to the diplomat, happened to be a man. By working in themes from Puccini’s opera “Madame Butterfly,” Hwang sets up a rich metaphor dealing with the imperialist male fantasy of conquering a submissive land and its even

more submissive women. ... [W]hile the fantasy persists, Gallimard is the image of the happy man. The great irony of his story - and the great success of Hwang’s play - is that Gallimard is telling us his story from a cell in a French prison, where he’s serving time for treason.

Chad Jones, “TheatreWorks ‘M. Butterfly’ still has wings,” *Oakland Tribune*, August 29, 2006

No one is now likely to leave *M. Butterfly* questioning its story, or merely talking about [Song Liling’s] remarkable female impersonation. Instead, we are left with a coup de theatre in which a pitiful Gallimard switches roles with his lover by bursting out of his own male cocoon. As [Gallimard] finally becomes the doomed, fragile, humiliated “butterfly” of his consuming fantasies and fears, *M. Butterfly* achieves a catharsis echoing the Puccini music that swells in accompaniment. A play that aims at a theatergoer’s head for most of the night suddenly, and devastatingly, reaches for the throat.

Frank Rich, “‘Plow’ and ‘Butterfly’: New Leads, New Light,” *The New York Times*, September 23, 1988

The play is to some degree about the nature of seduction – in the sense that we seduce ourselves. Sometimes when you have the desire to fall in love or you desire to have someone to be some kind of ideal, you can make that person ideal in your own mind whether or not the actual facts correspond to the reality. I think that it’s often true in a smaller, less extreme sense that we get involved with people and decide to blind ourselves to their faults so that they can be the perfect love that we’ve always wanted. And on some level we’re aware that that is not the case. But we prefer the fantasy over the reality. The play presents an obviously more extreme and less common situation, where the reality is so radically different from fantasy that at the core, even the simple, fundamental fact that it’s a man instead of a woman is something that the person in love chooses to block out. But it’s not actually that different qualitatively from everyday types of deceptions that people make in order to convince themselves they’re in love.

I had the same reactions as everybody else-how could it have happened? But then on some level it seemed natural to me that it should have happened, that given the degree of misperception generally between East and West and between men and women, it seemed inevitable that a mistake of this magnitude would one day take place. As a metaphor, the story made perfect sense in the context of the general misunderstanding that I have always perceived takes place between these different groups. In retrospect, it seems to me that that was what really piqued my imagination. I felt the impossibility of the situation and the inevitability of it, both at the same time.

“M. Butterfly”: An Interview with David Henry Hwang, David Henry Hwang and John Louis DiGaetani, *TDR*, Autumn, 1989.

At the core of *M. Butterfly* is the question of cultural translation. Through the juxtaposition of fantasy and reality, the play questions whether it is really possible to see the truth about a culture, a loved one, or even oneself. Are we doomed to be imprisoned within the realm of our own subjectivity and forced to perceive meaning through the limits of the representations by which we are surrounded? This play brings to the surface the reality of translation as a ubiquitous practice determining the contours of our very identity and existence.

Maria C. Zamora, *nation, Race and History in Asian American Literature: remembering the body*, 2008

## EXCERPTS FROM THE PLAY

There is a vision of the Orient that I have. Of slender women in chong sams and kimonos who die for the love of unworthy foreign devils. Who are born and raised to be the perfect women. Who take whatever punishment we give them, and bounce back, strengthened by love, unconditionally. It is a vision that has become my life.

GALLIMARD

Consider it this way: what would you say if a blonde homecoming queen fell in love with a short Japanese businessman? He treats her cruelly, then goes home for three years, during which time she prays to his picture and turns down marriage from a young Kennedy. Then, when she learns he has remarried, she kills herself. Now, I believe you would consider this girl to be a deranged idiot, correct? But because it's an Oriental who kills herself for a Westerner – ah! – you find it, beautiful.

SONG LILING

The love of a Butterfly can withstand many things – unfaithfulness, loss, even abandonment. But how can it face the one sin that implies all others? The devastating knowledge that, underneath it all, the object of her love was nothing more, nothing less than ... a man.

GALLIMARD

## ABOUT DAVID HENRY HWANG



**D**avid Henry Hwang has emerged as one of the preeminent new voices of the theater with plays that tackle race and art in provocative and affecting ways.

David Henry Hwang was born August 11, 1957 as the son of Chinese immigrants in San Gabriel, a suburb of Los Angeles, California. As a young child Hwang was not particularly conscious of his ethnicity. When he was ten Hwang stayed with his maternal grandmother, who was ailing in the Philippines, where he rapidly learned about his heritage; offering to gather information to share with others back home.

Hwang's ethnic consciousness continued to grow while he was a student at Stanford University in the mid-1970s. Through contact with various student organizations and exposure to works of Asian-American authors, Hwang became actively involved in the voicing of protest against racial discrimination.

During his senior year, Hwang developed an interest in writing plays. He attended a playwright's workshop in Claremont, California conducted by Sam Shepard and upon the positive reception of his piece about Asian-American immigrants, *F.O.B.*, meaning "fresh off the boat," Hwang made a submission to the National Playwright's Conference of the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut. Shortly before graduating Hwang was notified that his play had been chosen for presentation at the conference. While the staging was of *F.O.B.* was being developed, theatrical producer Joseph Papp took notice of Hwang. Papp brought the play to New York's off-Broadway circuit the following year where it won an Obie Award in 1981. Papp also offered to produce any subsequent plays that Hwang might write and remained his sustaining producer throughout Hwang's early development.

Many of his plays, like *M. Butterfly*, reclaim and reinvent cultural myths and stereotypes, including his revision of the 1958 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Flower Drum Song*, which earned a Tony nomination in 2003. *M. Butterfly* premiered on Broadway in 1988, winning multiple awards including the Tony and Drama Desk awards, and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

**I**n the ethnic communities that spawned them, artists who manage to cross over into the mainstream from Harlem or Watts or Chinatown east or west call the journey "riding on the hyphen." Pop musicians like Mexican-American Ricardo Valenzuela, who as Ritchie Valens topped the charts in the 1950's with "La Bamba," were among the first. ...

David Henry Hwang – barely 30 and haunted by spirits often of his own invention – is riding on the hyphen into mainstream American theater as few Asian-Americans have before him. For the young playwright, the Broadway opening next Sunday of his "M. Butterfly" represents a breathtaking leap. With its scandalous and incredible plot, its flourishes of Chinese opera and flashes of nudity, its Western soliloquizing and reflections on East-West politics, its original music ... interwoven with Puccini's "Madama Butterfly," Hwang's play breaches just about every convention of the commercial theater. ...

"The story enabled me to pull together various concerns that I have about racism, sexism and imperialism," says Hwang. "The story was like a perfect little jar that could hold all these different subjects.

“I only knew *Madame Butterfly* as a cultural stereotype,” he continues. “Like, sometimes you would say, ‘Oh, she’s pulling a Butterfly’ - which meant someone trying to do a submissive-Oriental number. I was trying to think of a hook, a way to break the back of this spy story. One day it popped into my head: What did Boursicot think he was getting? Well, he probably thought he was getting *Madame Butterfly*.” ...

The spying gave the playwright a route into political issues he wanted to deal with. “It has real implications for the choices that were made,” Hwang says of the affair. “People went to war, died, made political decisions through these personal things. We didn’t consider Orientals to be our equals. We didn’t figure after the Second World War that they’d come back and beat us at our own game. That sort of miscalculation also led us to believe that if we bombed Vietnam enough, they would all give in.”

Jeremy Gerard, “David Hwang: Riding on the Hyphen,” *The New York Times*, March 13, 1988

**E**thnicity has become less prominent in some of the work by younger Asian-American playwrights, said David Henry Hwang. More important to these writers are the universal questions that have forever informed and provoked theater, he said, with style and aesthetic rising to the fore. ...

“Because the concept of being Asian-American was so new for my generation, the baby boomers, it became the subject of a lot of our work,” Hwang said. “With a lot of new work out there, ethnicity is one part of the complicated mosaic of factors that makes us who we are, but it’s not the answer to the riddle of identity.”

Hwang, born in Los Angeles to Chinese immigrant parents, first struck the national consciousness in 1980 with “F.O.B.,” an acronym for “Fresh Off the Boat,” which won an Obie for best new play in a production at Joe Papp’s New York Shakespeare Festival. “*M. Butterfly*,” a delicious and intriguing piece steeped in espionage and sexual identity, won the Tony in 1988, and Hwang adapted it for the screen in 1993. ...

Younger writers – such as Diana Son, Sung Rno, Julia Cho and Lloyd Suh – deal with a new configuration full of nuance and broader definition.

“You have more recognition that these categories of race are fairly arbitrary,” he said. “And there is so much intermarriage that racial

categories literally become quite difficult to identify in an obvious sense. So I think it’s kind of natural that the discussion and the discourse should end up going in this direction.” ...

That doesn’t mean, Hwang stressed, that Asian-American theater companies have outgrown their reason for existence. The art form requires that some institutions continue to push the envelope and continue to produce theater that challenges mainstream notions. If ethnicity steps into a secondary role, the company will distinguish itself through a certain style or aesthetic.

“Look at someone like Ping Chong,” Hwang said. “His work of the past 10 to 15 years has to some extent been more about Asian issues than his previous work, but you don’t necessarily define his work by that subject. His work is defined by a certain way of working and a certain aesthetic, so these companies may end up defining themselves by criteria that are different from what they were founded for, but still remain distinct as places that do new work and push the envelope.”

Graydon Royce, “Broader Identities,” *Star Tribune*, August 22, 2004

**It’s important to realize that when *F.O.B.* was produced at the Public, I was twenty-three. At that point Joe [Papp] said that he would produce anything I wrote, and subsequently he was quite good to his word and produced my next four plays. To have that sort of context and that confidence from a producer so that one is not working in a vacuum is a wonderful luxury for a developing writer. I think one of the most frightening things - and I’ve seen this in some of my friends who are writers - is going through that period when you feel you’re writing just for yourself, that there’s no other audience. This is particularly true for playwrights and for screenwriters, whose work doesn’t really come to fruition until it enters a collaborative situation. It’s very stifling to feel that one is working in a vacuum. Always having had the resources of the Public, knowing that I would have access to actors and a stage and directors since a very early age and a very early point in my career, I think really helped me develop as a playwright. People who don’t have that luxury have to struggle it out for themselves, whereas I had a wonderful support system.**

David Henry Hwang, phone interview with Jean W. Ross, June 28, 1989.

## COMMENTS BY THE PLAYWRIGHT

For the myths of the East, the myths of the West, the myths of men, and the myths of women - these have so saturated our consciousness that truthful contact between nations and lovers can only be the work of heroic effort. Those who prefer to bypass the work involved will remain in a world of surfaces, misperceptions running rampant. This is, to me, the convenient world in which the French diplomat and the Chinese spy lived. This is why, after twenty years, he learned nothing at all about his lover, not even the truth of his sex.

David Henry Hwang, Afterword to *M. Butterfly*, 1988

This play is to some degree about the nature of seduction - in the sense that we seduce ourselves. Sometimes when you have the desire to fall in love or you desire to have someone to be some kind of ideal, you can make that person ideal in your own mind whether or not the actual facts correspond to the reality. I think that it's often true in a smaller, less extreme sense that we get involved with people and decide to blind ourselves to their faults so that they can be the perfect love that we've always wanted. And on some level we're aware that that is not the case. But we prefer the fantasy over the reality.

David Henry Hwang, in an interview with John Louis DiGaetani, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 33, No 3 (Autumn 1989)

We live in a time when reality has evidently trumped fiction. The novel loses readers, as narrative nonfiction and memoirs gain in popularity. Reality television, once derided as a fad, is apparently here to stay. Young people abandon the so-called old media to post anecdotes from their lives and videos of their activities online. In theater, docudramas, in which quotes from real people are dramatized, have become more present on our stages. Today, truth is not only stranger than fiction, it also seems to be more popular.

Yet even as America's appetite for real-life stories continues unabated, we might ask whether the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction are really so clear and concrete. ...

Critics and the public seem to have agreed on a line separating fiction from nonfiction. Nonfiction writers can tell stories from their own points of view and even recount conversations at which they were not present ... . But they cannot invent incidents or characters wholesale. The standard to which they should aspire is journalistic integrity.

I wonder, however, if even journalists are immune from fictionalizing. By this, I don't mean such obvious incidents as the Jayson Blair case, in which the former *New York Times* reporter was caught fabricating elements of his stories. Even when writers adhere to "real" facts and aspire to "objectivity," does the very interpretation of data itself open up a story to the reporter's own preconceptions, biases and prejudices? ...

[Hwang's play] "Yellow Face" attempts to explore these questions by further blurring the line between fact and fiction. My comedy combines actual incidents from my own life with completely invented ones. In some ways, the play resembles "mockumentaries" such as "This Is Spinal Tap" and "Borat," which use documentary techniques to tell a fictional story. My piece could just as easily, however, be regarded as a comic memoir in which some events are invented. In "Yellow Face," the difference between real and fake is often in doubt.

To my mind, this blurring reflects a fundamental flaw in America's current preoccupation with "reality." In an age when people creatively embellish their Internet profiles and photos can be doctored on most home computers, the line between truth and fiction is fuzzier than ever. Or perhaps it has always been so.

More than a century ago, the playwright Oscar Wilde said, "Give [a man] a mask, and he will tell you the truth." Then, as today, reality should not be taken at face value. Sometimes, it is fiction that actually reveals the truth.

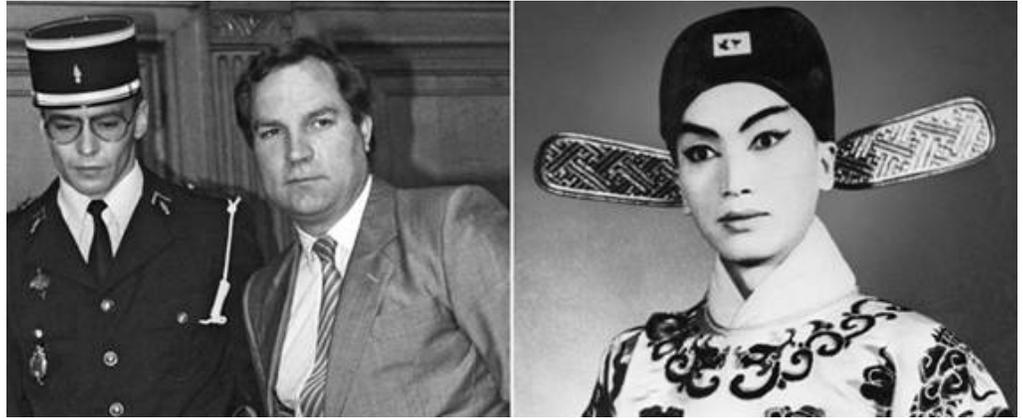
David Henry Hwang, "Playwrights on Writing," *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 2007

# THE STORY BEHIND THE PLAY

## THE ACCOUNT OF BOURSICOT AND PEI PU

**“T**here are people, they hear my story, they don’t believe. They think it is about a homosexual couple, they want to have a son. This is a normal situation, I agree, but this is not my story. My story is true, it is overwhelming, it is not a false story. It is not that I did not want to believe Shi Pei Pu was a man, I was stupefied when I learned. He was not like a homosexual man when he was with me; he was like a woman.”

Bernard Boursicot, *Liaison*, 305.



**“It was only an illusion. But ninety percent of love, even a man of science will volunteer, is illusion. In defense of love, a story we love, a person we love, is there anyone among us who has not closed his eyes and refused to see?”**

Joyce Wadler, “The Real M. Butterfly” *People Weekly*, August 8, 1988.

**“Y**ears and years of his beautiful lies. I went before the judge; he said to me, ‘Do you believe everything everybody tells you?’ I said, ‘Yes, that is why I am here.’ What a violinist Pei Pu was. And before such a stupid man.”

Bernard Boursicot, *Liaison*, 305.

**“People ask do I hate Pei Pu. I don’t say he’s a bastard, no. I hate no man, not even the police. I have no regrets for what they call this spying. I am just sorry the story was not the one I was believing. Love is to trust; that is what was the fault of my friend Shi Pei Pu: to lie. It’s better to be cheated than to cheat, there is no dishonor in being cheated.”**

Bernard Boursicot, *Liaison*, 306.

**D**avid Henry Hwang did not write *M. Butterfly* with the intention of creating a docudrama. Although he acknowledges the influence of the Boursicot/Pei Pu love affair and trial, *M. Butterfly* is his own invention: a play that investigates the impact of dualities and the blurring of lines between cultures and mistaken sexual identity as represented by a farcical tragedy of love, its illusion and its demise.

The story of Bernard Boursicot and Shi Pei Pu begins in 1964 when Boursicot took residence in Beijing as a French embassy accountant. Two months after his arrival in Beijing, Boursicot met Pei Pu as a man at a dinner party. The pair spent time together and eventually Boursicot came to believe that Pei Pu was a woman. Boursicot claims that Pei Pu insisted:

When he was born his mother, afraid her husband would divorce her for not producing a son, decided to bring Shi up as a boy. Shi said I must keep this secret to protect his family. And I did, for 20 years. ... It seemed possible. His face was completely without hair, he had the hands of a woman, and Chinese women had very little breasts.

Until his death in 2009, Pei Pu continued to insist that Boursicot came to the conclusion of his sex on his own and that he did nothing to dispute it for fear that Boursicot would not love him otherwise.

While people may assume Shi Pei Pu actively worked to deceive Bernard Boursicot, journalist Joyce Wadler reports in her account of their affair, *Liaison*, that Pei Pu was unaware of his own sexuality until three months after his affair with Boursicot began at the age of 27:

There was a period of time that *mes attributs masculins* had not descended, so that they did not show, and I did not know whether I had any or not... At the end of 1965, I met a doctor named Ma. He told me I was really a man and after making me take hormones and carrying out a little operation, brought down my genitals. I have never had feminine sexual attributes.

After the descent of Pei Pu’s sexual organs, sexual relations between himself and Boursicot became more of a ruse, of which Boursicot claims to have had no knowledge.

But, how could a man not know he was sleeping with another man? In an interview with Wadler, Pei Pu further dissolved the mystery of sexual relations between himself and Boursicot, saying that intercourse always took place in the dark:

Boursicot always showed the greatest *delicatesse* toward me. I want to stress that this was my first sexual experience, and according to Boursicot, the same was true for him. Since I did not have a female sexual organ Boursicot could not penetrate me. When I made love, I kept my legs lightly pressed together, so that Boursicot may have had the impression that he was penetrating me.

In 1983, Bernard Boursicot and Shi Pei Pu were arrested in Paris and were later convicted of espionage. Pei Pu, being in poor health, was examined by doctors and found to be male. This revelation was publicized in the process of the Boursicot and Pei Pu espionage trial of 1986 – this was also the first time Boursicot was aware of his lovers' sex. In an interview with Wadler, later transcribed into *Liaison*, Boursicot explained "It [was] not that I did not want to believe Shi Pei Pu was a man, I was stupefied when I learned. He was not like a homosexual man when he was with me; he was like a woman."

During their trial in 1986, the prosecution maintained that Boursicot had betrayed his country and that Pei Pu used seduction to secure information for China. While defense lawyers argued that the relationship was a love story, not a spy story, and that no harm had been done to France, the two men were found guilty and sentenced to six years in jail; Pei Pu was released after 19 months for health reasons and Boursicot served 49 months. Both were then pardoned.

The response from the French greatly differed from the English or American public during the time of the trial. In an essay by Marjorie

Garber – "The Occidental Tourist: *M. Butterfly* and the Scandal of Transvestism" – the following attitudes were described: while the British saw Boursicot's blunder as an excusable mistake, the Americans thought Boursicot was a dupe, a man not to be pitied but rather mocked; the French thought Boursicot's mistake was horrific and unforgivable – they were not so much concerned with the treachery of leaching documents to the Chinese but the fact that "a Frenchman was unable to tell the difference between a man and a woman."

Later in life, Bernard Boursicot revealed that he was homosexual; this led the public to further questions. Was his relationship with Shi Pei Pu one of a homosexual nature or one of clouded heterosexual vision? Others ask, does this distinction matter and if so, to whom?

After the death of Shi Pei Pu in 2009, there was an outpouring of newspaper articles discussing the case with new scrutiny. Not only did questions again circulate around the practicalities of Pei Pu's deception, but his death also sparked discussion about the identification and recognition of transsexual, intersex and hermaphroditic individuals. While gender politics may not be as systematic or close-minded as it was twenty years ago, the binary vision of male/female continues to dominate in Western society, causing discomfort to many in the presence of gender ambiguity.

While the convoluted love affair of Bernard Boursicot and Shi Pei Pu continues to astound people around the world, the victim Boursicot is now liberated. At the age of 64, Boursicot responded to the death of his former lover Pei Pu without sadness, "he did so many things against me that he had no pity for, I think it is stupid to play another game now and say I am sad. The plate is clean now. I am free."

Joyce Wadler "Sexually ambiguous opera singer, spy inspired *M. Butterfly*." *The Globe and Mail*. 4 Jul 2009.

# WORDS AND CONCEPTS FOUND IN THE PLAY

## THE TIMES: THEN AND NOW: FROM 1960 TO 1988 TO TODAY

**1960s:** The United States fights in the Vietnam war. In 1969, more than 500,000 American troops are stationed in South Vietnam. Casualties mount. More than 10,000 American soldiers are killed in Vietnam this year.

**1980s:** Vietnam no longer exists as two separate, independent nations; it is one nation under communist rule.

**Today:** The United States has normal diplomatic relations with communist-ruled Vietnam, but expresses frustration at the slow pace of Vietnam's economic and political reform. Vietnam continues to ask for aid in dealing with the continuing environmental and health effects of Agent Orange, a highly toxic defoliant used by U.S. forces during the Vietnam war.

**1960s:** In 1966 China begins the Cultural Revolution, a period of upheaval that lasts until 1976, to try to rekindle revolutionary fervor amongst the young.

**1980s:** In 1989, hundreds of nonviolent, prodemocracy students are massacred by Chinese troops in Beijing's Tianamen Square.

**Today:** U.S. policy towards China is a major topic of political debate. Human rights activists oppose the granting of permanent trading relations with China, but probusiness groups argue that it will be good for American trade.

**1960s:** Asian-American writers find it difficult to get their works published. Even when they succeed, their books sell poorly, are soon out of print, and are regarded, if they are noticed at all, as "minority" or "ethnic" literature.

**1980s:** In the late 1980s, around the time that *M. Butterfly*, is written, there is an explosion of interest in Asian-American writing. Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) becomes a bestseller, and acclaimed Asian-American writer Maxine Hong Kingston publishes her first novel, *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989).

**Today:** Hundreds of books by and about Asian Americans are in print. Many of them have mass-market appeal, and Asian-American writers are on the cutting edge of literary achievement.

**1960s:** In 1965, the Immigration Act removes discriminatory quotas against immigrants from Asia. Asian immigration to the United States undergoes a rapid increase.

**1980s:** Because of their economic success and strong family structures, Asian Americans are sometimes referred to as the "model minority"; some Asian Americans see this as yet another stereotype imposed on them by the dominant white culture.

**Today:** According to a public policy report issued by a team of respected scholars in March 2000, Asian Americans, no matter how long they have lived in the United States, are still often perceived as an "alien presence."

## M. BUTTERFLY A GLOSSARY OF WORDS AND CONCEPTS FOUND IN THE PLAY

The limits of my cell are as such: four-and-a half meters by five. There's one window against the far wall; a door, very strong, to protect me from autograph hounds. I'm responsible for the tape recorder, the hot plate, and this charming coffee table. When I want to eat, I'm marched off to the dining Room – hot, steaming slop appears on my plate. When I want to sleep, the light bulb turns itself off – the work of fairies. It's an enchanted space I occupy. The French – we know how to run a prison.

GALLIMARD

Bernard Boursicot, the former diplomat whose real story provided inspiration for the play was imprisoned in **Fresnes Prison**, (*Centre pénitentiaire de Fresnes*), the second largest prison in France, located in the town of Fresnes, Val-de-Marne near the city of Paris.

**In order for you to understand what I did and why, I must introduce you to my favorite opera: *Madame Butterfly*. By Giacomo Puccini. First produced at La Scala, Milan, in 1904, it is now beloved throughout the Western world**

GALLIMARD



**M***adama Butterfly* (*Madame Butterfly*) is an opera in three acts (originally two acts) by Giacomo Puccini, with an Italian libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa. Puccini based his opera in part on the short story “Madame Butterfly” (1898) by John Luther Long, which was dramatized by David Belasco. Puccini also based it on the novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887) by Pierre Loti. According to one scholar, the opera was based on events that actually occurred in Nagasaki in the early 1890s.

The original version of the opera, in two acts, premiered on February 17, 1904, at La Scala in Milan. It was very poorly received despite the presence of such notable singers as soprano Rosina Storchio, tenor Giovanni Zenatello and baritone Giuseppe De Luca in the lead roles. This was due in large part to the late completion and inadequate time for rehearsals. Puccini revised the opera, splitting the second act into two acts and making other changes. On May 28, 1904, this version was performed in Brescia and was a huge success.

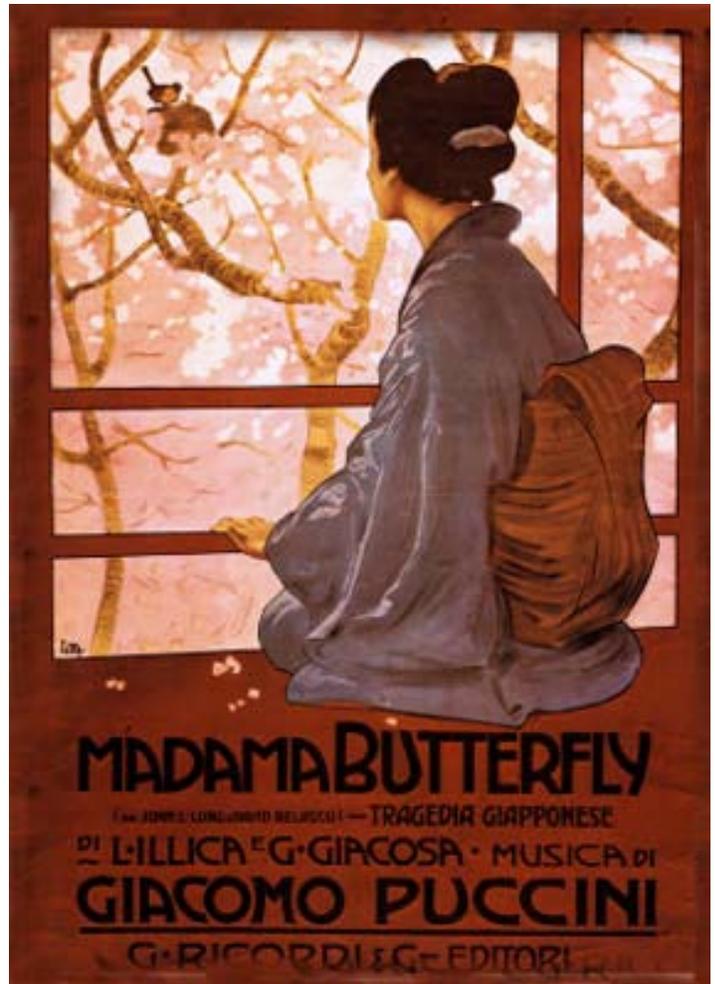
*Butterfly* is a staple of the standard operatic repertoire for companies around the world and it is the most-performed opera in the United States, where it ranks as Number 1 in Opera America’s list of the 20 most-performed operas in North America.

## ACT 1

The curtain rises on a Japanese house, with its terrace and garden. Below, in the background, are the bay, harbor, and town of Nagasaki. From a back-room Goro, the marriage-broker, leads in Pinkerton obsequiously, drawing his attention to the details of the structure. They go down into the garden, and the servants whom Goro has engaged for the household are introduced to their new master. Then the broker, while keeping a look-out for the bride and her party, enumerates the expected guests.

The first to arrive is Sharpless, the American Consul, breathless after climbing the steep ascent to the house. Pinkerton, having ordered refreshments, discusses the beautiful view with his friend, and tells him that he has bought this picturesque dwelling for 999 years, with the option of canceling the contract every month. Inviting Sharpless to be seated, he gives him a taste of his philosophy in a characteristic song. “The whole world over, on business and pleasure, the Yankee travels all danger scorning. His anchor boldly he casts at random, until a sudden squall upsets his ship, then up go sails and rigging. And life is not worth living if he can’t win the best and fairest of each country, and the heart of each maid.”

Acting on this theory, he is now marrying in Japanese fashion, tied for 999 years, yet free to annul the marriage monthly. Sharpless interrupts the song to remark that this is “an easy gospel which makes life very pleasant, but is fatal in the end.” The Lieutenant, however, pays no attention to his friend’s warning. He goes on to explain how he has been fascinated by the quaint little girl, who “seems to have stepped down straight from a screen,” and who is so like her namesake the butterfly, that a wild wish had seized him to rush after her, “though in the quest her frail wings should be broken.” The Consul has not yet seen the bride, but he has heard her speak, and her voice has touched his soul. “Surely,” he says, “love that is pure and true speaks like that. It were indeed sad pity to tear those dainty wings and perhaps torment a trusting heart.” The Lieutenant nevertheless will not allow that any harm can come to Butterfly through him. Raising his glass, Sharpless



drinks to friends and relations at home; Pinkerton, showing how far from seriously he takes this love affair, drinks to the day on which he will wed “in real marriage, a real wife from America.”

At this moment the bridal party are heard singing in the distance. As they approach, praising the beauty of the surrounding scene, the bride’s voice is added to the chorus, in strains expressing her joy at standing on the threshold of love. At last she appears on the stage with her girl friends, all carrying large, bright-colored sunshades, and making a very pretty picture. After the exchange of greetings, Sharpless inquires if the bride comes from Nagasaki. In reply she tells him the story of her life. She was rich at one time but, becoming poor, had to go as a Geisha to earn her living. Her mother is still alive; her father, alas, is dead; one uncle is the Bonze, a miracle of wisdom; the other, Yakuside, is a perpetual tippler. Then with childish coquetry she makes the Consul guess her age. She is fifteen, “the age of plaything and sweetmeats.”

Presently Goro announces new arrivals – the august High Commissioner, the Official Registrar, and the relatives. The bride and her girl friends receive the quaint group, while Pinkerton, taking Sharpless to one side, laughingly remarks: “What a farce is this procession of my worthy new relations, held on terms of monthly contract!” Butterfly now points out the bridegroom to her kinsfolk, who in turn proceed to criticize Pinkerton’s looks with great candor. Most of them think him handsome, a few have a different opinion.

At this stage the Consul examines the papers for the contract. Pinkerton, meanwhile, approaching Butterfly, finds her rather embarrassed. She is drawing from her sleeves the few treasures she had not wished to part with on entering on her new life – silken kerchiefs, a colored ribbon, a little silver buckle, a mirror, a fan, and a tiny jar of carmine (rouge). Her most sacred possession, a long narrow sheath, she lays down reverently. This, Goro whispers, was sent by the Mikado to her father with a command, which he obeyed – and the broker imitates the action of suicide. Last of all, Butterfly takes some images from her sleeves, the souls of her forefathers, the “Ottokè.” In confidential tones she tells her lover that, for his sake, and unknown to her family, she has been to the mission, abjured her own religion, and adopted his. To give him more pleasure, she can almost forget her race and kindred. “Away they go,” she cries, throwing down the Ottokè, just as Goro approaches Sharpless and having received the Consul’s orders shouts “Silence!” The chattering ceases, they all leave off eating and drinking, and coming forward in a circle, in the center of which stand the bride and bridegroom, they listen with much interest to the wedding ceremony, performed by the Commissioner. After the signing of the papers, the friends congratulate Butterfly, and the function is over.

The Commissioner, the Registrar, and Sharpless take their leave together, but the Consul turns back for a moment to again warn his friend to be careful. Pinkerton reassures him, and waving his hand from the background, returns to the front, to get rid of the family party as quickly as possible. He plies them with cakes and wine, and they are all drinking the health of the newly married couple, when suddenly strange cries are heard coming from the path on the hill; the tam-tam sounds from the distance, and the voice of the Bonze shouts, “Cho-cho-san! Abomination!” The guests are awestruck and huddle together in terror. In the background there appears the odd figure of the Buddhist priest. At sight of Butterfly he stretches out his hands menacingly. “What were you doing at the mission?” he cries, and receiving no answer, informs the party: “She has renounced her true religion, she has renounced us all!” He approaches his niece in a fury, and hurls imprecations at the poor girl till Pinkerton loses patience, and intervening between the priest and the bride, loudly bids him hold his peace and begone. The relatives join the Bonze in denouncing Butterfly, and as they retire, their curses are heard for some time growing faint in the distance.

Butterfly, thoroughly upset by this scene, bursts into tears, and her husband, who has watched the departure of his guests from the back, hastens forward to comfort her.

Just then Butterfly’s maid, Suzuki, is heard within at her evening prayer, and the lovers move towards the house. The servants close the shosi; Suzuki assists her mistress to change her wedding dress for one of pure white; and at last the bride and bridegroom are left alone. While Butterfly arranges her hair, Pinkerton watches her and soliloquizes on her graceful prettiness and alluring charm. Presently he leads her to the terrace.

And now they breathe out their mutual devotion amid the beauties of an Eastern night, willingly yielding themselves to the passionate influence of the heaven and earth around them, of which they feel themselves a part. Twice during this exquisite love scene, Butterfly is disturbed by thoughts of the anathemas of her people, only to be reassured by the protestations of her husband, whom she has for the time being completely fascinated by her innocent charm. She naively confesses she had not wished to marry him when his offer first came to her through the marriage-broker, but she loved him when she saw

him, and now he is all the world to her, now she is perfectly happy. Very pathetic is her prayer: “Ah, love me a little, just a very little, as you would love a baby; ‘tis all that I ask for. I come of a people accustomed to little; grateful for love that’s silent, light as a blossom, and yet everlasting as the sky, as the fathomless ocean.”

When Pinkerton calls her his butterfly, her face clouds over, and she reminds him: “They say that in your country, if a butterfly is caught by a man, he’ll pierce its heart with a needle and leave it to perish.” Her lover’s embrace, however, chases away the painful thought, and gazing at the starlit sky they join in praising the glory of the night, pouring out their rapture on the sleeping world around. Pinkerton leads his bride from the garden into the house, and the curtain falls on a scene full of poetry, charm, and passion.

## ACT 2, FIRST PART

Three years have passed when the curtain rises again on the interior of Butterfly’s house. Suzuki, coiled up before the image of Buddha, is praying, and from time to time she rings the prayer-bell to invoke the attention of the gods. Butterfly is standing rigid and motionless near a screen. At last the maid goes to a small cabinet, and opening a casket, shows her mistress a very few coins. Unless her husband comes back quickly they are in a sad plight. Suzuki has little faith in Pinkerton’s home-coming after so long an absence. This provokes Butterfly’s anger, and to warrant her belief in her husband, she quotes his last promise to her, to “return with the roses, the warm and sunny season, when the red-breasted robins are busy nesting.” Then she prettily depicts his arrival, acting the scene as though it were really taking place.

She has scarcely recovered from the entrancement of this beautiful day-dream when Goro and Sharpless appear in the garden. The consul enters to the great joy of Butterfly. Anxious to explain the object of his visit, he produces a letter which he tells her is from Pinkerton. “Then I’m the happiest woman in Japan,” she exclaims; yet before she will hear it, she must ask a question: “At what time of the year do the robins nest in America?” In Japan they have built thrice already since her husband’s departure. In America perhaps they may build more rarely? Goro, who has been listening on the terrace, bursts out laughing. Sharpless, in a confused manner, declares that he has not studied ornithology. He tries to reopen the subject of the letter, but Goro’s presence reminds Butterfly to inform the Consul that her husband was scarcely gone before the broker endeavored to induce her to marry again; that he had offered her half-a-dozen suitors, and now wishes her to wed a wealthy idiot, Prince Yamadori.

Just then the Prince is seen on the terrace. He enters with great pomp, greets the Consuls, bows most graciously to Butterfly, and sits down between them. Although she makes fun of him and teases him unmercifully, Yamadori is ready to swear eternal faith to the charming Butterfly. The devoted little woman, however, insists that she is still Pinkerton’s wife, and therefore cannot wed another. To put an end to discussion she pours out tea for her guests. Goro, meanwhile, whispers to Sharpless that the Lieutenant’s ship is already signaled. The Consul is in despair as to how he is to deliver his message, when Yamadori, rising, takes a sorrowful farewell of Butterfly, who laughs behind her fan at his grotesque figure in the throes of love. Goro follows the Prince.

At last Sharpless manages to begin the reading of the letter. Many times he is interrupted by the excited girl; and she is so convinced of Pinkerton’s loyalty that the Consul has not the heart to tell her plainly

what she must expect. Instead of finishing the letter, he asks her what she would do were she never to see her husband again. The poor soul, looking as if she had received a death-blow, stammers out: "Two things I might do: go back and entertain the people with my songs, or else better to die." Sharpless is deeply moved. He is loath indeed to destroy her illusion, but he urges her to accept the wealthy Yamadori. Coming from one she had thought of as her husband's friend and her own, this suggestion wounds her cruelly. She is nearly fainting, when she suddenly revives, and running out of the room, returns triumphantly carrying her baby on her shoulder – the son that had been born after Pinkerton's departure.

In a highly dramatic song to the child she describes how she may yet have to take him in her arms and sing and dance in the street to earn a living. In her imagination she pictures the boy being noticed by the Emperor, who will ultimately make him "the most exalted ruler of his kingdom." Sharpless, conquering his emotion, inquires the baby's name and receives this reply from Butterfly, who with childlike grace addresses her son: "Give answer – Sir, my name now is Trouble, but yet write and tell my father that on the day of his returning, Joy shall be my name." The Consul promises that the father shall be told, and takes his leave.

In a few minutes Suzuki enters, dragging in Goro. The despicable creature has been spreading the scandal all through the town that no one knows who the baby's father is. Butterfly is furious, and seizing the dagger that hangs by the shrine, she threatens to kill the broker. The maid throws herself between them, and carries off the child, while Goro escapes.

Suddenly the cannon announces the arrival in the harbor of a man-of-war. Suzuki comes in breathlessly, and both run to the terrace. Butterfly, looking through a telescope, exclaims "The Abraham Lincoln!" (Pinkerton's ship), and in a state of excitement reproaches the maid for her want of faith. Immediately they begin to decorate the room with flowers from the garden, at the same time giving vocal expression to their rapture and joyous anticipation of the long-expected meeting. Finally, when the garden has been robbed of every blossom, Suzuki helps to dress her mistress in her wedding garment, and to adorn the baby. Night falls, and the maid closes the shosi, in which Butterfly makes three holes. Beside these they, settle themselves to watch and wait for the wanderer's return. The moonbeams light up the shosi from without, and, as the sound of singing comes from the distance, the baby and Suzuki fall asleep. Butterfly remains rigid and motionless. The sounds die away, while the curtain falls.

## SECOND PART

It rises again upon the same scene and situation, though the midnight hours are past and the dawn is at hand. Butterfly is still gazing out into the distance; Suzuki and the child are asleep. The day breaks, and Butterfly, rousing herself, carries the boy upstairs, singing a lullaby on the way. The maid has just had time to open the shosi, when there is a knocking at the door, and presently, to her surprise, Pinkerton and Sharpless enter, very quietly, bidding her not disturb her mistress. Seeing a lady in the garden, she eagerly demands: "Who's that?" After a little hesitation, Sharpless replies: "His wife." The faithful Suzuki is stupefied with grief. The Consul tries to soothe her, and explains that they have come very early in order to see her alone and get her help. While Pinkerton walks about the room in great agitation, noticing the flowers, the image of Buddha, and all the familiar details, Sharpless tells Suzuki that the future of the little one is their first and special thought.

If Butterfly will entrust the child to Mrs. Pinkerton, it shall have a mother's care. He persuades her to go to that lady and hear what she has to say.

The Lieutenant, while giving his friend some money for Butterfly, confesses his sorrow and remorse for having thoughtlessly caused all this terrible suffering. The Consul now recalls how he had cautioned him not to trifle with the girl's affection, and had foretold the end, if he persisted in deceiving her. After bidding a sad farewell to the home where he had once known such happiness, and declaring that he will always be haunted by Butterfly's reproachful eyes, Pinkerton wrings the Consul's hand and goes out quickly.

Mrs. Pinkerton and Suzuki enter from the garden, talking about the child. Butterfly is now heard calling Suzuki from the room above, and, though the maid attempts to prevent her coming down, she will not be hindered. She assumes her husband has arrived and looks for him in every corner; then, seeing the American lady, she seems at last to understand the situation. Mrs. Pinkerton would fain take her hand, but Butterfly decidedly though kindly refuses to be approached. "Neath the blue vault of the sky, there is no happier lady than you are. May you remain so, nor e'er be saddened through me. Yet it would please me much that you should tell him that peace will come to me." Thus she addresses the woman who, through no fault of her own, is the cause of her despair. She listens to the other's pleading for the child, and solemnly promises that the father shall have his son if he will come to fetch the child in half-an-hour. Sharpless and the lady withdraw, feeling utterly helpless to console this anguished yet noble spirit.

Butterfly, on the point of collapse, gradually rallies, and seeing that it is broad daylight, bids Suzuki draw the curtains, so that he rooms is in almost total darkness. The maid reluctantly leaves her, weeping bitterly. After a few moments Butterfly lifts a white veil from the shrine and throws it over the screen, then taking the dagger from its case, she reads the inscription: "Death with honor is better than life with dishonor!" She is pointing the blade at her throat, when the door opens, showing Suzuki's arm pushing in the child. With outstretched hands he runs to his mother, who lets the dagger fall, and almost smothers him with kisses. In a sublime outburst of love and despair she bids farewell to this "adored being." For the sake of the child's future she will take her own life, that he may go away beyond the ocean, and never feel when he is older that his mother forsook him.

At last she sets the baby on a stool, and gives him the American flag and a doll to play with, while she gently blindfolds him. Seizing the dagger she disappears behind the screen. The knife is heard falling. Butterfly emerges with a long white veil around her neck, and tottering, gropes her way towards the boy. She has just enough strength left to embrace him, then sinks by his side. At this moment Pinkerton is heard outside calling "Butterfly," the door is thrown open, and the Lieutenant and Sharpless rush into the room. With a feeble gesture the dying girl points to the child and breathes her last. The Consul takes the little one in his arms, sobbing, Pinkerton falls on his knees, and the curtain descends.

**I married late, at age thirty-one. I was faithful to my marriage for eight years. Until the day when, as a junior-level diplomat in puritanical Peking, in a parlor at the German ambassador's house, during the "Reign of a Hundred Flowers," I first saw her ... singing the death scene from Madame Butterfly.**

GALLIMARD

## REIGN OF A HUNDRED FLOWERS OR HUNDRED FLOWERS CAMPAIGN

(Brief history of China in the 20th century)

The Qing Dynasty ruled from 1644 until 1911 and saw the expansion of China into Tibet and Mongolia. Especially in later years, the Qing practiced strict isolationism, which ultimately led to their downfall, as their military technology did not keep pace with that of the Western powers. Foreign traders came to the country by sea, bringing opium with them. The Qing banned opium in 1800, but the foreigners did not heed that decree. In 1839, the Chinese confiscated twenty thousand chests of the drug from the British. The British retaliated, and the four Opium Wars began. The result was a defeat for China and the establishment of Western settlements at numerous seaports. The foreigners took advantage of the Qing's weakened hold on power and divided the nation into "spheres of influence."

Another result of the Opium Wars was the loss of Hong Kong to the British. The 1840 Treaty of Nanjing gave the British rights to that city "in perpetuity." An 1898 agreement also "leased" Kowloon and the nearby New Territories to the British for one hundred years. A group of rebels called the "Righteous and Harmonious Fists," or the Boxers, formed to overthrow both the foreigners and the Qing. The Qing, recognizing their compromised position, united with the Boxers to attack the Western presence in the country. The Boxer Rebellion saw the end of the Qing Dynasty, and in 1912, Sun Yatsen became president of the newly declared Chinese Republic. In reality, power rested in the hands of regional rulers who often resorted to violence. On 4 May 1919, a student protest erupted in Beijing in opposition to continued Western influence. The student agitation gained strength, and the years between 1915 and the 1920s came to be known as the May Fourth Movement, a period that saw a large-scale rejection of Confucianism and a rise in social action, both of which were precursors to the communist revolution.

The politically weakened and disunited state of the country paved the way for two opposing political parties, each of which had a different vision of a modern, united nation. At Beijing University, several young men, including Mao Zedong, founded the Chinese Communist Party. Their opposition, the Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party, was led by Chiang Kaishek. The two tried to join forces, with Chiang as the head of the National Revolutionary Army, but dissension led to a civil war.

The Sino-Japanese war began in 1931 when Japan, taking advantage of China's weakened and divided state, invaded the country. An attack on the city of Nanjing (the capital at that time) in 1937 resulted in 300,000 deaths and large-scale destruction of the city. Japan did not withdraw its forces until after World War II.

The Kuomintang, with its military superiority, forced the communists into a retreat to the north that lasted a year and became known as the Long March. Along the way, the communists redistributed land from the rich owners to the peasants, many of whom joined their fight. The Nationalists controlled the cities, but the communists continued to grow in strength and numbers in the countryside; by the late 1940s, the Nationalists were surrounded. Many Kuomintang members abandoned Chiang's army and joined the communists. In April 1949, Nanjing fell to the communists; other cities followed, and Chiang, along with two million of his followers, fled to Taiwan. Mao Zedong, the chairman

of the Chinese Communist Party, declared the establishment of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949.

Mao began a series of Five Year Plans to improve the economy, beginning with heavy industry. In 1957, as part of those reforms, he initiated a campaign he named the Great Leap Forward, whose goals were to modernize the agricultural system by building dams and irrigation networks and redistributing land into communes. At the same time, industries were established in rural areas. Many of those efforts failed because of poor planning and a severe drought in the northern and central regions of the country. A two-year famine killed thirty million people.

The government launched the so-called **One Hundred Flowers campaign** in the spring of 1956 with the slogan "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend." The intent was to encourage creative freedom; the next year, it was extended to include freedom of intellectual expression. Many people interpreted this to mean an increased tolerance of political expression, but the government did not agree, and the result was a large-scale purge of intellectuals and critics of the Communist Party. This was part of what became known as the Cultural Revolution. In an attempt to rehabilitate his popularity, Mao initiated an attack on his enemies in the Communist Party. Those attacks extended beyond the government to include intellectuals, teachers, and scientists, many of whom were sent to work camps in the countryside for "reeducation." Religion was outlawed, and many temples were destroyed. Tens of thousands of young people were enlisted in Mao's Red Guards, who carried out his orders and lived by the words of the *Little Red Book* of Mao's quotations.

In the early 1970s, toward the end of Mao's regime, Zhou Enlai, an influential politician, worked to restore relations between China and the outside world, from which it had been largely cut off during the Cultural Revolution. In 1972, U.S. President Richard Nixon made a historic trip to China to meet with Mao, beginning a period of improvement in diplomatic relations with the United States.

When Mao died in 1976, the country was in a state of virtual chaos. His successor was Hua Guofeng, a protégé whom the chairman had promoted through the ranks of the party. However, Mao's widow, Jiang Qing, along with three other bureaucrats (Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen, and Yao Wenyuan), assumed more power in the transitional government. Known as the Gang of Four, they were widely disliked. When the gang publicly announced its opposition to Hua in 1976, Hua had them arrested, a move that was widely approved. The four politicians were imprisoned but did not come to trial until 1980.

In 1977, Deng Xiaoping, a Communist Party member who had been instrumental in the Civil War and the founding of the People's Republic, rose to power and began a program of modernization and moderation of hard-line economic policies. He was faced with the great challenge of updating a decrepit and wasteful government system and responding to demands for increased freedom while maintaining order. Dissatisfaction was widespread, particularly among students, who began calling for an end to government corruption and the establishment of a more democratic government. In 1989, Beijing University students organized demonstrations in Tiananmen Square that lasted for weeks. The People's Liberation Army finally opened fire on the protesters. The June Fourth Massacre (Tiananmen Square Massacre) garnered international attention and sparked worldwide indignation. The United States responded by imposing trade sanctions.

Deng died in 1997, marking the end of government by the original founders of the communist state.

President Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji, both former mayors of Shanghai, led post-Tiananmen People's Republic in the 1990s. Under Jiang Zemin's ten years of administration, the PRC's economic performance pulled an estimated 150 million peasants out of poverty and sustained an average annual GDP growth rate of 11.2%. The country formally joined the World Trade Organization in 2001. Although the PRC needs economic growth to spur its development, the government has begun to worry that rapid economic growth has negatively impacted the country's resources and environment.

Another concern is that certain sectors of society are not sufficiently benefiting from the PRC's economic development. As a result, under current President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, the PRC has initiated policies to address these issues of equitable distribution of resources, but the outcome remains to be seen. More than 40 million farmers have been displaced from their land, usually for economic development, contributing to the 87,000 demonstrations and riots across China in 2005. For much of the PRC's population in major urban centers, living standards have seen extremely large improvements, and freedom continues to expand, but political controls remain tight and rural areas poor.

## NOTE: PEKING VS BEIJING

Peking is an older English name for Beijing. The term originated with French missionaries four hundred years ago.

In China, the city has had many names. Between 1928 and 1949, it was known as Peiping or "Northern Peace". The name was changed because *jing* means "capital" and the Kuomintang government in Nanking (now Nanjing) wanted to emphasize that Peking was not the capital of China, and Peking's warlord government was not legitimate. The Temple of Heaven was built to commemorate this change.

The name was changed back to Beijing by the Japanese, since Beijing was the capital of a North China; at the end of World War II the Republic of China changed the name back. The Communist Party of China changed the name to Beijing in 1949 again in part to emphasize that Beijing was the capital of China.

**I will never do Butterfly again, Monsieur Gallimard. If you wish to see some real theatre, come to the Peking Opera sometime. Expand your mind.**

SONG

Known as China's national opera, Peking Opera, which originated in the late 18th century, is a synthesis of music, dance, art and acrobatics. It is the most influential and representative of all operas in China.

Based upon traditional Anhui Opera, it has also adopted repertoire, music and performing techniques from Kun Opera and Qingqiang Opera as well as traditional folk tunes in its development, eventually forming its own highly stylized music and performing techniques.

Peking Opera can be divided into "civil" pieces, which are characterized by singing, and "martial" ones, which feature acrobatics and stunts. Some operas are combination of both.

Its repertoire includes historical plays, comedies, tragedies and farces. Many historical events are adapted into Peking Opera plays, which in the past were an important primer on history and ethical principles for poorly educated folk.

Two orchestras, playing string and percussion instruments, accompany the singing, which follows a fixed pattern but has a variety of melodies and rhythms. The *"jinghu"*, a small two-strings bowed instrument, is the backbone of the orchestras.

The operatic dialogues and monologues are recited in Beijing dialect, and some of the words are pronounced in a special fashion, unique to the opera.

The actors and actresses, in addition to singing, use well-established movements, such as smoothing a beard, adjusting a hat, jerking a sleeve or raising a foot, to express certain emotions and meaning.

The hands and body trembling all over indicates extreme anger and the flicking of a sleeve expresses disgust. If an actor throws his hand above his head and flicks his sleeves back, he is astonished or surprised. An actor or actress demonstrates embarrassment by covering his or her face with one sleeve.

Some of the movements are less easily understood. An actor grasps his sleeves with a quick movement and then promptly puts his hands behind his back in a decisive manner to show that he is bracing himself for some peril to come.

Sometimes a movement can go on for as long as 20 minutes. For example, while an actor is conceiving a plan, his fingers and hands flutter nervously at his sides, and when the plan is formulated, he just thumps his fist against the palm of his hand with a resounding smack. When worried the actor will rub his hands together for several minutes.

Peking Opera's acrobatic fighting, whether between two parties or in a melee, is a skillful combination of martial arts and acting.

There are four roles in general: the male, the female, the "painted face", and the clown, which are further classified by age and profession. *Sheng* or male roles can be divided into three categories: the old, the young and the martial arts expert. *Dan* or female roles includes the young and the middle-aged, the innocent and dissolute, girls with martial arts skills and old women. *Jing* or painted face roles are always played by frank and open-minded men with brightly colored faces. *Chou* or clown roles are marked by a dab of white on the ridge of the nose. This character is sometimes positive, kind-hearted and humorous, but sometimes negative, crafty, malicious or silly. Each role has its fixed singing and acting styles.

Like the acting and singing, the makeup is stylized, inspired by the masks worn by dancers in Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties operas. The makeup highlights and exaggerates the principal features of the characters.

For the painted face role, the color of their made-up faces can be an indication of their characters or personality. Red indicates uprightness and loyalty; white is craftiness and cunning. Blue indicates a vigorous, courageous and enterprising nature while yellow shows an intelligent character, but a less extroverted one. Black shows a sound and honest character while brown is often the symbol of a stubborn and obstinate character.

The costumes are based on those of the Ming Dynasty, no matter when the story is set. The props can include a cloth wall, tents, parasols, whips, paddles and weapons. The props are realistic, but not so elaborate that they detract from the performance.

Exaggeration and symbolism are characteristics of the opera. Holding a whip is enough to indicate an actor is galloping on a horse. A few soldiers on the stage may represent a whole army. An actor circling the stage suggests a long journey.

Often there are just a table and a few chairs on the stage. The description of many situations depends on the performance of the actors and actresses. In this respect, it is quite different from modern plays of the English languages for the lack of stage manager to tell the setting, the time and overview.

Opening a door, walking at night, rowing a boat, eating, drinking and the like are all demonstrated by the stylized movements of the actors and actresses. Performers also use their eyes and facial expressions to help convey the specific meaning.

In the past 200 years, numerous schools and celebrated performers have emerged. Many of them are emulated by modern-day actors and actresses.

Famous male actors include Tan Xinpei, Yang Xiaolou, Yu Shuyan, Ma Lianliang and Zhou Xinfang. The most famous actors who played female roles are Mei Lanfang, Shang Xiaoyun, Cheng Yanqiu, Zhang Junqiu and Xun Huisheng.

Peking Opera represents an important part of Chinese culture and has become a refined form of art as a result of the hard work of hundreds of artists over the past two centuries.

## THE ORIGIN, PRODUCTION STYLE AND PRESENTATION OF JINGJU IN *M. BUTTERFLY*

It is helpful and necessary to explain that *M. Butterfly* is a play that makes mention of both Italian Opera, with Giacomo Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, as well as Peking Opera, otherwise known as Beijing Opera or *Jingju*.

The name of the performance style has caused much confusion. Over the years the name has changed to correspond with the name of the capital city. From 1927 to 1949, the city of Beijing was known as Beiping (Peiping) and the Beijing Opera was known as *Pingxi* or *Pingju*. With the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the name of the capital city was reverted to Beijing and the formal name of Beijing theatre in Mainland China was established as *Jingju*. Peking is itself an older English name for Beijing, which originated from French missionaries over four hundred years ago. Now identified as a misnomer, Peking Opera is no longer the preferred term to describe the dramatic style and the term *Jingju* will be the term used hereafter.

*Jingju* is a form of traditional Chinese theater which developed over the period of several decades at the end of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911/12). The name *Jingju* itself reflects its origin in the capital city, *Jing*, and the form of the performance, *Xi*.

Like other forms of Chinese opera, *Jingju* utilizes a bare stage and minimal props, relying on pantomime and highly developed symbolism to convey setting, the transition of time or movement through space. There may be a backdrop, a table and several chairs to indicate a throne, wall, mountain, or other location. Costumes, headgear and makeup are used to identify standard character types.

As a rule, actors play a single role type which is determined after seven years of training. An actor can be either: male (*sheng*), female

(*dan*), painted-face warrior (*jing*), or clown (*chou*). With the intense specialization of its actors, *Jingju* combines music, vocal performance, mime, dance and acrobatics setting it apart from other operatic styles.

While Western audiences often go to “see” an opera, Eastern audiences go to “hear” an opera. According to Xi Chengbei's *The Peking Opera* “audiences often listen to singing with eyes shut and hands beating time. When they like a particular line, they [shout] ‘bravo!’”

Unlike Italian Opera, the stories of *Jingju* are often well-known by the audience. Rather than relying on the shock-value of a new story as entertainment, the talent of the skilled actors is showcased.

Traditional *Jingju* stories are often moral, but not religious in tone; conveying virtuous conduct and the decimation of evil. The typical play concludes on a note of poetic justice and virtue rewarded and evil punished, thus showing the proper way of human conduct in a social world.

When the Communist Party of China came to power in Mainland China in 1949, the newly formed government moved to bring art into line with Communist ideology, and to make art and literature a component of the whole revolutionary machine. To this end, dramatic works without Communist themes were considered subversive, and were ultimately banned during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

The use of opera as a tool to transmit communist ideology reached its apogee in the Cultural Revolution, under the purview of Jiang Qing, wife of Mao Zedong. The ‘model operas’ were considered one of the great achievements of the Cultural Revolution, and were meant to express Mao's view that “art must serve the interests of the workers, peasants, and soldiers and must conform to proletarian ideology.”

Among the eight model plays eventually retained during that time were five Beijing operas. Notable among these operas was *The Legend of the Red Lantern*, which was approved as a concert with piano accompaniment based on a suggestion from Jiang Qing. But it must be noted that performances of works adapted from *Jingju* for and beyond the eight model plays were allowed only in heavily modified form. The endings of many traditional plays were changed, and visible stage assistants in Beijing opera were eliminated.

This production of *M. Butterfly* will highlight the transition of traditional *Jingju* performance to the performance style that was adopted during the Chinese Cultural Revolution through intentional costume design. Members of the cast will display both robes like those used in traditional *Jingju* performances during their tableau from *The Legend of White Snake*, as well as uniforms that replaced the classical *Jingju* attire, worn by Communist Peking Opera performers during the Cultural Revolution under Jiang Qing's moderation. May these visual distinctions illustrate the startling impact that the Cultural Revolution had upon the performing arts in China as Communist ideology suppressed tradition and limited artistic expression.

**“Art for the masses” is a shitty excuse to keep artists poor.**

SONG

## ARTWORK IN CHINA DURING THE GPCR

China has the oldest printmaking history in the world, a vibrant tradition centuries before Gutenberg developed the groundbreaking concept of movable type. Woodblock prints were invented during the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-907), allowing art to be mechanically duplicated for the first time. Later, some mass-produced documents addressed social change movements, such as the illustrated tracts and leaflets created during the 1900 Boxer Rebellion to oppose European cultural penetration. But modern Chinese posters, used as a means of mass communication, are a relatively recent genre that evolved into a distinct form under the direction of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). These propaganda posters were mounted in public places and sold in stores. Like public art in the later stages of the postrevolutionary Soviet Union, these posters fell under the principle that art and literature must serve the people, Mao Zedong formally articulated this position even before the Chinese Communist revolution had succeeded:

Revolutionary culture is a powerful revolutionary weapon for the broad masses of the people. It prepares the ground ideologically before the revolution comes and is an important, indeed essential, fighting front in the general revolutionary front during the revolution.

On New Democracy, January 1940

Our literary and art workers must accomplish [their] task and shift their stand; they must gradually move their feet over to the side of the workers, peasants, and soldiers, to the side of the proletariat, through the process of going into their very midst and into the thick of practical struggles and through the process of studying Marxism and society.

Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art, May 1942

During the GPCR, the arts, including posters, were defined by several guiding political principles:

1. **Rejection of Western and classical Chinese styles.** The GPCR sought to build a new socialist nation without reliance on the values of foreign societies or previous corrupt domestic ones. This meant striving to create new, modern Chinese forms. Although the general style of Socialist Realist propaganda art was adopted from the Soviet Union and taught in most of the Chinese art schools, the Chinese worked to make the art and rhetoric uniquely their own.
2. **Developing artwork from previously disenfranchised social strata and regions.** Formally trained artists were thought likely to harbor revisionist values (ones not supportive of fundamental class struggle), and a huge effort went into finding and supporting art by people who were workers, peasants, and soldiers. To a more limited degree, the GPCR encouraged art about and by ethnic minorities.
3. **Rejection of “art for art’s sake.”** Art styles narrowed to a slim range of Socialist Realism, without abstraction or modernism. Art was expected to have some sort of productive social function or application. Artists did not sign their work, though most did get individual or collective published credit.

Some scholars have described the GPCR as representing a “lost chapter” of Chinese art history because of the narrow range of officially accepted forms and the view that Party politics trumped artistic creativity. There are numerous examples of artwork destroyed, academic departments dismantled, personal careers ruined, and even imprisonment and death.

## Then come again next Thursday. I am playing The Drunken Beauty. May I count on you?

SONG

### The Drunken Beauty

**Origin:** Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD)

**Time:** Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) during the reign of Emperor Tang Minghuang (712-756 AD)

**Place:** Chang'an (in present day Shaanxi Province)

**Main characters:** Yang Guifei (Imperial concubine of the Tang Emperor) and Gao Lishi (chamberlain of the Tang court)

Emperor Tang Minghuang, greatly enamored of wine, women, and song, dispatches his chamberlain, eunuch Gao Lishi, to conduct a search for the most beautiful women of the land. Gao Lishi tours the length and breadth of the country, and selects for the Emperor an exceptional beauty named Jiang Caiping. Not only is her face ethereal and her body like a swaying willow, but she is intelligent and creative as well, accomplished in both poetry and song. Tang Minghuang is well pleased when he sees her, and holds a lavish banquet to reward his officials. Because Jiang Caiping especially loves plum blossoms, the Emperor causes a plum orchard to be planted for her inside the rear palace walls, and gives her the name "Plum Concubine."



Before long, Tang Minghuang learns that his son Prince Shou has a concubine of even greater beauty, named Yang Yuhuan. He orders that she be sent to his palace to wait upon him. Prince Shou dares not disobey his father, and has no choice but to comply. Tang Minghuang receives Yang Yuhuan and inspects her closely, deciding that she is indeed the most lovely woman under heaven. On the spot, he grants her the rank of "Guifei," or Imperial Concubine. From that moment on they are always together, soaking in hot springs, feasting and drinking on balmy spring nights, viewing flowers and listening to music, and singing and dancing.

One day, Tang Minghuang remembers the Plum Concubine, whom he has neglected for so long. He decides on the spot to go spend the night with her. Yang Yuhuan, unaware, sets out a feast of wine and delicacies in Hundred Flower Pavilion, and prepares to spend yet another night of pleasure with the Emperor. When the hours go by and the Emperor does not arrive, Yang Yuhuan realizes that there must be another woman in his heart. Assailed with a wave of bitter pain and resentment, she starts to drink alone, attempting to drown her sorrows while reflecting upon the transience of life and the unreliability of a man's heart. The more she drinks, the lower her spirits fall, until finally she is overcome by the wine and becomes totally inebriated. Gao Lishi, waiting by her side, attempts to console her, deeply sympathetic to

this lonely, abandoned Imperial concubine. Yang Yuhuan waits until the moon sinks in the west and the stars fade, but the Emperor never comes. Finally she is supported home, drunk, staggering, and alone.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQWsDeOB23Q> (a clip of Mei Langfang performing "The Drunken Beauty" on a U.S. tour, circa 1930)

[**Gallimard** looks around the room. He picks up a picture in a frame, studies it. Without his noticing, **Song** enters, dressed elegantly in a black gown from the twenties. She stands in the doorway looking like **Anna May Wong**.]

**Anna May Wong** was an American actress, the first Chinese American movie star, and the first Asian American to become an international star. Her long and varied career spanned both silent and sound film, television, stage, and radio. For decades after her death, Wong was remembered principally for the stereotypical "Dragon Lady" and demure "Butterfly" roles that she was often given.



**TOULON:** This is very secret, **Gallimard:** yes. The Americans don't have an embassy here. They're asking us to be their eyes and ears. Say Jack Kennedy signed an order to bomb North Vietnam, Laos. How would the Chinese react?

**GALLIMARD:** I think the Chinese will squawk ...

**TOULON:** What a bunch of jerks. Vietnam was our colony. Not only didn't the Americans help us fight to keep them, but now, seven years later, they've come back to grab the territory for themselves. It's very irritating.

...

**GALLIMARD:** With all due respect, sir, why should the Americans have won our war for us back in '54 if we didn't have the will to win it ourselves?

1963. A party at the Austrian embassy. None of us could remember the Austrian ambassador's name, which seemed somehow appropriate. So, I tell the Americans, Diem must go. The U.S. wants to be respected by the Vietnamese, and yet they're propping up this nobody seminarian as her president. A man whose claim to fame is his sister-in-law imposing fanatic "moral order" campaigns? Oriental women - when they're good, they're very good, but when they're bad, they're Christians.

...

**TOULON:** That the U.S. will allow the Vietnamese generals to stage a coup ... and assassinate President Diem.

“**This nobody seminarian**” refers to **Ngo Dinh Diem**. At aged fifteen, he followed his elder brother Ngô Đình Thục, later to become Vietnam’s highest ranking priest, into a monastery. After a few months, he left, believing it to be too rigorous. At the end of his secondary schooling, his examination results at the French lycee in Huế saw him offered a scholarship to Paris but declined to contemplate becoming a priest. He dropped the idea, believing it to be too rigorous. He moved to Hanoi to study at the School of Public Administration and Law, a French school that trained Vietnamese bureaucrats. It was there that he had the only romantic relationship of his life when he fell in love with one of his teacher’s daughters. After she jilted him for a convent, he remained celibate.

### VIETNAM, FRANCE, US DURING THE PERIOD OF THE PLAY

The Second Indochina War, 1954-1975, grew out of the long conflict between France and Vietnam. In July 1954, after one hundred years of colonial rule, a defeated France was forced to leave Vietnam. Nationalist forces under the direction of General Vo Nguyen Giap trounced the allied French troops at the remote mountain outpost of Dien Bien Phu in the northwest corner of Vietnam. This decisive battle convinced the French that they could no longer maintain their Indochinese colonies and Paris quickly sued for peace. As the two sides came together in Geneva, Switzerland, international events were already shaping the future of Vietnam’s modern revolution.

### THE GENEVA PEACE ACCORDS

The Geneva Peace Accords, signed by France and Vietnam in the summer of 1954, reflected the strains of the international cold war. Drawn up in the shadow of the Korean War, the Geneva Accords represented the worst of all possible futures for war-torn Vietnam. Because of outside pressures brought to bear by the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, Vietnam’s delegates to the Geneva Conference agreed to the temporary partition of their nation at the seventeenth parallel to allow France a face-saving defeat. The Communist superpowers feared that a provocative peace would anger the United States and its western European allies, and neither Moscow or Peking wanted to risk another confrontation with the West so soon after the Korean War.

According to the terms of the Geneva Accords, Vietnam would hold national elections in 1956 to reunify the country. The division at the seventeenth parallel, a temporary separation without cultural precedent, would vanish with the elections. The United States, however, had other ideas. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles did not support the Geneva Accords because he thought they granted too much power to the Communist Party of Vietnam.

Instead, Dulles and President Dwight D. Eisenhower supported the creation of a counter-revolutionary alternative south of the seventeenth parallel. The United States supported this effort at nation-building through a series of multilateral agreements that created the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO).

### SOUTH VIETNAM UNDER NGO DINH DIEM

Using SEATO for political cover, the Eisenhower administration helped create a new nation from dust in southern Vietnam. In 1955, with the help of massive amounts of American military, political, and economic aid, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam (GVN or South Vietnam) was born. The following year, Ngo Dinh Diem, a staunchly anti-Communist figure from the South, won a dubious election that made him president of the GVN. Almost immediately, Diem claimed that his newly created government was under attack from Communists in the north. Diem argued that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV or North Vietnam) wanted to take South Vietnam by force. In late 1957, with American military aid, Diem began to counterattack. He used the help of the American Central Intelligence Agency to identify those who sought to bring his government down and arrested thousands. Diem passed a repressive series of acts known as Law 10/59 that made it legal to hold someone in jail if s/he was a suspected Communist without bringing formal charges.

The outcry against Diem’s harsh and oppressive actions was immediate. Buddhist monks and nuns were joined by students, business people, intellectuals, and peasants in opposition to the corrupt rule of Ngo Dinh Diem. The more these forces attacked Diem’s troops and secret police, the more Diem complained that the Communists were trying to take South Vietnam by force. This was, in Diem’s words, “a hostile act of aggression by North Vietnam against peace-loving and democratic South Vietnam.”

The Kennedy administration seemed split on how peaceful or democratic the Diem regime really was. Some Kennedy advisers believed Diem had not instituted enough social and economic reforms to remain a viable leader in the nation-building experiment. Others argued that Diem was the “best of a bad lot.” As the White House met to decide the future of its Vietnam policy, a change in strategy took place at the highest levels of the Communist Party.

From 1956-1960, the Communist Party of Vietnam desired to reunify the country through political means alone. Accepting the Soviet Union’s model of political struggle, the Communist Party tried unsuccessfully to cause Diem’s collapse by exerting tremendous internal political pressure. After Diem’s attacks on suspected Communists in the South, however, southern Communists convinced the Party to adopt more violent tactics to guarantee Diem’s downfall. At the Fifteenth Party Plenum in January 1959, the Communist Party finally approved the use of revolutionary violence to overthrow Ngo Dinh Diem’s government and liberate Vietnam south of the seventeenth parallel. In May 1959, and again in September 1960, the Party confirmed its use of revolutionary violence and the combination of the political and armed struggle movements. The result was the creation of a broad-based united front to help mobilize southerners in opposition to the GVN.

## THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT

The united front had long and historic roots in Vietnam. Used earlier in the century to mobilize anti-French forces, the united front brought together Communists and non-Communists in an umbrella organization that had limited, but important goals. On December 20, 1960, the Party's new united front, the National Liberation Front (NLF), was born. Anyone could join this front as long as they opposed Ngo Dinh Diem and wanted to unify Vietnam.

The character of the NLF and its relationship to the Communists in Hanoi has caused considerable debate among scholars, anti-war activists, and policymakers. From the birth of the NLF, government officials in Washington claimed that Hanoi directed the NLF's violent attacks against the Saigon regime. In a series of government "White Papers," Washington insiders denounced the NLF, claiming that it was merely a puppet of Hanoi and that its non-Communist elements were Communist dupes. The NLF, on the other hand, argued that it was autonomous and independent of the Communists in Hanoi and that it was made up mostly of non-Communists. Many anti-war activists supported the NLF's claims. Washington continued to discredit the NLF, however, calling it the "Viet Cong," a derogatory and slang term meaning Vietnamese Communist.

## DECEMBER 1961 WHITE PAPER

In 1961, President Kennedy sent a team to Vietnam to report on conditions in the South and to assess future American aid requirements. The report, now known as the "December 1961 White Paper," argued for an increase in military, technical, and economic aid, and the introduction of large-scale American "advisers" to help stabilize the Diem regime and crush the NLF. As Kennedy weighed the merits of these recommendations, some of his other advisers urged the president to withdraw from Vietnam altogether, claiming that it was a "dead-end alley."

In typical Kennedy fashion, the president chose a middle route. Instead of a large-scale military buildup as the White Paper had called for or a negotiated settlement that some of his advisers had long advocated, Kennedy sought a limited accord with Diem. The United States would increase the level of its military involvement in South Vietnam through more machinery and advisers, but would not intervene whole-scale with troops. This arrangement was doomed from the start, and soon reports from Vietnam came in to Washington attesting to further NLF victories. To counteract the NLF's success in the countryside, Washington and Saigon launched an ambitious and deadly military effort in the rural areas. Called the Strategic Hamlet Program, the new counterinsurgency plan rounded up villagers and placed them in "safe hamlets" constructed by the GVN. The idea was to isolate the NLF from villagers, its base of support. This culturally-insensitive plan produced limited results and further alienated the peasants from the Saigon regime. Through much of Diem's reign, rural Vietnamese had viewed the GVN as a distant annoyance, but the Strategic Hamlet Program brought the GVN to the countryside. The Saigon regime's reactive policies ironically produced more cadres for the NLF.

## MILITARY COUP

By the summer of 1963, because of NLF successes and its own failures, it was clear that the GVN was on the verge of political collapse. Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, had raided the Buddhist pagodas of South Vietnam, claiming that they had harbored the Communists that were creating the political instability. The result was massive protests on the streets of Saigon that led Buddhist monks to self-immolation. The pictures of the monks engulfed in flames made world headlines and caused considerable consternation in Washington. By late September, the Buddhist protest had created such dislocation in the south that the Kennedy administration supported a coup. **In 1963, some of Diem's own generals in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) approached the American Embassy in Saigon with plans to overthrow Diem. With Washington's tacit approval, on November 1, 1963, Diem and his brother were captured and later killed. Three weeks later, President Kennedy was assassinated on the streets of Dallas.**

At the time of the Kennedy and Diem assassinations, there were 16,000 military advisers in Vietnam. The Kennedy administration had managed to run the war from Washington without the large-scale introduction of American combat troops. The continuing political problems in Saigon, however, convinced the new president, Lyndon Baines Johnson, that more aggressive action was needed. Perhaps Johnson was more prone to military intervention or maybe events in Vietnam had forced the president's hand to more direct action. In any event, after a dubious DRV raid on two U.S. ships in the Gulf of Tonkin, the Johnson administration argued for expansive war powers for the president.

## GULF OF TONKIN RESOLUTION

In August 1964, in response to American and GVN espionage along its coast, the DRV launched a local and controlled attack against the C. Turner Joy and the U.S.S. Maddox, two American ships on call in the Gulf of Tonkin. The first of these attacks occurred on August 2, 1964. A second attack was supposed to have taken place on August 4, although Vo Nguyen Giap, the DRV's leading military figure at the time, and Johnson's Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara have recently concluded that no second attack ever took place. In any event, the Johnson administration used the August 4 attack as political cover for a Congressional resolution that gave the president broad war powers. The resolution, now known as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, passed both the House and Senate with only two dissenting votes (Senators Morse of Oregon and Gruening of Alaska). The Resolution was followed by limited reprisal air attacks against the DRV.

Throughout the fall and into the winter of 1964, the Johnson administration debated the correct strategy in Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted to expand the air war over the DRV quickly to help stabilize the new Saigon regime. The civilians in the Pentagon wanted to apply gradual pressure to the Communist Party with limited and selective bombings. Only Undersecretary of State George Ball dissented, claiming that Johnson's Vietnam policy was too provocative for its limited expected results. In early 1965, the NLF attacked two U.S. army

installations in South Vietnam, and as a result, Johnson ordered the sustained bombing missions over the DRV that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had long advocated.

The bombing missions, known as OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER, caused the Communist Party to reassess its own war strategy. From 1960 through late 1964, the Party believed it could win a military victory in the south “in a relatively short period of time.” With the new American military commitment, confirmed in March 1965 when Johnson sent the first combat troops to Vietnam, the Party moved to a protracted war strategy. The idea was to get the United States bogged down in a war that it could not win militarily and create unfavorable conditions for political victory. The Communist Party believed that it would prevail in a protracted war because the United States had no clearly defined objectives, and therefore, the country would eventually tire of the war and demand a negotiated settlement. While some naive and simple-minded critics have claimed that the Communist Party, and Vietnamese in general, did not have the same regard for life and therefore were willing to sustain more losses in a protracted war, the Party understood that it had an ideological commitment to victory from large segments of the Vietnamese population.

### THE WAR IN AMERICA

One of the greatest ironies in a war rich in ironies was that Washington had also moved toward a limited war in Vietnam. The Johnson administration wanted to fight this war in “cold blood.” This meant that America would go to war in Vietnam with the precision of a surgeon with little noticeable impact on domestic culture. A limited war called for limited mobilization of resources, material and human, and caused little disruption in everyday life in America. Of course, these goals were never met. The Vietnam War did have a major impact on everyday life in America, and the Johnson administration was forced to consider domestic consequences of its decisions every day. Eventually, there simply were not enough volunteers to continue to fight a protracted war and the government instituted a draft. As the deaths mounted and Americans continued to leave for Southeast Asia, the Johnson administration was met with the full weight of American anti-war sentiments. Protests erupted on college campuses and in major cities at first, but by 1968 every corner of the country seemed to have felt the war’s impact. Perhaps one of the most famous incidents in the anti-war movement was the police riot in Chicago during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Hundreds of thousands of people came to Chicago in August 1968 to protest American intervention in Vietnam and the leaders of the Democratic Party who continued to prosecute the war.

### THE TET OFFENSIVE

By 1968, things had gone from bad to worse for the Johnson administration. In late January, the DRV and the NLF launched coordinated attacks against the major southern cities. These attacks, known in the West as the Tet Offensive, were designed to force the Johnson administration to the bargaining table. The Communist Party

correctly believed that the American people were growing war-weary and that its continued successes in the countryside had tipped the balance of forces in its favor. Although many historians have since claimed that the Tet Offensive was a military defeat, but a psychological victory for the Communists, it had produced the desired results. In late March 1968, a disgraced Lyndon Johnson announced that he would not seek the Democratic Party’s re-nomination for president and hinted that he would go to the bargaining table with the Communists to end the war.

### THE NIXON YEARS

The secret negotiations began in the spring of 1968 in Paris and soon it was made public that Americans and Vietnamese were meeting to discuss an end to the long and costly war. Despite the progress in Paris, the Democratic Party could not rescue the presidency from Republican challenger Richard Nixon who claimed he had a secret plan to end the war.

Nixon’s secret plan, it turned out, was borrowing from a strategic move from Lyndon Johnson’s last year in office. The new president continued a process called “Vietnamization”, an awful term that implied that Vietnamese were not fighting and dying in the jungles of Southeast Asia. This strategy brought American troops home while increasing the air war over the DRV and relying more on the ARVN for ground attacks. The Nixon years also saw the expansion of the war into neighboring Laos and Cambodia, violating the international rights of these countries in secret campaigns, as the White House tried desperately to rout out Communist sanctuaries and supply routes. The intense bombing campaigns and intervention in Cambodia in late April 1970 sparked intense campus protests all across America. At Kent State in Ohio, four students were killed by National Guardsmen who were called out to preserve order on campus after days of anti-Nixon protest. Shock waves crossed the nation as students at Jackson State in Mississippi were also shot and killed for political reasons, prompting one mother to cry, “They are killing our babies in Vietnam and in our own backyard.”

The expanded air war did not deter the Communist Party, however, and it continued to make hard demands in Paris. Nixon’s Vietnamization plan temporarily quieted domestic critics, but his continued reliance on an expanded air war to provide cover for an American retreat angered U.S. citizens. By the early fall 1972, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and DRV representatives Xuan Thuy and Le Duc Tho had hammered out a preliminary peace draft. Washington and Hanoi assumed that its southern allies would naturally accept any agreement drawn up in Paris, but this was not to pass. The leaders in Saigon, especially President Nguyen van Thieu and Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, rejected the Kissinger-Tho peace draft, demanding that no concessions be made. The conflict intensified in December 1972, when the Nixon administration unleashed a series of deadly bombing raids against targets in the DRV’s largest cities, Hanoi and Haiphong. These attacks, now known as the Christmas bombings, brought immediate condemnation from the international community and forced the Nixon administration to reconsider its tactics and negotiation strategy.

## THE PARIS PEACE AGREEMENT

In early January 1973, the Nixon White House convinced the Thieu-Ky regime in Saigon that they would not abandon the GVN if they signed onto the peace accord. On January 23, therefore, the final draft was initialed, ending open hostilities between the United States and the DRV. The Paris Peace Agreement did not end the conflict in Vietnam, however, as the Thieu-Ky regime continued to battle Communist forces. From March 1973 until the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, ARVN forces tried desperately to save the South from political and military collapse. The end finally came, however, as DRV tanks rolled south along National Highway One. On the morning of April 30, Communist forces captured the presidential palace in Saigon, ending the Second Indochina War.

### Don't forget: there is no homosexuality in China!

CHIN

Formal historical data provided by ancient records dealing with male homosexuality in China can be dated back to the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century - 11th century BC), according to Li Yinhe in her book *History of Chinese Homosexuality*.

The term “Luan Feng” was used to describe homosexuality in the “Shang Dynasty Records”. Interestingly, there are no record of lesbianism in Chinese history.

Historical traces of male homosexuality persist through dynasty to dynasty from ancient times and never disappear. It was in full swing during the Spring and Autumn and the Warring Periods, at which time Mi Zixia, favorite of the Monarch Wei, and Long Yang, favored by Monarch Wei, were the two best-known figures.

The greatest influences and achievements back then, however, belonged to the famous poet Qu Yuan. It is said that his love for the monarch Chu can be felt in most of his works, for instance his “Lisao” and “Longing for Beauty.”

## PREVAILING AMONG EMPERORS

Li claimed that during the powerful Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD) the homosexual activities of emperors and ministers were frequently preserved in the historical records. According to the “Historical Record” and “Han Dynasty Records”, almost all emperors of the Western Han Dynasty had lovers of their same sex.

There was a much-told story about Emperor Ai, whose name was Liu Xin, and who reigned from 6 BC to 2 BC. Unwilling to awaken his male lover Dong Xian, who had fallen asleep on his robes, Liu cut off his sleeves instead.

After the Han Dynasty, the general attitude was tolerant, so long as homosexuals fulfilled their filial duties by getting married and continuing the family line.

Remarkably, a calm and dispassionate attitude to the homosexual phenomenon was always prevalent in ancient China. There was neither eulogy, nor criticism. It seemed to do no harm in maintaining traditional family ethics.

## MALE PROSTITUTION

The years 1573-1620 marked the most flourishing period of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). With great developments in industry and trade, luxurious life-styles also proliferated, according to Li's book.

Prostitution was a common practice at that time, due to the moral concept which advocated the acceptance of natural sexual needs, an approach promoted by the neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yangming.

Male prostitutes (gigolos) were widely available to meet their clients' specific requirements.

Confucianism was canonized during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), with emphasis put on strict obedience to the social order. That is to say, both wife and husband should always remember their correct relationship, but homosexuals went directly against such rules.

## RESTRICTIVE DECREE

Then, in 1740, the first anti-homosexual decree in Chinese history was promulgated, defining voluntarily homosexual intercourse between adults as illegal. Though there were no records on the effectiveness of this decree, it was the first time homosexuality had been subject to legal proscription in China.

During the cultural revolution (1966-76), homosexuals faced their worst period of persecution in Chinese history. The government considered homosexuality to be a social disgrace or a form of mental illness.

The police regularly rounded up gays and lesbians. Since there was no law against homosexuality, gays and lesbians were charged with hooliganism or disturbing public order. Since that time homosexuality has remained in closet.

## ACCEPTANCE AND TOLERANCE

With the replacement of the 1989 edict – which defined homosexuality as a “psychiatric disorder of sexuality” – by the new “Chinese Classification and Diagnostic Criteria of Mental Disorders”, released in March, 2002 by the Chinese Psychiatric Association, China took a step closer to WHO policies, with homosexuals also benefiting from a general loosening of social restrictions.

And what was waiting for me back in Paris? Well, better Chinese food than I'd eaten in China. Friends and relatives. A little accounting, regular schedule, keeping track of traffic violations in the suburbs. ... And the indignity of students shouting the slogans of Chairman Mao at me - in French.

GALLIMARD

May 1, 1968, A crowd of students protest at the Sorbonne, University of Paris. Many carry posters of Mao and communist banners. In May of 1968, Paris was shaken by student demonstrations, later joined by workers.



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

SONG

The Shanghai Bund (rhymes with “fund”) has dozens of historical buildings, lining the Huangpu River, that once housed numerous banks and trading houses from Britain, France, the U.S., Russia, Germany, Japan, The Netherlands and Belgium, as well as the consulates of Russia and Britain, a newspaper, the Shanghai Club and the Masonic Club. The Bund lies north of the old, walled city of Shanghai. This was initially a British settlement; later the British and American settlements were combined in the International Settlement. A building boom at the end of 19th century and beginning of 20th century led to the Bund becoming a major financial hub of East Asia. The former French Bund, east of the walled city was formerly more a working harborside.

By the 1940s the Bund housed the headquarters of many, if not most, of the major financial institutions operating in China, including the “big four” national banks in the Republic of China era. However, with the Communist victory in the Chinese civil war, many of the financial institutions were moved out gradually in the 1950s, and the hotels and clubs closed or converted to other uses. The statues of colonial figures and foreign worthies which had dotted the riverside were also removed.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, with the thawing of economic policy in the People’s Republic of China, buildings on the Bund were gradually returned to their former uses. Government institutions were moved out in favor of financial institutions, while hotels resumed trading as such. Also during this period, a series of floods caused by typhoons motivated the municipal government to construct a tall levee along the riverfront, with the result that the embankment now stands some 10 meters higher than street level. This has dramatically changed

the streetscape of the Bund. In the 1990s, Zhongshan Road (named after Sun Yat-sen), the road on which the Bund is centered, was widened to ten lanes. As a result, most of the parkland which had existed along the road disappeared. Also in this period, the ferry wharves connecting the Bund and Pudong, which had served the area’s original purpose, were removed. A number of pleasure cruises still operate from some nearby wharves.

The Bund stretches one mile along the bank of the Huangpu River. Traditionally, the Bund begins at Yan’an Road (formerly Edward VII Avenue) in the south and ends at Waibaidu Bridge (formerly Garden Bridge) in the north, which crosses Suzhou Creek.

The Bund centers on a stretch of the Zhongshan Road, named after Sun Yat-sen. Zhongshan Road is a largely circular road which formed the traditional conceptual boundary of Shanghai city “proper”. To the west of this stretch of the road stands some 52 buildings of various Western classical and modern styles which is the main feature of the Bund (see Architecture and buildings below). To the east of the road was formerly a stretch of parkland culminating at Huangpu Park. (This park is the site of the infamous sign reported to have proclaimed “no dogs or Chinese”, although this exact wording never existed. Further information, including an image of the sign, can be found at the article on Huangpu Park.) This area is now much reduced due to the expansion of Zhongshan Road. Further east is a tall levee, constructed in the 1990s to ward off flood waters. The construction of this high wall has dramatically changed the appearance of the Bund.

Near the Nanjing Road intersection stands what is currently the only bronze statue along the Bund. It is a statue of Chen Yi, the first Communist mayor of Shanghai. At the northern end of The Bund, along the riverfront, is Huangpu Park, in which is situated the Monument to the People’s Heroes - a tall, abstract concrete tower which is a memorial for the those who died during the revolutionary struggle of Shanghai dating back to the Opium Wars.

## FROM THE DIRECTOR



**I** have wanted to direct *M. Butterfly* for years, but it's a play that demands an incredible cast, an extraordinary group of designers, and a dramaturgical and a technical team that can bring great care to the work. To be able to stage this great play at the Guthrie is thrilling.

And intimidating. The learning curve on this one has been steep and has taken a year in preparation. I knew Puccini's opera well, having directed it. And I've spent a lot of time in Italy conducting research at the various Puccini archives. But I knew very little about the Cultural Revolution, which to begin to understand you have to unlock 3,000 years of Chinese history. I also knew very little about the various theatrical traditions from Japan and China that David Henry Hwang has brilliantly incorporated into the work: Kabuki, Chinese Opera (or Jingju), and the Model Works of the Cultural Revolution. *M. Butterfly* is a play inspired by a real life story; however, its point of departure is an Italian opera, that's based on an American play, that's based on a French novella. It could be subtitled *Lost in Translation*.

The playwright has graciously spent a good deal of time with me over the past year, and has revisited the text making a number of changes, including doing away with the second intermission. Interesting enough, Puccini made the same choice ultimately turning his three act opera into two acts, with the second broken into two parts. David has also agreed to let me do away with much of the physical and theatrical vocabulary of the original staging to create something new.

We have doubled the cast size from the original Broadway production. We are using Puccini's opera much more extensively throughout. We are expanding the responsibilities of the Kurogo (which comes from the Kabuki tradition) to play numerous roles. We often have several actors embodying one character. We are opening and closing the production with a concrete bookend and reversal.

**I began the design process with a set of contradictions.**

**I wanted the production to be:  
both operatic and painfully intimate  
gorgeous yet brutal  
streamlined but also ornamental  
contemporary yet ancient  
anti-sentimental yet cathartic**

The play is a juxtaposition of East and West, of male and female, of fantasy and reality. When do those opposites bang up against each other and when is there a bleed or even a fusion? Sometimes scenes, locations, realities can happen simultaneously, other times we cut away from one to the next, other moments we bleed from one reality into another. The transitions offer enormous opportunity in the exchange of ideas.

Gallimard, our hero, progresses to insanity by play's end, though we the audience understand him much more than we had at the beginning, an interesting irony. The audience should progress from titillated voyeur, like the guests at the first cocktail party to a place of honest empathy. While the play is politically charged and a brilliant discourse of ideas, our ultimate goal is emotional entanglement and catharsis by play's end.

I believe the play lacks the shock value it did when it first premiered 22 years ago, largely in part because of progress around sexual identity and partly due to numerous stories with transgender characters joining popular culture. We need to find a way for the play to feel dangerous, challenging our expectations around cultural stereotypes, gender roles, and sexual identity.

In the final “duet” of the play, Gallimard states, “You if anyone should know, I am pure imagination. And in imagination I will remain.” This statement from Gallimard, who is our theatrical guide, dictates the physical world of OUR production. The play will happen in a black void that is penetrated with highly theatrical gestures. The reality, or one reality of the play, is that we are in Gallimard’s cell, where his only tool is a tape recorder. Therefore the “audio” experience is primary, and the visual secondary. Like our imagination, it is a fragmented reality where one sense triggers another. This dynamic, I believe, is inherently theatrical, a fragmented experience that demands the audience complete the picture, filling in the gaps to create a whole.

Music becomes our mode of transportation, defining time, place and culture. Unlike the original we will perform parts of the opera live. Three actors in addition to Randy Reyes will embody Song Liling over the course of the evening. By this doubling we are able to illuminate Gallimard’s obsession and the fact that he is in love with a fantastical stereotype not with a human being. Doubling will also allow us to play with the audience’s expectations around gender, blurring the lines between male and female. At times we will be seeing one actor, but hearing Randy, again illuminating this fragmented reality that favors the audio experience.

Doubling is a part of the Chinese Opera tradition. I should refer to the Chinese Opera as Jingju. Chinese Opera is no longer considered appropriate, as “opera” is a colonial term, and it also implies an art form where music is primary. And this form shares an equal emphasis on music, dance, mime, and stage combat. In Jingju, the diva is played by several different performers depending upon the focus of a given scene: singing, acting, or combat.

The playwright didn’t dictate which Jingju is staged in *M. Butterfly*. I have chosen *The Legend of White Snake*, because that is the work where the real life couple first met. It was fortuitous because *The Legend of*

*White Snake* is an ancient Chinese story that parallels *Madame Butterfly* in many ways. White Snake falls in love with a man, who’s a cad. They marry instantly. She has his child. He leaves her. The difference between White Snake and Butterfly is White Snake is not submissive, and she does not kill herself for the love of a man.

During the Cultural Revolution, the performance of Jingju was forbidden and replaced with what they called *Model Works*. Madame Mao, a failed performer herself, was put in charge of arts and culture. She developed eight works of propaganda, and they were the only eight works in all of the performing arts that were allowed between 1966 and 1976. Some of the artists became part of that work; others were imprisoned, sent to work camps, tortured or killed.

With our production we are trying to heighten the brutal realities of the Cultural Revolution. Homosexuals and other sexual minorities were treated with more disdain during the Cultural Revolution than the whole of Chinese history. I believe Song’s choices are dictated by those harsh realities. She becomes a spy, not because she supports Mao, quite the contrary, but because it is the only way she can live an authentic life.

The real Song Liling passed away this past summer. The real Gallimard is still living, in a nursing home in France. Throughout the extensive trials he contends that for 20 years he made love to a woman. The psychologist who spoke in his defense spoke of the human brain’s incredible ability to construct an alternate reality in order to make one’s life bearable. The degree to which fantasy may supersede reality is shocking, and not to be discredited. “I am pure imagination.”

In Act II, 6, Gallimard says: “By the time I reached her, Pinkerton (the anti-hero of Puccini’s opera) had vanished from my heart. To be replaced by something new, something unnatural, that flew in the face of all I’d learned in the world – something very close to love.” The play is a poignant and brutal look at two human beings attempts at love – the tragedy lies in their inability to move beyond “all they had learned in the world,” the cultural stereotypes, gender roles, and psychological constructs. I believe those barriers are a part of our universally flawed attempts at love, but in that imperfection one finds vulnerability, beauty and truth.

Peter Rothstein, March 23, 2010

# BUILDING THE PRODUCTION

## Backstage information about *M. Butterfly*.

Opening April 23, 2010

Compiled by Jacque Frazzini,  
Artistic Relations

Production photos by Michal Daniel



## SET

Allen Moyer, Set Designer

Eric Gebhard, Assistant Technical Director

Assistant Technical Director Eric Gebhard explains some of the unique challenges of bringing the set designs of Allen Moyer, Set Designer, to life on the Guthrie stage for this production. Audience members are presented with two different worlds – the world of reality which is the jail cell of Rene Gallimard (Andrew Long) and the world of Rene’s imagination. Different scenes taking place in Gallimard’s memory are created by moving wagons on stage and by using an elevator to bring set pieces to stage level from the trap room below the stage. For example, the elevator brings Rene’s cell from below the stage. The cell is on a castored platform 10’ wide, 8’ deep and 9” tall. Covered with Duron (a type of hardwood) and steel framed, Lead Scenic Artist Michael Hoover and his staff have applied a texture to create the look of concrete. A single floor drain in the middle of the platform is used for a blood effect at the end of the show to “bookend” the opening scene. The stage deck has been constructed of Duron (a type of hard wood) laid over a stock plywood sub-deck. To attain the high gloss, Hoover and his staff used primer, black paint and a floor product – overall seven steps of high gloss were applied.

The opening is the death scene from *Madame Butterfly*, the opera by Giacomo Puccini, and takes place on a proscenium

space upstage. This playing space is 8’ deep x 80’ long and is 8’ off of the stage deck. A steel framework is supported by steel trusses which have been placed 12’ apart which allow wagons to pass through from upstage to downstage playing areas. Wagons are used for the recital scene with the piano, for several of the apartments - Song Liling’s (Randy Reyes), Gallimard’s and the apartment that he rents for Song. By using steel framed sliding doors covered with black velour, scene changes are accomplished smoothly. Several drops (theatrical curtains) are used in this production. The order in which these drops are hung moving from upstage to downstage is as follows:

- At the far back is a rear projection screen which allows light to be projected downstage.
- Next is a scenic opera translucent curtain or Butterfly backdrop with a landscape.



- The “Butterfly” portal, a translucent muslin curtain with scenes of trees and houses was created by Hoover and his staff by painting, cutting it to Moyer’s specifications, then reversing it and painting parts of it in back. Unpainted parts allow the light to show through. Once the painting has been completed, scenery netting applied to the back of the drop to stiffen it and give it stability.
- Next is a blue and white drop used in the opera scene made from two different colors of China silk and rigged to a mechanism engineered to allow the curtain to drop into place.
- The grand red velour drape that is used following the death scene is from the McGuire Proscenium theater.
- Propaganda banner which is white muslin with Chinese characters.
- Finally the space is covered by a black velour drop.

Circling the performance space are catwalks reminding the audience of Rene’s prison environment. Only the catwalk bridge which extends across the upstage area is actually functional. The three sections which are not functional have been constructed of 2” x 1” tube steel with Duron applied to the outside of the platform matching the structural bridge; the railings are 1½” steel tubing. These units are suspended by aircraft cables. Two 18’ long platforms form the catwalk bridge with 4” steel sections and 1½” tube railings. Side platforms

of the bridge have the same structural pattern as the bridge. The bridge is lowered to the stage deck during Act II by means of a winch which is the same apparatus used to lower the cornucopia in *A Christmas Carol*. Fitted with a braking mechanism, the bridge is locked down ensuring stability and the actors' safety. All catwalks and bridge work have been painted with a layer of black and then a layer of grey.

## PROPS

Patricia Olive, Props Manager

Sarah Gullickson, Associate Props Manager

Once the set designs are established, the Props Department's assignment is to create the appropriate furniture, decorative objects, curtains, bedding and hand props to bring the stage to life. Props Manager Patricia Olive and Associate Props Manager Sarah Gullickson explain that the bare stage that confronts the audience at the beginning of the show gives a "minimalist" appearance that is deceptive considering the extraordinary amount of props that are used throughout the production. The specific nature of this production required specialty props which have been ordered from online companies or purchased locally. Such props include:

- Parasols which were ordered online from Asian Ideas and the Pearl River Company in New York; however for the Chinese Opera scenes, the parasols were hand painted to match the geisha's kimonos and obis by Staff Props Craftsperson Nick Golfis.



- Black fans used by the Kurogos (on stage assistants) are from Pearl River. Fans used in *Madama Butterfly* scenes were ordered from Japan.
- The costume racks in the dressing room scenes are from the Wardrobe Department; the costumes are from the stock at



Costume Rentals but were originally from the Chinese Opera.

- The chair in Song and Gallimard's apartment was purchased from ChinaFurnitureOnline.com.
- The tea set is from Devotea in Little Canada, MN.

Some props have been pulled from stock or specially built, such as:

- Furnishings in Gallimard's cell.
- Tuna can ashtray has an authentic French label created by Golfis along with the French porno magazines.
- The parasol used in the closing scene was ordered online, but painted and distressed by Golfis.
- Golfis also created the French textbooks that are seen in Renee's (Katie Guentzel) apartment.
- Song's "child" is one of the puppets which were used in the Guthrie production of *The Secret Fall of Constance Wilde*. Adjustments were made by Staff Props Craftsperson Kellie Larson to make the body more rigid.
- Staff Props Craftsperson John Vlatkovich reworked the piano used in the German ambassador's apartment by adding a speaker which is operated through the theater sound system.
- For the apartment of Helga (Charity Jones) and Gallimard, Golfis built the nightstands and the bed using plywood and bamboo. The matching lamps were donated by Moyer.
- To create the paddle fans used in the White Snake Opera scene, Larson and Staff Props Craftsperson Stacey Schwebach

collaborated using China silk and Wonderflex, a plastic that is heat sensitive and can be bent to shape.

- Schwebach built the headdress for the chorus dressing room scenes; Larson designed and built the dragon's head.
- Using steel and wire, Master Props Craftsperson Mel Springer built the mail cart for the French Embassy; Larson dressed it with packages, letters and stamps.
- For the shower of cherry blossoms at the end of Act I, the four kurogos are using tiny paper packets from S.E.O. Magic.
- In the Cultural Revolution scene, Springer built the dancing swords using Lauan (a type of plywood); Schwebach made the red flags and Golfis created the "placards of shame" by using rope and plywood. The little red books with quotes from Chairman Mao (Founder of the People's Republic of China) are from Amazon.com.
- For the "transformation scene" at the end of the play, Golfis adapted a box pulled from stock to hold the cosmetics and built the Plexiglas mirror inside it.
- Finally, Gallimard squeezes blood packets made by Springer with blood purchased from the Reel Blood Company in Hollywood, CA. For the other blood effect, a special tank has been built by Springer to house an air compressor which causes the blood to "pool" around the drain in the floor.

Olive describes *M. Butterfly* as one of the most "props intensive" productions at the Guthrie in a very long time; however, the



result of all the careful research and efforts of her department give audiences an exceptional experience time and place in Gallimard's story.

## LIGHTING

Marcus Dilliard, Lighting Designer  
Ryan Connealy, Lighting Design Assistant

Lighting Design Assistant Ryan Connealy concedes that there were specific challenges in lighting the production. He cites the extremely shiny floor which, if not lighted correctly, can cause lights to “bounce back” into the audience's eyes. The second major challenge was the catwalks which surround the performance space – particularly in the upstage area where pipes with lighting instruments are hung. As mentioned in the section on Set Design, there is a large rear projection screen upstage needed for the considerable amount of back lighting in the show.

The color palette for the production calls for two systems – one using blue and white lighting on one of the pipes and another using an assortment of red, blue and green. In addition to the backlighting, side lighting is also being used with conventional lighting instruments. Operated by wireless dimmers through the lighting system, there are many “practicals” which are small lamps in scenes on wagons or on elevator units. Lighting for the brothel and moon scenes is done with one light on a pipe which can be raised and lowered. Two follow spotlights are used for Gallimard's direct speeches to the audience. Warm, colorful lighting for the opera scenes contrasts effectively with the stark reality of the prison. Standard 75W conventional lights controlled through the light board are used under the catwalks.

Overall lighting statistics for the production include 580 conventional lighting instruments, 33 color scrollers (lights which change color gels for stage lighting) and 25 gobos (a piece of metal or glass in which a pattern has been cut allowing light to be projected through it creating designs or patterns). There are 200 lighting cues in the production.

## SOUND

Scott Edwards, Sound Designer

Sound Designer Scott Edwards states that the sound design in this production defines culture, place and time for the story. To create the soundscape, several techniques were used. For the opera scenes, a 1974 London Symphony CD of *Madama Butterfly* starring Mirella Freni as Butterfly and Luciano Pavarotti as Pinkerton is being used throughout the production; however, the sound is modified at times as when Gallimard is playing the cassette tape in his cell. A wireless speaker has been installed in the crate and an equalization system is used when the fast forward sound is needed. Two other wireless speakers are used for the piano and for the Victrola player in Song's apartment. Choral music heard from time to time during the production is from the London Symphony recording. The piano music was recorded in the Guthrie sound studio with Momoko Tanno singing. Hers is the only singing that is done live during the performance. At times she will follow the music cue; at other times, she sings and the cue follows.

Using recorded music from the Chinese Opera, Edwards combined this music with a selection of various of musical sounds from the Guthrie sound library to create the

background for the Chinese and White Snake Opera scenes. Such sounds include percussion, six tams, small gongs, wood blocks, various authentic instruments, flutes and stringed instruments. Music for the Revolution scenes is from “East is Red” the 1960's anthem for the Cultural Revolution. The specific piece which is used is from the “Revolutionary Opera” and also, from a ballet, “The Red Detachment of Women.” When Song is in the labor camp, the sound is modified to make it sound as if it is coming through the bullhorn.

Other sound effects used in the production and pulled from the sound library are: the big cell door, street noises, sirens, riot sounds, office sounds and telephones. Each of the embassy parties has a different sound – specifically, for the French, it is period jazz from the 1960's and music from the Clearwater Hot Club, an acoustic jazz group located in northern Minnesota.

## COSTUMES

Linda Cho, Costume Designer  
Amy Schmidt, Costume Manager

Creating the magic that audiences experience onstage in *M. Butterfly* would not be possible without the extraordinary collaborative efforts of the Costume, Costume Crafts and Wig Departments. According to Costume Manager Amy Schmidt, building thirty-one of the costumes seen in *M. Butterfly* began two weeks before the first rehearsal including eight hand-painted kimonos and two butterfly appliquéed wedding kimonos. Fabric is primarily purchased from New York. Samantha Haddow, Guthrie Crafts and Dye Artisan, hand painted the kimonos worn by Butterfly and her friends in the *Madama Butterfly* scenes.



These kimonos started as plain white silk crepe, which was dyed to the colors the chosen



by the designer, Linda Cho. The patterns were then painted onto the dyed fabrics with a discharge paste, which removed the color in the areas to be painted, allowing brighter, purer shades to be achieved. To finish the process, Haddow painted in the white areas with fabric paint depicting lovely landscape and floral designs. This process took about 2 days of dyeing and painting to get the color and pattern on before construction. The designs on the wedding kimono were achieved by Stitcher Mary Linda, who painstakingly appliquéd individual butterflies to the silk. Costumes built for the production include the Beijing Opera costumes, the four Kurogo who are the on stage assistants throughout the production, three Bohemian robes used by Song doubles, and the majority of Song's looks.

The elaborate headdresses and shoes used in the Peking Opera scenes are authentic, purchased from China. Haddow and her assistant were responsible for painting and customizing the 26 masks that are used in the show. Overall, there are 65 costumes in the production; those that were not built were purchased or pulled from Guthrie stock.

To create the writing on the anti-revolutionaries, revolutionary dancers and Mao uniforms' arm bands, the Guthrie Costume Department collaborated with Jiahong Quon, University of Minnesota Department of Asian Languages and Literature, an expert in calligraphy. She was also consulted about

the writing on the dunce caps of shame worn in Act II. To complete the desired look for the characters, collaboration with the Wig Department was essential as explained in the following section.

## WIGS

Ivy Loughborough, Wigmaster  
Andrea Moriarty, Wig Assistant

Wigmaster Ivy Loughborough and her assistants have created an array of 29 wigs for this production. Some of the actors have as many as four wigs to facilitate quick changes as they assume another character. As mentioned in the Costume section, collaboration between these two departments was essential in order to create the appropriate look for the nine geisha style wigs and for the characters in the opera scenes.



One of the most unique aspects of the wigs for this production was the creation of

the kanzashi which are hair ornaments used in traditional Japanese hairstyles. Kanzashi are fabricated from a wide range of materials such as lacquered wood, gold and silver plated metal, tortoiseshell and silk. Some of the ornaments created by the Wig Department are in the hana kanzashi style in which squares of silk are folded and cut into single petals which are attached to backings of metal to create whole flowers. Japanese fabric was imported for use in creating these flowers. Additional ornamentation for the geisha wigs includes combs and hairpieces purchased from Japan. Masks for the geishas are worn according to tradition under their wigs to make it possible to see their widow's peak. Geisha wigs for the production are maintained with beeswax. According to Wig Assistant Andrea Moriarty, to create the sculptured look of the geisha wigs, the fronts are hand-tied human hair while the backs are synthetic due to the extra length required to accommodate the poofs and hair stuffing necessary for the shape.



In addition to creating the wigs for *M. Butterfly*, Loughborough also created the make-up for Song and worked with Gallimard in his "transformation" to reflect the appropriate nature of his final scene. For interested audience members, handmade kanzashi flowers such as those seen in the production are available for purchase in the Guthrie Gift Shop.

## FOR FURTHER READING

*Between Worlds: Contemporary Asian-American Plays*, edited with an introduction by Misha Berson (1990), contains a selection of plays that includes Hwang's *As the Crow Flies* and *The Sound of a Voice*.

*Asian-American Literature: A Brief Introduction and Anthology*, edited by Shawn Wong (1996), is an attractive anthology that includes essays, fiction, poetry, and drama (thirty-five pieces in all) by Asian Americans. Wong's introduction surveys the history of Asian-American literature.

*Growing Up Asian-American: An Anthology*, edited with an introduction by Maria Hong (1993). This collection of essays, excerpts, and short stories is about the experiences of Asian Americans growing up in America. The collection covers a wide range of topics, from first love to adolescent rebellion, and also deals with Asian-American concerns about assimilation and cultural history.

*Liaison: The Gripping Real Story of the Diplomat Spy and the Chinese Opera Star Whose Affair Inspired M. Butterfly*, by Joyce Wadler (1993), examines the bizarre true story that gave rise to Hwang's play. Wadler draws on interviews with the two men involved, French diplomat Bernard Boursicot and Chinese opera singer Pei Pu, and many of their friends and colleagues.

*Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution*, by Ji-Li Jiang (1998) is a vivid account of how the chaos of the Cultural Revolution in China in the late 1960s affected a young girl and her family, who lived in terror of arrest and detention. The book includes a foreword by David Henry Hwang.

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