

Contemporary Drag Practices and Performers

Drag in a Changing Scene Volume 1

Chinoiserie Drag

Masquerading as the Oriental Other

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Chinoiserie, a European decorative style made popular in the eighteenth century and inspired by art and design from China and East Asia, existed in the mind of the colonial imagination, invoking exotic, faraway places full of mystery. Anne Whitchard has called it a ‘fanciful interpretation of Chineseness’ (2017: 206). The exuberance of the rococo style of that period lent itself to the camp excess of, for example, the willow-patterned ceramics, opulent bird designs and pagoda-shaped pavilions of chinoiserie. Chinoiserie and such embellishment adorned European decorative arts, garden design, literature, theatre and music. In this chapter I demonstrate how chinoiserie was applied to the corporeal body, creating East Asian drag acts in the parodic performance of race. I identify chinoiserie drag as a performance which is a ‘fanciful interpretation’ of East Asian people. These performances appear in theatre, cinema and television. My focus here will be on what I term ‘chinoiserie drag’ in film. I will draw on the scholarship of Judith Butler and her exploration of gender and performativity; Katrin Sieg for her analysis of ethnic drag; and utilize a contrapuntal reading of the films analysed in this work. Contrapuntal analysis of a text was an approach developed by Edward Said where different perspectives are interpreted simultaneously to ‘connect the structures of a narrative to the ideas, concepts, and experiences from which it draws support’ (1993: 79).

Chinoiserie in the arts and crafts created a mythical image of Chinese culture and combined this with Western style to create something exotic and other. Although chinoiserie as a style more widely fell out of favour in the late nineteenth century, chinoiserie on stage and screen still persists in the form of drag acts.¹ For instance, the recent staging of *The Orphan of Zhao* (2012) and *In the Depth of Dead Love* (2017), both set in China but with a mainly white cast, were criticized for yellowface casting and erasure.² While yellowface refers specifically to the casting of (usually) white actors as East Asian characters, chinoiserie drag signifies the performance of ethnicity, which uses the physical stylistic expressions thought to be attributed to East Asian people. Chinoiserie drag is both a mimetic performance and an ethnic masquerade, which is devoid of any authentic source and thereby is often

appropriated. The producers of *In the Depths of Dead Love* declared, ‘While the characters have been given Chinese names, that is to reference the abstract and folkloric idea of the universal’ (in Hewis, 2016). Such thinking creates a mythical and imagined idea of East Asia

and has allowed for the formation of a racial performance that I call chinoiserie drag. In recent years, scholars have formulated an understanding of how race might be performed. Katrin Sieg, in *Ethnic Drag* (2009), borrows Judith Butler's (2006) use of the term drag as the parodic subversion of gender and applies it to race. Butler asserts that, far from being biological, gender identities are circumscribed and socially constituted. She theorizes that gender is thus performative because it produces a series of effects. In an online interview, she argues that 'we act and talk and speak in ways that consolidate an impression of being a woman or being a man ...' (Butler, 2011). In Sieg's critique, ethnicity can likewise be performative as a kind of drag act. She writes, '[e]thnic drag includes not only cross-racial casting on stage, but more generally the performance of "race" as masquerade' (2009: 2). Sieg's analysis draws on Homi Bhabha's notions of mimicry and Butler's theory of performativity to describe the manifold possibilities of ethnic masquerade. Homi Bhabha's use of the word mimicry is central to his thesis on the ambivalence of colonial discourse. Bhabha adapted the term ambivalence, which was developed in psychoanalysis to describe contradictory feelings towards something that creates a love/hate relationship. In the context of a colonial discourse, this ambivalence produces tension because it decentres the relationship between the colonized and colonizer. The colonial master wants their subjects to mimic their habits and values. However, the mimicry produced is ambivalent because it is a pastiche bordering on mockery – it disrupts authority.

In this chapter, I hope to contribute to current scholarship on performing race by using textual analysis of films featuring East Asian characters. I also seek to broaden the debates on the screen identities of British East Asians and explore the complexities of negotiating agency within the social construction of race. Through the following discussion I interrogate the themes in the documentary film *Deconstructing Zoe* (2016) and demonstrate how, by performing a racialized gender, Zoe is able to enact her agency by authoring her own identity. I draw on two films featuring East Asian actors to illustrate how Zoe employs different aspects of chinoiserie drag to create her own identity. Looking at *Piccadilly* (1929), starring Anna May Wong, I explore the exoticization of Wong alongside the film's subversive elements that paradoxically challenge the exotification of race. Secondly, I give a textual analysis of Ray Yeung's short film *A Bridge to the Past* (1994), a dramatized documentary about the Chinese Hungry Ghost Festival, and I show how he successfully queers chinoiserie using mimesis and masquerade.

Both the long version of *Deconstructing Zoe* (52 minutes) and the short version, *Scent of an Orchid* (22 minutes), are documentary films about transgender actor Zoe/Chowee Leow. The film had its world premiere in May 2016 at *Translations Transgender* film festival in Seattle, USA, and went on to have international screenings across Asia and the UK. Both versions of the film have been used to inform debates on transgender identity and gender fluidity (*Being Human Festival*, 2016; *In Flux: The Queering of Race and Gender*, 2017).³ The film captures Zoe's public and private performances of herself as a Chinese Malay trans woman living in London. The central themes in the documentary look at the fluidity of gender, sexuality and race. Some of these themes were developed in the collaborative film *Council House Movie Star* (2012) with dancemaker and academic Mark Edward. The underpinning research for *Council House Movie Star* looked at how identity is embodied

through performance. My work on *Council House Movie Star* helped me articulate the approach I wanted to use when exploring the themes of gender, race and performativity in *Deconstructing Zoe*. The making of the documentary puts the theory of performativity into practice by capturing the conscious performance of the subjects in the film, thus allowing the audience to reflect on how we all perform our identities. *Deconstructing Zoe* explores the intersection between gender, race and sexuality, where Zoe plays out her identity in the postcolonial geographical spaces of her world stage. A review of *Deconstructing Zoe* highlighted how the film ‘untangles the interconnections of Asian life in the diaspora and in the arts, exoticification and imperialism, transmisogyny, gender and sexual fluidity, racism, and femininity’ (3DollarBillCinema, 2016).

Deconstructing Zoe looks at the intersection of race and gender and poses this question: If gender is ‘manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body’ (Butler, 2006), then can the same also be said of race? Does Zoe act in ways that consolidate an impression of what it is to be Chinese, for example (Fong, 2018)? In this regard, Katrin Sieg’s exploration in *Ethnic Drag* (2009) has proved fruitful, especially her argument that drag can uncover how race intersects with national identity and gender. I have written elsewhere that, while Sieg’s study applies specifically to performing race and sexuality in West Germany, her analysis is a useful framework when applied to a broader notion of ethnic drag. In particular, her analysis of postcolonial theories of ambivalence and mimicry, and dramatic theories of mimesis and impersonation, have a direct relevance to Zoe’s drag persona (Fong, 2018).

In his groundbreaking work, *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said illustrates how Western colonialism constructed an idea of the Middle East. This Western construct of the East was endorsed through Western art, literature and academia, creating imagined geographies (Gregory, 1995), that is, an idea of the Orient. The Western colonial project further rationalized this experience by imagining the West as masculine and strong, and the Orient as feminine and weak (Hosford, 2010: 24). This shared rationalization has mapped itself onto contemporary notions of the East, where in Europe and America ‘Orientals’ include people from East Asia. This interplay creates an imaginative space in which chinoiserie drag can operate. Moreover, an enduring narrative of the imperialist project was often the depiction of Oriental women as highly sexualized, mysterious and full of erotic delights. Said’s contrapuntal assessment of colonial art and literature traces the development of this representation, noting an ‘almost *uniform association between the Orient and sex*’ (Said, 1978: 188, italics in original). This association is mapped onto the Orient as a whole, creating a feminization and gendering of the East: ‘Why the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies, is something on which one could speculate’ (ibid.: 188).

Given that both come loaded with cultural discourse, how does Zoe create agency when performing gender and race? How does Zoe, as a transgender woman, deal with the social construction of identity such that she takes some ownership of that identity? A focus on the highly codified racial gendering of East Asian people in the West, where the women are fetishized and the men desexualized, is essential to answer these questions. Below I explore Zoe’s brand of chinoiserie drag that empowers her to reveal her fluid-gendered self.

Speeding down the Westway: Invisibility of East Asian men and the hypervisibility of East Asian women

She [Zoe] goes, When I'm driving as a man nobody notices me, everybody goes Chink. But when I'm Zoe men are honking at me, they're tailing me. And she's like vroom, speeding down the Westway. (Ivan Heng quoting Zoe, in *Deconstructing Zoe*, 2016)

This vivid quote from *Deconstructing Zoe* serves to illustrate the contrasting ideas of East Asian gender. As an East Asian man in the West, Zoe feels she is rendered invisible – a 'Chink', a man who is despised – but as an East Asian woman she is desired and hypervisible. In this geographical space of a highly sexualized racism, I will demonstrate how Zoe is able to mediate her identity by deftly moving herself from a position of invisibility to visibility. Feminist anthropologist Ann Stoler (1989) asserts that the racialization of gender and sex was deeply ingrained in the colonial enterprise. Along the same vein, historian Claire Lowrie (2013) traces how the colonial master/servant narrative sought to infantilize Chinese male servants in order to assert white male potency. They were characterized as being passive, feminized, servile. Yet, as I will show, in the interwar years in Europe, Chinese men represented a sexual threat, with the potential to destabilize white superiority through miscegenation. The conceptual castration of Chinese men as feminine and eunuch-like underscored white men's fears of Chinese men (Lowrie, 2013: 52). This trope has since been perpetuated in numerous examples of East Asian characters and has led to their desexualization in Euro-American popular culture. In contrast, in the early literature of the European writers and missionaries, East Asian women were characterized as having a licentious libido, to be feared and desired in equal measure. This trope was played out throughout popular culture.

In E. A. Du Pont's silent film *Piccadilly* (1929), made for British Films International, Anna May Wong plays a lowly scullery maid thrust into stardom by becoming an exotic dancer in London's Piccadilly. Although Wong was a third-generation American-born Chinese, in her Hollywood films she always played the Oriental Other. She complained, 'I was so tired of the parts I had to play ... Why is it that the screen Chinese is nearly always the villain of the piece?' (Mackie, 1933: 11). To British audiences, Wong was the embodiment of the Orient. Her race was always foremost in the plot. The characters she played were personified by exoticness or deceit (Staszak, 2015: 9). This heightened performance of Chineseness was employed as self-exoticization by Wong; Yiman Wang calls it 'yellow yellowface' (2005: 325). There are many tropes of Orientalism at play in *Piccadilly*; one of the most enduring is the exoticization and feminization of the East. Jean-François Staszak observes how Anna May Wong's performances were rooted in Western imaginative geographies recreated in Euro-American film culture (Staszak, 2015). Here the interlacing discourse of sex, gender and race are tied in with her performances.

Although Anna May Wong was born in California, her screen identity was constructed through her perceived ethnicity and validated by her exoticization. When the audience first encounter Wong as Shosho, she is dancing seductively on the kitchen table, watched by night club owner Valentine. He watches her from afar, and the viewer is invited to share his vision of her uninhibited dance. Her nipples can be seen through her dress – quite risqué for the

time – and the camera tilts down her body to her legs, revealing laddered stockings. In fact, the film comes with a censor warning: for adults only. The hypervisibility of Shosho's body, and the subsequent exoticization of her ethnicity through Valentine's point-of-view shot, creates a subject/object relationship between them throughout the film.

The next time Valentine and Shosho meet is when he summons her to his office. Valentine sits at his desk drawing her likeness on a pad, eyeing her furtively. Again, the camera lingers on Shosho's legs. She tells Valentine that she danced once in Limehouse and reveals, 'They wouldn't let me dance again, sir – there was trouble between two men – knives, policemen'. This demonstrates Shosho's illicit appeal and is in keeping with the reputation of London's Limehouse at the time. Contemporary popular novels painted Chinese Limehouse as a place of vice and miscegenation, linking the two conceptually. Limehouse during the interwar years was seen as dark and exotic 'with hints of luxurious opium places hidden in the slums' (Whitchard, 2007). This dark charm appealed to the English society set looking for exotic delights. Bus trips ferried eager tourists to gawk at Chinamen in Limehouse. Shosho represents the promise of that Oriental excess. Miscegenation threatened the hierarchical structure of race upon which colonial rule was based.

It is Valentine who initiates the ethnic dragging of Shosho, declaring that she needs a Chinese costume to dance in. Therein the chinoiserie drag stage is set, through the exoticization and eroticization of Oriental femininity. Shosho convinces Valentine that the only place to buy an authentic Chinese costume is in Limehouse, except the Chinese costume Shosho chooses is reminiscent of a Thai or Myanmar dance costume. When Valentine asks her to try it on for him, she refuses him the pleasure and instead tells Jim, her Chinese boyfriend, to put it on. Valentine looks uncomfortable by the gender-bending charade, while Jim looks bored. Herein, this campy setup of gender and ethnicity is conflated to draw attention to the masquerade. In this swift turn of the narrative, Shosho highlights that Valentine's erotic pleasure has nothing to do with gender, but the imagined geography of race. Judith Butler theorized that drag acts can expose the performativity of sex and gender. Likewise, by lampooning ethnic stereotypes through estrangement and denaturalization, the performativity of race contests its mimetic logic (Sieg, 2009). In *Piccadilly*, Shosho and Valentine's interracial desire is challenged and damned. In the denouement the two Chinese characters Shosho and Jim die and Valentine is exonerated, ultimately restoring the (white) status quo.

In *Deconstructing Zoe* (2016), Zoe employs similar yellow yellowfacing tactics as Wong in *Piccadilly*. Utilizing the Butterfly myth, Zoe plays on the exoticization of Oriental femininity. The Butterfly myth is an enduring Western fantasy and construct, which evokes and reinforces the idea of the East as passive, submissive and childlike. This myth has been renewed throughout colonialism and postcolonialism. It has fascinated Italian, French and American writers, performers and audiences in equal measures. In France, the semi-autobiographical novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (Loti, 1888) describes the temporary 'marriage' between a French naval officer and Chrysanthème, a Japanese geisha. Loti's novel helped shape the way the West sees the East and is still in print today. In Italy, Puccini created the three-act opera *Madama Butterfly* (1904), which is based on Loti's novel. The French naval officer has been replaced by a US naval officer. In 1989, the myth was revived

in *Miss Saigon*, relocating the story to Vietnam. The romance this time revolves around an American GI and a Vietnamese bargirl. The plot for each follows the same formula: a Western man journeys to East Asia, where he indulges his vision of the East by ‘marrying’ a local woman. The Western lover leaves the Asian woman, and she takes her own life in a final act of loyalty to him. In the Butterfly myth, the East is portrayed as a feminized, infantized, aesthetic construct (Wisenthal, 2006: 5), while the West is masculine and powerful. The central female character embodies the Western fantasy of the Orient as submissive, passive and childlike. In *Madame Chrysanthème*, the narrator imagines the real Japan as Japanoiserie, which he ‘already knew in the paintings of lacquer and porcelains. It is so an exact a representation’ (Wisenthal, 2006: 8).

In 1988, David Henry Hwang’s play *M. Butterfly* opened on Broadway. The play was loosely based on the relationship between the French diplomat Bernard Boursicot and Beijing opera singer Shi Pei Pu. Boursicot had a twenty-year affair with his male lover, believing he was a woman who bore him a child. The play was a critique of the Butterfly myth, and was made into a feature film in 1993 by Cronenberg. *M. Butterfly* (1988) is a play within a play, which foregrounds the act of a stage performance. By performing multiple versions of Butterfly in *Deconstructing Zoe*, Zoe creates a construct within a construct, queering ideas of gender and ethnicity. In the documentary, Zoe performs two versions of the Butterfly myth. In the first, she is ‘Butterfly’, playing on chinoiserie drag. Ebonknee asks Zoe, ‘So do you think you play the submissive Butterfly?’ (*Deconstructing Zoe*, 2016) to which she replies, ‘I think I project this image of a delicate oriental butterfly.’ Zoe has explored this exotification of race in the stage play *An Occasional Orchid* (1996), which is restaged in the documentary. Together with the director Ivan Heng, they questioned why the orchid was prized as an exotic plant in the West, when in East Asia it was as commonplace as a rose. In *Deconstructing Zoe*, she shares her thoughts: ‘The orchid is an exotification of a race or culture which is foreign to someone. I feel as Zoe there’s this exotification of myself’ (Zoe, in *Deconstructing Zoe*, 2016). Just like the narrator in *Madame Chrysanthème* (Loti, 1888), who imagines the real Japan as japanoiserie, what people choose to see in Zoe is chinoiserie – an idea of the East caught in a lacquered screen or a willow-pattern plate. In this version of Zoe’s Butterfly, like chinoiserie, she is a pure invention.

Ray Yeung’s short film *A Bridge to The Past* (1994) similarly uses racial masquerade and mimesis in the vein of chinoiserie drag. The film is billed as a stylized drama, incorporating elements of Peking opera (*sic*) and martial arts, which examine the beliefs underlying the Chinese Hungry Ghost Festival. In the vein of a docudrama, Yeung deliberately creates a pastiche, then a satire of the ‘exoticized Oriental image’ (Yeung, 2014). Costume and stylized acting are used in a deliberate attempt to add an other-worldly feeling to the setting and story. This, together with the presence of Mu Lan and mystical goddess Guan Yin, both in drag, is how Yeung lampoons the tropes of Orientalism. *A Bridge to the Past* uses both mimetic and masquerade as modes of address in order to usurp the hegemonic gaze. The opening scene of *A Bridge to the Past* immediately sets up the tropes of exoticness and mystery. Colette Koo, playing the part of the ghost mother of an older Chinese woman, is dressed in period cheongsam, holding a lantern and walking with trepidation towards an ornate wooden door.⁴ Epic music, along with dry ice and red lighting, create a setting reminiscent of the films of

the so-called Fifth Generation of Chinese filmmakers, such as Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou. They set their stories in the past, often evoking a bygone era seen through the dramatic lens of sweeping vistas and a bold palette, serving to ‘remythify Chinese culture and history’ (Zhang, 2004: 237). Indeed, such films provided inspiration for neo-chinoiserie in contemporary fashion.⁵ The opening scene in Yeung’s film seems to reinforce the persistent configurations of colonial Other. But Yeung transforms the narrative. Colette Koo’s performance as the ghost mother, and later as Mu Lan, employs ethnic drag using mimicry and mimesis as masquerade. Indeed, Koo’s character employs ‘sly civility’ to complicate the reading of the docudrama.⁶ In the opening, Koo plays the role of presenter, leading spectators through the story, teaching them about the Hungry Ghost Festival. In period cheongsam with hair in a demure bun, her bodily presentation is ‘Oriental’, but she speaks in English received pronunciation.⁷ This configuration of bodily Oriental/English demeanour calls to mind V. S. Naipaul’s *mimic-men* (1967) and Homi Bhabha’s concept of colonial mimicry (Bhabha, 1994), where, in the discourse of post-Enlightenment English colonialism, the subject is Asian ‘in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, morals and intellect’ (Macaulay, in Bhabha, 1994: 87). Bhabha argues that mimicry not only destroys the colonized person but also that ‘the discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference’ (Bhabha, 1994: 86). While Koo’s ghost mother appears to uphold the image of ‘colonial mimicry’ and recalls the mimetic logic of racial identity by presenting a ‘naturalistic’ performance of race, other key characters in the docudrama throw this reading into doubt. In particular, the role of Chung played by Chowee Leow as a comic coolie Chinaman, played to camp excess, serves as a ‘critical undoing of mimesis’ (Sieg, 2009: 228). Chung fellating a saveloy sausage to a tune reminiscent of the breathless love ballad *Je t’aime* puts into check any misreading of this deliberate attempt at defamiliarization via excess. The ghost mother presenter tells Chung, ‘It’s a British delicacy ... is it nice?’ as he works the saveloy suggestively in and out of his mouth.

Zoe grew up in Malaysia, a former British colony, and she perhaps has experienced first-hand the legacy of colonial rhetoric. By masquerading as the Oriental Other, Zoe produces a similar effect as Koo’s ghost mother in Yeung’s film – that of mimicry. Zoe performs the enduring imperialist narrative of the Oriental woman with ‘sly civility’. Bhabha hints at how mimicry can play a subversive role in postcolonial discourse (Bhabha, 1994), where the ‘colonized subject’ is able to shift and leak out of the constraints imposed on them. In *Deconstructing Zoe*, theatremaker and director Ivan Heng comments that Zoe plays the stereotype of the Oriental woman, ‘playfully, knowingly, playing a game’ (Heng, in *Deconstructing Zoe*, 2016). In acknowledgement of this, Zoe, proclaims she is a construct. This is not to say that Zoe is not her authentic self; rather, it is an acknowledgement that identity is produced and achieved and that it is not innate; rather, it is negotiated between people and relationships (Lawler, 2008). Therefore, for Zoe, taking ownership of that construct renders her visible. Zoe declares:

[I]t’s fascinating for me when I walk down the street as a guy – how people perceive you as an Asian man and how that is different when you walk down the street as an Asian woman. You know you’ve got this energy and get looks and you

know why that is? It's this exotification, because I'm this exotic Asian woman – this feminine creature which this big Western man wants to protect. The orchid represents this exoticness for me. (Zoe, in *Deconstructing Zoe*, 2016)

However, the success of Zoe's chinoiserie drag is dependent on Western perception. This is explained by Zoe's observation that when she is in England, people notice her race first, then her gender. While, back in Malaysia, it is her gender that people notice first and that the pass is less successful. Neil in *Deconstructing Zoe* comments that his idea of drag conjures up the idea of stage drag and that he does not see Zoe as drag, rather as transgender. However, Ebonknee tells Zoe that she sees her as glam drag. Rusty Barrett explains, 'the goal of glam drag is to produce an outward appearance indistinguishable from that of a "real" woman' (Barrett, 2017: 38).

The second version of Zoe's Butterfly is more nuanced. In this rendition, Zoe uses *M. Butterfly* to empower herself. In *Deconstructing Zoe* (2016), Zoe describes how she was a dancer in London's West End version of *M. Butterfly* (1988). Acting and performing in Hwang's play night after night must have left an impression on the young Zoe. Wearing a butterfly-themed shirt and sitting on the chaise longue Zoe says, 'The East has always been seen as something feminine, mystical [...] The West has always been seen as very masculine, very powerful, you know. And I think there is always this urge for the West to colonize the East because the woman needs to be protected' (Zoe, in *Deconstructing Zoe*, 2016).

This echo's Song's speech in *M. Butterfly*: 'As soon as a Western man comes into contact with the East – he's already confused. The West has sort of an international rape mentality towards the East [...] The West thinks of itself as masculine – big guns, big industry, big money – so the East is feminine – weak, delicate poor [...]' (Hwang, 1988: 83).

Elsewhere, Zoe tells Ebonknee, 'When I'm Zoe I think I project this image of a delicate oriental butterfly, because that in itself is powerful. But I think that's only powerful because I'm playing it from an Asian male perspective.'

Zoe's words are almost a direct quotation from *M. Butterfly* (1988) in the scene where Song reveals to Chin the nature of her power over Gallimard:

Song Miss Chin, why in Peking opera are women roles played by men?

Chin I don't know, maybe a reactionary element of male –

Song No (*Beat*) Because only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act.

Lai Sai Acón Chan, in her analysis of this interaction in *M. Butterfly*, offers this insight: 'Song's strategy is playing the master's game and pretending to be what they think he is.' Within the logic of *M. Butterfly*, Hwang's commentary is that Asian men used their perceived femininity as a ploy to empower the subaltern (Lai, 2014: 14). In Sherrill Grace's reading, Gallimard (representative of the West), disappears further into his own fantasy, a 'vision of the Orient', until he becomes Butterfly, 'a woman created by a man' (Grace, 2006: 141).

As a film-maker of Chinese heritage, I have long been interested in exploring through my films how identity is fashioned through performance, and whether in the context of my projects what Butler says of gender can be said of race. In making my documentary, *Deconstructing Zoe* (2016), I investigated whether race can be performative, and whether we

act out in ways that consolidate an impression of what it is to be Chinese (Fong, 2018).

To return to Zoe speeding down the Westway as a Chinese woman: this vivid image points to the power Zoe believes she is able to harness as an East Asian woman. She contrasts this image with the invisibility she has as a Chinese man in the West, who is metaphorically castrated of his power. By playing with an essentialized Western image of the Orientalized other, Zoe is able to destabilize the hegemonic order. Indeed it is her submission to the essentialized idea of Orientalized woman which helps her consolidate her power as an Oriental man. Zoe's refusal to conform to a fixed uniform racialized gendered identity enables her to shape her self-hood, creating manifold identities of contestation. By employing chinoiserie drag acts, Zoe makes her invisible self visible in the West.

Notes

Orphan of Zhao, RSC, 2012; *In the Depth of Dead Love*, Print Room, 2017; *Miss Saigon*, 2017–18, UK; *Sherlock Holmes*, *The Blind Banker*, BBC, 2010; *No Escape*, 2015, Dir. John Erick Dowdle.

See Fenton (2012).

A series of events and conferences to stimulate thought-provoking ideas and discussion.

Cheongsam is a traditional Chinese dress.

China: Through the Looking Glass exhibition 2015 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, focusing on the impact of Chinese design on Western fashion over the centuries. For a critique of the exhibition, see Givhan (2015).

See Bhabha (1994: 99), 'Refusal to satisfy the colonizer's narrative demand'. Or a secretive means to defy the colonizing dominance while upholding a sense of civility.

Standard English pronunciation based on the educated speech of southern England.

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