



شبكة المعلومات الجامعية  
التوثيق الإلكتروني والميكرو فيلم

# بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم



**HANAA ALY**



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# جامعة عين شمس

## التوثيق الإلكتروني والميكروفيلم

### قسم

نقسم بالله العظيم أن المادة التي تم توثيقها وتسجيلها  
علي هذه الأقراص المدمجة قد أعدت دون أية تغيرات



### يجب أن

تحفظ هذه الأقراص المدمجة بعيدا عن الغبار



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# **Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in Selected Plays by David Henry Hwang**

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## Abbreviations

*Chinglish*

David Henry Hwang

*FOB* "Fresh of the Boat"

*Golden Child*

Henry Yuan Hwang

*M. Butterfly*

Name Withheld on Advice of Counsel

*Yellow Face*

The University of California, Los Angeles

*Ching*

DHH

*FOB*

*GC*

HYH

*MB*

NWOAOC

*YF*

UCLA

# Chapter One

## Introduction

America is the home of a variety of ethnic groups who came from different parts of the world to work and live there. All the migrants have distinctive background or ethnicity that concerns a particular culture. In *Theory of American Ethnicity*, Werner Sollors confirms that "American culture is full of examples of the fusion of ethnicity and otherness"(22). America is a multiethnic and multicultural society since it helped to pull different people from different cultures to create some national cultures. Thus, different cultures such as Irish, Spanish, Italian, Black and Asian co-existed together in the American society. These different cultures interacted with each other or with the mainstream culture. This interaction took forms of assimilation, acculturation and in some other times, it took a deculturation form; some migrants separate themselves from the mainstream society and struggle to keep their own cultural heritage suffering a cultural conflict. On the other hand, other migrants try assimilation by acquiring the traits of the new culture. In "Being Asian American: Identity, Cultural Constructs, and Stereotypes Perception", both Oyserman and Sakamoto state that "assimilation was assumed to be the goal attained by all who were willing to abandon allegiance to their culture of origin and take on the American characteristics of hard work and individuality based on striving achievements"(436). Those who chose the path of assimilation should view themselves as being part of the mainstream society. Others exert much effort to share both cultures adopting what is known as acculturation. Acculturation depends on two dimensions, namely the migrants' willingness to be mainstreamed or accepted by the host culture and the complex process of retaining all or some of the characteristics of their cultural heritage. Ethnic group members can be either accepted or marginalized by the mainstream culture. In "Cultural Identity and its assessment", Susham Gupta and Dinesh Bhugra comment that "inclusion and acceptance by the new culture depends on a range of socio-economic factors but, in most societies, those farthest from the color/ or culture of the majority group are often the most marginalized"(333).

Historically, although the presence of Asians in America dates back to the sixteenth century, Josephine Lee in *Performing Asian American* assures that "the second half of the nineteenth century saw the first major wave of Asian immigration to the



United States"(1). She also adds that Asian immigrants are "attracted by the economic opportunities provided by the California gold rush and westward development and spurred by civil unrest and famine in China"(2). Asian immigrants came to work first in gold mines during the gold rush, sugarcane plantation in Hawaii and later on the transcontinental railroad construction. They excelled white workers because of their skills as well as being the cheapest kind of laborers. Some supported the continuous flow of Asian immigrants to America because of the economic value they have while others felt threatened by their increasing numbers. In *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, David Krasner states that "after the exhaustion of gold rush and the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 the excess laborers in the west led to anti-Chinese xenophobia, culminating in the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882"(303). In order to control their increasing numbers, strict procedures were taken such as preventing the wives of Chinese laborers from entering America. In addition, numerous laws which aim at minimizing the number of Asian immigrants were passed. Lee states that Asian immigrants' new lives "were complicated by the acts of violence and institutionalized discrimination"(2). In her book *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe confirms that the conditions of Asian immigrants in America have become worse because of passing "immigration exclusion acts and laws against naturalization in 1882, 1924, and 1934"(5).

A series of laws were passed to bar entry of Asian immigrants to America. The first of these acts was the Page Law of 1875 which barred entry to different ethnicities of Asian immigrants; Chinese, Japanese and Mongolians. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act suspended immigration of laborers for ten years and in 1892, this law was renewed for another ten years demanding all Chinese immigrants to register. In 1902, the law was not only renewed for another ten years but also the police raided Chinatowns in major American cities arresting those who have not registered yet. In 1924, the Immigration Act prohibited not only Asians but also other immigrants from entering America. In search for security and safety and in order to provide themselves with mutual help to resist oppression, early Asian immigrants established organizations and associations that played the role of community centers. The first of these associations was formed in San Francisco in 1851 and in the following year, the first formal association which was called Zhonghua Hurguan was formed to unite smaller Chinese groups. This association

later on acquired the nickname "Chinese Six Companies". Other Asian ethnic groups formed similar organizations such as the Japanese Association of America in 1908, the Korean National Association "KNA" in 1909, the Sikh temple that served as the Indian community in 1912, and the Fraternal Organization of the Filipinos in 1921. These associations provided different kinds of social activities and services such as giving money loans, sending money and letters to China as well as other Asian countries, building altars and temples for worship, and paying much care for the sick and the needy. For mutual benefit, these smaller ethnic groups united together to form coalitions. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Asian immigrants formed their own towns in regions of major American cities such as Chinatown in San Francisco and Little Tokyo in Los Angeles.

Asian immigrants rejected and resisted these exclusion laws by all possible means. They fought these laws in numerous courts and the Chinese Six Companies hired a group of lawyers to defend the rights of its members. They held continuous demonstrations and strikes until they received treatment equal to other immigrants in 1965. This equal treatment made them build their own schools, churches and temples where they taught their children not only their cultural heritage but also Western ways of living. The Chinese Six Companies opened the first Chinese language school in San Francisco in 1884. During the first half of the twentieth century and with the increase of the number of American-born Asians who are known as the second generation Asians, their fathers insisted on teaching them the traditional values they brought from Asia as well as seeing them accepted and assimilated into American culture. The second generation Asians now had the right to attend public schools and enjoyed other privileges yet they were denied full participation because of racial discrimination.

In America, Asian culture developed to the extent that Asians have maintained their separate identity and have retained their sense of worth in the midst of a multiethnic and hostile society. If a group of people belongs to a specific ethnic group, it becomes a necessity for the members of this group to learn about their background, culture and perception as a part of that particular ethnicity. In their study entitled "Being Asian American", Oyserman and Sakamoto confirm that Asian American ethnic identity is constructed upon the interdependence and group connectedness that are assumed to be the cultural hallmarks of Asian Americans' cultural heritage. They say, "Asian American

ethnic identity focused on four content domains: family relatedness, pride in heritage-connectedness to traditions, awareness of discrimination-barriers, and achievement as integral to group membership"(438). In *Beyond Ethnicity*, Werner Sollors confirms that ethnicity as a term is interrelated with other literary terms such as race, imperialism, class, intermarriage, etc. He states, "terms like ethnicity, melting pot, intermarriage, regionalism, and generation are all used in a dazzling variety of elusive ways"(5). Although ethnicity as a term is often mixed with race in critical discussions, it is not the same as race and it has its own history of meaning and assumptions. In *Race and Ethnicity in America*, John Iceland states that although race and ethnicity are often used interchangeably in public conversations because of some factors such as increasing intermarriage and importance of group differences, "ethnicity refers to a group of people who are differentiated by *culture* rather than by perceived physical or genetic differences central to notions of race"(14). Ethnicity as a discourse is considered as an inherited status based on the society in which one lives. In his search for its first usage, Sollors in *Beyond Ethnicity* states that he found " the apparently first occurrences of ethnicity in W. Lloyd Warner's *Yankee City Series*, the well-known, five volume community study of Newburyport, Massachusetts, which began to appear in 1941"( 23).

An ethnic group is a social group that can be defined by sharing a distinctive cultural heritage, ancestry, religion, history, homeland, language or dialect. Consequently, an ethnic group can be identified as a group with specific cultural traits. One ethnic group is different from another. Ethnic group members feel a sense of "in group identity" that sets them apart from others. The word "ethnic" has been derived from the Greek word "Ethos" which means nation or people. In *Ethnic Stratifications*, Kwan and Shibutani assure that the word ethnic has the same meaning of the German word "volk" which refers to people. They see that an ethnic group consists of a "people who conceive themselves as being of a kind. They are united by emotional bonds and concerned with the preservation of their type: they speak the same language and share a common cultural heritage"(17). Kwan's and Shibutani's definition focuses on the psychological and cultural aspects of ethnicity. Concerning cultural aspect, ethnic group members have a sense of belonging and feel at home within their own group where they share the belief that has a common descent and a history of common origin. Asian-American ethnic group's presence in America has been strongly felt since the beginnings

of the nation and their cultural, social, economic and political contributions have not been left unnoticed.

As any literary theory, modern ethnicity theory has witnessed many major waves. The first wave concentrates on the biological and social Darwinist views of race that were predominant at the turn of the last century. Subsequent theorists have not only focused on the questions of immigration and cultural assimilation but also debated the issues of whether and to what extent ethnic groups maintain their distinctive traits particularly with respect to second and third generation Americans. Speaking on Asian American immigration history, George Sanchez gives a dynamic definition to ethnicity which is based on practices and experiences of immigrants to America and does not concentrate on the fixed set of customs they brought from their mother country. He considers ethnicity as a collective identity and an active process. He says that ethnicity "was not a fixed set of customs surviving from life in Mexico, but rather a collective identity that emerged from daily experience in the United States"(11). According to Sanchez's definition, ethnicity arose through elements such as interaction, dialogue and sometimes debate between immigrants and the larger cultural world. Ethnicity has passed through processes of recreation over generations and these processes help produce a different identity. This different identity has its own characteristics which are different from those of an immigrant identity. Processes of recreation can be carried out through time and across space. According to Erdmans, "Ethnic identities are created and recreated in two ways: through time, as second and subsequent generations reinterpreted their collective identity in specific historical context, and across space, as immigrants carry culture from one place to another"( 176).

Sanchez's definition is based on the relationship of different ethnicities living in America and this relationship is based on two relatively neutral terms; descent and consent. He states that "consent and descent are two terms which allow me to approach and question the whole maze of American ethnicity and culture"(6). Descent relations are the relations that are based on blood (father, mother, brother, sister, aunt, etc.) or nature (natural child, illegitimate child, natural mother, etc.). "Descent relations are those defined by anthropologists as relations of substance (by blood or nature)"(6) whereas consent relations are governed by law and similar practices such as husband, wife, and marriage. He states that "Consent relations describe those of law and marriage"(6).

Concerning the relations of blood and law, in his study entitled "Theory of American Ethnicity", Werner Sollors states that men can change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religions, their philosophies, to greater or lesser extent but they cannot change their grandfathers. Grandfathers are imagined as blood whereas wives are viewed as law (271). Each of the two terms has its own language; "descent language emphasizes our positions as heirs, our hereditary qualities, liabilities, and entitlements"(Sanchez 6). The language of consent has a different task as Sanchez points out that "Consent language stresses our abilities as mature free agents and architects of our fates to choose our spouses, our destinies and our political systems"(6).

According to Sanchez, ethnic literary works should be reread and re-explained because they have different tasks. He confirms that "works of ethnic literature- written by, about, or for persons who perceived themselves, or were perceived by others, as members of ethnic groups- may thus be reread not only as expressions of mediations between cultures but also as a handbook of socialization into the code of Americanness"(7). This idea was confirmed by Oscar Handlin when he was going to write about the immigrants' history in America. He states, "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history"(3). Even Caroline Ware in her book, *The Cultural Approach to History*, argues for a broad ethnic explanation and interpretation of America. She asserts that "Immigrants and the children of immigrants are the American people. Their culture is the American culture, not merely a contributor to American culture"(83). Researchers in the field of Asian American studies have emphasized the fluidity of Asian American identity demonstrating how Asian ethnic groups negotiate identity through dynamic interaction within or outside their communities.

Culture consists of the set of beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors, and dress considered normative for a particular group within a dominant culture. There are different factors that constitute Cultural Identity such as race, religion, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and familial identities, and other similar factors. In his book *Literary Theory Today*, Louis Tyson gives a practical definition of culture as it "is a collection of interactive cultures, each of which is growing and changing, each of which is constituted at any given moment in time by the interaction of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, occupation, and similar factors that contribute

to the experience of its members "(296). Some other factors such as national, social, and personal identity can also contribute to one's cultural identity. Cultural identity is not only the characteristics of the individual but also of the culturally identical group of members sharing the same cultural identity.

Some critics such as Peter Calvert define culture according to people's behavior within a society. He defines it as "the entire pattern of behavior of a given society"(78). Meanwhile others such as Milton Gordon assert man's heritage, he defines it as a process that "refers to the social heritage of man, the ways of acting and the ways of doing things which are passed down from one generation to the next, not by formal and informal methods of teachings and demonstrations"(32).The idea of considering culture as a social heredity is confirmed by Williams Jr. who defines it as "the total legacy of the past human behavior effective in the past and represents the accumulation through generations, artifacts, knowledge, beliefs, and values by which men deal with their world"(27). For Williams, an ethnic group is any subgroup within a larger society which is considered a custodian of cultural traits.

For achieving the integration of any nation, perspectives such as politics, economics, and sociology must remain inseparable domains that cannot be ignored. John R. Howard assures that political, social and economic circumstances which determine the status of any minority group are essential factors. Such circumstances are encountered by minor members while trying to prove their cultural identity. He says:

Members of minority groups experience stigma. In other words, irrespective of the individual's attributes or behavior he is subject to stigma by virtue of his group identity. This stigma manifests itself in terms of social exclusion, economic oppression and political powerlessness. Minority group status implies at least these three conditions (3).

Madan Sarup defines identity as a "construction, a consequence of process of interaction between people, institutions and practices"(11). He also adds that, "Because the range of human behavior is so wide, groups maintain boundaries to limit the types of behavior within a defined cultural identity"(11).This definition implies two interacting modes of identity: an individual mode and a society mode. Individual mode is about self-

perception and recognition of one self as a separate entity. Concerning the social mode of identity, people bear the characteristics and features of the society they live in. There is an inseparable connection between the individuals and the society they live in, so each society casts certain qualities on its members.

Identity of any minor group member should be talked through this member's struggle to achieve a social rank within his ethnic group as well as the mainstream society. While studying ethnic groups in America, Stephen Steinberg confirms that minor group members are observed through "art, literature, and politics they sought to promote ethnic pride and solidarity, and to affirm their right to a separate identity within the framework of a pluralist nation"(7). Thus, Cultural Identity is formed by a compromise of the characteristics of both the individuals and their societies. In "A Psychology of Immigrants", Cultural identity as a compound term is defined by J. W. Berry as "a complex set of beliefs and attitudes that people have about themselves in relation to their cultural group membership; usually these come to the fore when people are in contact with another culture, rather than [when] they live in a single culture"(6). In tackling the Asian American cultural identity, the characteristics and features of both individuals and society must be taken into consideration. Asian-Americans should cooperate with each other and interact in the society where they live while trying to maintain their cultural identity.

In order to achieve cultural identity, there must be internal and external connections and relationships among the Asian Americans themselves. By internal connection, it means that they must have readiness and aptitude to carry a sense of belonging towards their own ethnic group. External connection refers to social behaviors and practices such as the use of mother tongue, ethnic group membership and adhering to customs and traditions. These two types of connections not only separate the characteristics and traits of Asian Americans from the mainstream society of America but also present a unified structure where cooperation among its members and loyalty to their ethnic group are apparently reflected. Asian Americans were exposed to different kinds of difficulties and hardships in order to prove their individual existence in the quest for getting not only an individual identity but also a collective identity for the whole group. In his book *Ethnic America*, Sowell summarizes how Asian Americans are