
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Racial Identity: A Study of the Dramatic Arts in David Henry Hwang's *Yellow Face*

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| ABSTRACT

After the immediate success of *M. Butterfly* by Chinese American playwright David Henry Hwang, *Yellow Face* is Hwang's other play that carries forward innovation in terms of theatricality and delivers an ideal of harmonious intercultural relationships and multicultural integration. *Yellow Face* is a semi-autobiographical Pirandellian comedy built out of a trio of Hwang and his father's real-life experiences in an attempt to blur the line between reality and fictionality, thus exposing the ambiguity and penetrability of boundaries. This article analyzes the Alienation-Effect of the structure, acting and stage setting in *Yellow Face* to probe into how, by means of A-Effect, Hwang deconstructs the essentialist notion of race and reveals the possibility of reconstructing a fluid identity.

| KEYWORDS

David Henry Hwang; *Yellow Face*; Alienation-Effect; fluid identity

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

From the 1960s onwards, diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity have become the keywords that characterize American theatre. Political theatre, black theatre, women's theatre and Chicano theatre work together to redefine the center and negotiate alternative spaces for Others to make their voices heard. Asian American theatre, which has long been marginalized, also plays an indispensable part in destabilizing the center and challenging the stereotyped images of Asians by staging such issues as race, gender and identity politics. Among the contributors to the development of Asian American theatre, Chinese American playwright David Henry Hwang has come into prominence as the first Asian American Tony Award-winner because of his stunning play *M. Butterfly* (1988). Thematically, Hwang shows great concern about race-related issues, such as the dilemma and trauma minority groups living in America undertake in striving for cultural identity. Theatrically, as an experimental postmodern playwright, Hwang spares no effort to make innovations in form. He employs unrealistic techniques to challenge the conventions of realistic drama so as to subvert racialized stereotypes and fixed identities. For him, form is in the service of content. As Esther Kim Lee (2015) insists, Hwang "emphasizes the form of theatre", and "his style of theatre is formalist, in that the story of each play is intimately linked to its form" (p. 6). Among his major works, *Yellow Face* (2007) is a play illustrating the perfect collaboration of form and content. It received a 2008 OBIE Award for Playwriting and was a finalist for the 2008 Pulitzer Prize, representing another peak in Hwang's career after a lapse of about twenty years. By a mix of fact and fiction in the style of stage mockumentary, *Yellow Face* is a two-act play built out of a trio of real-life events around a character based on Hwang himself called DHH, who inadvertently casts a white actor as the Asian lead in his play *Face Value*, and whose father HYH is dragged into the racially motivated federal investigations along with a Chinese American nuclear scientist Wen Ho Lee and other Asian Americans. Set primarily on Broadway from 1990 to the present, the play, in an ironic manner, once again reveals the playwright's reflections on the issue of race and identity.

In contrast to the overwhelming critical response to *M. Butterfly*, *Yellow Face* generally receives not enough attention from critics and scholars. The existing criticism can be roughly divided into two categories: thematic and theatrical studies. The first group comprises the scholarship, which approaches the play by investigating the issue of identity. By employing the theory of ethnic performativity, Zhang Qiumei (2018) stated in her article that Hwang reveals the absurdity of the label "Asian Americans" and highlights the fluidity of identities. Besides, Josephine Lee (2019), under the historical and contemporary contexts, examined yellowface performance in Hwang's *Yellow Face* and Lloyd Suh's *Charles Francis Chan Jr.'s Exotic Oriental Murder Mystery* to critique the legacies of yellowface representation and prompt further reflection on how Asian American identities are shaped by both political radicalism and "model minority" conformity. He believed these plays re-appropriate yellowface to comment on the changing nature of racial categories. What's more, Fulvia Sarnelli (2022) explored issues of representation, representativity, and access to narratives of identity choice in *Yellow Face* to discuss the correlation between Asian American subjectivity and exemplarity. Borrowing David L. Eng and Shinhee Han's concept of racial melancholia, she concluded the "melancholic condition" as a political strategy for building communities within and beyond racial, class, and national boundaries (Sarnelli, 2022, p. 46).

The second group is characterized by the interpretations of Hwang's dramatic devices in the play. The article by Qi Yaping (2019) explores Hwang's postmodern dramatic techniques in *Yellow Face*. It argues that the play deploys such devices as nonlinear narrative, metadramatic form and hybrid stage to expose the performative nature of race. Another important article, under the authorship of William C. Boles (2019), centers on *Yellow Face's* relation with documentary theatre. Boles believed that Hwang, by blending fact with fiction, draws on documentary theatre format to provoke the audience's engagement with ethnic persecutions.

In addition, there are two influential monographs which deserve attention: William C. Boles's *Understanding David Henry Hwang* (2013) and Esther Kim Lee's *The Theatre of David Henry Hwang* (2015). The former thoroughly analyzes Hwang's nine plays, with a main focus on their critical reception and thematic implications. The latter pays attention to Hwang's production history and theatrical aesthetics. In the book, Lee looks into the form and style of Hwang's plays, tracing non-verbal, visual stage elements and movements and emphasizing Hwang's dramatic tactic of blending xiqu with Western theatre. Yet, both Boles and Lee do not probe the connection between Hwang's theatrical aesthetics and his dramatic concerns.

In light of the existing scanty criticism of *Yellow Face*, this article attempts to provide a complementary study on the analysis of the play's theatricality and its relation with Hwang's thematic concerns. It focuses on the Alienation-Effect created in the structure, acting and stage setting, aiming at finding out how, by means of A-Effect, Hwang deconstructs the homogeneity of established racial discourse and reconstructs a notion of racial identity characterized by fluidity so as to advocate an ideal world of multicultural integration.

Verfremdung, also known as Alienation-Effect, is a core concept of epic theatre put forward by German playwright and theatre director Bertolt Brecht, running counter to Aristotle's age-old tradition of "dramatic theatre". According to Brecht, the Aristotelian concept of drama, which emphasizes catharsis by terror and pity, is to be dispensed with. He is opposed to a kind of theatre that creates illusion and beguiles the audience into believing that what is happening before their eyes is true. His concept of Alienation-Effect instead prevents "the audience from losing itself completely in character and lead the audience to be a consciously critical observer" (Brown, 1991, p. 34). In other words, A-Effect is used to alienate and distance the audience from what they have been familiar with to think objectively about the play, to reflect on its argument, to understand it, and to draw conclusions. David Henry Hwang does not consider himself "a Brechtian" (Hwang, DiGaetani, 1989, p. 153). However, those who are acquainted with Brecht's theatrical theories can easily notice the trace of Brecht's techniques in Hwang's play. Literally speaking, it is Brecht's A-Effect that creates such a befitting artistic form to highlight the theme of subversion and deconstruction.

2. The Structure: Deconstructing the Essentialist View of Race

Yellow Face is a two-act play with a loose and fragmented structure arranged in the form of a collage to disrupt the linear development of the plot. The main narrative line is intermittent, often interspersed with public documents, interviews, media statements, emails, flashbacks, and "play within play", showing non-linear narrative characteristics. The scenarios in collage create a fluid space for characters to cross temporal and spatial confines freely, rendering the linear temporality interrupted and spatial boundaries blurred. The incoherent plot and non-linear narrative echo Brecht's suggestion of a discontinuous and open structure in epic theatre, which helps to prevent strong emotional resonance and produce an Alienation-Effect that can evoke the rational thinking of the audience.

To be more specific, the play opens with DHH's (initials of David Henry Hwang) reading of the first e-mail sent by Marcus in 2006, a Caucasian actor who passes for Asians to play Asian roles in the theatre. Then it unfolds in the way of memories and flashbacks to the 1990s when DHH, both a playwright and director, recalls how he mistakenly casts a white actor as Asian for the lead in his play *Face Value* (1993) after his involvement in the protest against the casting controversy aroused by the musical *Miss Saigon* where an Asian role is played by the white. In the second act, the play focuses on the story of DHH's father HYH (initials of Henry

Yuan Hwang, father of David Henry Hwang), who is accused of laundering money for the American presidential election. Echoing the opening scene, at the ending one, DHH receives another e-mail from Marcus, with the time pushed forward to the present. In this way, the play is framed with Marcus's first and last emails sent to DHH, while the sandwiched part is related via the narrative device of flashback. The discourse time is backward, but the story time moves forward. As Hwang explains in an interview, *Yellow Face* is "a memoir—a kind of unreliable memoir" (Hoo, 2014). The unreliability lies in that the play is filled with fragmented memories, with places of narration and scenarios changing suddenly from one to another, breaking the principles of the classical unities. For example, the play jumps from the scene of DHH reading an e-mail in 2006 to the scene of *Miss Saigon's* casting dispute in 1990 with an inserted retrospective narrative of a scene of the awards ceremony in 1988 announcing David Henry Hwang's winning the Tony Award for Best Play. Also, when DHH's play *Face Value* flops, he drunkenly calls Margaret Fung to ask for a Justice in Action Award as compensation. Of a sudden, the scene shifts to the present, with Marcus reading another e-mail to DHH about his trip to a Dong village in Guizhou, China. Just as the phone rings, the scene once again goes back to the 1990s. For a moment, DHH and HYH talk about the banking affairs on the phone, and the next moment they present at the Far East National Bank board meeting. When the meeting comes to an end, the ensemble of the meeting becomes actors taking a curtain call from the play *The King and I*, where Marcus plays the King, and DHH becomes an audience watching the play. To some degree, the places of narration and scenarios change without pause, connection and logic to cross spatial-temporal confines in an attempt to disrupt the chronological sequence of time and the linear progression of events, thus challenging the conventions of realistic drama and the normal cognitive frames as well.

Additionally, the fragmented feature of the structure is further enhanced by the embedding of various non-dramatic texts, such as media commentaries, newspaper clippings and critical reviews, which mainly represent the viewpoints of mainstream society. Hwang even creates an anonymous character called the Announcer, who functions to introduce the newspapers, reviewers or critics. Following an e-mail in the opening, the play continues with DHH responding to the critical reviews from Senator John Kerry and playwright Frank Chin. Also, in the scene of DHH writing a letter to Actor's Equity to protest against the musical *Miss Saigon* casting a white actor to play an Asian pimp, newspaper reports from the *New York Times* telling the entire process of casting controversy are interposed in the conversations between characters. What's more, mixed reviews on DHH's play *Face Value* from *Boston Globe*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Boston Phoenix*, *New York Times* and *Theater Week* are projected through the Announcer to discontinue the coherent narrative line. Apart from newspaper clippings and reviews, the play also contains such non-dramatic scenarios as auditions and interviews to disrupt the already fragmented narrative. The audition of Marcus for *Face Value* that creates a "play within play", endows *Yellow Face* with a multi-layer structure of story and performance, which to some extent challenges the traditional relationship between actors and the audience ready for illusion. Under such an unnatural arrangement of splicing leaping scenarios and non-dramatic texts, the A-Effect is therefore achieved. It is hard for the audience to indulge in the emotional atmosphere along a broken narrative line in this loose and intermittent structure. When the plot is frequently interrupted by the use of irregular devices, the rational thinking of the audience is aroused more actively than the affective thinking, leading them to critically ponder on the conveyed messages.

On American stages, there is a fat chance for Asian actors to play positive roles. They are offered only minor roles or even vilified and stereotyped ones like Fu Manchu and Charlie Chen. Even though in some Asian American plays, the white actors just put on the make-up of "yellow face" to enact the Asian roles, with one's eyes "all taped up and everything" (Hwang, 2009, p. 5). Hwang himself is totally aware of the racial discrimination imposed on Asian Americans through the label of "yellow face" created by mainstream society. He understands racial identity as performative, aiming to expose how racial discourses like the characteristics of appearance are (re)produced in a citational chain and thus discipline minority subjects. In *Yellow Face*, DHH strongly opposes the discriminated casting of *Miss Saigon*, bound by the notion of racial authenticity, an essentialist view of identity that stresses the naturalized origin of race and highlights such biological attributes as skin color and blood. But ironically, he casts a Caucasian as the Asian lead in his play. In order to cover up his mistake, he suggests changing the actor's name from Marcus G. Dahlman to Marcus Gee, which sounds more Asian and claims Marcus's Siberian roots as the basis of his fictional Asian identity. Ever since then, Marcus gets more voluntarily involved in the Asian community with his constructed Asian identity and becomes famous by acting as the Asian lead in the play *The King and I*. Through the identity transformation of Marcus, Hwang subverts and deconstructs the otherwise fixed ontological view of race. As Marcus speaks up in the play, "Never let anyone tell you that what you look like is who you are. Those are the limitations we have to fight . . . Especially people who look like me" (p. 39). Asian faces come in a variety of shapes and sizes, just like any other human being, and everyone can choose the identity he wants through will and determination. More importantly, the unconventional fragmented structure questions the certainty of meaning and standardization of the model, thus dissolving the homogeneity of established racial discourses. In this dramatic world of collage, Hwang seems to indicate that racial identity is like dramatic creation, which could be moderately restructured and composed. At the same time, the montage design of the structure can "create distance between the stage and the audience, as well as establish direct communication between the two" (Odom, 2017, p. 203), therefore arousing a socially critical consciousness in the audience to reconsider the taken-for-granted assumptions about race and identity.

3. The Acting: Realizing the Fluidity of Identity

The acting of actors is a very important element in Brecht's dramatic aesthetics. The task of an actor is to show, by his acting, that he is keeping a cool head and oriented towards the purpose of exposing the theatre only as a theatre. As Brecht has said, "The actor must show an event, and he must show himself. He naturally shows the event by showing himself, and he shows himself by showing the event" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 21). Methodologically, in order to act skillfully out of characters, actors are suggested to smoke while acting, play an uncustomary role, turn physical manifestations into verbal descriptions, talk to the audience directly, jump out of the role and plot to give comments or play multiple roles, etc. (Huang, 2002, p. 26). Only by these means can the audience's readiness for empathy and illusion be paralysed, instead encouraged to adopt a sober attitude under the created Alienation-Effect.

In *Yellow Face*, Brechtian acting is fully implemented, most typically including role playing within the role and directly addressing the audience. First of all, role playing within the role or playing multiple roles is a device defined as "when a character for some reason takes on a role that is different from his usual self" (Hornby, 1986, p. 67). By virtue of the fact that some of the characters are actors, they can shift their roles via role-playing games with other characters. In the play, DHH is both a character and playwright-director, while Marcus is a character and an actor. They interact with each other by crossing the boundary between inner play and outer. As a director, DHH tries to help Marcus pass as Asian by changing his name and assigning him a feigned racial identity. As a playwright, he confesses directly to the audience that he has written this play and created the character Marcus, with evidence that Marcus discloses at the end of the play, "you've [DHH's] written about your dad, and yourself, and what happened with that" (p. 71). For Marcus, as an actor, he stages a story of passing as Asian and seeks to play Asian roles, such as King of Siam in *The King and I*. However, he is like one of DHH's friends offstage, writing emails to him and talking with him about theatre-making and playwriting. He is conscious of the fact that he is a character created by DHH. Meanwhile, both of them, as characters, enact a play in the form of a mock stage documentary. By placing DHH and Marcus in a director-actor and playwright-character relationship and showing their consciousness and knowledge of their role playing within the role, Hwang makes the audience aware of the fictionality of the stage and the estrangement created by role playing. What is worth further attention is that Marcus's taking on the feigned racial identity from involuntariness to willingness in his role playing testifies to the notion that race is performatively (re)produced and racial identity is fluid. Although initially Marcus's role playing is externally driven by DHH to cover up the mistake, he gradually and willingly accepts his new racial identity and tries to identify himself as Asian, feeling that he finally finds "a home" (p. 31) in the Asian community. After his original racial identity is unveiled to the public to prove his innocence in the accusation of being an evil foreigner, Marcus encounters some frustrations, but then he realizes he loves the community more than ever. He tells DHH, "I imagined myself as something completely different from what I was", and painstakingly constructs that new identity "through sheer will and determination" (p. 71). Evidently, it is role playing that enables Marcus to take up a different racial identity consciously or unconsciously and pass the invisible racial line, which indicates that race resembles a mask that can be arbitrarily put on and taken off. Meanwhile, role playing within the role exposes the discrepancies between illusion and reality, between the outside mask and inside nature, through which the audience is alienated to critically consider the becoming and changing nature of identity. Leigh Silverman, the director of *Yellow Face*, comments on this aspect of the play, noting that what "we ask people to believe in in the play is that everything that you're seeing is true, and everything that you're seeing is theatre. And it—that it really leaves it up to the audience to decide. And I think that is part of the conception of the play, with many actors playing many different roles of different races and different genders. I think it's part of the idea that anyone can do anything; everyone can do anything" (Lunden, 2007).

In addition, a number of characters in the play step out of the story world abruptly and address the audience directly, an action reminding them what they are watching is just a play. Their manifest self-references serve to distract the audience from the fourth-wall illusion and enable them to examine the theatre only as a theatre. In Richard Hornby's words, self-reference, "a splash of cold water thrown into the face of a dreaming, imagining audience" (1986, p. 104), is more direct and straightforward than role playing within the role to tear off the mask that a play usually wears. Normally, self-reference functions together with role playing within the role to disclose the fictitiousness of a play. In *Yellow Face*, particularly near the end, when Marcus gets out of the role-playing game and has a face-to-face talk with DHH, he, acting as an all-knowing person, tells DHH and the audience that "I'm a character" (p. 71). To refute Marcus's words, however, DHH insists that "I . . . wasn't planning to get into this . . . I was planning to maintain the ambiguity about reality versus fiction—through the end of the play" (p. 71-2). At this moment, DHH becomes the playwright and reveals the dramatic alter ego of Hwang as well. With self-reference, DHH or Hwang himself reminds the audience that what happens on stage is fictional, awakening them from the dramatic illusion. In the following, their self-referential comments on playwriting become more and more manifest as the dialogue continues:

DHH: Hey, hey! If you're my creation, do what I say!

MARCUS: C'mon, Dave—any characters worth their salt eventually go their own way. Now tell the truth. You can do it.

DHH: This is . . . kind of humiliating.

MARCUS: It's a little late in the show to start worrying about humiliating yourself.

DHH (*To the audience*): Marcus is . . . a fictional character. Created by me.

MARCUS: Why?

DHH: Because . . . I'm a writer. And, in the end, everything's always all about me.

MARCUS: And now, you don't need me anymore. (*Pause*) But do me a favor. Write me a happy ending, okay?

DHH: They're not my specialty . . . but I'll try. I'll send you to a Chinese village—called Zhencong. (p. 72)

The deliberate arrangement of the above dialogue further destroys the fictional world on stage and pushes down the fourth wall for the audience. Moreover, by emphasizing the made-up nature of the character Marcus, Hwang tends to “demonstrate the fictive nature of ethnic groups and make people aware of the fluid nature of ethnic identity” (Zhang, 2018, p. 95-6). It is also interesting that Marcus asks the playwright to write him a happy ending in which he finds true belonging in a Chinese village. In this sense, Hwang manages to reflect Marcus's subject consciousness in deciding and reconstructing his own racial identity. Through the use of role playing within the role and self-reference, Hwang puts the theatre as a theatre to the foreground in the hope of making the audience reconsider the fluidity of identity and “see the absurdities in identifying ourselves exclusively in terms of narrow definitions of race” (Lee, 2015, p. 87).

4. The Stage Setting: Achieving the Multicultural Integration

Apart from the structure and acting, the stage setting is also an indispensable element in achieving the Alienation-Effect. To expose the performance as a performance, Brecht, who is greatly inspired by the Expressionistic drama, advocates a simplified or even empty stage setting with little property instead of a detailed and vivid reproduction of real life in the realistic drama that facilitates the audience's readiness for illusion. The simplified setting could realize the spatialization of the non-linear narrative, which serves to the rapid shift of fragmented scenarios and role playing and the arbitrary crossing of different time and space.

On the stage of *Yellow Face*, there is almost no property to decorate the set and present the scene. The progression of the plot and the shifting of different scenes are realized by the verbal descriptions of the Announcer, the background music and the sounds. For example, the sounds of a ringing phone, of keys tapping on an IBM Selectric, of paper coming out of an old thermal-style fax machine to replace real entities. The scene of DHH reading Marcus's first e-mail in 2006 is changed to the scene of the Tony Award ceremony in 1988 by the use of awards ceremony entrance music. The scene of DHH talking with Stuart about the casting of *Face Value* is suddenly shifted to the performance scene of the play *Go for Broke*, where Marcus plays a role, with the aid of stage sound effects of gun battle and verbal descriptions of the Announcer hinting at the places changing. It is also noteworthy that the play contains multiple locations, including the Guizhou Province, China, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, Boston, San Francisco and New York City. These tangible places are blended together throughout Marcus's transformation of racial identities to create an impression that spaces are fluid, and thus identities are fluid. More importantly, if the stage setting is arranged according to naturalistic or realistic requirements of replicating the real world, it is hardly possible for the sudden shifts of various scenes in different times and spaces. A simplified stage, together with the use of aural effects suggesting the context, enables the actors to travel between the past and the present, between different places, thus an indication of blurred boundaries spatially, temporally and also culturally. It allows the successive appearance of a collage of public documents, interviews, media statements, and emails like a movie montage unconstrained by time and space, thereafter constructing a multi-layered spatialization of narrative. Meanwhile, digital presences, including electronic communications through emails and indirect dialogues through telephones, create multiple spaces that run in parallel with the main action. The conflation of these incompatible spaces once again bespeaks the fluidity of space and, of course, the fluidity of identity. In this way, the stage is rendered polyphonic and more spatialized.

In fact, Hwang has turned the simple stage into a platform across multiple boundaries. In a broader sense, by bridging the temporal and spatial boundaries, he attempts to blur the racial and cultural boundaries to build up color-blind communities, therefore achieving multicultural integration. This ideal is incisively shown in the blending of Chinese folk songs of Dong Ethnicity into the stage setting. Dong folk songs, “da ge” or “big song” in particular, are passed on orally in Dong Ethnicity, an ethnic minority in Guizhou Province, China. “Da ge” is a kind of polyphonic music that can only be sung by the whole Dong village together. By singing the “big song”, the Dong entertain themselves, educate their children, make friends with each other, express tender feelings to lovers, narrate history, and even resolve interpersonal conflicts (Zeng, 2011, p. 8). Moreover, in one of Marcus's letters to DHH, he introduces the history of the “big song” which “came to China over the Silk Road . . . the whole journey—from the Carpathian Mountains, through the Middle East, all the way into Asia, covering half the world” (p. 34). Hence, Dong folk songs are chanted to extol love, friendship, and the harmonious link between East and West. They serve as a non-verbal medium to express the message of harmony on stage by popping up in the form of background music. According to the stage directions, there are three tracks from the CD *Dong Folk Songs: People and Nature in Harmony*: “We Close the Village for Rituals” (Track #2), “Cicadas are Crying, I Sign as My Youth Passes by” (Track #15) and “I Am a Butterfly Searching for Flowers” (Track #20). Every time accompanying the reading of Marcus's emails to DHH, Dong folk songs ring through the air abruptly. Track #2 is played at both the opening and ending of the play, while Track #15 and #20 appear near the end of Act One and the opening of Act Two, respectively. In such a way, the folk songs encircle the whole play to underline again and again the message of harmony they convey. Besides, they are

not mere background music but work to generate alienation since they interrupt the main narrative line so suddenly and illogically without contextual link that they drag the audience out of dramatic illusion to consciously think about the implications of music. Functioning as a non-dramatic device, they are disruptive, "destined to disturb fixed configurations of time, space and belonging while involved in sounding out communities to come" (Chambers, 2015, p. 122). A community which acts like a color-blind utopia embracing multiplicity and heterogeneity is to come. Moreover, the Dong folk songs echoing head and tail form a circular structure that lays emphasis on the vision Hwang upholds, that is, establishing equal and harmonious relationships in the multicultural society. This musical symbol becomes a metaphor for a utopia where the racial line is blurred, and a communal sense is experienced. At the end of the play, Marcus, immersed in the "big song", appears in a separate space to read his last e-mail written to DHH:

Dear David, It's happened at last, nine months after my arrival in Dong country. Tonight, as they gathered together for the "big song", I saw a couple of villagers gesturing for me to come closer . . . They saw who I am, and gave me "face" . . . I joined the "big song" and found the thing I had lost. A reason to hope. And now, I can go home. (p. 72-3)

The e-mail delivers Marcus's desire to integrate into the Dong ethnic culture and expresses the theme of multicultural integration recurring in Hwang's earlier plays. It is an ambition harboured by Hwang "to take words like 'Asian' and 'American', like 'race' and 'nation', and mess them up so bad no one has any idea what they even mean anymore" (p. 72). And so Hwang has done exactly that in *Yellow Face*, sending East and West into cultural and racial collision and integration and juxtaposing Chinese folk songs with the American sitcom. He is still struggling in earnest to "make its [American] democratic ideals into a reality" (Rich, 2009, p. vvi).

5. Conclusion

Cultural identity or racial identity is a recurring motif in Chinese American literature, upon which most Asian American writers and critics tend to go along with the non-essentialist view of identity, that is, the multiplicity and fluidity of identity. By employing the loose and open structure, interchangeable and self-referential performances of actors in role playing within the role, and simplified stage setting with connotative music across time and space, Hwang, in his dramatic aesthetics, deconstructs the homogeneity of established assumptions about race and identity, and at the same time reconstructs a heterogeneous and harmonious ideal community where fluid identity is embraced. In a deeper sense, he imagines a world where all the boundaries are ambiguous and penetrable, which echos Asian American writers' decentralized vision of multicultural integration. And by means of the Alienation-Effect, he wants to estrange the audience from the dramatic illusion to feel a world with great harmony and collectively reflect on the definition of what it is to be an "American". The A-Effect is not just an aesthetic device but a mode of critical seeing, altering the audience's habitual way of viewing race and identity. In A-Effect's critical interruptions, the audience is enlightened by Hwang to anticipate the ongoing national story with sensibility.

Although this article has dealt with the A-Effect in *Yellow Face*, it did not take another equally important Brechtian element called the comic into account. *Yellow Face* is a tragicomedy. Hwang's combination of the comic with the serious can produce a similarly unnatural effect to alienate the audience from illusion as well as to estrange the naturalized racial discourses. Notwithstanding the limitations, the article still serves as a departure for further studies of more Brechtian theatrical aesthetics reflected in the play. It is also plausible to conduct further research into Hwang's other genres of theatrical expressions, like his musicals and his other experimental play named *Chinglish* (2012), which distinctly manifest Hwang's dramatic arts.

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