Butterfly: Žižek’s Mirror Image of Ancient China

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As a psychoanalytic philosopher, Žižek shows great interest in such Pre-Qin thoughts as Confucianism and philosophy of Chuang Tzu, and relates them to Lacanian philosophy. Through the psychoanalytic analysis of “butterfly” image in The Butterfly Dream, M. Butterfly and so on, Žižek interprets ancient Confucian culture, thus visualizes the image of ancient China as an existing “Other” to the West. His Chinese butterfly image and cultural mirror image have some kind of fundamental homogeneity. From Žižek’s analysis of butterfly image, we can see how he conceptualizes ancient China by constructing the fantasy of butterfly, and how western scholars understand modern China through the mirror image of the Other. Understanding how Žižek views China can provide us with a perspective to reflect upon cultural exchange between China and the West.

Keywords: Žižek; Chinese Culture; Confucius;Chuang Tzu

Introduction

Slavoj Žižek is a contemporary philosopher and radical left-wing thinker from Slovenia, an East European country. It is this cultural theorist involved in cultural center of the West that associates his philosophical thought with China. Chinese image and culture has constantly become the subject of Žižek’s works and interviews. Žižek’s views on China mainly include two aspects: one is the understanding and interpretation about ancient Chinese culture represented by Confucianism; the other is the reflection on modern China represented by Chinese Revolution, Mao Zedong Thought, and contemporary screen culture. Presently the cultural exchange between China and the West has been amplified and deepened, but the West does not seem to understand China as much. One reason is that the western scholars’ unconscious cognitive structure and prejudice (pre-understanding) may have restricted the openness of their vision. As a contemporary philosopher, by explaining how the subject generates desire from the Other in such texts as The Butterfly Dream and M. Butterfly, has pointed out the fact that if people want to perceive something, some kind of “fantasy frame” is needed, and those two cultural texts from Confucianism and Taoism just provide the westerners with such an unconscious “butterfly image” to view China. Though Žižek captures the unconscious fame in understanding and cognition, he is not able to surmount this fantasy frame. Through the study we can see Žižek’s
interpretation of Pre-Qin Confucianism and Taoism still relies on the understanding of the mirror image of the Other, here being the “butterfly”. This shows it is hard for the western scholars to transcend the mirror image relations of subject-other and West-China to interpret China, which often leads to cognitive misconception and even misunderstanding.

**The Butterfly Dream: Theory of Identity and Fantasy**

Chinese culture has been introduced to Europe by missionaries since Ming and Qing Dynasty. In the 17th and 18th century, European countries like France and Germany generally accepted ancient Chinese culture and art, and even regarded Chinese cultural elements as fashion. Moreover, classic cultural works by Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Chuang Tzu were widely translated and studied in Europe. Contemporary French psychoanalyst Lacan was attracted by dream culture in the book of *Chuang Tzu*. He quoted the idea from *The Butterfly Dream* in his *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* and innovatively interpreted Freudian theory of dreams through Chuang Tzu’s thought about dreams. Being one of Lacan’s followers, Žižek applies his forerunner’s idea about butterfly dream to the realm of ideology, therefore creates his theory of mirror image and identity in ideology.

“On the Conformity of All Things” in *Chuang Tzu* says: “I, by the name of Zhuang Zhou, once dreamed that I was a butterfly, a butterfly fluttering happily here and there. I was so pleased that I forgot that I was Zhuang Zhou. When I suddenly woke up, I was astonished to find that I was as a matter of Zhuang Zhou. Did Zhuang Zhou dream of the butterfly or did the butterfly dream of Zhuang Zhou? Between Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly there must be some distinctions. This is called ‘the transformation of things’.”² It means Zhuang Zhou³ dreamed that he became a butterfly flying everywhere happily, but when he woke up he discovered he was actually Zhuang Zhou himself. He was confused about whether it was Zhuang Zhou that transformed into a butterfly in his dream or the butterfly that transformed into Zhuang Zhou in its dream. Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly must have some differences, which is called “transformation of things”.

There is a conflict between the reality of Zhuang Zhou and his dream of butterfly, which is so called “distinctions between Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly”: On the relationship between reality and dream, Freud believes that the reality is real and the unfulfilled or unconscious desire in reality can be imaginatively fulfilled in the dream. However, Lacan’s interpretation of *The Butterfly Dream* has broken through Freudian theory of dream. Lacan explains the dream of “a burning child”. A sleeping father dreams that his son is shaking his arm forcefully, complaining: “Dad, can’t you see I am on fire?” The father then wakes up and finds his son burnt by a lighted candle. According to Freudian classic theory of dream, one of the functions of dream is to maintain sleep: the outside stimulation in reality such as door-bells, door-knocks and smell of smoke is dramatized by the dream and becomes an excuse for continuing sleep. Only excess of such stimulation can wake one up from the dream. While Freudian theory is scientific and reasonable in a sense, Lacan gives an interpretation which is completely contrary. Lacan believes that the father does want to evade the external simulation with his dream, but when he encounters his son on fire in the dream he is experiencing “the Real” of his desire, which suggests his criminal psychology and guilt for his son. At that point, he wants to wake up in order to escape from the grip of his inner desire, or it would be too much for him to bear. For Lacan, to those who cannot stand the stress

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³ Zhuang Zhou is the name of Chuang Tzu.
in “the Real”, the reality is undoubtedly a dream. Likewise, Žižek remarks: “Reality is a fantasy-construction which enables us to mask the Real of our desire”.4

According to Žižek, like the dream of the burning child, Zhuang Zhou’s dream about the butterfly also reflects one of Lacan’s psychoanalytical theories, theory of fantasy. Žižek points out that Zhuang Zhou in reality dreams of himself becoming a butterfly, but what we can actually get is that it is the butterfly that dreams of becoming Zhuang Zhou in reality. Zhuang Zhou dreaming of the butterfly and the butterfly dreaming of Zhuang Zhou are not symmetrical. Žižek believes “When he was thinking that he was a butterfly dreaming of being Chuang Tzu, Chuang Tzu was in a way correct. The butterfly was the object which constituted the frame, the backbone, of his fantasy-identity (the relationship Chuang Tzu can be written $\square$). In the symbolic reality he was Chuang Tzu, but in the Real of his desire he was a butterfly. Being a butterfly was the whole consistency of his positive being outside the symbolic network”.5 That is to say, butterfly is the “anchor point” for the unity of Chuang Tzu’s real life as stated by Lacan and Žižek. Chuang Tzu in reality was thinking about how to break away from the enslavement of objects in order to fulfill a state of freedom both physically and spiritually. The butterfly fluttering happily here and there is the symbolic object, so called “fantasy”, which can construct his whole living world. Without it, Chuang Tzu who longs for Peripateticism couldn’t have been flying.

As a matter of fact, Chuang Tzu’s dream of butterfly has a little in common with Lacan’s theory, both discussing whether reality or dream is real, and both concerning the identity problem in life. However, Chuang Tzu stated more clearly in another passage of “On the Conformity of All Things”: “A man may dream of a grand feast but weep at daybreak; a man may dream of weeping but go hunting at daybreak. When he dreams, he does not know that he is dreaming. In his dream he may even try to interpret the dream; but when he awakes, he knows that he has been dreaming. Only after he is totally awakened does he realize that all was a grand dream. All the while, the fool thinks that he himself is awake, seemingly aware of everything.”6 By that, Chuang Tzu meant he who makes merry by drinking in dream may experience sorrow in reality; he who weeps in dream may go hunting awake, for he doesn’t know he is dreaming while in dream. He can even explain his own dream therein until he realizes it’s a dream after waking up. Then it dawns on him that life itself is but a dream, however only a fool believes that he is sober knowing everything. Chuang Tzu thought the people in dream usually do not know it is a dream until awake, and life is just as empty as a dream which few people know while alive. The paradox between dream and reality leads to Lacan’s reflection on the problem of self-identity in the realms of dream, reality and desire. How do we know they are not dreaming? In other words, how should we identify our “sense of reality”—the facticity of our real life as Chuang Tzu did? According to Lacan and Žižek, we have to determine an object “a” first, that is, something or some image in the Real of desire that keeps us from “sleepwalking”. For Zhuang Zhou, it is freedom and butterfly. How about us? Therefore, Žižek believes that everyone, even a nation, a country, a regime and an ideology needs an object “a” to be projected on the screen of our desire. Once it becomes our goal, our desire will embrace this object and makes it a fantasy which serves as a support for our sense of real existence. Fantasy is the only way to achieve our sense of reality, and the essence to realize the unity of our real world. The formula of fantasy is therefore

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regarded as an attribute to the formation of desire. That is to say, the content of human desire is empty until we fill it up with an “other”.

Žižek introduces the theory of fantasy to his theory of ideology. He holds that ideology resembles dream in that it is not an illusion for us escape from separation and pain in reality but a fundamental fulcrum to construct our reality. “Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our reality itself an ‘illusion’ which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel (conceptualized by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe as ‘antagonism’: a traumatic social division which cannot be symbolized’).” In other words, the society of reality is not a harmonious unity with lots of insurmountable barriers and division. This is the Real of the society. However, any ideology can find its excuse or fantasy to account for or make up for its impossible gap, thus to create an integration of the society. For example, anti-Jewish fascism believed that Jews were the root cause of social division and corruption, and only the genocide of Jews could help to restore peace and harmony. This is the ideological fantasy that the fascist Germany created in order to deal with social division and conflict. Once people recognized this fantasy and set up the “other” of Jews as a mirror image, they seemed to discover the root for adversaries such as unemployment, failure of love and war defeat. Therefore, Žižek takes fantasy as the construction of people’s sense of reality in life, which is not an illusion but “the Real” of reality construction for people to escape from social division. In other words, to become a subject, one needs fantasy and the “other” in the mirror so as to construct his own integrated sense of reality.

In fact, Zhuang Zhou’s dream of butterfly and Chuang Tzu’s theory of dream serve as a mirror image for Lacan and Žižek’s psychoanalysis of the subject. There is such commonality between them that they become a mirror image of the “other” for their thoughts. That is to say, only when they see the theoretical reflection therein can they confirm the validity of their own theories. The reflective relation between the subject (the West) and the Other (China) is displayed again in Žižek’s textual analysis of Courtly Love about the same subject-Other relation.

M. Butterfly: Mirror Image of Desire between Subject and the Other

Žižek explores the Libido mechanism between subject and other in love by analyzing such literary works and movies as medieval Courtly Love, Les Liaisons Dangereuses, The Crying Game and M. Butterfly which he calls “The Crying Game Goes East”. He believes that all other variations of love are based on the pattern of Courtly Love, with their common principle of unsymmetrical identity relationship between the subject and the Other. I think this dialectical identity relation between subject and Other is exactly the profound theoretical perspective Žižek uses to view and interpret China. Courtly Love is the platonic love of the knights in the Middle Ages to aristocratic ladies. This kind of love does not aim at physical desire but spiritual love to elevate them to higher moral and religious spheres, therefore it is purely platonic. For Žižek, such relationship is not symmetrical one between subject and subject, but rather unsymmetrical one between subject and the Other. The Lady is no noble, tender and lovable but cold, senseless and inhuman partner. She often subjects impossible ordeals for the knight and thereby becomes an inaccessible object. “The Lady is the Other which is not our ‘fellow-creature’; that is to say, she is someone with whom no relationship of empathy is possible. This

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traumatic Otherness is what Lacan designates by means of the Freudian term das Ding, the Thing—the Real that ‘always returns to its place’, the hard kernel that resists symbolization.8

Here Žižek introduces Freudian concept of sublimation, which is the mystification and exaltation of the other in love. Lacan believes sublimation is to elevate an ordinary object to the level of an inaccessible object. The means is to set obstruction and makes the other a forbidden object so as to prevent the subject from getting access to it. For Žižek, the Lady in the knight’s eyes is exalted from ordinary woman to an impossible sacred woman—Woman-Thing. Such sublimation does not mean to raise the value of the Lady but to stimulate the knight’s (the subject) organization of psychological power around this “black hole” until desire is generated once some woman transforms into a Woman-Thing. Therefore, through the exaltation of a common object to something intangible and sacred, the subject takes the sacred to be some absolute “Other” which occupies the position of the object “a” in the subject’s inner desire, thus dialectics of desire is realized.

Žižek explains the dialects of desire with Neil Jordan’s The Crying Game. Fergus falls in love with his black friend’s girlfriend Dil, but is always turned down by her sovereign distance. Dil finally gives way to Fergus’ persistent advances when the latter discovers her real identity as a male transvestite which is unbearable to him. By that time, Dil has been passionately in love with him and the relationship between eromenos (the loved one) and erastes (the loving one) has been reversed. According to Žižek, Dil has always played a role of the Lady, cold and inaccessible, but when she is reversed to a desperate servant, the time has also come for her love to emerge. The dialectics of love is produced when the object is idealized as something sovereign thereby full of obstacles. To love someone means the loving one covets something from the other, but the loved one does not know what it is, for he/she cannot give something that he/she does not possess to the other. The way the loved one uses to escape from this deadlock is to return the “emptiness of love” to the other, and then he/she becomes the loving one. This is what Žižek calls an asymmetry in the dialectics of desire. Love is constructed when the object is regarded as an alienated Other and is ruined by the subjectivization of the Other when they get too close.

Žižek reviews this theory in M. Butterfly—The Crying Game Goes East and further elaborates on the dialects of desire between subject and the Other (another subject). M. Butterfly is a replica of both the opera Madama Butterfly and the film The Crying Game. However, M. Butterfly is based on a true romance between a French diplomat in China and a male opera singer. David Henry Hwang, a famous Chinese-American scriptwriter composed the opera Madama Butterfly based on the well-known trial, which was later adapted into the film M. Butterfly by David Cronenberg. Both achieved great success. Žižek shows considerable interests in them and makes a comparative study between the mechanism of desire in Courtly Love and the romance in M. Butterfly. As a result, he discovers homogeneity between them and clarifies the subject-Other relationship of desire.

M. Butterfly recounts a story about a French diplomat falling in love with a beautiful Chinese “actress”, calling her “My Butterfly”, but is transferred away from China later. Soon afterwards, she produces a child, so the diplomat manages to reunite with his wife and son in Paris against all odds. But meanwhile, the diplomat is tried by the authorities for spying. In the prison, she takes off her clothes and offers herself naked as a man to him: “Here I am, your Butterfly!” The diplomat cannot bear this fatal blow of truth and commits suicide in a performance in his disguise of M. Butterfly. According to Žižek, this film is not for politico-military purposes,

therefore it is not right to interpret it as an image of political struggle. Nor is it significant to regard it as deceitful love of a transvestite, for both love each other authentically and sincerely. So what secret does M. Butterfly reveals on earth that intrigues Žižek so much? The answer is the dialectical relationship of desire between subject and the Other. On the surface, the diplomat may have loved the wrong person, mistaking a homosexual man as an oriental woman with compassion, tenderness and self-sacrifice. In fact, M. Butterfly is the fantasy-object in his desire, and only when positing the male hero to M. Butterfly’s sovereign place can he generate this desire. That is to say, the more mysterious, distant and inaccessible his M. Butterfly is to the diplomat, the more love she will get from him, because his desire motivates him to sublime an ordinary woman to a Woman-Thing. This is apparently a misidentification in the Mirror, and moreover a subjective misidentification. However, when M. Butterfly transforms into a male lover, he retracts. Though love remains unchanged and the object remains the same, it is the desire structure that changes. Žižek points out, when the Chinese takes off his clothes and desperately expresses his love to the diplomat, “He proposes himself as what he is outside the hero’s fantasy-frame of a mysterious Oriental woman”.

In other words, he believes the diplomat loves him as himself instead of a delicate, gentle feminine fantasy. At that moment, faced with the true lover, the diplomat retreats and refuses to respond, not because of deception but because his desire now loses its motivation—fantasy of the Other. At last, the hero sings famous aria “Un bel di, vedremo” from Madama Butterfly and ends his life with suicide in order to make up for his guilt for having no courage to accept his love and the truth in the Real. “In both cases the hero stages a psychotic identification with his love object, with his sinthome (synthetic formation of the nonexistent woman, ‘Butterfly’)—that is, he ‘regresses’ from the object-choice to an immediate identification with the object...By his suicidal act the hero makes up for his guilt, for his rejection of the object when the object was offered to him outside the fantasy-frame.”

From Courtly Love to M. Butterfly, Žižek illustrates a single truth that the construction of the subject’s desire lies in the pursuit of some fantasy which becomes the object of desire just because it is the Other in the subject’s mirror but not a real object in reality. Only with the division and distance does the object become the reflection and projection of the subject’s desire. Once the real object appears as it is in the Real in front of the subject, it will result in the collapse of the unity between the subject’s inner self and external world. In other words, the formation of desire relies on non-transparent and the mysterious Other. It only matters as long as the Other can construct the subject’s desire and does not matter whether the object can be subjectivation or can talk to the subject. Once the Other starts to talk to the subject, it is a fatal blow to the subject’s fantasy, without which the subject’s whole sense of reality will be crashed.

So far, we have learned from Žižek’s analysis of The Butterfly Dream and M. Butterfly that the relationship of Mirror projection and identification between subject and the Other is the only means to the self-fulfillment of subject construction. Such construction has little to do the real object. Isn’t this the same means by which some western sinologists, philosophers, aestheticians and art critics to identify China? They set forth from their own philosophical and cultural perspectives and view Chinese culture and image as the existence of the Other for western culture. The value of China lies in its transformation into the mirror projection of western culture and reflection of western values. They hardly see what China really is and accept

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the fact that China is becoming the subject from the Other, telling its own story. Once China shows its real face, some people who support west-centrism may receive a fatal blow to their frame of cultural fantasy.

Confucian Culture: Ideological Mirror Image

Žižek has great interests in ancient Chinese political culture, especially the debate between Confucianism and Legalism in Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period. He points out, by then the political hierarchy and the system of rites and music of Zhou Dynasty had fallen apart, and Confucianism, Legalism and other schools were seeking solutions to social division and conflicts, but their political remedies turned out to be different or even contradictory. Žižek analyzes Confucian culture from the perspective of psycho-analytical ideology.

Facing the social disparities in Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period, Confucius chose to go back to the previous “Golden Time”, trying to restore the systems of hierarchy, rites and music. Žižek holds that what actually interested Confucius was not the metaphysical philosophical truth but harmonious social order as in the remarks “Let the prince be a prince, and a public servant be a servant. Let the father be a father, and let the son be a son.” In Chapter of Yan Yuan in The Analects of Confucius (12.11), it states: “The reigning prince of a certain State asked Confucius what was essential in the government of a country. Confucius answered: ‘Let the prince be a prince, and a public servant be a servant. Let the father be a father, and let the son be a son’. ‘It is very true,’ replied the prince, ‘indeed, if the prince is not a prince, and the public servant is not a public servant, and the father is not a father and the son is not a son, even though I had my revenue, how should I enjoy it?’”

It means the ruler should do his duty as a ruler, and a minister should take his responsibilities as a minister; the father should act as a father and the son should behave like a son. Each should qualify his own position, each should perform his respective duties, and each should play his particular role. Only in this way can self-discipline and rites be fulfilled, and everybody be in his right place and get his own needs. Žižek believes such an ideal social order no longer existed in Confucius’ time, “In contrast, the present is a time of decay, involving the disintegration of organic social ties and a growing gap between things and words, individuals and their titles or social roles.”

Facing the declining stability of the hierarchical order, Confucius chose to recreate the tradition of rites and music, but for Žižek such a tradition and all the attempts are just an ideological fantasy in Confucius’ eyes.

Žižek considers the ideal society order of “ruler, public minister, father and son” created by Confucius as zero-level ideology, so to speak, an ideological fantasy which cannot be fulfilled. Such an ideal social order requires the existence of a more powerful nameless authority, so called “Heaven” (tian) or “Mandate of Heaven” (tian ming). Žižek believes that by “Heaven” Confucius means an objective power beyond human will and the natural rules which guide the order of human life. “According to Confucius, people live within parameters established by heaven (which, more than a purposeful Supreme Being, designate natural order of things with its own fixed cycles and patterns).” The Heaven affects and manipulates human society through destiny or mandate. The Heaven is primarily concerned with human well-being, and imparts this supreme task to a certain individual or ruler to rule over the masses with justice and fairness in order to protect their welfare.

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The ruler must regard people’s welfare (“Benevolent Government”) as the principal concern, and if he fails this task, Heaven will remove the mandate from him and bestow it to another who is capable.

Žižek’s understanding about Confucianism is basically right. However, there are two confusions. Firstly, Žižek confuses Confucian “Heaven” (tian) with “Mandate of Heaven” (tian ming) in Han Dynasty. Žižek’s interpretation of “Heaven” is actually the concept of “way of Heaven” (tian dao) or “way of orthodoxy” (dao tong) by Dong Zhongshu but not exactly Confucian “Tao” in his political philosophy. In Confucius’ opinion, Heaven or destiny (ming) is not a personal God or deity in Shang and Zhou Dynasty but rather justice, morality and righteousness in general. For Confucius, Heaven and Mandate of Heaven are rather obligations for benevolence and justice than a Personal God over human beings. In other words, Confucius is a pre-Qin philosopher who uses the idea of destiny to mean his “Tao”. Secondly, Žižek believes that Heaven or destiny is “the big Other” in ideology. The big Other is a concept in psychoanalysis which is different from “the little other” (parents, companions, friends, etc.) used for human self-identification. The big Other usually refers to father, social authority, power, God, deity or other social order of power-discourse. If taken as a “way of orthodoxy” or “way of Heaven”, Mandate of Heaven indeed functions as the big Other in Žižek’s theory of ideology and helps to shape a person. However, as far as I am concerned, Mandate of Heaven or destiny is meant more for the rulers or intellectuals than the common people.

Žižek thinks the Mandate as the Other is bestowed to someone who follows God’s will, and in this case, Confucius himself. Confucius attributed the collapse of rites and music to the lack of connection between things and names, that is, both the rulers and subordinates claimed the titles for which they were not worthy. There should be a revolution to make things conform to their names, or in other words, each should stay in his proper place and play his particular role. This is what Confucius addresses in “the ruler being a ruler, the minister being a minister, the father being a father and the son being a son” and “if names be correct, language is in accordance with the truth of things”. For Žižek, rectification of names (zheng ming) is to rectify acts to correspond to names, which is to entitle individuals who must play their due roles in hierarchical order through their acts. Žižek calls Confucian’s rectification of names an Althusserian theory of ideological interpellation. “Confucius proposed a proto-Althusserian theory of ideological interpellation: the ideological “big other”, embodied in its apparatuses (rituals), interpellates individuals, who must act in accordance with their titles.”

In other words, Žižek considers Confucian ritual “look at nothing in defiance of ritual, listen to nothing in defiance of ritual, speak of nothing in defiance of ritual, never stir hand or foot in defiance of ritual” (Analects 12. 1) to be a very strict one. Though sometimes we obey the rituals, our inner experience and empathy may not recognize them.

Žižek’s also has some misunderstandings on Confucius in this point. First, Confucian “rite and benevolence” are related to each other, the priority of benevolence being filial piety and rites being spontaneous expression of filial piety and fraternal duty from inside instead of some impersonal external rules. Confucius once says: “It is better that there be deep sorrow than in minute attention to observances” (Analects 3.4). Second, Althusserian theory of ideological interpellation is external interpellation of social ideology such as religion and school imposed on an individual who has to be identified in accordance with his social position. However, Confucius’ “rectification of names” and “the ruler being a ruler, the minister being a minister, the father being a father and the son being a son” both involve internal emotional identification. In other words,

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ritual as the natural overflow of inner feelings is sublimated to social rationality. At the same time, there is no exception that the ideological order will interpellate every individual as an ideological subject, while Confucian “benevolence and justice” and decent man who bears “benevolence and justice” cannot be entitled to average individuals. In Confucian philosophy, there are “gentlemen” (jun zi) who bear morality and justice, but there are also “villains” (xiao ren) who are content with their personal life. Confucius never expects all to be gentlemen. Therefore, when Žižek views Confucian rectification of names as Althusserian theory of ideological interpellation, he might be reasonable in a sense but mistaken in another. As a philosopher in western culture, such misunderstanding and misreading is not only understandable but also inevitable.

Conclusion

From Žižek’s interpretation of various Pre-Qin schools of culture such as Chuang Tzu and Confucius and the association of Lacanian theory of desire with literary works of Eastern romance, we can see that westerners are greatly attracted to image of China, which in their eyes appears to be a mysterious land with ancient civilization. We can also see that scholars such as Žižek tend to view China from the perspective of west-centrism unconsciously which can lead to misunderstandings and misreading on Chinese culture and its present situation. Just as Bakhtin states that everyone has his own “super visibility” but is blind to his own defects, such a circumstance can both be an advantage and a disadvantage. Žižek believes Slovenia (or Balkan Peninsula in a broader sense) to West Europe is what periphery is to center, and what other is to subject. West Europe as the center of Europe considers Balkan countries lack of civilization, taking them as the other of the subject in the Mirror. According to Žižek, if the subject wants to identify its subjectivity, it has to find an “other” for self-reflection and self-identification, which is the mirror-image relation between the subject and the Other. To West Europe, East European culture such as that of Slovenia is just a reflexive mirror image of the other. Likewise, for westerners, on the one hand, China is a land of ancient and mysterious civilization; on the other hand, it is also a developing country with all kinds of problems. The image of China is just like a mysterious fluttering butterfly, beautiful but elusive. Žižek remarks: “Taking into account the central role of the term ‘butterfly’ in Schumann’s universe...one should emphasize how this term attracted Schumann’s attention not only as a metaphor for a fragile and passing spark of beauty, but also as a term which involves the opposition to larva as its not-yet-fully developed form, as well as to the moth as a ‘butterfly of the night’ ”.15 Therefore, I believe Chinese culture and imagination about it in Žižek’s eyes is only a butterfly-resembling mirror image as the Other for the western culture instead of a real Chinese story.

In short, though Žižek and other western scholars have made great efforts to understand and approach China, due to their own theoretical horizon and the influence of west-centrism, they unconsciously regard Chinese culture and image as the existence of a reflective Other for the West, which is a mysterious and elusive mirror image of butterfly. To my way of thinking, to change the westerners’ view on China, we should show the real face of China and tell real stories of China.

References


