Culture, Identity, Commodity
Diasporic Chinese Literatures in English

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## Contents

Acknowledgements  ix

Contributors  xi

INTRODUCTION: Culture, Identity, Commodity: Testing Diasporic Literary Boundaries  1
• Tseen Khoo

### SECTION 1: COMMODIFYING DESIRES  17

1. “Peeking Ducks” and “Food Pornographers”: Commodifying Culinary Chinese Americanness  19
• Anita Mannur

2. Market Forces and Powerful Desires: Reading Evelyn Lau’s Cultural Labor  39
• Rita Wong

• Jodi Kim
SECTION 2: DIASPORIC RE-VISITATIONS

4. “How Taste Remembers Life”: Diasporic Memory and Community in Fred Wah’s Poetry
   • Lily Cho

5. “Where are you from?”: New Imaginings of Identity in Chinese-Australian Writing
   • Peta Stephenson

6. The Problem of Diaspora: On Chinese Canadian Cultural Production in English
   • Guy Beauregard

SECTION 3: SEXING DIASPORA

   • Donald C. Goellnicht

8. Decentring Orientalist and Ocker Masculinities in Birds of Passage
   • Kam Louie

9. Exporting Feminism: Jade Snow Wong’s Global Tour
   • Leslie Bow

SECTION 4: THE “OTHER” SELF

10. Sleep No More: Ouyang Yu’s Wake-up Call to Multicultural Australia
    • Wenche Ommundsen

    • David Leiwei Li
12. “Many Degrees of Dark and Light”: Sliding the Scale of Whiteness with Simone Lazaroo
  • Robyn Morris

Index
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INTRODUCTION

Culture, Identity, Commodity: Testing Diasporic Literary Boundaries

TSEEN KHOO

When I first conceived of the idea for a doctoral project that involved a comparative study of East Asian-Australian and East Asian-Canadian literatures, I was frequently asked whether I was Canadian or had family in Canada. It became clear that my interest in Asian-Australian material was "understood" in that I was marked as Asian-Australian (therefore, one assumes, intellectually predisposed to things Asian-Australian), but the Canadian connection failed to make sense.

In the face of these queries, I would sketch the project in relation to comparative multiculturalisms and explain the constructive juxtaposition of postcolonial settler-invader cultures. This seemed to work. Traffic in Australian-Canadian intellectual work has been strong for decades, particularly in the humanities, but its profile is often low. For me, however, the interesting factor was more than this need to respond to "why Canada?" It was the automatic, companion question that emerged: "why not the US?" Framing my project, as I did, in relation to racialized minority groups and their cultural production, the presence of Asian-American studies was only occasionally made explicit for fear of its heightened momentum eclipsing the less established fields of Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian studies. Having said that, however, critical cultural theories from Asian-American studies significantly informed my ensuing publications,

1 even as the complex and differentiated terrain of diasporic East Asian literary cultures became more apparent and prolific.

Culture, Identity, Commodity, then, is a collection that engages overtly
and thoughtfully with the productive possibilities of examining diasporic Chinese texts in English from Canada, Australia, and the US. For these critiques to speak responsibly to broader intellectual frames, however, interrogating textual place, "face," representation, and their consequential politics are necessary critical acts. Given the racialized nature of living and creating for those of Chinese descent in the West, this is not surprising nor will it cease to be a source of theoretical and social provocation.

The positioning of diasporic Chinese authors writing from Australia, Canada, and the US has several general points in common. Generally speaking, all these sites are postcolonial settler/invader nations in which diversity and "multiculturalism" manifest themselves in instructive ways. Authors of Chinese descent are usually considered "minority" artists and racialized cultural agents. They are positioned, producing in, and often must be complicit with, white-dominated marketing processes and audiences. The situation of diasporic Chinese literatures written in Chinese, translated, or published in contexts where Chinese groups are the majority (e.g., Singapore), is not within the scope of this volume. Neither is our direct focus on instances in which diasporic Chinese authors are creating in other European languages (such as French, Dutch, or Spanish). This is not to deny their significance but rather reflects the need for this project to have a sharp focus, critically and textually. The fact that this area of diasporic Chinese literary studies is now prominent enough for there to be distinct literary theorizations is a double-edged sword — it means that, once again, English tends to dominate, but it also means that these texts provide unique, richly complicated and comparable critical opportunities. They function demonstrably as transnational textual commodities, valued in turn for both their localized perspectives and "common" sensibilities. These racialized literary fields intervene variously as subversive, "additive," or transformative threads that seek to destabilize formations of traditional literary canons.

Reading the politics of resistance through literature is a dynamic critiqued in Viet Nguyen's *Race and Resistance* (2002), and he states that "our satisfaction with Asian America as a resistant political identity ... needs to be brought into crisis" (58). Nguyen applies his foregrounding and insightful interrogation of these issues to the Asian-American context, but the dynamics and political trajectories of which he speaks also have relevance for other contemporary Western sites of diasporic Chinese literary production. Formations of new critical reading strategies work to accommodate a work's multivalenced existence — as a text that was formed within a particular cultural and national moment and, in an increasingly
"transnational" literary economy, as a text that has engagements with, and audiences in, other sociocultural contexts. It is into this vexed and dynamic network of issues that this volume intervenes.

**Culture, Identity, Commodity**

Our title signals key framing terms for diasporic studies, particularly within societies that aspire to transnational financial and cultural gain. What are the different conceptions of diasporic literary cultures and their perceived effects? How do they influence identity politics and attempts to build cultural communities? Given the reification of ethnicity and the persistence of Orientalist mythologies, what are the consequences for diasporic literatures in relation to commodity exchange and fetishization of difference? The very act of marking out a category for diasporic Chinese literatures is intended as both provocation and recognition. In many ways, it participates in the "invention" of a field, such as delineated by Daniel Coleman and Donald Goellnicht, a tactic that "constitutes a belated, and resistant, making of community" (17).

The momentum of diasporic Chinese literary studies, and diasporic Asian studies in general, is a contemporary phenomenon that appears to show no signs of flagging. In the past decade, collections that address diasporic Chinese groups and their sociological, economic, and cultural situations have proliferated along with increasing interest in particular national contexts and their specific community formations. Long dominated by Chinese-American studies, the diasporic cultural field is now developing discernible nodes of criticism from sites such as Canada, Australia, and Southeast Asia. This collection presents the interwoven research that comprises literary studies in diasporic Chinese cultures; perhaps the title should have read “Cultures, Identities, Commodities,” to more appropriately reflect the erosion of universalist imperatives and singular identifications at the core of many “minor literature” projects. Heeding the call for multifaceted, sociocultural perspectives in literary studies, this book provides wide-ranging, critically engaged discussions about specific texts and contexts while raising self-reflexive questions about the very notion of “diasporic Chinese literary studies” as a field of enquiry. We are excited to include both established and emerging scholars in this volume. Their work engages with a wide range of textual productions, from novels and autobiographies to plays and Chinese cooking shows, with focused interrogation in their
analyses of our book’s stated foci: culture, identity, commodity. This project participates in the ongoing process of “academic globalization” in the positive sense discussed and delineated by Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa (6), and hopes to give form and range to this important part of diasporic Asian studies. It is an alternative dynamic to “[t]he homogenization scenario … that allows the export, and globalization, of cultural critique; or alternatively formulated, bringing in fuel from the periphery for local debates in the center” posited by Ulf Hannerz (109). Instead, the model is more about various “peripheries” intersecting with and challenging each other.

The genesis of Culture, Identity, Commodity was a typically sweltering summer conference in 2001 in Brisbane, Australia. The topic of “Asian diaspora” had drawn a broad and significant range of researchers from around Australia and from international sites such as Canada, Taiwan, the UK, and the US. This gathering planted the seed for this volume in the desire to craft a collection that sought to confront, yet also synthesize, the notion of diasporic Chinese literary studies. In late 2002, “Kaihua Jeiguo Zai Haiwai: An International Conference on Literatures of the Chinese Diaspora” took place at the University of California, Berkeley. This significant event showcased new formations in diasporic Chinese literary studies and marked the heightened level of research interest in this field. What intrigues this collection is the question of whether this “level of research interest” can be said to have formed a discipline. If so, is this a useful way to conceive of this dynamic and theoretically evolving area? In what ways do diversely positioned critics read diasporic creative work? For literature in particular, increasing momentum in comparative diasporic studies creates an energetic environment for research. As with the emergent vigor in any research area, however, pace and energy can come at the expense of nuance and context. Fear of conglomerative and celebratory perspectives can become a pressing issue. Increasingly, a globalized and diasporic frame rests atop the already complex layers of negotiated national literary spaces. Part of the contentious nature of “diasporic Chinese literary studies” lies, I would argue, in the perceived danger of decontextualization and the desire to return to the axis of “Chineseness” as a point of departure as opposed to a point of constant negotiation. This is not a baseless fear, as there is a tendency in some literary projects to consider diasporic Chinese writers as a practically “borderless” group affected by certain global moments. Considering “diasporic Chinese literatures” as a disciplinary area can be a contentious issue because of fears of essentialist cultural conglomeration or celebration. This collection presents a knowing interrogation of each of the terms in the phrase “diasporic
Chinese literatures," establishing a necessary and continuous mode of critical rigor for these studies. Far from wanting to herald a "new" field, this volume examines critical flows toward a broadening of diasporic literary studies and interrogates what these intersections may mean.

While increasing numbers of publications addressing diasporic Chinese literary production suggests some shifts in cultural vision, I am mindful of Barbara Godard's statements on the Canadian literary instance. She argues that "[a]lthough ethnicity has become a signifier of marketability, multiculturalism is accepted insofar as it increases the cultural capital of the dominant culture" (227). Of course, it is not a straightforward case of strengthening the national cultural body with infusions of multi-ethnicity (though that is definitely one facet of the issue). The perspectives of the contributors to this volume are not just those of "in-betweenness," of being part of a racial minority and excluded from (or only "added to") narratives of nation. As stated above, these creative and critical works now "travel" often to other cultural contexts, and scholarship addressing the effect of such textual transfers is only now emerging. Second, viewing these works within the context of comparative studies, along with the localized textures of each site, imbues them with usefully conditional theorizations. Third, as several writers in this collection argue, the literatures themselves are taking on new referential qualities, particularly in diasporic engagement. This multivalent research often takes place in fields of comparative literature, multicultural or ethnic studies and, increasingly, Chinese studies.

Colleen Lye has written incisively about "the particularly visible porousness of the relationship between Asian and Asian Americans" and encourages critics to use this to "think beyond the national frame" (284). Particularly valuable is Lye's discussion of the modulations and manifestations of Orientalism outside the East/West binary, focusing on new structures of marketing "Asianness" within Asia itself (283-5). I am convinced by her careful delineation of identity politics but am left with questions about how the field of diasporic Chinese literary studies would function in this different frame. How much weight should be given to the local (national) politics of literary production, as these micropolitics would certainly affect subsequent production and publication? Some projects choose to read texts as "transnational" literatures speaking to common themes; for example, the simplistic and prevalent tactic of reading any Chinese woman's text that generates 'homeland' controversy (mostly meaning China) as an example of subversive or liberational literature. American scholar Yunte Huang argues against this urge to read texts in progressivist modes, particularly for
the purposes of establishing nativist credentials. Huang posits his theory that the recognition of the role of transpacific displacement within US literary production will enable Asian-American literature to maintain a subversive role without marginalization. He states that “[w]hen the so-called minor is recognized as vital to the formation of the major, it can no longer be segregated and the polarity of minor versus major is destabilized” (6–7). Huang's model of critique allows these literatures to make local, politicized interventions while also being attentive to the effects of global textual influences.

There may be particular connections and comparable forms among diasporic works and their authors, though I suggest we bear in mind Ien Ang's statement that “the unevenly scattered imagined community of the diaspora itself cannot be envisioned in any unified or homogenous way” (17–8). Attempts to cohere texts from diverse sites of production can be valuable for contingent arguments, but without consideration of the political and national creative environments in which authors live and publish, it would be ultimately a very limited project. What the essays in this book achieve is engagement with “diaspora space” as defined by Avtar Brah, in which “the politics of location, of being situated and positioned, derive from a simultaneity of diasporisation and rootedness” (242). As the work in this volume attests, an engagement with the localized politics of production, marketing, and reading for diasporic Chinese literatures is crucial in placing these works within more specific and theoretically useful economies of publishing and readership.

The narrowing of the focus to English-language texts will no doubt raise the ire of a few. In our aim to examine these literatures within existing economies of reading and publishing, as well as the presence of an appropriate critical cultural “industry,” this was a necessary choice. We sourced these essays strategically from Australia, Canada, and the US, where the momentum and depth of research in these fields currently reside. Although these sites differ significantly on many levels, the general momentum of publication and critical attention in diasporic Chinese studies has risen significantly. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the situation in the UK. While it does have several Chinese writers' and artists' societies and a few prominent authors such as Hong Ying, Timothy Mo, and Chang Jung, it does not appear to have comparable critical momentum.

Our initial plan was to divide this book into national clusters to furnish scholars with a “mapping” of the kinds of research taking place at each site. As we further considered the work that was being prepared for the volume,
however, we decided that key topics would function more flexibly and still allow us to emphasize the international nature of our contributions in less traditionally "bordered" ways. The commodification of ethnicity, race, sexuality, and gender informs many of the essays in this volume, as do the vexed issues of representation, the development of new modes of identity and cultural politics, and critical interrogation of diasporic categories. This particular organization of the essays groups works that offer effective complementary dialogues on key threads of diasporic critique. To this end, the four sections within this volume are: "Commodifying Desires," "Diasporic Re-visitations," "Sexing Diaspora," and "The 'Other' Self."

**Commodifying Desires**

Fetish, desire, and commodity are terms that increasingly appear in studies about diasporic cultural studies. The impulse of commodification, particularly within "economies of difference," has various manifestations and dynamics, depending on medium and subject. Dorinne Kondo considers "[t]he lives of all academics and all denizens of consumer capitalist societies" as "inextricable from the forces of commodification," stating, "the question is not how one can transcend it — as though one could — but how within it one can make interventions that matter" (184). Many contemporary nations feel the need to amplify national "cosmopolitan" development and the fostering of international links by showcasing examples of multi-ethnicity in their own societies. This is particularly true of Western nations that are heavily invested in the management of multi-ethnic/racial populations and have sanctioned policies of multiculturalism. It is certainly the case in the academic and cultural "traffic" that Australian and Canadian governments encourage. As I argued in "Why Asian Canadian Studies?", these issues of racialized cultural production, even those critical of nation and government, could be seen as potential exports in the building of national profiles as "tolerant" nations. The very idea of "tolerance" or "successful multiculturalism" becomes a commodity in itself. As a case in point, Ann DuCille examines the racialized politics of merchandising difference through the increasing range of "ethnic" versions of the ubiquitous Barbie Doll. She states:

For me these dolls are at once the symbol and a symptom of what multiculturalism has become in the hands of contemporary commodity
culture; an easy and immensely profitable way off the hook of Eurocentrism that gives us the face of cultural diversity without the particulars of racial difference. (3—4)

DuCille also discusses the gendered overtones of the doll and concludes: “[t]hrough the compound fractures of interpellation and universalization, the Other is reproduced not in her own image but in ours. If we have gotten away from ‘Us’ and ‘Them,’ it may be only because Them R Us” (10). Using this perspective of assimilative multiculturalism and its intersections with marketing ethnicity, Anita Mannur examines celebrity chef Ming Tsai, who has become “the poster boy for Asian-American fusion cuisine”, and characters in Frank Chin’s Year of the Dragon and David Wong Louie’s The Barbarians Are Coming. She concludes that their “socio-economic success as Chinese-American men who ‘sell’ food and ethnicity is inextricably linked to their abilities to satisfy the needs of the dominant group”. Similarly, dominant marketing strategies and the pressing influence of capitalist society are Rita Wong’s foci in her essay on Evelyn Lau’s “literary fixation on Old White Daddies”. She discusses the ways in which the Canadian marketing of Lau’s books reinforces Orientalist stereotypes about women. Wong also examines the broader issues of the heteronormative gaze and politics of women’s sexual labor. In a complementary mode, Jodi Kim engages with David Henry Hwang’s M. Butterfly and “why Orientalism should be such a persistent symptom, indeed a privileged index, of commodity fetishism in American-Asian relations”. She achieves this by tracing the “emergence of the peculiar figure” of the “uber-Oriental, the commodity fetish par excellence”, and positions these stimulating discussions within the distinct political and cultural nuances of Cold War America.

Diasporic Re-visitations

The essays in this second section chart and challenge current models of diasporic meaning-making. Theoretical and cultural writings about the idea of diaspora have burgeoned over the past two decades, and there are several recent compilations that have marked significant points in scholarship. One of these is the recent publication edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader (2003), which contains what could now be considered “classic” work on the diasporic condition by scholars
such as Rey Chow, R. Radhakrishnan, Stuart Hall, and Kobena Mercer. An observation that I find particularly valuable is the careful distinction Braziel and Mannur make between diaspora and transnationalism, terms that are often collapsed or considered interchangeable. They discuss Arjun Appadurai’s argument for considering the United States as “another diasporic switching point” rather than the conclusion of a journey (“Introduction” 14) and provide us with a timely reminder that diaspora “remains, above all, a human phenomenon — lived and experienced” (8). This diasporic consideration of subjects and lived experience interlaces well with Lily Cho’s rigorous and compelling critique of the work of one of Canada’s foremost writers, Fred Wah. NeWest Press published Wah’s biotext The Diamond Grill in 1996, and this text about “racial anger” (Wah) has caused much critical stimulus. Using Wah’s work as embodying many of the key “emotive” points of her argument, Cho discusses notions of nostalgia and melancholy, providing a broad-ranging and opportune engagement with Wah criticism. It is becoming clearer in recent writings that a theoretical commitment to the racialized politics of the local is an essential part of engaged diasporic studies. Cho’s encouragement to “think of diasporic community as constituted not in history, but in memory” has particular consequence for the neglected area of diasporic literary studies examined by Peta Stephenson, that of indigenous-Chinese interaction. In Australia, the prevalence of indigenous/white discourse has often meant that other racialized groups have been elided in discussions of race and nation. Stephenson’s essay focuses specifically on the representation of indigenous-Chinese relations and interactions, looking at “examples of Chinese-Australian writing that narrate the complex and ambiguous alliances between indigenous and Chinese diasporic communities”. Her reading of the sociocultural exchange between Chinese-Australian artist Zhou Xiaoping and Aboriginal groups offers us another way to think about racialized cultural relations in Australia. Their establishment of “a coalition of minority knowledges and politics that does not heed the sovereignty of the nation-state” gives us a dynamic that is positively “un-Australian”. As Lisa Lowe has stated, such “crucial alliances” enable “the ongoing work of transforming hegemony” (151). This disengagement with the traditional circuits of meaning-making brings into question, once again, contemporary functions for ideas of “nation” and the “national” in textual studies.

Connections with, and references to, “nation” and “diaspora” have always grappled with each other in diasporic studies. Approaching this critical terrain from a distinctly Canadian perspective, Guy Beauregard interrogates
the term “diaspora” through turning his attention to the works of writer and scholar Wah and filmmaker and cultural critic Richard Fung. Fung’s work is highly influential and engagingly astute in reworking questions of diaspora, identity, and politicality. Monika Kin Gagnon’s “retrospective” of his “matrix of videos, writings and activist organizing” (12) details Fung’s breadth of inspiration and emphasizes how he continues to shape scholarship and activism in Toronto, Canada, North America and internationally. In his engagement with Wah and Fung, Beauregard knowingly shifts discussion to the area of why Chinese-Canadian writing should matter to us when undertaking research into diasporic Chinese literary studies, and how “new social solidarities” might form.

**Sexing Diaspora**

The topics of gender and sexual identity in diasporic Chinese cultures are recurring and volatile issues. The feminization of “Asian-ness” in a multitude of Western discourses problematizes engagements with gender/sexuality and diasporic Chinese cultures. In addition, notable theoretical threads have ranged over interrogations of feminist formations and politics (particularly tensions between Western and “Other” feminisms), concepts of Chinese queer communities as “minorities within minorities” through “double” marginalization, and the dearth of critical work about diasporic Asian masculinities.

Gender functions, of course, in close and inextricable ways with other sociocultural conditions, and the interleaved, vacillating layers of identification and disidentification give rise to incisive individual and group representations. Australian-based Asian-Canadian Andy Quan muses about the prioritization of race, sexuality, and/or gender and examines his own positioning on the diasporic publishing landscape. Quan demonstrates playful and strategic usage of the proliferating labels under which he writes (e.g., gay, Canadian, Asian-Canadian, North American, Chinese), and concludes that “[u]ndoubtedly, ‘minority’ group writers dance a complicated jig between the mainstream and the margins” (180). Donald Goellnicht’s focus on queer inflections in contemporary Chinese-Canadian literature is a timely contribution to this conversation. He provides an excellent précis of the Chinese-Canadian context while guiding the critical focus to the specific works of Larissa Lai (*When Fox Is a Thousand*) and Lydia Kwa (*This Place Called Absence*). Goellnicht argues for their participation in the ongoing
project of "the simultaneous queering of the diaspora and diasporizing of
the queer" and describes their work as more "diasporic" than "immigrant." His readings of Lai and Kwa offer us engagement with "the vantage point
of an 'impossible' subject" (275) in Gayatri Gopinath's terms, and new ways
of thinking about connections between a mythic Asia and contemporary
Asian Canada.

In an essay focused on masculinities and engaging with notions of a
mythic "China" and "Australia," Kam Louie interrogates the ambivalent
prospect of becoming "native" and asserting a sense of belonging post-
migration. His essay examines the work of prominent Australian author Brian
Castro, interrogating the author's representations of "Chinese" and
"Australian" culture and masculinity. His specific focus is on Castro's first
novel, *Birds of Passage*, and it offers one of the few extended critical
engagements with issues of Chinese-Australian masculinity thus far. In the
process of examining how "traditional" Chinese motifs infuse contemporary
writings, Louie states that Castro has created a "Chinese masculine identity
that is populist but unwelcome in China itself".

In a similar focus on the politics of gender in diaspora, Leslie Bow's
contribution investigates the notion of "exporting feminism" in her reading
of Jade Snow Wong. Bow is suspicious of the association between gender
equality and the advancing of national interest through the promotion of a
generic "First World belief in women's equality". The extensive critical body
of study on Wong's work, particularly re-readings from within a
contemporary frame, continues to expand available meanings for "historical"
Asian-American texts and their relevance in today's much-changed economy
of literature. Bow stresses, "while representations of race and ethnicity may
resist decontextualization, narratives of gender oppression often assume an
air of timelessness".

*The "Other" Self*

This last section engages primarily with the notion of cultural citizenship
and mechanisms of belonging for racialized minorities in Western societies.
In many ways, its overarching contentions involve permutations of the
assimilative impulse and the elided cultural power of "whiteness." The three
essays in this section probe the sociocultural contexts and representational
politics of their subjects, actively participating in the project summarized
by Timothy Powell as going beyond "an understanding of culture based
solely on biology and/or biography” (176). The complex pressures of ethnic and racial identification, and the ways in which these processes are commodified by individuals and their surrounding communities, are the lens through which the following critiques are performed.

Wenche Ommundsen, whose essay in some ways also overlaps with Louie’s work, considers the disobedient critical persona of one of the best-known Chinese-Australian writers, Ouyang Yu. Ommundsen writes about Ouyang’s work and its attendant identity politics and cultural contexts. She expands on and critiques Ouyang’s themes of alienation, migration, and linguistic and cultural smugness, suggesting, “what fascinates him is the nether limits of the genre”. One of the most controversial aspects of Ouyang’s work has been his showcasing of aggressive male sexuality as part of poetic practice, and Ommundsen does not shy away from investigating this aspect.

Gary Krist, in his review of Eric Liu’s The Accidental Asian, states: “[i]n a population increasingly defined by hyphenated bloodlines ... the task of distinguishing between ‘Asian’ and ‘American’ may be academic sooner than we think” (2). Krist’s gesture towards the classic “melting-pot” model of American multiculturalism finds considerable resistance from David Li’s arguments. Highlighting the cultural work still to be done in critically reading contemporary diasporic Chinese identities, Li’s essay offers a close and rigorous examination of Liu’s book, one that flags “ascriptive and acquisitional Americanness” as its title and core business. Li’s critique of Liu’s high-profile text concludes: “[a]lthough Liu invokes cultural hybridity as an all-purpose ointment, racial mixing is implied as really capable of dissolving the national contradiction between one’s political and cultural consent and one’s biological and racial descent”. In questioning the notion that a person of Chinese descent can claim “nativity” in America, Li makes manifest the lacunae in liberal multicultural rhetoric. In the process, he also exposes the extent of its permeation in some versions of modern “Chinese Americanness.”

Robyn Morris’s essay focuses on gender and racial oppression and the complexity of their effects within exclusionary discourses. She interrogates these issues through an examination of the Eurasian protagonist in Simone Lazaroo’s second novel, The Australian Fiancé. While engaging in a feminist reading, Morris uses the trope of “whiteness” as the hub of her analysis. Her reading discusses the narrative by examining “its resistance to strategies of surveillance that attempt to contain and mark out racialized differences” and how it critically modulates its historical setting of “White Australia.”
Morris argues for the strategy of eroding "whiteness" through its naming and, thus, disrupting the categorization of difference. Her discussion of the aspirational value of whiteness is particularly relevant to our mediations on contemporary forms and processes of racialization, particularly given the growing fascination for "whiteness studies" in many areas of the humanities. An ongoing critical impulse is crucial to ensure that examinations of whiteness "[refuse] to make the [mistake] of forgetting [their] anti-racist and democratic roots [by] lapsing into bourgeoisie self-indulgence, becoming a psychologized attempt to 'feel good' about the angst of privilege, or losing sight of the power dynamics that shape racial relations" (Kincheloe 17).

As is apparent in my introduction to this volume's deliberations, engagements with what could constitute the field of diasporic Chinese literary studies spans many complex formations of culture, identity, and commodification. At the core of this volume is the understanding that these diasporic literatures function as part of cultural economies — global and local — and that they act as carriers of diverse social meanings, many of which delineate the "intimate connection[s] between aesthetics and politics" (Eng 33). Given the broad-ranging and very active area of diaspora studies, this volume does not aim for comprehensiveness. Rather, it provides a unique, cross-contextual set of investigations in the field of "diasporic Chinese literary studies," a set of investigations that contributes to and extends, questions and challenges, existing research and debate from a multitude of sociocultural sites.

Notes

1. For example, see Khoo's *Banana Bending: Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian Literatures* (2003).

2. An example of this is "From Mao to Madonna: 'Bad Girl' Literature and the New China" (Schaffer). Kay Schaffer's project seeks to announce a 'post-Tiananmen' creative sensibility in transnational Chinese women writers, sweeping together authors from mainland China, the US, Australia, Singapore, and the UK. Perhaps an indicator of the sometimes stretched nature of the study is Schaffer's inclusion of Canadian Evelyn Lau's *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid*. Lau's book, based on her diary entries written between 1986 and 1988, sits uneasily in a discussion that purportedly focuses on the emergence of "a post-1989 generation of lost souls" (11).

3. For an excellent discussion of the contemporary tensions between "Chinese" and "Western" feminisms, see Shu-Mei Shih.
4. *Lost in the Whitewash* (Ed. Penny Edwards and Shen Yuanfang) is the first compilation to focus exclusively on Australian Aboriginal and Asian "encounters." It was published in 2003.

5. See David Eng's *Racial Castration*, a text that is adept at drawing together interdisciplinary threads for an innovative study of "queer" spaces and Asian American masculinities.

**Works Cited**


Index

Aboriginal people see Australian Aboriginal people
absence, 178–9, 238, 282
Academy of Chinese Culture
(Zhongguo wenhuo shuyuan), 189
The Accidental Asian see Liu, Eric
"additive" threads, 2
Agamben, Giorgio, 98
Ahmed, Sara, 280
Alarcon, Norma, 157
alienation, 12, 43, 50, 54, 185, 244–5, 264
aliens, 155, 284
Althusser, Louis, 70, 72
American Dream, 22
Americanization, 208, 215, 271
Americanness, ascriptive and acquisitional, 12, 253–77
see also Chinese Americanness
Anderson, Ian, 110
Ang, Ien, 6, 87, 131, 133–4, 143, 167, 177, 189
anger, 9, 236, 240–1, 243–4
Anthias, Floya, 156, 160, 162
aphrodisiacs, 193–5
Appadurai, Arjun, 9
Arbuthnot, May Hill, 212
Asia
Australian perceptions, 110–11, 114–15
diasporic literary cultures, 1, 3, 10, 83–4, 100
economic miracle, 188
European perceptions, 154
marketing Asianness, 5
mythic, 11
traffic with Canada, 155
United States and, 60, 61–3, 65, 67, 73–5
values, 188
see also Southeast Asia
Asian-American fusion cuisine see fusion cuisine
Asian-American studies, 1, 5–6, 9, 95, 132, 143, 153
assimilation, 253–5, 257–9, 261–9, 272
culinary styles, 8, 19–21, 23–4, 28–9
foreign policy see United States foreign policy
masculinity, 197
see also Chinese-American studies
Asian-Australian studies, 1, 7, 110, 118–19, 121–2, 187
see also Chinese-Australian writing; Lazaroo, Simone
Asian-Canadian studies, 1, 7, 10–11, 54–5, 153, 168
Asian diasporic studies conferences, 4, 131
Asian market, 61, 73
Asianness, 5, 10, 19, 281, 285, 296
see also food; pan-Asianness
assimilation, 11
Australia, 235, 283, 286, 295
Canada, 54, 95, 155
United States, 8, 12, 20, 23, 26–8, 32–3, 253–77
Australia
immigration see immigrants; immigration policies
masculinity, 190–3, 198–201
nationalism see nationalism/nationality
whiteness, 279–98
see also Asian-Australian studies; Australian Aboriginal people; Asianness; Chinese-Australian writing; White Australia policy
Australian Aboriginal people, 9, 107, 109, 116–24, 284–5, 288
The Australian Fiance see Lazaroo, Simone
Australian studies, 190–1
Asianness, 9, 117–18, 281, 287, 295–6
authenticity
Chinese American texts, 71, 211, 214, 269–70
Chinese Australian texts, 112, 116, 189, 200
Chinese Canadian texts, 84, 101–2, 162–3, 168–9
Chinese food, 28–9, 32, 35, 88
auto/biographies, 12
Chinese American texts, 212–19, 253, 259, 270–1
Chinese Australian texts, 111–14, 122, 233, 246, 280
Chinese Canadian texts, 41, 82, 94–7, 155
Balibar, Etienne, 265
Banting, Pamela, 82–3
The Barbarians Are Coming see Wong Louie, David
Barbie Dolls, 7–8
Barné, Geremie, 237
Barthes, Roland, 186
Bates, Judy Fong, 136
Beauregard, Guy, xi
chapter by, 9–10, 129–49
belonging, 11, 36, 87, 144, 174, 253, 291
Benjamin, Walter, 85, 90–1, 295
Bennett, Cathy, 200
Berger, John, 295
Berlant, Lauren, 272
Berry, Chris, 115
Bhabha, Homi K., 74, 281, 294, 296
biography see auto/biographies
biology, 12
Chinese American texts, 254, 256–7, 260, 265, 267, 272
Chinese Australian texts, 197
Chinese Canadian texts, 98, 99
Birch, Tony, 115
Birds of Passage see Castro, Brian
Black Civil Rights Movement, 157
Bloom, Harold, 82
body see female body
Bow, Leslie, xi
chapter by, 11, 205-27
Brah, Avtar, 6
Brand, Dionne, 55
Braziel, Jana Evans, 8-9, 129, 134
Broinowski, Alison, 237, 248
Buddhism, 179
The Bulletin, 198, 295-6
Bush, George W., 273
Butler, Judith, 74

Cabezas, Amalia Lucia, 43
Cacho, Lisa Marie, 27
Camfoo, Tex and Nelly, 122
Campbell, Marion J., 193
Canada see Asian-Canadian studies;
Chinese Canadian cultural production in English
Cao, Lan: Monkey Bridge, 208
capitalist society
Asian Australian texts, 288-9
Chinese Canadian texts, 8, 39-40, 43, 46-7, 49, 52-3, 55-6, 133, 175
Carr, Robert, 114
Castro, Brian, 11, 116, 119-21, 184-6, 190-6, 198, 200-1, 245
celestial land, 211, 212-19, 221-2
censorship, 189-90, 193-5, 236
center, 189-90, 195, 198-201
Chakrabarty, Dipesh, 85
Chang, Jung: Wild Swans, 6, 112, 237
Chao, Lien, 41, 53, 56
Charmandy, David, 142
Charlie Chan stereotype, 183-4
Chen Ying, 155
Cheng, Anne Anlin, 69-72, 95, 159, 164
Cheong, Fiona, 208-9
Chin, Frank, 213, 265-6

Year of the Dragon, 8, 20, 23-6, 31, 35
China
Australian perceptions, 111, 233, 236-40, 245-7, 249
cultural, 86-8, 90, 189-90, 201, 205, 224, 234
market, 65-7, 73-5
metaphor, 59
mythic, 11
Orientalizing culture, 188, 192
reception of diasporic literature, 11, 188, 194-5
traffic with Canada, 155
Western perceptions, 5, 183-4
Chinatown, 96, 185, 213-14, 219, 222-3, 270
Chinese-American studies, 1-3, 5-6, 87, 131-2, 190
see also Hwang, David Henry; Liu, Eric; United States foreign policy; Wong, Jade Snow
Chinese Americanness, 12, 265
culinary, 8, 19-38
see also Liu, Eric
Chinese-Australian writing, 2, 3, 6, 87, 134, 285
Gold Rush, 185-6, 196, 200
identity, 107-28
masculinities, 11, 183-204
see also Asian-Australian studies;
Castro, Brian; Ouyang Yu
Chinese Canadian cultural production in English, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9-10, 129-49
queering diasporic fictions, 153-82
see also Lau, Evelyn; Wah, Fred
Chinese diasporic literary studies, 4-6, 13
Australia, 112-13, 116, 119, 188, 237
Canada, 10, 56-7, 86-90, 100, 129, 131, 143-4
see also Chineseness
Chinese language, 2
  Chinese Australian texts, 186, 189, 236
  Chinese American texts, 222, 270, 271
  Chinese Canadian texts, 82–3, 86, 177–8
Chinese restaurants see food
Chinese studies, 5, 190
Chinese women writers, 191, 194
Chineseness
  American assimilation, 255–7, 259, 271
  Australia, 237
  Canada, 134–5, 142, 154, 156, 162, 164–5, 167, 169, 175, 177
culture, 189
deconstructing, 86–93, 101
diaspora studies, 4, 130, 133–4
food pornography, 23–6, 28, 30–5
Jade Snow Wong, 217
  M. Butterfly, 71–2
masculinity, 192, 195
neo-Confucianists, 201
  Wah, 82–3, 86, 97, 101–2, 137, 139
Chinoiserie, 34
Cho, Lily, xi–xii, 142
  chapter by, 9, 81–106
Choi, C.Y., 110
Chong, Denise, 154
Chong, Kevin, 136, 154
Choo, Christine, 118
Chow, Rey, 9, 74, 86–90, 112, 115, 130, 168, 170, 211, 214
Choy, Wayson, 136, 154
Christianity, 179, 219, 290
Chuck, Maurice Wong, 131
Chuh, Kandice, 4
Chun, Allen, 87–8
Chun, Gloria, 183
Chung, Ling, 170–1
citizenship, 11, 133, 166, 207, 271–2, 281, 284
“claiming America”, 269
“claiming Canada”, 154, 148, 161
class
  Australia, 285, 289–90
  Canada, 43, 47–53, 55, 133, 156, 162, 166, 172
  United States, 209, 214, 254, 257, 263, 270, 272
Clements, Marie, 43
Clifford, James, 20, 131, 136, 154, 156, 158, 161
Clinton, Bill, 261, 266
Cold War, 8, 60–1, 63–6, 74, 212, 219–22
Coleman, Daniel, 3
colonizing
  Australia, 107–8, 115–16, 120–1, 124, 186, 231, 282–3, 289, 293–4
  Canada, 83, 91–2, 102, 133–4, 173, 175
  United States, 65, 74, 208
commercialization, 40, 49
commodification, 3–7, 8, 12–13, 39, 51, 54, 136, 214, 222, 289
culinary Chinese America, 23, 19–38
  M. Butterfly, 61–7
commodity fetishism, 8, 56, 59–78, 289
Confucian values, 75, 131, 159–60, 170–1, 174, 188, 197, 201, 264–5
consanguinity, myth of, 87–8, 130
Conrad, Joseph: Heart of Darkness, 293
cosmopolitanist society, 39, 51–3, 268
Cook, James, 91
cookbooks see food
cosmopolitanism, 7, 92–3, 133
Cowlishaw, Gillian, 110, 122
Crary, Jonathan, 293
culinary culture see food
cultural China see China
cultural diversity see multiculturalism
cultural hybridity see hybridity
cultural nationalism see nationalism
cultural politics, 7, 24
Cultural Revolution, 66–7, 74, 112, 191
cultural texts, 40, 130, 136, 142–4, 154
cultural theory, 129–34, 136, 142–3
culture
  Chinese-Australian writing, 109–16
diasporic studies, 3–7
Cummings, Bruce, 59, 63, 69
Curthoys, Ann, 116, 124

Dai Yin, 110
Darwinism, 215
Dean, Misao, 41
dehconstructing Chineseness, 86–93
denationalization, 132
derksen, Jeffrey, 84, 86
desires, 39–58
  commodifying, 7–8
gopolitics, 59–78
gopolitics: M. Butterfly, 67–75
Lazaroo, 286–9
Wah, 101–2
see also sexuality
diasporic Asian studies see Asian
diasporic studies
diasporic Chinese literary studies see
  Chinese diasporic literary studies
diasporic community (Wah’s poetry),
  93–103
diasporic literature, 1–15
  as problem, 142–9
  conferences, 4, 131
  discontents, 130–4
  poetics, 134–6
  re-visitations, 8–10
diasporic memory see memory
Dickinson, Peter, 157
difference
  Australia, 12–13, 279–81, 283, 285,
    287, 289, 291–2
  Canada, 8, 156–7, 161, 165, 172
  United States, 213, 217, 261, 263,
    266–8, 270, 273
Ding, Raymond, 206
Disappearing Moon Cafe see Lee, SKY
discontents, 130–4
discrimination, 200, 217, 221, 238,
  261–2
disidentification, 27–8, 33
disinheritance, 186–90
diversity see multiculturalism
Doyle, James A., 197
Drift see Castro, Brian
DuCille, Ann, 7–8
Dyer, Richard, 290, 293

East Asia see Asia
East/West binary
  Asian Americans, 5
  fusion cuisine, 21–2, 32
  Lai, 165
  M. Butterfly, 59–60, 64, 71, 75
  masculinity, 183–4, 193
  Ouyang, 246
  economic exchange, 61–3, 65, 68, 70–2
  economics, 188, 211, 237
  economies of difference, 7
  editing see publishing
  education, 50, 214, 217–18, 220, 258
  Edwards, Brent Hayes, 130
  Edwards, Louise, 190
  Edwards, Penny, 123
  Ee Tiang Hong, 111
  Eng, David L., 24, 28, 157, 168, 197
  English language, 2, 6
    Australia, 198, 233–4, 239, 241–2,
      245
    Canada, 82–3, 86, 253, 256–7, 266,
      270
United States, 22
see also language

Enlightenment, European, 99–100

essentialism
Australia, 116–17, 119, 254, 290, 293
Canada, 83, 86, 88, 90, 140, 154, 156, 162
United States, 60

ethnic writing, 20, 54, 113, 115–16, 118, 187, 206, 213

ethnicity, 7, 12
Australia, 124, 184–5, 192, 285
Canada, 5, 83, 87, 95, 130–2, 135, 140–2, 153–4, 156–62, 164–5, 167–9, 175, 178
Singapore, 208–9
United States, 8, 11, 23–6, 211–12, 214–15, 221–2, 224, 255, 259, 261, 264, 266

ethnography, 20–1, 83–5

Eurasians see racial mixedness

Eurocentrism, 8, 140, 170, 294–5

European languages, 2, 155, 244–5, 256

exclusion
Asian Australian texts, 12, 121, 287, 297, 284
Chinese American texts, 219, 256
Chinese Canadian texts, 135, 140, 144, 172

culinary Chinese America, 33–6

exploitation, 42, 44, 46–7, 53–4, 56, 70, 175

exports, 7

feminism, 11, 205–27

face, 2

Facey, A.B., 197

“faking it”, 138–9

family
Australia, 188, 240, 280–1, 286, 289

Canada, 47–9, 53–4, 164–5, 168–9, 172, 176

Fanon, Frantz, 47, 279, 283, 287, 289–90

father figures
Jade Snow Wong, 214, 217–19, 222–3
Kwa, 172–3, 179
Lau, 41, 44–5, 48, 50–1, 54
Lazaroo, 280, 291
Liu, 255–6, 271
Wah, 93, 95, 97–8, 101, 137–40

female body, 41–2, 287

feminism, 10

Asian Australian texts, 12, 190, 193, 244, 247
Chinese Canadian texts, 136, 157, 159–62, 170, 179
exporting (US), 11, 205–27

feminization, 10, 24, 60, 193

Fengjiuling (Foong Wai Fong), 188, 194

fengshui (geomancy), 196

fetishism, 7, 287

see also commodity fetishism

First Nations people, 42

First World see Western culture

Fisher, Susan, 83

Fitzgerald, Shirley, 110

food, 19–38

Australia, 286

Jade Snow Wong, 213, 217

Chinese American, 21–3
taste, 81–106

Wah, 97–103

see also fusion cuisine

food pornography, 23–6, 33, 213

Foong Wai Fong (Fengjiuling), 188, 194

foreign policy see United States foreign policy
Foucault, Michel, 212
fox women myth, 159–60, 163–6, 168–71
Freud, Sigmund, 47, 89, 100, 178
Fu Manchu stereotype, 183–4
Fung, Richard, 10, 136, 139–42, 155, 168
fusion cuisine, 8, 20–3, 26, 30, 32–4
Gagnon, Monika Kin, 10, 139
Ganguly, Keya, 101
Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., 253, 254
gay texts, 10, 28, 141, 157, 166–8, 177, 191, 221
see also homophobia; lesbianism
Geary, Joyce, 212
gender, 7, 8, 10
Asian Australian texts, 12, 185, 190,
192–8, 243, 246, 248, 287–8, 290
Chinese American texts, 11, 59–60,
207–12, 215–16, 222, 224–5
Chinese Canadian texts, 156, 167
geopolitics of desire, 59–78
M. Butterfly, 67–75
geomancy (fengshui), 196
Giese, Diana, 113, 114, 117, 235
Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, 219
Gilroy, Paul, 131, 142, 144, 156, 161,
173, 176, 263
global cities, 133–4, 143
globalization
academic, 4
capitalism, 43, 133, 268
citizenship, 166
cultural theories, 143, 224
feminism, 209
masculinity, 184
migration patterns, 132, 223
politics, 259
social and cultural, 133, 136, 159, 246
textual influences, 6, 13, 92
Godard, Barbara, 5
Goddard, Jonathan, 101
Goellnicht, Donald C., xii, 3, 143
chapter by, 10–11, 153–82
Gopinath, Gayatri, 11
government, 7, 109, 121–2, 124, 289, 296
Greenblatt, Stephen, 85
Gregory, Chester W., 216
Gunew, Sneja, 29, 113, 115
Gunn, Jeannie, 197
Hagedorn, Jessica: Dog eaters, 207–8
Halbwachs, Maurice, 96
Hall, Stuart, 9, 129, 131, 134, 144, 156,
163, 169, 171, 285, 286–7
Hannerz, Ulf, 4
Hanson, Pauline, 232
Haraway, Donna, 279, 295
Harvard University, 189–90
Hawthorne, Susan, 114
Hegel, G.W.F., 85, 93, 100
Heldke, Lisa, 24
Hennessy, Rosemary, 43, 47, 53
heteronormativity, 8, 56–7, 156–7, 159,
167–8, 175–6, 296
Hibbins, Ray, 191
history
Asian Australian texts, 192, 200–1,
237, 285, 289, 292
Chinese American texts, 209–10,
219, 223–4, 254, 257, 261
Chinese Canadian texts, 155, 162–
4, 166, 169–70, 175
nostalgia and historicity (Canada), 9,
82, 84–5, 86–93, 95–6, 102
Hodge, Bob, 120
Hom, Alice Y., 28, 157, 168, 197
homeland, 5
Asian Australian texts, 112, 115
Chinese Canadian texts, 92–3, 96,
102, 131, 140, 158–9, 164, 169,
172–6, 178
homesickness see nostalgia
homogenization, 4, 140, 156
homophobia, 24, 165–6, 168–9
homosexuality see gay texts
Hong, Ying, 6
Hong Kong, 75, 87, 93, 111, 119, 155, 158, 169, 184, 188
Hornadge, Bill, 198
Huang, Yunte, 5–6
Huaren website, 133
Huck, Arthur, 110
hula-hoops, 64–7, 74
human rights, 208
humanism, 59–60, 263
Huangfu, Jun, 114
Huppatz, D.J., 234, 236
Hwang, David Henry: M. Butterfly, 8, 59–78
hybridity
Australia, 119–21, 281
Canada, 84, 133, 143, 156, 165, 177
United States, 12, 254, 273
identity
Chinese-American texts, 35, 253–4, 256, 261, 266–7
diasporic studies, 3–7
Hong Kong, 184
see also disidentification
identity politics, 5, 7, 10, 12, 81, 90, 267, 280, 290
ideologies
Asian Australian texts, 109–16, 187, 192, 290, 292, 294, 296–7
Chinese-American texts, 27, 213, 219, 222, 224–5, 263
Chinese-Canadian texts, 160
immigrants
Australia, 12, 107, 111–12, 114–17, 124, 187, 199, 201, 232, 234–5, 238–9, 243, 245, 248
United States, 34, 218–19, 255–6, 261
immigration policies
Australia, 109, 187, 249, 282–6, 289
Canada, 134–5, 173
United States, 65, 223
imperialism
Asian American texts, 59–61, 65–7, 71
Asian Australian texts, 279–80, 282, 284, 288, 292–7
Asian Canadian texts, 133, 210, 224, 255, 259
In the Mood for Love (film), 89
inclusion see exclusion
indigenous groups, 9
see also Australian Aboriginal people; First Nations people
individualism
Chinese American texts, 214, 219, 254, 261, 263, 268, 273
Chinese Canadian texts, 41, 53, 57, 81
Inglis, Christine, 110
inscrutable Oriental stereotype, 73, 197, 238
Ismail, Jam., 136
Iyer, Pico, 225
 Jacobs, Lyn, 233
Japan, 60, 61–5, 67, 74–5, 183, 197, 265, 266, 282, 285
Japanese poetic forms, 83
Jefferson, Thomas, 260
Jones, Margaret, 235
Index

Jose, Nicholas, 234, 235, 241
*The Joy Luck Club* see Tan, Amy
Julien, Isaac, 157

Kabeer, Nalila, 210
Kadohata, Cynthia: *The Floating World*, 208
Kam, Winston Christopher, 155
Kant, Immanuel, 102
Keenan, Thomas, 68—9, 72
Keller, Nora Okja: *Comfort Women*, 208
Kettner, James, 271
Khoo, Tseen, xii, 117, 118
chapter by, 1—15
Kidd, Ros, 110
Kim, Elaine, 132, 215, 219
Kim, Jodi, xii
chapter by, 8, 59—78
Kingston, Maxine Hong, 95, 112, 158, 191, 207, 221, 269
kinship, 133
Kiyooka, Roy, 83
Kondo, Dorinne, 7
Korea, 75, 188, 265, 285
Krist, Gary, 12
Kwa, Lydia, 56, 136
*This Place Called Absence*, 10—11, 155—63, 172—9

labor, 40, 216—17
see also sexual labor
Lacan, Jacques, 72—3
Lai, Larissa, 136
*When Fox Is a Thousand*, 10—11, 155—72, 176, 179
Laiwan, 136
language, 12
Chinese American texts, 256, 260
Chinese Australian texts, 192, 232, 243
Chinese Canadian texts, 56, 136, 138, 157, 163, 170, 177—8
see also Chinese language; English language; European languages
Lau, Evelyn, 8, 39—58, 154
Lazaroo, Simone, 279—98
*The Australian Fiancé*, 12, 121, 279, 281—5, 287—9, 291, 292—5
*The World Waiting to Be Made*, 279—82, 286—91
Le Guerier, Annick, 100
Lee, Bruce, 30
Lee, Christopher, 144
Lee, Gregory, 189
Lee, Helen, 140
Lee, Helie: *Still Life With Rice*, 207
Lee Kuan-yew, 188
Lee, Nancy, 135
Lee, Rachel, 24
Lee, SKY, 136, 154, 155
*Disappearing Moon Café*, 158, 207
Lee, Wen-Ho, 258
Leviens Morales, Aurora, 207
Li Bai, 271
Li, David Leiwei, xiii
chapter by, 12, 253—77
liberalism
Australia, 232
Canada, 57, 158, 161, 164—5, 172, 178
United States, 207—12, 214—15, 218—20
light, culture of (*The Australian Fiancé*), 292—5
Ling, Chek, 113
Lipsitz, George, 258
literary constraints (Chinese-Australian writing), 109—16
literary marketplace see publishing
Liu, Eric: *The Accidental Asian*, 12, 253—77
Liu Guande, 114
Lo, Eileen Yin-Fei, 25
Lo, Jacqueline, 281
local identities, 9, 13, 136, 143
Louie, David Wong see Wong Louie, David
Louie, Kam, xiii
chapter by, 11, 12, 183-204
Lowe, Lisa, 9
Lye, Colleen, 5, 75

M. Butterfly see Hwang, David Henry
McClintock, Anne, 47, 288
McCormick, Thomas J., 65
McKee, Delber, 65
Madame Butterfly genre, 61, 69
Maira, Sunaina, 20
Mannur, Annita, xiii, 8-9, 129, 134
chapter by, 8, 19-38
Mao Zedong, 60, 237
see also Cultural Revolution
Marcus, Jane, 206
market forces, 39-58, 268
marketing, 7-8, 23-6
Asian market, 61, 65-7, 73-5
Marxism, 62, 66, 68-70, 73, 85, 129, 141
masculinities, 10-11
Asian-American, 22, 24
M. Butterfly, 59, 71
Orientalist and Ocker, 183-204
masculinism, 156, 160, 282, 284, 288, 296
Mathur, Ashok, 138, 160
Meer, Ameena: Bombay Talkie, 207
melancholy, 9, 88-9, 93, 95, 159, 164, 169, 178, 240
Memmi, Albert, 92
memory, 9, 81-106, 163-4, 170, 172-3, 179, 192, 266-7
Wah's poetry, 93-103, 137
merchandising see marketing
Mercer, Kobena, 9, 129, 157
migrants see immigrants
Miki, Roy, 39, 135
Milkman, Ruth, 216
Min, Anchee: Red Azalea, 208
minority texts, 2-3, 5-6, 9-11, 84, 113, 115, 132, 159
miscegenation see racial mixedness
Mishra, Vijay, 120, 131, 143
misogyny, 159, 207
mixed race see racial mixedness
Mo, Timothy, 6
model minority myth, 22, 26, 27, 32, 33, 34, 35, 172-3, 257
Moraga, Cherrie and Gloria Anzaldúa (eds): This Bridge Called My Back, 206-7
Mori, Toshio, 206
Morris, Barry, 110
Morris, Robyn, xiii-xiv
chapter by, 12-13, 279-98
mourning, 92-3, 95, 159, 162, 179
multiculturalism
Australia, 108-9, 114, 116, 124, 187, 231-51, 294
Canada, 55, 134, 140, 156-8, 161, 165-7, 173
comparative, 1-2, 5, 7-8
food, 29, 33
global, 166
Hong Kong, 184
United States, 12, 209, 211, 224, 254, 267-8
Muñoz, José Esteban, 27
naming, 170-2, 179, 196, 198
Nancy, Jean-Luc, 85
Narayan, Uma, 29
nationalism/nationality, 5-6
Australia, 9, 184, 187, 198-200, 249, 282, 284-6, 288
Canada, 7, 81, 84, 86-8, 90, 133, 140, 156-7, 160, 167, 172-4
Index

Singapore, 209
United States, 206–7, 211, 221, 255, 257–60, 266, 269–70, 273
native informants, 26, 32, 111–13, 211, 213–14, 221
New World Order, 225, 255
Newcombe, H.S., 293–4
Nguyen, Viet, 2
Nielsen, Aldon, 84
Nonini, Donald, 133
Nora, Pierre, 96, 100
nostalgia, 9, 115–16, 120, 159, 231, 237, 271
historicism and (Canada), 9, 82, 84–5, 86–93, 95–6, 99, 102
Nowra, Louis, 282

Odzer, Cleo, 210
Okihiro, Gary, 34
Old White Daddies, 41
Ommundsen, Wenche, xiv, 111, 112, 113–14, 116, 187
chapter by, 12, 231–51
Ong, Aihwa, 131–4, 143–4, 209–10
oppression, 12, 55, 133, 142, 206–7, 214, 263
oral history, 111, 113–14, 234–5
Orientalism
American, 5, 19, 23–4, 30, 34, 253, 265
Canada, 8, 41, 165–7
Chinese culture, 188, 192
Castro, 193–4, 198
M. Butterfly, 60, 62, 67, 69, 71–3
Otherness, 8, 11–13
Canada, 166
commodification, 19
exotic, 24, 33
feminism, 10
language, 82
Orientalism, 69
United States, 211
Ouyang Yu, 12, 192, 201
identity, 107, 110–11, 119
multicultural Australia, 231–51
Palumbo-Liu, David, 129
pan-Asianness, 26, 262, 265
Paterson, A.B. Banjo, 198–200
Patton, Cindy, 161–2
patriarchy
Chinese American texts, 207, 209–10, 218
Chinese Australian texts, 192–3
Perera, Suvendrini, 284
peripheries, 4, 189
Philippines, 73, 155, 208
philosophy, 193–4
photography (The Australian Fiancé), 292–5
πO, 244
Pickton, Robert, 42
Pierce, Peter, 186
Pietz, William, 68, 73
place, textual, 2, 161–2
poetic forms
Ouyang, 241, 245
Wah, 82–6
poetics of diaspora, 130, 134–6, 140, 143
politics, 2, 5, 7–12
Australia, 123, 236, 279–80, 282, 284, 296
Canada, 42, 55–6, 83–4, 87, 133, 135, 140–2, 154, 156–7, 164
China, 71–3, 195, 236–7
Index

United States, 24, 35-6, 211, 215, 220, 259-60
see also cultural politics; geopolitics; identity politics
populism, 11, 194
postcolonialism, 1-2, 90, 92, 133, 142, 207-8, 210
postethnicity, 234, 263
Powell, Timothy, 11
power structure
Asian-Australian texts, 121, 243, 280, 286-7, 290, 293-7
Chinese-American texts, 218, 259
Chinese-Canadian texts, 39-40, 42, 44-5, 49, 55-6, 102, 157
class and, 49-53
M. Butterfly, 70, 72
see also patriarchy
problems
diaspora, 142-4
migration, 115
progress, 5, 91, 93, 165, 207-11, 240, 288
prostitution see sexual labor
psychoanalysis and class, 47-9
Puar, Jasbir, 156, 167
publishing, 20, 40-2, 53-4, 111, 113
Puccini see Madame Butterfly genre
Quan, Andy, 10
queerness, 10-11, 27-8, 56, 136, 153-82
see also gay texts; lesbianism
race, 6, 8, 12, 54
Australia, 119, 122, 184, 197, 279, 281, 283, 285-6, 288-92, 297
Canada, 9, 10, 81-3, 87, 90, 95, 140, 154, 156-7, 161, 163-4, 167, 169, 172
United States, 11, 60, 210-11, 213-15, 217, 222, 224-5, 254-5, 257-60, 262-5, 267-8, 270-3
rational minorities see minority texts
racial mixedness, 12, 85, 137, 177, 200, 270-3, 279-83, 286-9, 294, 296
racialization
Australia, 279, 282, 288, 291-2, 296
Canada, 155, 159
communities, 95
cultural agents, 2
cultural production, 7
differences, 12-13
Fung, 140
minorities, 11
politics, 9, 258
subjectivity, 82
Wah’s writing, 83-6, 101, 137-9, 142
racism
Australia, 116, 120, 200, 232-3, 235, 238-9, 248, 280-2, 284-6, 288, 290-1, 295
Canada, 41, 87, 95, 139-40, 142, 165-6, 168
United States, 254, 259, 267, 273
Radhakrishnan, R., 9
representation, 2, 7, 11, 135-6, 139-44, 279, 282, 286
representational transparency (Chinese-Australian writing), 115, 116-24
restaurants see food
Rexroth, Kenneth, 170
Reynolds, Henry, 110
Rich, Adrienne, 159
Ringer, Benjamin, 260
Roberts, Bev, 190
Rodriguez, Richard, 254, 256
Rolls, Eric, 234
Romantic mode, 140, 199, 209
Rushton, J. Philippe, 198
Ryan, James, 292-3, 295
Ryan, Jan, 201
Said, Edward, 34, 69, 165
Sánchez-Eppler, Benigno, 161–2
Sang Ye, 113, 114, 235, 237, 249
Sassen, Saskia, 133
Scott, David, 81, 85, 100–1
sentimentality, 89, 101–2, 114, 120, 205–6, 213, 224, 271
Seremetakis, Nadia, 99, 100
sex trade workers see sexual labor
sexism, 41, 215, 248
sexuality
Asian Australian texts, 12, 183, 190–4, 195–8, 232, 236–7, 242–4, 247–8, 283, 287–8, 290
Chinese-American texts, 59–60, 224
Chinese-Canadian texts, 43, 140–1, 156–7, 159–61, 163, 166–9, 171–2, 175–6, 178
commodification, 7
sexing diaspora, 10–11
Sheehan, Paul, 114
Shen Yuan-fang, 111, 123
Shi Guoying, 191
Shigekuni, Julie, 206
Shimakawa, Karen, 4, 73
Sinfelld, Alan, 157
Singapore, 2, 75, 209
Asian Australian texts, 111, 121, 188, 280–3, 288–9, 291–2, 294
Chinese Canadian texts, 133, 155, 158–62, 172–6
Sinofcentrism, 165, 265
Slemon, Stephen, 142
social investments, 53–7
social justice, 40, 47–8, 51
socioeconomic status, 20, 22–3, 26–7, 34, 50, 53–4, 162, 235, 260
Sollors, Warner, 271, 272
Sontag, Susan, 292–3
Southeast Asia, 3, 111, 177, 188, 210, 220, 265, 285
see also Singapore
Spivak, Gayatri, 75, 113, 118, 143, 161, 210, 219
Steel, Shelby, 254
Stephenson, Peta, xiv
chapter by, 9, 107–28
stereotypes
Asian Americans, 34–5
Asian cooks, 22, 197
Asian Australian texts, 116, 237–8, 287–8
Chinese Americans, 24, 26, 31–3, 261, 263
Chinese Canadians, 139, 172
Chinese migrants, 112
Lau, 41
M. Butterfly, 59–60, 73
Oriental women, 8
Orientalist, 183–4
racial, 197
Stevens, F.S., 110
Stone, Sharman, 110
styles, Asian, 19–20
Su, Karen, 216–17, 219
subaltern experience, 114, 133, 210, 219
subversive literature, 2, 5–6
Sugars, Cynthia, 83
Sydney, 133
Taiwan, 75, 111, 155, 188, 254–5
Tan, Amy, 112, 191, 192, 194, 208, 256
The Joy Luck Club, 205–6, 208
Taoism, 170–1, 193–5, 198
Target ® Stores, 23, 26, 32, 35
taste see food
television, 20–1, 30–2, 40, 135
Terdiman, Richard, 94
Thien, Madeleine, 135, 154
Third World
  economics, 188
  feminism, 157, 209–10
This Bridge Called My Back (ed. Moraga and Anzaldúa), 206–7
This Place Called Absence see Kwa, Lydia
Tiananmen Square massacre, 164, 235
tolerance, 7, 165–6, 168
  see also liberalism; multiculturalism
transformations, 2, 156, 179, 195, 253, 269, 286
transnationality, 3, 5, 9, 207, 245
  Chinese Canadian texts, 89–90, 132–3, 142, 144, 155–6, 169
transpacific experience, 81, 98, 155, 158, 165, 173
travel relations, 136
triumphalism, 205–6, 219, 267
truth and fiction, 20, 36, 200
Tsai, Ming, 8, 19, 20, 21–3, 25–6, 32–5
Tu Wei-Ming, 86–7, 90, 189–90, 201
Turner, Frederick Jackson, 73
Turner, Graeme, 199
uber-Oriental (M. Butterfly), 8, 61, 67, 73–5
United Kingdom, 6
United States see Americanness; Asian-American studies; Chinese-American studies; Chinese Americanness
United States foreign policy, 60–7, 132, 183, 219–21, 225
universities, 109–10, 135
uses of diaspora, 130, 143
van den Berg, Rosemary, 124
Van Gulik, R.H., 168
Vancouver Five, 55
Vietnam, 155
violence, 41–2, 120, 137
Wah, Fred, 9, 10, 54–5, 81–106, 135, 136–9, 140, 142
Walcott, Rinaldo, 135
Walker, Alice, 206
Walker, David, 110
Walwicz, Ania, 233, 244
Wang Gungwu, 86
Wang Ling-chi, 86–7
Waring, Marilyn, 52
Warner, Marina, 292
wen-wu see masculinities
West, Cornell, 279
West Indies, 155
Western culture, 7, 10, 11, 287, 289, 294, 297
  see also East/West binary; feminism
Westernization, 190, 196, 208, 212, 241
When Fox Is a Thousand see Lai, Larissa
White, Hayden, 209
White, Patrick, 234
White, Richard, 285, 291
White Australia policy, 12–13, 235, 284–5
whiteness, 11
  Australia, 12–13, 279–98
  Canada, 156–7, 165, 167
  United States, 256–9, 261, 268–9, 271–2
Wild Swans see Chang, Jung
women
  Castro, 193, 200
diasporic communities, 156, 160
  labor, 216–17
sexuality, 190
stereotypes, 8
writers, 5, 24, 112–13, 187, 190–2, 206–9, 224, 279
  see also lesbianism; sexual labor
Wong, Jade Snow, 11, 211–27
  as ambassador, 219–21
  meeting with, 222–5
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pages/References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wong Kar Wai: <em>In the Mood for Love</em> (film)</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wong, Rita</td>
<td>xiv, 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chapter by</td>
<td>8, 39–58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wong Sau-ling Cynthia</td>
<td>23, 24, 35, 131–2, 134, 143, 213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wong, Shawn</td>
<td>205–7, 222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wong-Chu, Jim</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wong Louie, David: <em>The Barbarians Are Coming</em></td>
<td>8, 20, 26–35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woo, Merle</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright, Richard</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wu, Frank</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamamoto, Hisaye</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan, Martin</td>
<td>21, 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarwood, A.T.</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Year of the Dragon</em> see Chin, Frank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeats, W.B.</td>
<td>201, 244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yee, Paul</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yellow peril myth</td>
<td>35, 74, 183, 235, 281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yin-yang dyad</td>
<td>193–5, 197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yong, C.F.</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoon, Suh-kyung</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young, Robert</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu, Henry</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu Huan-Chi</td>
<td>166–8, 170–1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu, Sarah</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Jie</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhong Yong</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhongguo wenhua shuyuan (Academy of Chinese Culture)</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhou Xiaoping</td>
<td>9, 117–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zizek, Slavoj</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION: Culture, Identity, Commodity: Testing Diasporic Literary Boundaries. (pp. 1-16). TSEEN KHOO. In contemporary cultural theory, the term diaspora has come to refer, in a rather loose sense, to the production of cultural identities in the aftermath of various histories of migration and dispersal as well as to a range of critical projects committed to rethinking the question of cultural identity.