Representations of Belonging in Asian Australian Writing

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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... iii
Statement of Authorship ............................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................................... v
Introduction ................................................................................................................... 1
  Asian Australian Writing in Anthologies ................................................................. 9
  The Concept of Place ................................................................................................. 18
Chapter One ................................................................................................................... 31
  ‘The Geography Closest In’: Narrating Bodies in Hsu-Ming Teo’s Behind the Moon
    Introduction ................................................................................................................ 31
    Restricted Bodies in Hsu-Ming Teo’s Behind the Moon .......................................... 36
    Liberation of the Body in Tom Cho’s Look Who’s Morphing ................................. 59
    Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 66
Chapter Two ................................................................................................................... 69
  Representations of Domestic Spaces in Alice Pung’s Unpolished Gem (2006) and
  Her Father’s Daughter (2011) .................................................................................... 69
    Introduction ................................................................................................................ 69
    Conceptualising ‘Home’ ............................................................................................ 70
    Unpolished Gem.......................................................................................................... 74
    Her Father’s Daughter ............................................................................................... 92
    Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 102
Chapter Three ................................................................................................................. 104
  Articulations of Chinatown and Ethnic Businesses in Growing Up Asian in Australia
  (2008) ......................................................................................................................... 104
    Introduction ................................................................................................................ 104
    A Brief Social History of Chinatown ........................................................................ 107
    Internal Differences: The Breaking Down of Essentialist Notions of Identity ......... 113
    Sites of Belonging, Unboundedness, and Anxieties: Hybrid Identities and Ethnic
    Consciousness ........................................................................................................... 123
    Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 136
Chapter Four ................................................................................................................... 138
  Suburban Reality and Myth in Simone Lazaroo’s The World Waiting to be Made
  (1994) and Siew Siang Tay’s Handpicked (2004) ...................................................... 138
    Introduction ................................................................................................................ 138
    Australian Suburbs in Context: How they Came to Be and What they (used to)
    Represent .................................................................................................................... 139
    The Development of the Australian Suburbs ............................................................ 141
    Anti-Suburban Commentary ..................................................................................... 143
    Asians and the Australian Suburb ............................................................................. 146
Living the Suburban Reality: Exploring ‘Eurasian’ Within a Racialised and Exoticised Suburban Entrapment in Simone Lazaroo’s *The World Waiting to be Made* .................................................. 149

Suburban Allegory and the Motif of In-Betweenness in the Self .................................................. 151


Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................... 173

Chapter Five ...................................................................................................................................... 175

Reading Transnational Landscapes in Nam Le’s *The Boat* (2008) and Brian Castro’s *Shanghai Dancing* (2003) ................................................................................................................. 175

Introduction ....................................................................................................................................... 175

Transnationalism and Asian Australian Literary Studies ................................................................. 178

Nam Le’s *The Boat* (2008) .............................................................................................................. 182

Brian Castro and the Convergence of the Memory and Spatial Palimpsests with Transnational Mobility ................................................................................................................................. 193

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................... 204

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................... 206

Works Consulted ................................................................................................................................. 216
Abstract

Australia has a long and ambivalent history with Asia. With an increasing visibility of the social and political presence of ‘Asia’ in Australia, the growing importance of the Asian region to Australia’s economy, and a transnational mobility of people and cultures across the globe, it becomes more relevant than ever to re-examine how a concept of Asian Australian identity and belonging might be understood in contemporary Australia. This thesis pursues this central question through the examination of a selection of recent Australian literary texts by writers of East and Southeast Asian-descent. In particular, the thesis maps shifting representations of Asian-Australian identity in these texts through increasingly expansive spatial categories – from the individual body, to the domestic home, to the ethnic ‘ghetto’, to the suburb, and finally to the global world – as their protagonists engage with normative ideas of ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality within Australian society. In different ways, the nine literary works considered in this thesis address the process of marking out a space of belonging in a contemporary culture that still places constant pressure on non-Anglo-Australian notions of identity. Ultimately, each of these works rejects any singular or definitive concept of ‘Asian’ experience or identity in Australia, in favour of a more complex and flexible understanding that identity and belonging are concepts that are always subject to border-crossing. Above all, these works not only challenge conventional understandings of what it means to be ‘Asian’ in contemporary Australia, but also challenge conventional understandings of what it means to be ‘Australian’.
Statement of Authorship

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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June 2016
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