

# Asian Diasporas

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## Cultures, Identities, Representations

*Edited by*

*Robbie B. H. Goh and Shawn Wong*



香港大學出版社

HONG KONG UNIVERSITY PRESS

Hong Kong University Press  
14/F Hing Wai Centre  
7 Tin Wan Praya Road  
Aberdeen  
Hong Kong

© Hong Kong University Press 2004

ISBN 962 209 672 7 (Hardback)

ISBN 962 209 673 5 (Paperback)

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Secure On-line Ordering  
<http://www.hkupress.org>

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library.

Printed and bound by Condor Production Co. Ltd., in Hong Kong, China

The image shows the Chinese characters for '香港大學' (Hong Kong University) written in a highly stylized, square-format calligraphic style. Each character is contained within a square frame, and the overall composition is vertical, reading from top to bottom.

Hong Kong University Press is honoured that Xu Bing, whose art explores the complex themes of language across cultures, has written the Press's name in his Square Word Calligraphy. This signals our commitment to cross-cultural thinking and the distinctive nature of our English-language books published in China.

"At first glance, Square Word Calligraphy appears to be nothing more unusual than Chinese characters, but in fact it is a new way of rendering English words in the format of a square so they resemble Chinese characters. Chinese viewers expect to be able to read Square Word Calligraphy but cannot. Western viewers, however are surprised to find they can read it. Delight erupts when meaning is unexpectedly revealed."

— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*

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## Introduction

# The Culture of Asian Diasporas: Integrating/Interrogating (Im)migration, Habitus, Textuality

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*Robbie B. H. Goh*

The claim that Asian diasporas are cultural phenomena would in all likelihood meet little or no objection — except, of course, for the problem of what precisely is meant by “culture”? In what ways can an understanding of cultural influences, transformations, and representations affect the study of those major transnational human movements that are the foci of diaspora studies? What kinds of relationships can be posited between the “hard” data of migration statistics and histories, housing and employment analyses of migrant workers, and the like, on the one hand; and the “soft” data of literature written by diasporic writers, representations of race in the context of immigration, the psychology or mentality of diasporas, and related material, on the other hand?

The present volume attempts to argue for the importance of a wider range of cultural documents — “high” literary texts, popular writings and public discourses, film and media texts, architecture and spatial design, the various cultural elements that shape identity politics and consciousnesses — in the analysis of diasporic movements. As Chuh and Shimakawa (2001: 5) observe, “In order to understand the phenomenon of globalization, it is necessary to ‘globalize’ academic practices by thinking across disciplinary and areal boundaries.” Such

cultural documents play a crucial role in acknowledging the complexity of diasporic identities, particularly in the present age of “global citizens” who face, and represent, a multiplicity of competing allegiances, claims, rights, and duties (Holston and Appadurai 1999; Sassen 1999). Until very recently, diaspora studies arguably did not pay sufficient attention to issues of global claims and rights, in part because these are often regarded as the privileged domain and condition of the “corporate and media elites” of global capitalism (Sassen 1999: 100). In turn, in the popular conception, immigration is regarded as the influx of lowly qualified members of a workforce who, it is commonly assumed, will take on low-paying jobs (if they are at all successful in gaining employment), live in abject conditions, and contribute to urban problems like crime and the creation of ghettos. Thus a recent article on “Who Gains from Immigration?” in *The Economist*, which considers the impact of immigration on Britain’s economy: while acknowledging that immigrants to Britain are “both more and less skilled,” the article in the main pursues the argument that immigrants “are generally prepared to work at lower wages” (*Economist* 2002: 56). Consequently, immigration adds supply pressures in those less desirable occupations for which immigrants compete and lowers those wages; the net result is that “immigration makes business and most people a bit better off, and some of the poor poorer” (*Economist* 2002: 56).

While this argument is hardly surprising in an article concerned with the economic results of immigration, it is representative of a type of discourse and consciousness which reifies transnational human movement in terms of labor and wages; social effects, where they are considered at all, usually focus on ills such as the loss of “public safety” and “cultural identity,” an increase in crimes, and an overburdening of welfare systems and provisions in the receiving nations (Sung 2001: 11). This reifying tendency is not merely a discourse of the popular press and media, nor is it merely a result of immigration-centered analyses and accounts. As Van Hear (1998: 5, 13–6) observes, scholarly accounts of “diaspora” tend to cluster around notions of “forced dispersions,” memories of the homeland and a desire to return there, socioeconomic “disparities between places of origin and destination,” laws and policies that prohibit or permit migration/immigration, “macropolitical economy,” and the like. Despite the differences between these accounts, and their usefulness for scholarly analysis, they nevertheless tend to

regard diasporas as mechanistic, static, and divisive. The emphasis on migratory flows and their various parameters narrows the notion of "diaspora" to a set of systemic causes not unlike the machinery of a global "invisible hand" (admittedly a complex one, incorporating interventions by various agencies and authorities) moving counters from a "push" area to a "pull" one. It is in turn tempting to see such migratory flows as divisive bipolarities set up between the original and host countries, played out in various oppositional terms such as "home" and "alien place," "self" and "other," "crisis spot" and "asylum," "poor" and "rich," and so on. Studies and anthologies such as *Ideas of Home* (Kain 1997) and *Narrating Nationalisms* (Ling 1998) are thus perhaps unfortunately titled, since they seem to hypostasize notions of a "homeland" or a discrete "national boundary" — notions which come under the most pressure in contemporary transnational conditions.

Van Hear's review of the scholarship is part of his argument for a more inclusive understanding of "New Diasporas," one which accepts more complexly fluid, multiple, and recurrent movements, which result in "transnational communities" rather than in relatively static displacements of laborers and asylum seekers (Van Hear 1998: 1, 6). To this necessary call for a more fluid notion of diasporic movements may be added a call for more fully textured studies of diasporic lives and lived experiences. As Yeoh and Huang (1998: 584) observe, scholarship on "Third World female migrants" has tended to view these individuals "first and foremost as *workers*," to the neglect of issues pertaining to their "lives beyond their work." This equation of female migrant workers with labor tends to skew research in the direction of "macroperspective" topics such as the role of remittances as "measures to overcome deficits in [national] balance of payments," the "structural causes" of growth in the supply of such workers, the "productive relations" and "work conditions" within which they work, and so on (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 584). Yet these conditions of labor and employment are also affected by, and affect, not only the workers' engagements with and movements in public space, but employers' attitudes to their domestic servants, the public image and representations of the latter, spaces and praxes, dialectical negotiations of freedom and power between employer and servant, cultures of consumption formed by these migrant workers (Yeoh and Huang 1998), and other related factors pertaining to the social identities, movements, and discourses by and of such groups.

Nor can diasporic “lived experience” simply be equated with housing and the related politics of space – with the main tropes that often emerge in studies of “race and ethnicity in the city.” Pinderhughes’s (1997: 76) survey of recent scholarship notes that the pressure on American cities of “immigrants in larger numbers and from all corners of the globe” has resulted in a focus on the “complex and ... conflictual” nature of “urban politics” among increasingly “bifurcated and differentiated” racial groups. Pinderhughes’s indication of future research directions moves away from the “limitations of the socioeconomic status model” toward an increased awareness of the complex developing “institutions” and “experiences” among the different racial and ethnic groups, and of the asymmetrical experiences that often arise within a single group as well (1997: 85, 86). A different analysis of the existing scholarship, by Ratcliffe (1997), notes the “inability of the literature” to convincingly theorize race and housing in urban Britain, particularly in light of the often imprecise racial and ethnic terms employed in census-based analyses, and the tendency to focus on relatively simple data categories such as housing tenure, dwelling type, location, number of occupants, and household income. While there may be “little disagreement about the *existence* of major inequalities in the housing market” (Ratcliffe 1997: 87) and the racialized bases for such inequalities, there is certainly a need to add substantially to the fronts on which research on race and urbanism is conducted.

Racial segregation, either in housing or in more generalized spatial politics and policies, continues to be a dominant area of research. Thus, for example, Goldsmith (2000: 49) sees a pattern of the segregation in European cities of “dangerous classes” of “darker skinned” immigrants either in “city centers” or “on the outskirts” — a pattern which reproduces the racial segregations of American cities. Other studies do not only indicate existing spatial and power patterns, but also contest the rigidities of racial segregation by importing notions of changing social identities, representations, and praxes in the lives of minority groups and their interactions with the white majority. Starting with spatial tropes such as the “Chinese takeaway” small business (Parker 2000), the “Asian gang” zone of violence (Alexander 2000), or Miami as a city characterized by “Cuban immigration” (Croucher 1997), these studies are not content with reconstructing patterns of racial segregation and confinement, but typically invoke a wide range of cultural documents — media and public



discourses, popular music, architecture and spatial symbolisms, food culture, and others — to argue for the “constructed” and “negotiated” nature of ethnic social identities and spatial interventions.

The key theoretical strand contributed by many of these newer studies of diasporic and ethnic identities thus seems to be the dynamic acts of cultural construction involved in social processes, and consequently the necessarily fluid, multiple, and often overdetermined nature of diasporic conditions. The replacement of divisive and static notions of diasporas with an acknowledgment of the recurring movements, conflictual desires, and mixed and multiple loyalties and affiliations that actually characterize such human transnational processes, is an important step in this new theoretical orientation. So too is the gradual balancing out of the predominant emphases on migration-as-labor, and housing and spatial segregations and exclusionary “power geometries” (Parker 2000: 75). Yet the movement toward a theory of dynamic diasporic cultures and social identities still requires the crucial input of theories of textual, discursive, and symbolic negotiation and contestation. Much of this theoretical ground is inextricably bound to the critical theory of poststructuralist and postmodernist culture and society — to the awareness of the constitutive role of multiple and complex narratives in contemporary social identities and positions (Lyotard 1992: 149).

A number of major strands in this textual and theoretical ground become vital to diasporic studies: firstly, the “dialogical” nature of social identities, as reflected in textual forms and structures (Bakhtin 1981: 3–13); this not only allows for an understanding of the ways in which political and social identities are contested via narrative forms, but also confers a terminology and theoretical framework for plural social identities coexisting and interacting with each other. Contemporary diasporic conditions are indeed akin to a “polyglossia” (Bakhtin 1981: 12) in which there are undoubtedly dominant majority voices, but ones that do not silence or invalidate a multiplicity of more marginal positions whose narratives constitute a challenge to the dominant. The polyglossia is not merely an allegory of ethnicity in the global city, but an actual model of diasporic relations; developments in communications technology, such as e-mail, webpage services, desktop publishing, digital filming, inexpensive and accessible long-distance telephoning and mobile phone networks, constitute new media narratives through which a

multitude of new social identities and positions may be voiced. These proliferating voices constitute a more pragmatic challenge to social dominants than the more overt avenues of policy, political power, and economic control.

Secondly, postcolonial literary and cultural studies add a particular set of nuances to the understanding of diasporic conditions by their insistence on the necessarily mixed and “hybrid” nature of newly independent nations in the new world order, as well as by their theorizing of the diachronic dimension of cultural influence. Bhabha’s (1994: 2) well-known formulation of the “location of culture” as an “interstitial” space, where “the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated,” is fundamentally dialogical in that it blurs the hard and fast distinction between dominant and marginal cultures, colonizing and colonized positions. This condition is not only true of the formerly colonized nation, but also of migrants, immigrant societies, and global diasporic contexts, as Bhabha himself observes (1994: 139). Hybridity thus becomes a “metaphor” not merely for the modern nation, but for a complex “form of living” which is constituted by “social and textual affiliation[s]” (Bhabha 1994: 140) — a form which can be found beyond the nation, among the ethnically diverse, transnationally oriented citizens of contemporary global zones. From this perspective, formerly colonized nations are critically hybrid due to the diachronic development of their “institutions at the core of culture”: their architectural and spatial forms, their social and political institutions, their terms and phrases, above all their consciousness and modes of thought which are infused with the language structures of the former colonial masters (King 1976: 41–66).

Space and time thus intersect in multiple and complex ways in the logic of postcolonial cultures, making it unremunerative to identify definitive moments of social influence and transformation. The production of a specific spatial trope — the church, the public square or garden, the town hall, the ghetto, the red-light district — is not confined to the period of actual physical construction, but incorporates the entire span of cultural influence and cultural production. This once again has a bearing on the question of diasporas: historical transnational movements, and indeed historical cultural influences of a broad variety, play their part in more recent diasporas and the construction of social identities. Diasporic space and time cannot be regarded as isolated phenomena

(the marginalized ethnoscape, the crisis moment of mass emigration, and the like), but must be seen as an interactive “critical space” (Virilio 1998: 58, 59) in which the speed, volume, diachronicity, and diversity of multiple subjective transactions and interventions (in travel, communications, media and commodity consumptions, and other acts) constantly recreate and renegotiate the social sphere and its significance.

In many ways this dynamic and fluid notion of diasporic culture is exemplified by contemporary Singapore: the former British colony, which gained independence in 1965, has a fundamentally diasporic population and society, with the majority of its inhabitants descended from Chinese, Indian, and other immigrants who came to work in the late nineteenth century and thereafter. While modernization and nationhood have resulted in many signal successes, a number of recent factors and developments contribute to create conditions of multiple “pulls” and allegiances: firstly, Singapore’s policy of emphatic “multiculturalism” paradoxically stresses racial and linguistic differences among its citizens (Chua 1998: 190), thus in some ways recalling the different migrant origins of different groups of citizens. This is exacerbated by cultural mechanisms which divide along the different vernacular lines: religions and rituals like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, ancestor worship/veneration; media texts like Bollywood films or Hong Kong television and film; and the language, literature, and popular writing of “mother” countries like India and China. Secondly, legacies of British colonial rule — the use of English as the language of education and government, a heavily exposed English literary tradition, media influences, elements of British education (such as the dominant influence, until very recently, of the Cambridge G.C.E. ‘O’ and ‘A’ Level examinations), colonial architecture, and so on — engage dialectically with vernacular social identities, exerting a diachronic influence from a different cultural source. These conditions are of course heightened by Singapore’s present push toward “world city formation,” and its economic and cultural engagements with global cities, markets, and centers (Perry, Kong, and Yeoh 1997: 18). The result is not only a fundamentally and inextricably hybrid culture and society, but also in some ways an “unsettled” nation whose population is constantly reminded of migrant pasts and present transnational possibilities and affiliations.

Singapore thus exemplifies similar forms of “unsettled settlements” in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific — in the former colonies (or otherwise

subjects of colonial interventions) whose historical mandate of imperial trade and commodity production resulted in significant diasporic movements and racial-cultural hybridity, and whose brief histories as independent nations have been marked in many ways by a perpetuation of significant past influences and the uncertainties of global competition. Certainly the diasporic particulars (the periods of mass diasporic movements, origins and destinations, languages and cultures involved, media influences, and so on) pertaining to Kuala Lumpur, Lagos, Manila, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Mumbai, Sydney, Jakarta, and other such cities differ from those of Singapore and from each other. Yet they share a particular historical affectedness — a characteristic marking by external political and economic forces, and by fundamental cultural influences — that makes them markedly conscious of and subject to transnational movements and patterns. Where the consciousness of a discrete national identity, a heritage of the past, a sense of “rootedness” and “home” are often missing or problematized, as they are in many of these places, then an essentially diasporic culture prevails, whether manifesting itself in actual large-scale migrations and immigrations, or else in national or group imaginings of some other home, or in other dislocating phenomena.

It is thus not untimely for the appearance of a volume such as the present one, which seeks not only to interrogate some of the *idées fixes* which often dominate diaspora studies, but in the process also to turn the focus away from immigration and ethnicity problems in North American and European locations toward an examination of the endemic and persistent diasporic cultures of Asia-Pacific zones. By the same token, it is not inappropriate that the genesis of this volume lies in an international conference on “Asian Diasporas and Cultures” held at the National University of Singapore in September 2001. It was perhaps the conference’s sense of place — the history, institutions, spatial logic, languages, and cultures of Singapore — that contributed something to the fundamentally dynamic and multidisciplinary sense of “diasporic culture” that these select papers attempt to analyze. Most, if not all, of the contributors have lived and worked in the unsettled and hybrid places that are the logical subjects for studies that rely on newer definitions of diasporas and transnational communities. Diasporas are by nature wideranging and far-flung subjects of study, and no one volume can lay claim to being an exhaustive study. Yet the range of papers in this volume

is itself part of an attempt to redefine diasporas, moving away from static locales (hypostasized "homes" and "away places"), and toward intermediary cultural mechanisms, social networks, and "third spaces" that characterize many contemporary transnational structures.

The main emphases are on the diasporic cultures associated with India and China — arguably two of the most far-reaching and numerically significant transnational networks of the long modern era (of European colonialism, industrialization, and world trade). Certainly there are other diasporic phenomena with equivalent claims for scholarly attention, including those of the Jewish and Latino peoples. Yet once again a certain correcting of balance is necessary: while Jewish and Latino (among other) diasporic movements and networks are entirely significant in and relevant to Europe and North America, they are less significant in the Asia-Pacific region (which has come in for less scholarly attention) than the Indian and Chinese ones. A study of Asian diasporic cultures cannot entirely ignore America, of course, but the condition of Asian communities in the U.S. will then form only one part of a global diasporic picture, rather than the exclusive or main focus that it constitutes in many of the studies of "Asian-American cultures."

In an enquiry of this nature, "location" becomes highly problematic, the site of contested identities and acts of power, imaginary recreations, and fluidly "interactive" (in Virilio's sense) subjectivities. Robbie Goh's essay on "Diaspora and Violence" in this volume points to the interpenetration of cultural representations of ethnicity and the spatial logic of multiracial hot spots such as the Chinatown areas of Birmingham and Vancouver. Film, literature, popular culture images such as advertising, and spatial symbolisms and the everyday experiences of space collectively cause violent disjunctions that rupture the apparent seamlessness of the landscape. Diasporic texts thus work across the fixities of location (nation, city, "home" and "away") to articulate the tensions inherent in these multiple affiliations and contested relations. In a similar way, Ann Brooks's essay foregrounds and juxtaposes Chinese diasporic communities in the very different locations of Singapore, Britain, and Australia, to show how a "flexible citizenship" (Ong 1999) is created out of the differentiated pulls of local politics, nationalism, and global socioeconomic networks. What results is a set of "complex subjectivities" nominally grouped around a particular ethnic transnational network, but in reality divided along lines of gender,

socioeconomic privileges and powers, class identities, and other such particularities. Regina Lee's account of three kinds of diasporic "psychological states, or forms of consciousness" is both an attempt at a taxonomy of theoretical approaches, and a recognition of the multiple strategies and means involved in the production of diasporic identities. Once again, the problematic discourses and projects of "the nation" are compromised by these diasporic strategies, but so too are the static and exclusionary categories ("self" and "other," "the past," "presence," "interior" and "exterior") that are the products of nationalisms.

The dislocation of national boundaries in the name of racially inflected social identities is in turn related to the production of "cultural citizenship," as opposed to a more tightly defined citizenship constituted by sociopolitical rights and privileges. Wenche Ommundsen's study of the Chinese community in Australia notes the duality of cultural citizenship: on the one hand, it is a flexible notion which facilitates the study of "culturally complex and inclusive communities," and may pave the way for a recognition of new kinds of citizen rights and responsibilities. On the other hand, however, it also constitutes yet another friction point in multicultural societies like that of Australia (and for that matter in many other nations), as a prescription for multicultural inclusivity that may provoke conservative reactions. At stake in this clash of different kinds of citizenship is the role of cultural parameters associated with diasporas — ethnicity, cultural difference, plural social identities and affiliations — within the existing tolerances even of modern immigrant nations like Australia.

In the light of questions thus raised, "hybridity" in diasporic conditions becomes problematized, not necessarily for reasons of irrelevance, but because it implies a more positive and constructive social condition than may be warranted in many locales. Rebecca Sultana's reading of Bharati Mukherjee's "attempt to become an American writer" goes against the laudatory grain of critics who see her as speaking for cosmopolitan writers, and as offering a positive image of the immigrant both in her personal life and in her dramatically hybrid, transnational fictional characters. Sultana's reading of Mukherjee is thus a paradigm for reading the absences and silences in celebratory transnational discourses; these must be informed by a critical reinsertion of the "conflicting locations of 'home,'" the real dualities of identity and culture, the problematic particularities of transnational dislocation. The

cautionary note sounded by this reading of Mukherjee is salient in a wider context: literature may play a vital role in diasporic culture, but not necessarily in rationalized and constructive ways; the critical project of reading ideologically motivated gaps and silences in such literatures may be as important, if not more so, than authorial intentions.

The return of the exile, the diasporic writer's confrontation with what is left behind, is precisely the topic of Carol Leon's essay on Michael Ondaatje. Ondaatje's return to his homeland after an absence of twenty-five years — a return recorded in his *Running in the Family* — offers a postmodern critique of settled migrant identities and positions. This postmodern narrative thus offers a form for inserting several of the key disjunctions characteristic of diasporic movements: the split between biographical and symbolic fathers and sons, the conflict of memories and desires and of history and subjective reconstructions, the "binary between self and other." In contrast and yet also in complement to Sultana's treatment of Mukherjee, Leon's reading of Ondaatje's postmodern autobiography-travelogue suggests how the complex tensions of diasporic identities can be articulated, if only in suitably open and multivalenced narrative forms.

"Distance" is obviously a crucial concept in the phenomenon of diasporas, and yet also one that is difficult to theorize. Relative notions of distance are involved in complex imaginings of "home" and "away," "community" and "isolation," "self" and "other." Diasporic movements emphasize distance (in going away from the "homeland") but paradoxically also reiterate closeness and return (in reconstructions of and desires for the home, and in networking mechanisms to approximate the homeland community). Monti and Mittapalli consider the question of diasporic distance from an intertextual perspective, analyzing figures of the migrant, exile, Hindu religion, notions of caste, and other tropes in the works of transnational Indian writers like Rao, Mistry, Seth, Ghosh, and others. While nostalgic reconstructions of the homeland are often read into the works of émigré writers, it is also the writers' sense of distance from India that permits their textual critiques of the "strictures and the forbidding regulations ... that continue to harness the lives of Hindus." Monti and Mittapalli, like Sultana and Leon, are wary of the tendency to see "hybridization" as a comfortably affirming condition. Their reading of diasporic Indian writing shows how the writers' experience of distance, and their fictional accounts of this experience,

constitute an act of power that enables the creation of a “postcolonial hegemony” and a corresponding “ethical other.”

Another notion of diasporic distance emerges in Jeffrey Partridge’s essay, which reads Shirley Lim’s *Joss & Gold* against the grain of the “claiming America” strand of Asian-American writing. Distance is crucial to Lim’s project, both in her own placement (as an ethnic Chinese who grew up in Southeast Asia and who now lives and works as an academic in the U.S.), as well as in the “tripart setting of the novel” (Malaysia, New York, Singapore). In significant part because of its translocational tropes and agenda, *Joss & Gold* thus represents Asian-American literature’s “heteroglossic phase,” in opposition to the older model of “ethnic nationalism” (Li 1998: 191, 196). Walter Lim’s reading of Russell Leong has similarities to Partridge’s paper, in positioning Leong against a larger strand of Asian-American writing and experience concerned with “generational travail” (Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston are perhaps the best known representatives of this strand). Like Shirley Lim, Leong is as much interested in Southeast Asia as he is in America as a site of immigration and cultural transformation. Another distancing device is Leong’s use of “deviance” — sexual deviance from social norms (of heterosexuality, monogamy, and so on), as well as the Asian immigrant’s deviation from traditional cultural practices and attitudes. Such distancing tropes are part of Leong’s concern, not with the more static notions of location and identity often produced in diasporic conditions, but with the fluid and often unsettling conditions of transnational identities in a global context.

The duality of diasporas — simultaneously an estranging distancing, as well as a perpetuated connectivity — is the subject of Bishop’s and Phillips’s essay on the military “insignia” that are borne by all diasporic movements. This essay in some ways links with Goh’s article, in seeing symbolic violence as the underlying condition of transnational and transcultural relationships. For Bishop and Phillips, the “insignia of the military” are a way of conceptualizing the complex technologies and mechanisms (such as electronic financing and markets, digital and telecommunications, state sovereignties) that simultaneously sponsor and give birth to diasporic dispersals, and yet also connect and transform diasporic communities into new orders, allegiances, and identities.

Diasporic cultures are the reality of the global order and its technologies and institutions. Scholarship has the burden of attempting



to document, theorize, and analyze the often rapid and intertwined social developments associated with transnational movements and communities. While no volume can claim to be an exhaustive study of such fluid and rapidly developing phenomena, there should nevertheless be an attempt to reflect and engage with the pace of diasporic developments through a theoretically informed, critically flexible, and multidisciplinary approach. It is hoped that the present volume will contribute to contemporary diasporic studies in precisely that spirit.

## Notes

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### CHAPTER 1

1. "The two principal factions contesting for national political power in the wake of British colonial administration in Singapore – a Communist faction, later grouped as the Barisan Socialist Party, and the social democrats organized as the People's Action Party, or PAP ... – both harnessed feminist issues to their national platforms. The first created a Singapore Women's federation as a front organization for revolutionary activity, and the second sponsored a women's league and women's subcommittees in 1956 under the direction of central PAP party leadership" (Heng 1997: 34–35).

### CHAPTER 2

1. Thus Menkhoff and Gerke (2002: 3–4) show that myths of the overseas Chinese as being all "successful economic actors" and "excellently networked" conceal the reality of significant disparities between different overseas Chinese communities and of real failures in Chinese businesses, and raise fears of absolute tribal loyalties among the diasporic Chinese.
2. As Saggar (1992: 120) observes, one plank of Margaret Thatcher's Tory regime was the presentation of a "more hospitable image towards potential supporters among the ethnic minorities," who became partners in the entrepreneurial project of the nation. Power (2001: 30) notes that *Britain's Richest Asians 2000*, published by Eastern Eye, is striking proof of the integration of at least the top echelons of Asian businessmen into the financial life of the nation.

3. There are numerous examples of these, representative of which are “Chinatown Video” (<http://www.chinatownvideo.com.au>), whose homepage features the rear view of a topless Asian woman dressed in leathers and an ammunition bandolier and carrying a gun; and “Chinatown Dreams” (<http://www.asianbeauties.nu/porn/Chinatowndreams/index-adultsights.html>), a bondage pornography site explicitly featuring Asian women.
4. This parallel is neither a thing of the past (of the 1960s Chinese migrant scene in Britain that is Mo’s setting), nor a fictional stretch, but continues to characterize the image of the Triad today. A recent editorial in Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post*, responding to the recruitment of children by gangs lately, explains this with the fact that gangs “become a perverted substitute for family,” especially if the biological family is characterized by the “poverty,” “limited potential,” and “broken home” that is often the case among both the poor in Hong Kong and working-class Chinese migrants overseas (reprinted in *Today*, 3 September 2001: 11).
5. There are biographical parallels: Mo’s own father (as a Cantonese man who married an English woman, and moved the family to England when Mo was ten years old) similarly bears the burden of that family’s cultural-geographical attenuations, and within the novel’s symbolic logic would be yet another risk-bearing candidate for ritualistic violence and sacrifice.

### CHAPTER 3

1. The popular conception of immigration, outlined by Robbie Goh in his introduction to this volume, as “influx of lowly qualified members of a workforce who ... will take on low-paying jobs, live in abject conditions, and contribute to urban problems,” constitutes the other dimension to the particular form of economic migration that I discuss here.
2. Integration, however, remains a problematic and highly contentious issue because of vested interests inherent in multiculturalism that apparently conflict with expectations of migrants to “integrate” or “assimilate.” For a discussion of the tensions arising from this conflictual desire to see migrants integrate and yet remain separate, see Hage (2000).
3. The type of nationalist rhetoric to which I am referring is explained by Ernest Gellner: “nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy,” based on the principle “that the political and the national unit should be congruent” (1983: 1).
4. Gellner identifies, as “some traditions of social thought,” “anarchism, Marxism — which hold that even, or especially, in an industrial order the state is dispensable” (1983: 5). Globalization, as advanced, sophisticated

- industrialization, epitomizes those processes contributing to the demise and (eventual) dispensability of the state.
5. Many critics have pointed to the “subversive” and empowering effect that the concept of ambivalence introduces into grand narratives and totalizing discourses. The “openness” inherent to such a concept has been criticized for fettering apolitical versions of diversity, rendering the subject the subject a free-floating signifier who stands for all and nothing at once.
  6. Ambivalence here becomes twofold: that which governs the nation’s drive to exclude its perceived Others, compounded by the ambivalent supplementarity of the diasporic community’s status.
  7. For a detailed discussion of the uses (and abuses) of positivistic images in and of grand narratives, see Žižek (1989). The hostland’s positivity lies in the myth that it constructs for the imagination of a homogeneous self untainted by foreign elements. While social reality attests to a plurality of Other voices and cultures, the national imaginary locates its existence within an idealized spatiality and temporality, the boundaries of which it tries to “fix” (by nationalist rhetoric and narratives). The nation therefore idealizes and mythologizes itself, in and as an act of positive affirmation for its members, people deemed appropriate and desirable for a particular constitution that it wants inscribed onto its (imaginary) national space. The imaginary may not materialize, because its function is purely mythical; to exist as the “homeland” for which its diaspora may retain positive images, while also acting as a propagandist vehicle for (re)validating the nation as an ideal space, in which its people are encouraged to remain. By constantly projecting positive images of itself, the nation (as homeland) is able to generate a sense of empowerment for both its local and diasporic communities. The homeland thus provides an image-based (“imaginary”) identification for the diaspora, while mnemonic devices (memory, distortion, and idealization) and past events work to enhance that image-based identification of the homeland, thereby imbuing the image with symbolic significance/signification. I would argue that this is where imaginary and symbolic identification can be said to have collapsed into each other, because where there once was a physical image, retrospection has led to an accumulation of other images, or a distortion of that image, so that it now takes on mythical qualities, and past events take on a “supernatural reality” (Brennan 1990: 45).
  8. Diasporic relocation is not always a consequence of economic factors, as highlighted by recent political upheavals. Under these conditions, the extent to which the diaspora idealizes its homeland will be considerably attenuated. Even so, relocation to a new country can still generate feelings of resentment by those “left behind.”

9. Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1996) expresses the opinion that "it's hip to be ethnic," and which has been literalized in North America, where "Hapa," or mixed-race Asians, are fast gaining street credibility and are becoming a prominent feature of the demographic landscape. Inundated with images of Hapa youth in fashion magazines and on billboards, a Vancouver daily has hailed the Hapa face as the ultimate fashion accessory one can acquire (*Vancouver Sun* 26 May 2001: E11). Yet, we have to note that the cultural capital derived from being ethnic is available to only those familiar with and able to access popular culture (and its language), i.e., a specific demographic. This sort of cultural capital does not accrue, however, to other sectors of the diaspora, such as older-generation migrants.
10. In the Hapa instance, the minority literally becomes an "absolute entity" whose image is a commercially viable and exploitable resource.
11. On the "fakeness" of experience, see Brah (1996), who argues that "experience does not reflect a pre-given 'reality' but is the discursive effect of processes that construct what we call reality" (Brah 1996: 11). However, the question then follows, "how do we think about the materiality of that which we call real?"
12. See Chow (1993), Chapter 2. "Where Have All the Natives Gone?"
13. This is also the same charge leveled against Charles Taylor's advocating of "equal recognition" in "The Politics of Recognition" (1994).
14. This observation is true to some extent because many novels written and published by the old diaspora were concerned with recovering their histories, a recuperative project aimed at (re)telling the tales of the first-comers to the new land (although written/narrated by the later generations).
15. Several recent films have highlighted the politics and problematics of diasporic cross-cultural experience, most significantly of Indians in Britain (I am referring to the films *East is East* [1999] and *Bend It Like Beckham* [2002]). Diasporic Asians in North America have had aspects of their lives portrayed in films such as *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), *Double Happiness* (1994), and in Australia, *Floating Life* (1995) and William Yang's autobiographical photo-documentary *Sadness* (1996).
16. In *White Nation*, Hage shows how the lack of a mainstream political language has led to the experience of white multiculturalism as loss. Coupled with "the discourse of Anglo-decline" (Hage 2000: 20), the political language that emerges is one of "a home-grown Australian neo-fascism."
17. In Australia, Prime Minister John Howard's tough stand against asylum seekers has ensured election victory (in the November 2001 elections), while others, especially those in the business sector, have suffered economically for taking a sympathetic stance on the refugee issue (as highlighted at a

public forum, “Let’s Talk About Race — Culture, Privilege and Prejudice,” held in Perth, Western Australia, 12 September 2002).

18. Most notably in *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan, which contextualizes and juxtaposes historical border crossings with present-day events. Other Chinese-North American works include Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony*, Denise Chong’s *The Concubine’s Children*, and to a certain extent, Sky Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe*.
19. This concept of a future tense is derived from, and also supplements, Paul Gilroy’s discussion of diaspora in his “It Ain’t Where You’re From, It’s Where You’re At ... : The Dialectics of Diasporic Identification” (1991).
20. Echoing Radhakrishnan’s point “[all] hybridities are not equal” (1996: 159).

#### CHAPTER 4

1. The Immigration Restriction Act, also known as the White Australia policy, was the first act passed by the newly federated Australian Parliament in 1901. It was gradually eased after World War II, but it was not until the early 1970s that the Whitlam government removed all reference to ethnic origin from its immigration policy.
2. I am referring specifically to the *Tampa* incident of August–September 2001, when the Norwegian ship *Tampa* rescued almost 500 asylum seekers, mostly from Afghanistan, bound for Australia on a nonseaworthy Indonesian vessel. The *Tampa* was refused entry to an Australian port, and the asylum seekers were eventually taken to the tiny island of Nauru for Australian authorities to process their applications. In order to ban their entry, the government had to rush through Parliament legislation similar to that of Premier Henry Parkes in his effort to ban entry to the Chinese would-be immigrants of 1888. In the subsequent weeks, several groups of boat people were intercepted by the Australian navy and turned away from Australia. The matter became a major issue in the run-up to the Australian election of 10 November 2001. Most commentators agree that the election victory of Prime Minister John Howard can in large part be attributed to his uncompromising stand on the question of asylum seekers (for a detailed analysis of the *Tampa* affair, see Marr and Wilkinson 2003).
3. The “banana,” whether evoked in scorn, jest, or pride, is the East Asian version of the “coconut” of the black diaspora: an image for someone who is “yellow” (i.e., racially marked) on the outside, but white on the inside, that is, culturally assimilated to a Western way of life and Western standards of thinking.
4. I am once again referring to the *Tampa* affair and subsequent debates in the Australian media.

5. It is common for British and American migrants to wait for decades before seeking citizenship, whereas immigrants from, for example, the People's Republic of China generally take out Australian citizenship as soon as they become eligible.
6. For a detailed discussion of the Giese and Sang Ye compilations, see Ommundsen 2002.
7. I would like at this point to acknowledge the contribution of Dr Ouyang Yu. Without his linguistic and cultural competence, and his extensive research skills, this project would not have been possible.
8. A large number of PRC migrants initially came to Australia in the late 1980s and early 1990s on temporary visas to attend short-term English courses. After the events of Tiananmen Square in June 1989, their visas were extended and many (some 40,000 to 50,000) have since obtained permanent residence or citizenship.

## CHAPTER 5

1. For the involvement of intellectuals in peasant rebellions see Spivak (1985) and Devi (1995). For a history of the Naxalites see Banerjee (1984), Franda (1971), and Sen et al. (1978).
2. A comparison between Mukherjee's novel and Mahasweta Devi's short story "Draupadi" (1995) reveals an alternate treatment of the topic of subaltern agency and female participation in the Naxal movement. In Devi's story, Dopdi, a female revolutionary, is raped by several members of the police force and in her defiance, Dopdi refuses to clothe herself in front of the Senanayak or the police chief, thus challenging the masculinity of her rapists.
3. Thomas Macaulay's 1835 "Minute" proposed to form "a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (cited in Bhabha 1994: 87).
4. In her interview with Michael Connell, Mukherjee says: "There is no reason why we should have to appropriate – wholesale and intact – the white, upper-middle-class women's tools and rhetoric" (Connell et al. 1990: 22). She later adds: "But I do disapprove of the imperialism of the feminists, American, and perhaps European feminists, but especially the American feminists of the mid-70s who felt that they could go to Iran and tell the Iranian women what to do" (1990: 23). But as I have shown, Mukherjee does appropriate the tools and rhetoric that she so disdains in her interview.
5. Such notions about Third World literature are not uncommon among cultural critics themselves. See Saba Mahmood's refutation of Stuart Hall's

comments in “Cultural Studies and Ethnic Absolutism: Comments on Stuart Hall’s ‘Culture, Community, Nation’” (Mahmood 1996). Mahmood criticizes Hall for possessing “the suspicion and dismissal with which most intellectuals of widely divergent political persuasions treat contemporary social movements” (1996: 2).

6. A cover blurb quoted from a review in the *Baltimore Sun* describes *Jasmine* as: “Poignant ... Heartrending ... The story of the transformation of an Indian village girl whose grandmother wants to marry her off at 11, into an American woman who finally thinks for herself.” Ideals of south Asian women are marketed not only as an exploited and oppressed group but also as a foil for the free and independent “American woman.”

## CHAPTER 7

1. In the Ahmad text, Homi Bhabha is cited from *The Location of Culture* (1994: 187).
2. In particular the chapter “Post-Colonial DestiNations,” 160–89.
3. Here reference is made to the late eighteenth-century Farsi novel *Nashtar*, literally “the surgeon’s knife,” that is the tragic separation of a pair of lovers, whose plight is reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet, insofar as their forbidden love comes to an end because of mischance and misunderstanding.

## CHAPTER 8

1. As in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the ban on Japanese and Korean immigration in Teddy Roosevelt’s “Gentleman’s Agreement” of 1907, the “Asiatic Barred Zone Act” of 1917, the National Origins Act of 1924, the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 that recategorized Filipinos as aliens.
2. As in the Cooper’s Act of 1902 prohibiting Filipinos from owning property, voting, operating businesses, etc.; and the internment of American citizens of Japanese ancestry under Executive Order 9066.
3. For a discussion of related issues, see David Leiwei Li’s analysis of Asian-American citizenship in the introduction to his book *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent* (1998).
4. Li An’s confrontation with English language and literature parallels Shirley Lim’s own experience as a student in Malaysia, one of many such autobiographical crossovers in the novel. In the preface to her book *Writing South/East Asia in English*, Lim makes reference to her “conversion” experience at the University of Malaya in 1966: “This undergraduate conversion, the belief in the necessity for a literature of one’s own, has remained my unshakable creed, even as the identity of ‘one’ — under the



multiple deconstructive interrogations of psychology, anthropology, sociology, global economics, politics, linguistics, revisionist history — has grown progressively more shaky” (1994: xi). Lim’s autobiography, *Among the White Moon Faces*, reveals more nonfictional crossovers with the fictional world of the novel.

5. The teasing Suyin endures works within *Joss & Gold* to highlight the existence of racism within Asia, and to therefore mark Singapore as *relatively tolerant* in comparison to the Malaysia and United States constructed by the novel. Intolerance in the US toward immigrants is suggested by several conversations in the New York segment of the novel, for instance when Dan argues that it is dangerous to let Indian immigrants work on US defense systems, whereas European immigrants are acceptable because they are “from our part of the world” (Lim 2001: 125). Even so, I find it difficult to reconcile the novel’s portrayal of intolerance with personal and anecdotal evidence I have gathered on the acceptance of Eurasian children in Singapore schools. Students in my Transnational Literature module at the National University of Singapore expressed surprise at Suyin’s mistreatment; they concurred with one another that Eurasian children were not teased, but were actually privileged in their schools by teachers and peers alike.

## CHAPTER 9

1. A consideration of the potential problems for the politics of Asian American studies as generated by a move toward favoring diasporic perspectives is offered in Wong (1995).
2. Dirlik (1999) registers this point; for further discussion of transnational and national paradigms in Asian American literary studies, see Lee (1999).
3. For an important meditation on the complex relationship of gender, migration, and information technology to the phenomenon of the global city, see Sassen (1998).
4. According to Ong (1999: 6), “‘Flexible citizenship’ refers to the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions.”
5. For an important work analyzing the intersection of feminist theory with modernist, postmodernist, and postcolonialist discourses, see Grewal and Kaplan (1994). A fine collection of critical essays dealing with the relationship between gay literature and the thematics of AIDS is offered in Murphy and Poirier (1993). For a contribution to the building of an artistic and critical tradition predicated upon the gay experience, see Bergman (1991).

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