

# **Culture, Identity, Commodity**

## Diasporic Chinese Literatures in English

***Edited by***  
**Tseen Khoo and Kam Louie**

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— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*

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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,<sup>1</sup> 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/invasor 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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, Beaugregard 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,<sup>5</sup> 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.

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