

Representations of Chinese Men in Australian Fiction 1973 — 2000
an analytical interpretation and a novella

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Summary

The thesis examines a number of representations of Chinese men in Australian fiction in the years after the end of white Australia policy and up to the year 2000. Integrated with the thesis is a creative component of fiction. The theoretical and creative components are weighted equally at 50 per cent.

The thesis is premised upon the assertion that two major spatial practices have historically shaped and continue to shape in different ways the national imaginary of Australians. These practices have been the dispossession of Aboriginal people upon European colonisation, and the institution of the white Australia policy which excluded immigrants of non-European, and specifically Asian and Pacific islands backgrounds. The thesis contends that despite the official end of the white Australia policy literary representations continue to configure Chinese men in various forms of exclusion.

The thesis argues that the institutionalisation of multiculturalism has not repressed race-based attitudes, that since the end of the white Australia policy race remains textually alive and continues to affect people's lives in a conscious and not merely "subterranean" manner. The thesis examines the literary works of seven prominent Australian authors who have written novels with Chinese male characters. The thesis seeks to examine in this literature a particular manner of representation that is effected through a spatialisation bearing on the figure of the Chinese man. This spatialising effect produces a distancing from the centrality of whiteness and includes forms of marginalisation, orientalisering, absence and loss through fetishism and melancholy, the search for a central Chinese masculine potency, and the appropriations of minority positions when the white narrating subject attempts to stand in and occupy the space of the Chinese male.

The research and creative components integrate to explore the positionality of the Chinese male figure in Australian literature. The research component establishes, through analytical readings of selected Australian fiction, the confusion of incorporating the Chinese man within Australian society, lurching between acceptance and exclusion; the creative component tracks through the journey of its protagonist in Australian and Asian space, what might be a response of the Chinese male figure when exclusion and inclusion become unpredictable.

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