Theorising the Chinese Diaspora:
Chinese Canadian and Chinese Australian Narratives

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DECLARATION

The work in this dissertation is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text. The material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

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Regina W. Lee
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This dissertation presents a study of Chinese diasporic narratives from Canada and Australia and examines the formation and negotiation of diasporic cultural identity and consciousness. Drawing upon theoretical discussions on diasporas in general, it investigates how the Chinese diaspora is imagined and represented, as a visible minority group, within the context of the multicultural nation state.

This dissertation begins with a taxonomy of the modes of explaining diaspora and offers three ways of theorising diasporic consciousness. In analysing the filmic and fictional narrative forms of the Chinese in Canada and Australia, the practices of cultural self-representation and of minority group participation and enjoyment of the nation are foregrounded in order to advance critical analysis of the Chinese diaspora. While taking into account the heterogeneity of the imagined diasporic Chinese community, this study also contends that the formation and negotiation of diasporic consciousness and diasporic cultural identity politics is strongly and invariably affected by the multicultural conditions and policies of their host countries. The adaptation and manifestation of minority groups’ cultural practices are thus a matter of social, cultural and political contingencies more often aligned with dominant cultural expectations and manipulations than with the assertiveness of more empowered minority group participation. This dissertation therefore argues for a broader and more complex understanding of diasporic cultural and identity politics in the widespread attempts to merge and incorporate minority group narratives into the key foundational (‘grand’) narratives of the white...
nation state. The importance of reinscribing Chinese diasporic histories into the cultural landscapes of their receiving countries is moreover increasingly propelled by the speed and momentum of globalisation that has resulted in the growing number of multicultural societies on the one hand but also led to the homogenisation of cultural differences and diversities.

In focussing on the fictional and filmic narratives from Canada and Australia, the diversity of the Chinese diasporic community and their conditions are emphasised in order to reflect upon the differences in the administration and practice of multiculturalism in these two countries. The comparative reading of Chinese-Canadian and Chinese-Australian novels and films locates its analysis of notions of ‘homeland’ and belonging, community and national and cultural citizenship within the context of the development and negotiation of diasporic identity politics.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction**  
Rethinking/theorising Diasporas

## PART A: DIASPORAS IN GENERAL

**Chapter 1**  
Theorising Diasporas

**Chapter 2**  
Theorising the Chinese Diaspora

## PART B: THE CHINESE DIASPORA IN CANADA

**Chapter 3**  
‘What makes a good ‘Chinese-Canadian’ novel?’ Internal/ised outcasts, authentics and bananas in *Disappearing Moon Café* and *Banana Boys*

**Chapter 4**  
Performing Chineseness: Renegotiating Diasporic Chinese Identities in 2 Chinese Canadian films

## PART C: THE CHINESE DIASPORA IN AUSTRALIA

**Chapter 5**  
Neither Here Nor There: The Fractured Existence of Diasporas in *Birds of Passage* and *The Eastern Slope Chronicle*

**Chapter 6**  
Floating Lives: Chinese-Australians Re-presented in *Floating Life* and *Sadness*

**CONCLUSION**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**