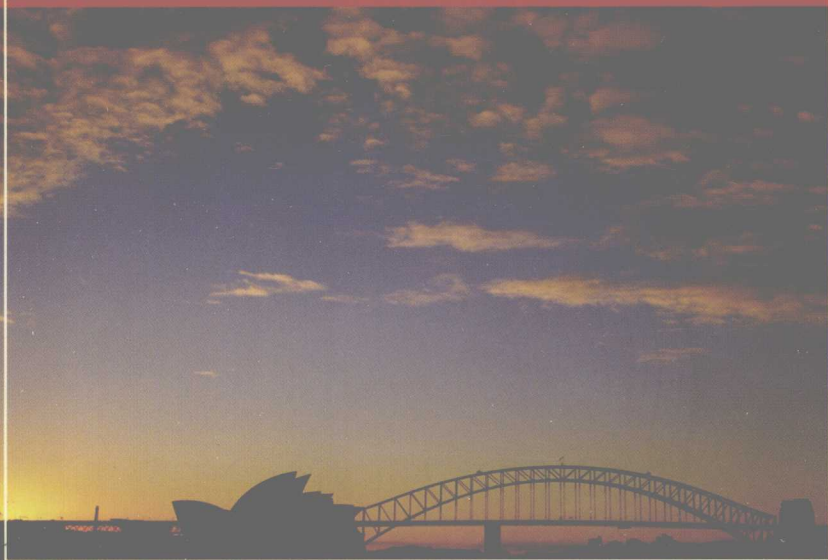


河北师范大学博士基金资助

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——澳大利亚文学中的中国妇女形象

马丽莉 著



*Confrontation and Reconciliation:  
Representing Chinese Women in Australian Literature*

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## 摘 要

无论从历史的还是从文学的角度看,澳洲语境下的中国都是一个复杂的概念。澳洲文学中对中国及中国妇女的表象更是经历了漫长的,不同的,甚至多层面的阶段。本书运用赛义得的东方主义理论、后结构女权主义理论以及后殖民主义理论,分析了澳洲文学中对中国以及中国人的描述上存在的成见及反成见、幼稚和成熟这些不同的阶段。这种分析侧重于对女性角色的描述。通过对从1895年到1997年间十三部小说、戏剧及电影的详细分析,本书强调了它们对于中国及中国妇女的正面描述,并阐述了澳洲文学对于两者的认知在一百多年来经受了怎样的变化。这十三部作品包括:《一个澳洲人在中国》《上海》《西方人在东方》《黑暗的丛林》《十足女人》《龟滩》《白壁无瑕》《愤怒的鳄鱼》《风与水的传说》《长安街》《祖先游戏》《浮生》,以及《中国之后》。

虽然现代许多作者都拒绝任何人为的标签,但本书还是尽可能地涵盖两种作家,即有中国血统和没有中国血统的作家。并且本人认为,前者更能从一个双重的角度来写作(描述),比如布赖恩·卡斯特(Brian Castro)和香港导演罗卓瑶。本书所选的作家(导演)对于中国及中国妇女进行了多棱镜似的描述。在这些描述中,人物的文化的,种族的,以及性别的身分都是在中国和澳洲两国文化的冲突与和解中得以表现。在这里,中国文化虽然坚不可摧,但也不像时下流行的描述那样密不可封、不能接受和渗透其他文化。中国妇女这一特殊群体,时常被看作是对中国传统以及现代文化的贡献者和传承

者。由此推论,被中国和澳大利亚所代表的东西方文化,最终是可以在不损失自身精髓的前提下,相遇并融合的。虽然这些作品中的中国妇女形象各异,但在她们身上,人们仍然可以看到一个共同的、正面的文化会集形象。

## Abstract

Australia's China has always been a complex concept in a historical and in a literary sense. The representation of China and Chinese women characters in Australian Literature has gone through many different and multi-faceted stages. Using Said's concept of Orientalism, post-structural feminist theory and post-colonial theory, this study offers an analysis of stereotype and anti-stereotype, naiveté and sophistication in the depiction of China and Chinese characters, with an emphasis on the representations of women figures. Through examining thirteen texts from 1895 to 1997, the book emphasises the positive aspects of China and Chinese women represented by sensitive Australian writers, and indicates how conceptions of China and its people have changed over almost a hundred years. The book deals in some detail with An Australian in China, Shanghai, West in the East, The Dark Backward, The Precious Woman, Turtle Beach, Flawless Jade, The Crocodile Fury, Wind and Water, Avenue of Eternal Peace, The Ancestor Game, Floating Life and After China.

The writing includes work by Anglo-Celtic authors, and by authors with Chinese ancestry who provide a double perspective. The writers under discussion provide a prismatic picture of China and Chinese women. The cultural, racial, ethnic and gender identity of the fictional characters is traced through their confrontations and reconcili-

ations with Australian and Chinese culture. Chinese culture is seen as indestructible in its confrontations with the West, but not as impervious as has been popularly thought. Chinese women are frequently seen as contributors to, and survivors in the old and new culture in China or elsewhere in a Chinese community. It further concludes that the two cultures, West and East, represented by Australia and China, may finally meet and merge with each other, without losing their essential differences. Many of the characters are shown to embrace a positive hybridity as they expand their cultural inheritances and embrace differences.

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## Introduction

This book looks at issues involved in an individual's search for identity through cultural confrontations and reconciliations in the context of Australian Literature. Identity has diverse meanings here; it refers to cultural, racial, ethnic and individual identity, which sometimes overlap and sometimes are separated. In the examination of some novels it will be seen that gender and sexual identity are also imbricated. Through an analysis of stereotype, naïveté and anti-stereotype in the depiction of China and Chinese characters in Australian fiction (and film), with an emphasis on the representation of women figures, the book argues that gradual changes can be observed from one period to another. Chapter One deals with the sometimes naïve construction of China and Chinese characters between the turn of the century and the 1960s; Chapter Two reads the images of Chinese women from feminist perspectives; Chapter Three shows how agency is given to women who narrate their own stories; Chapter Four emphasises the positive perspective for migration and displacement; and Chapter Five, which examines the most complex novel in the book, considers the real and symbolic importance of narrated stories.

The issues raised and the tropes employed in the fiction include Westerners who go to the East on a quest; the reconstruction of Chinese women who consciously resist their subject positions as defined by

patriarchy; the displacement experienced by individuals in a new environment; and their conflict and reconciliation with their ancestors. The book argues that the fiction examined here shows that the two cultures, East and West, represented by China and Australia, can merge with each other without shedding their fundamental differences. Asian religions and philosophies such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, can be read in alignment with the Western religion of Christianity than in opposition. In these texts Chinese culture and Chinese women can be read as contributors and survivors when analysed in the Australian context. They survive through a narrative which facilitates reconciliation between gender, culture, race and ethnicity. The later novels suggest that, as a multi-cultured country, Australia is now capable of expanding its cultural inheritances and embracing differences, and that this contributes to the commingling of two cultures and to the breeding of hybridity.

The contact between Australia and China has been long and complex. The confrontations and reconciliations between the two cultures in terms of race and ethnicity have been much discussed by historians, sociologists and literary critics.<sup>①</sup> However, the representations of Chinese women characters in Australian literature have not been examined

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① See Nicholas Jose, *Chinese Whispers: Cultural Essays* (South Australia: Wakefield Press, 1995): 45. Jose argues that Australia's China is not monolithic but complex, it is "a complex, various, historically evolved and specific entity". Others who write about China include Lachlan Strahan, *Australia's China: Changing Perceptions from the 1930s to the 1990s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Eric Rolls, *Sojourners: the epic story of China's centuries-old relationship with Australia* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992); *Citizens: Continuing the epic story of China's centuries-old relationship with Australia* ... the sequel to *Sojourners* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1996).

closely. How Chinese women are constructed in Australian fiction in terms of their gender and ethnic identity from the turn of the century to the 1990s is worth an examination.

Through an analysis of the work selected from different periods, the book examines a gradual development in the representation of China and Chinese women, which is shown most clearly by emphasising the positive aspects in each work rather than the negative aspects of racial and gender discrimination and inequality. This tendency to stress the positive aspects of Australia's construction of China is supported by Professor Wang Gungwu's idea of enhancing the understanding between Australia and Asia. In his essay "The Australia Asians might not see" (1992), Professor Wang cites examples of Australian historians and novelists who write about Asia, such as Eric Rolls, Peter Carey and David Malouf who have created in their work "a better sense of what Australia is about". He writes, "What is missing is probably the kind of preparation needed to induce Asian readers to see Australia through the eyes of such sensitive writers" (Wang Gungwu, "The Australia" 355).

An affirmative reading of the work is offered here wherever possible. Nevertheless, racial and gender discrimination and inequality are scrutinised as the social context in which progress becomes visible.

Although my research is in some sense an extension of Dr. Ouyang Yu's thesis "Representing the 'Other': the Chinese in Australian Fiction: 1888–1988" (1994)<sup>①</sup>, it differs from his by empha-

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① My choice of novels in Chapter One is largely based on the bibliography of Dr. Ouyang who kindly allowed me to photocopy his entire bibliography in 1996. The thesis of Dr. Ouyang is not accessible until May 1999.

sising the depiction of women characters. Moreover, my book focuses on fiction after 1988, and examines two plays and one film.

It is in some of the lesser novels that Chinese women, more often than not, are constructed as the 'other' in both the feminist and the post-colonial sense. To illustrate this, Edward Said's Orientalist concept and a number of feminist theories are overlapped when they are applied. Modern writing, however, with the authors' greater awareness of a multi-cultured world and a post-colonial era, begins to show wider knowledge and deeper understanding of China and of Chinese women. This is especially obvious in the work by writers in the 1990s, such as Beth Yahp, Nicholas Jose, Alex Miller, Brian Castro, Ang Chin Geok, and Clara Law.

This book, then, attempts to find ways of reading Australian representations of China and Chinese women which will emphasise the writers' tendencies to show the growing affinities rather than the differences between the two cultures. The indestructibility of Chinese culture was emphasised by Charles Cooper as early as the 1930s. The issue is raised again by later writers such as Eric Lambert and Nicholas Jose who construct characters who articulate the resilience and tenacity of Chinese people. Lambert's Malayan Chinese people and Jose's Chinese figures like Jin Juan, Eagle, and Professor Hsu in Avenue of Eternal Peace (1989), are examples of characters whose strength and endurance are represented as a part of this Chinese inheritance.

The figures of Chinese women have been used as sites by sensitive writers for various purposes. In this way, the Chinese women represent either the indestructibility of the culture of China, as mentioned earlier; or the affinity between Chinese and Australian cultures; or the feminist struggle against patriarchal power. This use of images of Chi-

nese women as sites to indicate change in the conceptualising of Chinese culture by Australian writers may foreshadow an even closer relationship between Asian culture, as represented by China, and Australian culture. These representations of Chinese women, in effect, may be seen as a stage in (or a symptom of) the strengthening of what has been called "the fusion process between Asia and Australia" (Broinowski, *Yellow Lady* 218). The possibility of this fusion, as shown in these texts, indicates the hope that history may not endlessly repeat the dichotomy of one culture being seen as marginal to the other.

The existence of these texts also suggests that it is possible now for China and Australia to learn about and from each other and to be in a position to listen to some 'authentic' reports from those 'insiders'. In his essay "The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West", Zhang Longxi argues: "In the fusion of horizons we are able to transcend the boundaries of language and culture so that there is no longer the isolation of East or West, no longer the exotic, mystifying, inexplicable Other, but something to be learned and assimilated until it becomes part of our knowledge and experience of the world. Thus, in demythologizing China as the myth of the Other, the myth disappears but not the beauty, for the real differences between China and the West will be clearly recognized. China's true Otherness will be appreciated as contributing to the variety of our world and the totality of what we may proudly call the heritage of human culture" (Zhang Longxi 131). It will be seen, of course, that none of the work examined here fully achieves Zhang's vision, but it is not too optimistic to suggest that even the minor texts catch a glimpse of this ideal.

The concept of 'Australian context' must not be oversimplified.

On the one hand, the authors of the selected works are from many ethnic backgrounds, they are not necessarily descendants of Anglo-Celtic settlers. Therefore a 'deconstruction' of the 'Australian context' is similar to Sneja Gunew's suggestion that in reading Australian literature, a term such as 'migrant' should be deconstructed because its "political implications are . . . powerful and complex" (Gunew, Striking Chords 42). I am careful not to suggest that women writers, migrant writers or writers with Chinese ancestry are the sole proprietors of a woman's, a migrant's or a Chinese perspective. On the other hand, the writers all contribute to Australian multi-culturalism and therefore for the sake of convenience, have to be subjected to a brief essentialism in the long run of my investigation.

In the process of investigation and writing up the results, the position of the investigator is important. In doing my research, I identify myself with Said when he says about himself that he "entered into the life of the West, and yet retained some organic connection with the place from which [he] originally came . . . seeking ideally to go beyond coercive limitations on thought toward a non-dominative and non-essentialist, type of learning" (Said, Orientalism 336).

Interestingly, my personal experience in Australia moved in parallel with my academic research. My initial inability to adapt to a new culture, and my sense of alienation as a temporary migrant, were well presented in Law's film Floating Life (1996). By the time I read Miller's The Ancestor Game (1992), I had overcome many difficulties and began to feel at home, an alternative Miller positively offers to people in exile. Brian Castro's After China (1992) enabled me to question further Chinese male chauvinism after I adopted a more distant position from Chinese culture.

Information about myself is intended to indicate the personal Chinese perspective from which I approach the work by Australians and the issues of Orientalism and feminism they raise. It is important to realize that while I have privileged insights as a Chinese reader, I do not represent a universal Chinese reader. I agree with Landy and Maclean who elaborate Spivak's injunction "unlearn one's privilege as one's loss":

Whoever we are, if we are reading Spivak, we are likely to be comparatively privileged, at least in terms of educational opportunity, citizenship, and location within the international division of labour. Unlearning one's privilege by considering it as one's loss constitutes a double recognition. Our privileges, whatever they may be in terms of race, class, nationality, gender, and the like, may have prevented us from gaining a certain kind of Other knowledge: not simply information that we have not yet received, but the knowledge that we are not equipped to understand by reason of our social positions. To unlearn our privileges means, on the one hand, to do our homework, to work hard at gaining some knowledge of the others who occupy those spaces most closed to our privileged view. On the other hand, it means attempting to speak to those others in such a way that they might take us seriously and, most important of all, be able to answer back. (Landy and Maclean 4-5)



My rationale for selecting the works includes historical and statistical reasons. Historically, “the Whitlam Government recognised the People’s Republic of China in December 1972” (Strahan 292). And as Alison Broinowski writes “[i]n the more radical 1970s Prime Minister Gough Whitlam reversed Labor tradition by declaring that Australia no longer saw its neighbourhood as a frontier rimmed with nameless Asian enemies” (Broinowski, *Yellow Lady* 17). Across the Western world, after the American President Nixon’s visit to China in 1972, Mackerras goes so far as to say “there was a ‘mania for everything Chinese’” (Mackerras, *Western Images* 16). Similarly, Spivak argues “during the 1970s, the prestigious journal *Tel Quel* . . . pursued an assiduous . . . interest in the matter of China” (Spivak, *IOW* 136). Overall, contact with the Chinese mainland not only weakened political and cultural hostility but also presented opportunities for strengthening positive cultural ties. Statistically, then, the period offers the widest selection of texts. According to Ouyang Yu “in the nineteenth century . . . except for two or three obscure stories, they [Chinese women] do not exist in Australian fiction” (Ouyang, *TOHO* 74).

While writing up my thesis, I undertook with a co-researcher, a concomitant but separate study which investigates the representation of Chinese women in the newspapers of North Queensland between 1860s and 1890s, and between 1960s and 1990s. The completed investigation finds an almost total absence of Chinese women, actual and representational, from newspapers of the nineteenth-century period.

Although Chapter One deals with a travel book and three novels written before the 1960s, the selected writing is chiefly from the period since the 1980s. Eight out of the thirteen works were written between the 1980s and the 1990s. Certainly there are more positive rep-