

Representations of Belonging in Asian Australian Writing

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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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### **Abstract**

Australia has a long and ambivalent history with Asia. With an increasing visibility of the social and political presence of 'Asia' in Australia, the growing importance of the Asian region to Australia's economy, and a transnational mobility of people and cultures across the globe, it becomes more relevant than ever to re-examine how a concept of Asian Australian identity and belonging might be understood in contemporary Australia. This thesis pursues this central question through the examination of a selection of recent Australian literary texts by writers of East and Southeast Asian-descent. In particular, the thesis maps shifting representations of Asian-Australian identity in these texts through increasingly expansive spatial categories – from the individual body, to the domestic home, to the ethnic 'ghetto', to the suburb, and finally to the global world – as their protagonists engage with normative ideas of ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality within Australian society. In different ways, the nine literary works considered in this thesis address the process of marking out a space of belonging in a contemporary culture that still places constant pressure on non-Anglo-Australian notions of identity. Ultimately, each of these works rejects any singular or definitive concept of 'Asian' experience or identity in Australia, in favour of a more complex and flexible understanding that identity and belonging are concepts that are always subject to border-crossing. Above all, these works not only challenge conventional understandings of what it means to be 'Asian' in contemporary Australia, but also challenge conventional understandings of what it means to be 'Australian'.

### **Statement of Authorship**

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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