A. Robert Lee (ed.), *China Fictions/English language: Literary Essays in Diaspora, Memory, Story* (Rodopi, 2008).

As the blurb of this book suggests, ‘The world is anything but unfamiliar with diaspora’, and indeed diaspora and transnationalism have become bywords for the post-modern, globalised world we live in. However, even though the field of diaspora studies has ‘occasioned a massive upsurge in analysis and scholarship’ (15), there are still gaps in the current state of knowledge. For instance, while there has been much work on the Jewish or African diasporas (despite the contestation of the term ‘diaspora’), there is relatively little on the very large numbers of Chinese people emigrating and creating new homes. This is a migration which has a very long history and is still very current.

Another gap in understandings of diaspora is in literary analysis of texts that deal with migration and all its associated issues. As the subtitle of this book suggests, these essays are concerned with memory and story as they relate to diasporic experience. It goes against the grain of the large social-scientific literature which may tend to objectify diasporic experience, and it does not see texts as simply cultural products which are somehow symptomatic of wider patterns. The essays in *China Fictions* deal with literature directly on its own terms, accounting for its human, individual aspects which are not easily generalisable to wider populations. Nonetheless, the essays here certainly reflect wider global currents and the progressive dissolution of boundaries, but this does not overshadow the specificity of human experience.

These global currents and flows are partly reflected by the wide range of ‘destinations’ for Chinese migration that are depicted by the authors under study. The collection starts with essays on Chinese authors living in the United States, such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan and Frank Chin. Following this, there are essays on Chinese-Australian authors Hsu-Ming Teo, Brian Castro and Ouyang Yu. Discussion of Chinese-Canadian authors SKY Lee, Way Choy, Evelyn Lau and Larissa Lai is then followed by discussion of Honk Kong-based authors Martin Booth and Poh Wah Lam. Following these are essays on Singaporean writers Hwee Hwee Tan and Colin Cheong, then UK authors Timothy Mo, Chiang Lee and Li Yuan Chua. This account gives some sense of the ambitious scope of this book.

However, listing the subjects of the chapters like this does no justice to the diversity and specificity of their cultural lives. For instance, Hsu Ming Teo’s Chinese origins are heavily mediated by her family’s lived experience in Singapore, and as Diana Yeh points out, many ‘Chinese-British’ authors are often labelled in terms of their ultimate home after their time in Britain. An author like Timothy Mo is particularly difficult to categorise in terms of origin and destination. Indeed, a focus on diaspora and globalisation rules out simplistic hyphenations suggested by terms like ‘Asian-American’ or ‘Asian-Canadian’, and this problem is itself a point of discussion for many authors.

As well as a diversity of contexts and cultural interactions, *China Fictions* also covers a wide array of themes. Here we see some usual suspects: for instance, the role of women in family and social life is analysed in terms of the mother-daughter relationship (Grice 34) as well as the phenomenon of non-Western so called ‘chick lit’

(Ommundsen 327). However, there are also extensions of these familiar themes: for instance, A. Robert Lee explores a resurgent masculinity in the fiction of Frank Chin which may display more complexity than what we see in Chin’s non-fiction (Lee 79). Other themes include the conflict between traditionalism and (post-)modernity (Hall 279; Ommundsen 327); the persistence of and opposition to Orientalism in all its forms (Ho 204; Goh 276; Yeh 299), and the essential role of language in structuring social experience (Goh 239; Yeh 314; Ommundsen 342). This ambitious thematic scope means that it is sometimes difficult to identify common threads between the many different works.

It must also be said that the quality of the contributions is sometimes inconsistent. For instance there are several noticeable proofreading errors in some sections (183-4) while other chapters are flawless. More seriously, some of the chapters seem much less assured and polished than others: for instance, Mary Conde’s chapter on ‘Canadian Border Crossings’ engages with some crucial ideas and starts out well, but ends up shifting between discussions of too many authors and losing its structural clarity as it goes on. One the other hand, Wenche Ommundsen’s discussion of ‘Chick Lit’ is thoughtful, assured, and clear. It starts with a thorough and useful definition of the post-feminist aspects of ‘Chick Lit’ as well as a balanced account of its strengths and weaknesses before proceeding to a careful and nuanced reading of texts to demonstrate that texts which fall within the genre are not always mere ‘fluff’.

This inconsistency is perhaps a result of the high ambitions that China Fictions has set for itself. Not unlike its subject matter, it is very broad and diverse, covering a wide range and large number of contexts, themes, authors, and positions. For this reason it runs a little wild, which is after all forgivable for a book which makes important steps forward for transnational literary criticism. However its greatest strength is in acknowledging, analysing and even encouraging a diversity which disputes not only binaries such as East/West, but even the dominance of terms such as ‘diaspora’ and the easy hyphenations which pigeonhole authors, texts, and ultimately individuals.

Chad Habel