

Positioning Asian Australian Writing: A Study of Three Australian Literary Anthologies

Wan Nur Madiha Ramlan¹
International Islamic University Malaysia

Maimunah Abdul Kadir²
International Islamic University Malaysia

Abstract

This paper examines three anthologies of Australian literature: *The Oxford Anthology of Australian Literature* (1985), *The Macmillan Anthology of Australian Literature* (1990), and *Macquarie PEN The Anthology of Australian Literature* (2010). It focusses on the politics of inclusion in anthology-making and the mechanics surrounding theme, perception, and ideology about literature as a reflection of a nation's culture and identity. The increasing popularity of Asian Australian writing in recent years has raised concerns about how it is perceived as part of the national literary tradition that is a relatively white space. Not much is discussed about how Asian Australian writing appears in anthologies despite increasing critical attention given to them as a literary genre. Informed by Asian Australian studies and anthology criticism, this study charts the trends in the inclusion of Asian Australian writing and how it is posited within the larger national canon.

Keywords

Australian literature, Asian Australian literature, politics of anthology-making, canon formation, Otherness, identity

Introduction

The long history of Australia and Asia is marked by a sense of ambivalence. Australian views of Asia and Asians are conflicting, swaying between starkly different attitudes. For Australia, Asia and Asians have always been framed as either an invisible presence (Fozdar 2), or a persistent threat to its security, identity, and sense of nationhood (Pung, "The Original Introduction"). This antagonism stems from an anxiety about Australia's proximity to Asia, which

¹ **Wan Nur Madiha Ramlan** is Assistant Professor of English at the Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University IIUM, where she teaches courses on American and postcolonial literatures. Her research interests include Malaysian folktales and using digital methods to study literary texts. Email: madyramlan@iium.edu.my

² **Maimunah Abdul Kadir** is Assistant Professor at the Department of English Language and Literature, IIUM. She has been teaching TESL, Sociolinguistics, Curriculum Development and Discourse Analysis for more than 30 years. Email: maimunah@iium.edu.my

continues to govern not only its foreign policy, but also its national imagination. Australia's geographical "displacement" as a Western outpost in Asia (Ang 2) and its self-regard as a protector of Western civilisation continue to characterise this dichotomous relationship.

The past 20 years have witnessed a change in Australia's attitudes, as the country is forced to reconsider its antagonism to benefit from an increasingly robust Asian economy. The publication of the White Paper titled *Australia in the Asian Century* (2012) by Julia Gillard's government is evidence of this change; it outlines ways in which Australia can improve its Asian-literacy. This period is also characterised by a boom in the publication of Asian Australians' works and critical studies (Lo et al. 1). As Bruce Bennett states:

...Asian Australians themselves have had a foothold in Australian literary publishing, and names, such as [Yasmine] Gooneratne, Brian Castro, Beth Yahp and Adib Khan, have gained a certain prominence in the 1980s and 1990s. (4).

However, while the White Australia Policy had ended in the 1970s and the sociocultural landscape continues to change, the national narrative is still contingent on the idea of white Anglo identity. This self-perception continues to inform political, social, and cultural rhetoric manifested in artefacts such as official documents, culture, and popular media (Pan 200), including literary texts. These mainstream discourses do not only help shape the "who 'we' are" part of Australian national identity (Pan 200) but also feeds into the notion of "who 'we' are not." Nonetheless, Asian Australian positionality remains precarious as Chinese economic ventures into the country and the current COVID-19 pandemic have heightened white Australian anxiety towards Asians, seeing them as the Yellow Peril once more.

Based on this background, this study examines three Australian literature anthologies to analyse what they might reveal about the relationship between Asian Australian writing and Australian literary history. The study of *The Oxford Anthology of Australian Literature* (1985), *The Macmillan Anthology of Australian Literature* (1990), and *The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature* (2010) will help us understand how Asian Australian writing is posited within the broader national literary canon. These anthologies are all prominent, published after the dissolution of the White Australian Policy in the 1970s. They provide curations of what their editors believe to be representative of Australian literature. Framed by Asian Australian studies and anthology criticism, this paper considers the anthologies' political currency and cultural work in helping to question the canonicity of Australian literature.

Although it is perceived as necessary but unremarkable, the anthologies can not only help readers form an understanding of what characterises a body of literature, but also reflect the history of a nation. In his discussion on the canon and literary history, Dermot McCarthy contends that literary development, more

often than not, mirrors a nation's social, cultural, and political actions (qtd. in Lecker 38). In his introduction to the *American Book Review*, Jeffrey R. Di Leo underscores the anthology's value by arguing that they emphasise the literary world as subjective geography, one which the anthology can serve as a guide to a space that is contentious and political. To understand more about the position of Asian Australian writing in Australian literary history, we believe that the best place to start is with national literature anthologies.

Scholars have long problematised the relationship between anthology and canon formation. Alexander Beecroft identifies the anthology as one of the "most important technologies of canon formation" (341). National literature anthologies bring together literary works that are deemed important to a nation's literary history. Therefore, anthologies are a genre in which a literary canon can emerge, be examined and maintained. In short, one can say that the anthology is the physical articulation of a literary canon. To this, we can argue that its compilation and publication may be motivated by several factors, including cultural politics, policies, and market demands. It is this complexity that makes the anthology a vital part of literary culture and criticism.

Our motivation in exploring the association between anthology and Asian Australian writing is twofold. Firstly, we want to study how Asian Australian writing is perceived as part of Australian literature. In doing so, we want to focus on the development of Asian Australian literary history as told by these anthologies. Secondly, we also want to highlight each anthology's sociocultural and political currencies as a literary genre in order to reveal how the Australian narrative it engenders is informed by stories and ways of reading these stories. In order to accomplish these aims, our discussion analyses the relationship between the anthologies and Asian Australian writing by looking at text selection, editorial essays, and commentaries in each anthology. However, due to the limited scope of this paper, we will not analyse the anthology-pieces in greater depth nor explore the implications surrounding their paratexts.

Anthology as a Contested Space

The anthology has evolved considerably from the original Greek word "Anthologia," to mean "collection" or "flowers." In a literary sense, the term anthology was first used to describe "flowers of verse" or works of poetry (Tuhiwai-Smith 521). Over the years, its definition has greatly expanded to mean a collection or curation of independent literary texts (Ben Grant, "Anthology") and creative media. Anthologies, particularly national surveys, have since become classroom staples both in high schools and literature programmes at the university level worldwide, thanks largely to the dominance of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. *The Norton Anthology*, L.E. Geriguis argues, has helped invent the modern classroom literary anthology genre in the 1960s (1). The widespread use of anthology in classrooms has motivated much research

specifically focused on the its pedagogical potential and its place in curriculum design. Yet, no matter how extensively we use anthology in classrooms, there is a penchant for readers and researchers alike to overlook its power and influence because its very ordinariness has helped mask its power and influence (Geriguis 1).

While there was a scant number of studies theorising the anthology as a genre and as part of the broader social and cultural narratives in the past, there is a growing interest in anthology studies in recent years. Scholars have argued over the place of the anthology in literary criticism (Lockard and Sandell 228) and as a contested space which foregrounds issues such as identity and belonging. Cary Nelson (1993) further expounds the anthology's importance by arguing that it is a representation of the more comprehensive social text and that its compilation and use is "fraught with social and political meaning and responsibility" (47). Moreover, the anthology is an essential aspect of nation-building, as Peter Burke (1992) maintains that it is an important cultural artefact in the process of nation-building because it has the potential to help consolidate power in nation-states and construct, inform, or challenge identities. This supports Linda Tuhiwai-Smith's assertion that not only is the anthology a space of possibility, but it is also a socially-interested publication (521).

Therefore, the anthology is an entanglement of social, cultural, and political motivations which affect those who are writing from the periphery. Due to Australia's self-regard as a white, Anglo, and often masculine nation, female, migrant, ethnic, and Indigenous writers are often embroiled within the politics of inclusion which has largely characterised anthology-making practices. Researchers such as Nelson (1993), Lockard, and Sandell (2008), and Chan (2015) point out that the text selection process in past anthologies, particularly in those on national literatures, attempted to shape and project a singular and homogenous canon. The editorial decision-making for an anthology project is arguably rife with different biases, including those involving ethnicity, class, and gender. Much of the gendered and racialised nature of anthology-making is not only revealed through editorial decisions but can also be seen in the ways pedagogical concerns and policies help characterise this dilemma. The reaction to Rosemary Neill's article "Lost for Words" (2007) offers us an important reference point in this regard. It had ignited intense debates about the decreasing prestige of Australian literature and the declining interest in academia. In response to this debacle, The Australian Council for the Arts organised a roundtable discussion and forwarded 16 recommendations to help improve the prestige of Australian literature. One of the recommendations involves a traditional definition of what constitutes Australian literature. The communique also encourages selections based on what the council terms as the "classics" of Australian texts. Concerning the Council's recommendations, Larissa McLean Davies mentions:

In this way, the Roundtable, ironically (considering it consisted, in part, of individuals who had spent their careers contesting and reconsidering notions of canon), sought to silence these debates and recolonise Australian literature for a twenty-first century readership. The sense that the Communiqué was both asserting and defending a traditional notion of canon was strongly reinforced in the ninth recommendation: ‘A group of distinguished writers, teachers and scholars should be convened to establish a list of Australian literary works that form part of the intellectual inheritance of all Australians’. (47)

The excerpt above demonstrates that the Council believes that the selection process for “distinguished” Australian texts by writers and educators is impartial. However, Nelson (1993) suggests that text selection is not a neutral process, and goes as far as to say that neutrality cannot exist in this context. Different modules and rubrics may often support this myth of neutrality in active projects concerning canon formation, whether they be based on factors such as aesthetics or the interest of the publishing industry. These rubrics are also informed by editorial decision-making; however, most times, it rarely acknowledges how a text can shape a reader’s worldview and is inexplicitly tied to how one sees oneself and others in larger social, cultural, and national contexts. Hence, a recommendation to improve the visibility and prestige of Australian literature by following a model with elitist and homogenous perceptions of the canon alienates people who cannot see or find themselves in the texts they read. When considering this to the relationship between text, self, and Other, it is important to understand that literature can reinforce a sense of self at personal and national levels.

Australian Literature and the Anthology

There are a number of studies pertaining to the anthology and its relationship with Australian literature. A few studies have explored how indigenous writings are represented in anthologies. Esther Prokopenko’s study of how Australian anthologies have selected and organised Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander writings highlights the subtle political power in these anthologies. In her examination of *The Oxford Anthology of Australian Literature* (1985) and *The Macmillan Anthology of Australian Literature* (1990), Prokopenko considers the editors’ use of language in their introductions and how it can guide readers on the functions of a specific anthology. This study sheds light on the power of an introduction. Among other things, an introduction expresses the goals, parameters, and selection of the anthology. It also helps to direct the reader to how the anthology’s contents are valued. Prokopenko suggests that the framing of the introductions in these major anthologies reduces the visibility of Aboriginal

literatures and sustains a conventional understanding of Australian identity through the perpetuation of whiteness and Anglo-centric values (64). Similarly, Marisa Virtich's 1997 thesis looks at indigenous anthologies and their relationship with the Australian canon. She examines how anthologies focused on indigenous writings help subvert the mechanics of creating and maintaining mainstream canons by questioning the representativeness of widely accepted white patriarchal values.

Another area of critical concern is the anthologising of poetry. Geoff Page's work on the canon and Australian poetry anthologies discusses multifaceted issues concerning its nature. He also notes that Australian poetry, especially those by Aboriginal and migrant writers, is grossly under-represented in many anthology projects (23). In 2017, Jim Berryman and Caitlin Stone examined 15 Australian national poetry anthologies published between 1946 and 2011. They wanted to identify the most anthologised poems by referring to the frequency of inclusion, identifying poets whose works have been anthologised the most, and seeing which poets have been represented consistently with the period analysis. Their analysis may help understand the role of national anthologies in maintaining and supporting what Berryman and Stone call a "hierarchy of established literary reputations" (47). Similarly, A. J. Carruthers has also contributed to the study of anthology criticism and Australian poetry in his work, "Who's Afraid of Poetic Convention? Anthologising Australian Poetry in the New Century" (2017). In his article, Carruthers pays attention to the idea of corpus in the study of Australian poetry and how it is represented in anthologies.

While work on Australian anthology criticism has increased, research focusing on the anthology and Asian Australian writing is still rare. So far, Pamela Graham's article, "Alice Pung's *Growing up Asian in Australia*: The Cultural Work of Anthologized Asian Australian Narratives of Childhood" (2013), is the only work in this area of study. In her work, Graham examines the cultural work that Pung the editor aims to achieve. Using auto/biography and Asian Australian studies, Graham considers how Pung has strategised to ensure the anthology reaches a broader readership and concludes that the anthology is a complex work that embeds elements of both integrationist and interventionist anthologies. More importantly, the *Growing Up* anthology helps problematise notions of Asia and Australia, and challenges what Australian identity entails. Graham does not elaborate on the implications of how national literature anthologies, such as the ones we have chosen to examine, select and arrange Asian Australian writing. Therefore, our research seeks to address this area of study to help understand the positionality of Asian Australian writing in an Australia that purportedly seeks to embrace a more Asia-literate future.

The Editorial Project

As literary texts concern the study of cultures and literatures, we argue that the three anthologies reflect the social and political circumstances of their publication. This, in turn, can help us further understand the shifts that occur within the Australian sociocultural landscape. The editorial project, which usually centres primarily on the editorial essay and other forms of commentary, is where most information about an anthology resides. The introduction is an important part of an anthology because, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Esther Prokopenko argue, it helps express what the anthology attempts to do. As Tuhiwai-Smith says:

The editorial project, the contributing authors, their disciplinary backgrounds and personal profiles, the introductory essay, and the individual essays all become in some way important signifiers of what an anthology is trying to say and what it is also trying to do. (521)

The three anthologies under discussion in this paper are all major anthologies of Australian literature and are published by reputable publishers such as The Oxford University Press, Macmillan Publishers, and the Macquarie University Press and PEN. They are significant also because they are national anthologies that cover a wide range of genres and forms of Australian writing. They are by no means the only survey anthologies that focus on Australian writing. In fact, there have been numerous anthologies such as *The Southern Euphrosyne and Australian Miscellany* (1848), *The Australian Souvenir for 1851* (1851), *Poets and Prose Writers of New South Wales* (1866), and *In Praise of Australia: An Anthology in Prose and Verse* which was published in 1912. There are also other anthologies published within the same period as the three selected anthologies. However, those are either smaller anthologies, such as *Australian Literature: An Anthology of Writing from the Land Down Under* (1993), *Made in Australia: An Anthology of Writing* (1990), and *Reading the Landscape: A Celebration of Australian Writing* (2018), or focus on a specific subject matters or genres such as *Australian Mosaic: An Anthology of Multicultural Writing* (1997), *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Poetry* (2008) and *The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature* (2008).

The three anthologies chosen were published after the dissolution of the White Australia Policy, which was finally dismantled by the Whitlam Government in 1973. This delineation is an integral part of the selection process. The White Australia Policy refers to a set of (racist) regulations that had prevented the immigration of non-Europeans into Australia. It was manifested mainly through the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, which used a language test to discriminate against certain immigrants, particularly the Pacific Islanders and Asians. Early in the Federation's history, an Australian national identity was contingent on the idea of white and Anglo identities. Even though multiculturalism is seen as an important part of Australian nation-building since the 1980s, this imagining of Australian national identity continues to centre on

white and Anglo ideals despite these self-imaginings being historically and socially constructed (Walton et al. 2). The Burr scandal in 2014 revealed continued anxieties surrounding diversity and multiculturalism. In the same year, academic consultants for the Howard Government reviewed the Australian Curriculum (AC). They maintained that, prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Islander histories and cultures, and Asia means undermining and downplaying aspects of Australia's knowledge base and foundation which make up its core content. Core content, as the report explains, is made up of Western tradition and knowledge, and Judeo-Christian heritage (Australian Government 138).

In the 25 years in between the publication of the *Oxford* and *Macquarie PEN* anthologies, a cultural shift had taken place in Australia and is made apparent in the differences marked in all of the anthologies under investigation. This cultural shift is what we would like to understand further, that is, how it may be articulated in the anthologies we read. This undertaking may reveal information on the position of Asian Australian writing and the ongoing debate surrounding Australian literature and national narratives.

The earliest of the anthologies in this study is *The Oxford Anthology of Australian Literature* which was published in 1985. Five years later came *The Macmillan Anthology of Australian Literature*. That was a period that some scholars, such as Patricia Eliades, term as “multicultural anthologomania” (74). Yet, up until the time of writing, *The Oxford* and *Macmillan* anthologies were the only editions of such texts. Since their publication decades ago, there have been no updates and no new editions that would usually characterise such anthologies. A good example of an anthology's continuity is best exemplified through the highly successful Norton Anthology series. Aside from smaller anthologies, especially those focussing on poetry, it was not until nearly two decades later that another national anthology focusing on Australian literature would be published.

In the introductions, usually all editors address questions surrounding the range and the diversity of the texts they have selected. Kramer and Mitchell, whose introduction to *The Oxford Anthology* is the briefest of the three, state that their chief purpose is to “represent the range of Australian writing in prose and verse from the end of the eighteenth century to the present day” (1) and that their main considerations for selection were the quality of writing as well as posterity. The commentaries in each section help little in contextualising text selection. Instead of a more in-depth explanation of their editorial choices, Kramer and Mitchell suggest that *The Oxford History of Australian Literature* (1981) will provide critical commentary to enhance readers' understanding of Australian literature.

Lawson and Goodwin, the general editors of the *Macmillan Anthology* and Nicholas Jose of the *Macquarie PEN Anthology*, provide a more holistic explanation of the motivations and underlying concerns surrounding their respective anthology projects. One of the most significant foci of a project of this magnitude will be on defining the boundaries of ‘Australian’. Lawson and Goodwin, and

Jose all agree that the criteria for inclusion concerning authorship are birth, citizenship, or residence. In Lawson's and Goodwin's case, an author's brief visit to Australia is an acceptable criterion as long as the text is concerned with Australia. Jose seems to support this criterion when he mentions that "[o]ur criteria for selection include that the work, written by someone born or living in, or writing about, Australia..." (2).

This inclusiveness also extends to how editors of the *Macmillan* and *Macquarie PEN* anthologies make clear the genres of writing included in the project. Unlike *The Oxford Anthology*, which only focuses on works of prose and poetry, *The Macmillan Anthology* is framed around what Lawson and Goodwin contend as an eclectic approach that was inspired by G.B. Barton's flexible inclusions for his anthology, *Poets and Prose Writers of New South Wales* (1866). Much like *The Macmillan Anthology*, *The Macquarie PEN Anthology* is more diverse in its selection of texts and includes works of translation. The criteria delineated in the introductory essays in the three anthologies may give us a glimpse into anthology-making processes. More importantly, they help underscore the ideologies and issues which frame each anthology.

Where are the Asian Australians?

Text selection is perhaps the most important process of anthology-making, one which has been the primary focus in anthology criticism. In their introduction to *The Oxford Anthology*, Kramer and Mitchell explain that Australia has multicultural writers, but the anthology fails to include any work by Asian Australians. We find this absence to be surprising and troubling given the fact that, by 1985, multiculturalism was in full force in the Australian national rhetoric and that there were a number of Asian Australian writers who published in English in that same period. While it could be argued that the number of Asian Australian writers publishing in English was limited when the anthology was published, we know this is not the case when we refer to the literary history of Asian Australian writers. This absence can mean many things; it can reflect a genuine oversight, complications regarding ideas of aesthetics that are usually standards based on Anglo-centric preferences, or lack of attention given to Asian Australian writers in the literary scene. Kramer and Mitchell stress that their selection was partly based on the merit of writing, which is unfortunately a subjective concept that lends itself to much ambiguity.

In fact, the only time Asia is mentioned in the anthology is through references to Asian nations, Asians in other countries, or specific Asian cultures. Except for Ee Tiang Hong's poem, "Coming To," *The Macmillan Anthology* makes no mention of other Asian Australian texts. The only other noteworthy work, although anonymous, is an article from *The Age* entitled "An Anti-Chinese Public Meeting" (1855). Due to the absence of Asian Australian writings in *The Oxford*

Anthology and its scarcity in *The Macmillan Anthology*, we were forced to look at this issue from another angle, one which articulates a broader concern for Asia.

Using Chengxin Pan's three modes of representations of Asia, we consider the relevance of representations of the continent in these two anthologies to a discussion on Asian Australian writing. Pan explains that representations of Asia in Australia's self-imagining usually oscillate between absence, threat, and opportunity (198). While Asian Australian writing is largely absent in the two anthologies, multiple configurations of Asia fulfil Pan's threat and opportunity modes of representation and articulate the dichotomous relationship between Asia and Australia. Asia is never actively engaged in *The Oxford* and *Macmillan* anthologies. Robert Hughes' essay, "The Australian Intellectual" (1967), which is included in the *Oxford Anthology*, refers to Asian nations thus:

Thus issues get shoved away, or juggled out of focus. One may have a vicarious yen for past issues... but present ones, like the invasions of Tibet or Vietnam, or the conflict between Sukarno and Malaysia, which don't have their Hemingways and Audens to make them real, demand less commitment. (413)

While Hughes criticises the academics' passivity in voicing out against the White Australia Policy, he still only talks about them in passing. Hal Porter's "House Girl," which is included in *The Macmillan Anthology*, mentions Japan and Japanese culture many times. Yet, Porter's work never goes beyond this, highlighting that Asia is both present as a setting but absent everywhere else. Additionally, Robin Boyd's "The Australian Ugliness" only refers to Asia by alluding to the threat from the North. Another Macmillan anthology-piece which deals with Asia is "An Anti-Chinese Public Meeting" published in 1855. This opinion piece considers whether or not Australia should allow Chinese immigrants into the country, and what policies on labour should warrant the need for Chinese immigration. The admission of Chinese labourers had stirred public debate because, not unlike contemporary narratives about the threat of Chinese businesses in Australia, the Chinese were seen as a cultural, social, and economic threat. The essay concludes that:

And here our first law is that of self-preservation. Philanthropy may say: Let them come here, and it will give us an opportunity of lifting them out of the ditch of heathenism in which they are wallowing. Very charitable; but it is worthwhile considering whether we shall lift them out, or whether they may not as likely drag us in. If we are confident of the former, by all means let them come; but if we have a misgiving, it may prove an act of prudence, on our part, to adopt a protective policy for a time. (177)

Unfortunately, *The Macmillan Anthology* does not give much context about this entry and what conference the writer had alluded to in the essay. The only entry that was written by an Australian-descent is the poem “Coming To” written by Malaysian Australian Ee Tiang Hong. Hong had migrated to Australia in 1975. The 1969 sectarian violence in Malaysia and his disillusionment with the country’s sociocultural and political landscapes were reasons why Hong decided to leave. He is representative of the new wave of Asian migrants to Australia during that period. In many of the texts, Asia and Asians are positioned outside of Australia and Australian culture. This reflects prevailing sociocultural attitudes towards most narratives surrounding Asia, even when the political rhetoric expresses the need for the country to be more Asia-literate.

Published in 2010, *The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature* is arguably the most ambitious, thorough, and representative endeavour in recent Australian literary history. Spanning a mammoth 1464 pages, this anthology is curated to show the evolving and increasingly diverse nature of Australian literature. Nicholas Jose, who had served as the general editor, comments that the people who were involved in the compilation of this anthology “intend that the anthology show the phases of change and development in Australian literature, and in Australian society and culture more generally” (2) and that the anthology points to the different articulations and ways of being Australian (2). Unlike other anthologies, *The Macquarie PEN Anthology* features eight Asian Australian writers. The following table highlights all the texts written by Australians of Asian origin:

Table 1

Asian Australian Writers and Texts in *The Macquarie PEN Anthology*

Author	Title of Work	Page Number
Taam Sze Pui (1853-1926)	From <i>My Life and Work</i> (1925)	217-219
Mena Abdullah (b.1930) and Ray Mathew (1929-2002)	“The Dragon of Kashmir” (1965)	780-783
Yahia al-Samawy (b. 1949)	“Your Voice is My Flute” (2005)	1183-1184
Brian Castro (b. 1950)	From <i>Shanghai Dancing</i> (2003)	1222-1224
Ouyang Yu (b. 1955)	“The Ungrateful Immigrant” (2004) “Listening to the Chinese Woman Philosopher” (2005)	1281-1283

Michelle De Kretser (b. 1957)	From <i>The Hamilton Case</i> (2003)	1307-1311
Adam Aitken (b. 1960)	“Post-colonial” (1996) “Changi” (2000)	1341-1344
Chi Vu (b. 1973)	From <i>Vietnam: A psychic guide</i> (2003)	1398-1402

The texts in the anthology are selected from Asian Australian writers of diverse backgrounds. Mena Abdullah’s work with Ray Mathews is the first Asian Australian creative work in English. However, Taam Sze Pui’s work is arguably the earliest example of life writing by an Asian Australian. Pui was from China and had migrated to Australia for work in the gold mines. In 1925, Pui published his memoir *My Life and Work*, making it a work of historical significance because it was the only memoir published in the nineteenth century by a Chinese Australian (Jupp 200). The inclusion of Pui’s work in *The Macquarie PEN Anthology* suggests that Asian Australian writing has a relatively longer history than is commonly assumed.

The excerpt from Pui’s *My Life and Work* describes the hopes of better fortunes and the hardships that he and his friends had to endure in their effort to find gold in a foreign land. Pui had later abandoned his quest to find gold and settled for a venture in trade and commerce. His store, *Poy & Sons*, became one of the biggest department stores in Queensland. Written in English and Chinese, the memoir is Pui’s account of his life from China, to the Australian gold mines and his venture into trading. The inclusion of Pui’s story in *The Macquarie PEN Anthology* challenges the idea that early Australian literature is largely a White domain. Instead, Pui’s life experience is also characterised by the same themes such as ideas of mateship, which is often understood as a great bond between friends, migration, the terror and beauty of the Australian landscape, opportunity and the Australian ethos of everyone having a ‘fair go’. The inclusion of Pui’s work in one of the biggest national anthologies of Australian literature helps subvert a long-standing perception that early Australian literature is an exclusively white experience. Additionally, it sheds light on the often racially-biased history of early Chinese settlers in Australia, a narrative that is predominantly marked by the view that the Chinese posed a cultural and social threat to the Australian way of life.

Similarly, Mena Abdullah’s and Ray Mathews’ work deals with the migrant experience. “The Dragon of Kashmir” is about a young girl’s interaction with an aged Kashmiri woman whom the family call Grandmother Shah. The protagonist finds a faded old fan and Grandmother Shah tells her the story of that fan and her friendship with a girl named Lala. The story foregrounds the circumstances of Grandmother Shah’s unwillingness to migrate to Australia as a young bride and the loss of selfhood experienced by married Kashmiri women.

The story talks about diaspora and references to the hybrid nature of young Kashmiri-Australians. These children exist within two different cultures and have to navigate these two spaces. Grandmother Shah, being a first-generation immigrant and an elder, passes down these stories and memories of Kashmir to the younger generation so that they will not forget their cultural roots when confronted with the pull of assimilation.

Adam Aitken's and Ouyang Yu's poems foreground the sense of Otherness that some Asian Australians experience. Yu's "The Ungrateful Immigrant" outlines the antagonism Asian immigrants face and the numerous misconceptions surrounding their stories. The speaker in Yu's poem explains that people believe that immigrants should be forever grateful to be given this opportunity to come and live in Australia. The speaker criticises this attitude and seems to suggest a sense of regret coming to Australia (Macquarie PEN 1282). Concluding the poem, Yu asks the reader whether or not the speaker is serious about all of these sentiments and the speaker answers in the negative and in return, asks the reader "What do you reckon?" (Macquarie PEN 1282). Aitken's poem, "Post-colonial" also captures this sense of Otherness but from a mother's perspective. The speaker in the poem not only talks about her own history, but also alludes to Robert Menzies' anti-communist policies and the overall social climate about the Vietnam War. Being refugees of the Vietnam War, the speaker's family was seen with much suspicion by Australians. This belief that Asians and Asian Australians pose a threat to the Australian identity and sociocultural well-being is still prevalent. This is well-documented in recent years, particularly due to the economic and political rise of China and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have been seen by many to be justifiable reasons to incite hatred for Asians.

The inclusion of Yahia al-Samawy's work in *The Macquarie PEN Anthology* is an important development as to how Australian literature is defined can no longer be confined to only works produced in the English language. Born in Iraq in 1970, al-Samawy migrated to Australia in 1997. His poem "Your Voice is My Flute" was originally written and published in Arabic but was later translated into English by Eva Sallis in 2005. The poem describes the speaker's yearning for an unnamed lover and is reminiscent of the style of traditional Arabic poetry. Thematically, the poem does not deal with traditional themes typically found in other Australian poetic works. Instead, the poem's inclusion stands as a stark reminder of the richness and diversity of Australian writing, not just in terms of style and thematic approach but also of language.

Works of Brian Castro, Michelle de Kretser, and Chi Vu were all published a few years before the publication of the anthology. They indicate that Asian Australian writing is not confined to victim narratives or the 'boat motif' that chiefly dominates perceptions surrounding Asian Australian writing. This emphasis opens up a myriad of possible narratives that may come from Australian writers of Asian descent. These texts are testimony to the fact that Asian

Australian writing, while at times dealing with the ambivalence of identity and trauma, also focuses on a wide variety of issues such as transnational subjectivities. While Asian Australian stories can still revolve around movement and diaspora, they nevertheless may not solely centre on stories of victimhood. Wenche Ommundsen, in reference to Alice Pung's novel, *Unpolished Gem* (2006), argues that stories like Pung's reject victimisation. Nonetheless, it acknowledges how these traumatising experiences may shape one's life (504). Castro's *Shanghai Dancing* (2003) is an autobiographical novel that deals with ideas of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and memory through the story of a young man named Castro, his life history of being a Chinese of Portuguese-descent and his travels to Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Australia. De Kretser's *The Hamilton Case* (2005) is a story about the Obeysekere family, murder, and colonisation in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). It is important to note that these works, though set in Asian countries, never resort to romanticising a sense of nostalgia for Asia.

What we can see in the selection of texts is that they truly embody Jose's comment about what the anthology aims to do and showcases a significant number of works by Asian Australian writers. *The Macquarie PEN* has certainly learned a lot from the shortcomings of its predecessors. It is vastly different from how Australian literature and identity are perceived in the *Oxford* and *Macmillan* anthologies' mostly monolithic impressions of Australian literature and identity present in its precursors. While Australia's self-imaginings have also revolved around the idea that the nation is a multicultural one, this was rarely manifested in its literary anthologies until the publication of *The Macquarie PEN Anthology*. It pays homage to Australian diversity by celebrating the work of its multilingual communities and challenges the conception of Australia as White and Anglo. In different ways, the works of the eight writers included in *The Macquarie PEN Anthology* reveal that there is no singular or definitive concept of Asian and Australian identity. They follow the larger thread set by the editors that there is a myriad of ways of being 'Australian'.

Conclusion

This paper presented an analysis of three different anthologies of Australian literature to highlight how mainstream literary texts position Asian Australian writing. The study of these anthologies has helped pursue the central question of how Asian Australian writing is regarded in the mainstream Australian' literary tradition. While the *Oxford* and *Macmillan* anthologies do not challenge conventional understanding of what it means to be Australian, *The Macquarie PEN Anthology* fulfils this role by providing a decent and diverse selection of writings by Asian Australian writers.

This scant attention to Asian Australian writing and Australian literary culture is one reason for the publication of the first Asian Australian anthology, *Growing Up Asian in Australia* (2008). The editor Alice Pung highlights the

historical struggle faced by Asian Australians in the original introduction to the anthology. “Throughout Australian literary history,” she explains, “Asians have often been written about by outsiders, as outsiders” (alicepung.com). Pung emphasises the struggles to have Asian Australian storytelling acknowledged as part of Australian literature. This is partly why she had decided to publish the *Growing Up* anthology, so that there is space to articulate different experiences of being Asian and Australian, and also subvert prevailing notions of Asian experiences in Australia.

The three anthologies of Australian literature examined have provided some insights into the developments of Asian Australian writing since the end of the White Australia Policy. We can observe that, between the 1980s and the early 1990s, writing by Asian Australians did not receive much recognition as part of the larger Australian canon. *The Macquarie PEN Anthology* tries to address this situation by being more flexible and inclusive in their selection and the anthology has included the greatest number of Asian Australian works so far. It gives more visibility to Asian Australian writing and underscores its importance in Australian literary history.

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