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‘Chinese Inscriptions’: Australian-Born Chinese Lives

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ABSTRACT

The title of this thesis is “‘Chinese Inscriptions’: Australian-born Chinese lives’. This thesis represents a transdisciplinary study based on qualitative research and critical analysis of oral history interviews and the personal narratives of sixty-seven Australian-born Chinese. It uses cultural studies approaches to investigate the diverse ways Chineseness becomes inscribed into the lives of Australian-born Chinese. It investigates diverse ways Chineseness becomes inscribed into the lives of Australian-born Chinese within three social and cultural spaces Australian-born Chinese inhabit. These are the family, mainstream Australian society and Chinese diasporic spaces located in China and Australia. In examining these three social and cultural spaces, this study seeks to demonstrate that Chineseness represents an inescapable ‘reality’ Australian-born Chinese are compelled to confront in their everyday lives. This ‘reality’ exists despite rights of birth, generational longevity, and strong national and cultural identities and identifications grounded in Australia, and whether or not Australian-born Chinese willingly choose to identify as ‘Chinese’. Nevertheless, despite the limits of Chineseness Australian-born Chinese experience in their lives, this study demonstrates that Australian-born Chinese are individual agents who devise a range of strategies and tactics which empower them to negotiate Chineseness in relevant and meaningful ways of their own choosing.

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