

**Accommodating Places: a migrant ethnography  
of two cities (Hong Kong and Sydney).**

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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2002

## **Abstract**

This ethnography is based on fieldwork in two very different cities, Hong Kong and Sydney. It traces the movements of subjects from Hong Kong through the analysis of differing modes of inhabiting urban space. The texture of lived spaces provides an analytic focus for examining a highly mobile migrant group. This ethnography explores the mesh of objective structures and migrant subjectivities in a mobile field of migrant 'place'.

A basic assumption of this study is that people from Hong Kong have acquired a common array of dispositions attuned to living in a specific environment. Hong Kong's dense and challenging urban space embodies aspects of the singular historical 'production of space' underpinning a colonial entrepôt that has expanded into a major global economic node. The conditions of lived space are examined through an historical analysis of urban space in Hong Kong and an ethnographic analysis of spatial practices and dispositions.

The sprawling spaces of suburban Sydney clearly differ sharply from that of Hong Kong. Interview accounts of settling in Sydney are used to investigate the 'gap' in spatial dispositions. Settling entails both practical accommodations to new and unfamiliar localities and an interweaving of cultural and ideological elements into the expanded everyday of migrant subjectivity.

Language and speech are integral to spatial practices and provide means of referencing and evaluating ongoing social relations and trajectories. The ‘discourse space’ of interview accounts of settlement in Sydney and movements back to Hong Kong are closely examined, yielding an array of perceptions and representations of different, and contested styles of urban life. All the senses are brought into play in accounts of densities and absences in people’s everyday worlds.

At the same time this thesis provides a perspective from which to interrogate contemporary interpretations of ‘transnational’ migration, suggesting the need for an analysis grounded in a specific economy of capacities and dispositions to appropriate social and symbolic goods.

## Declaration

I declare that this is an original work of scholarship, and that all sources are, to the best of my knowledge, properly recognised and referenced.

A substantial part of chapter six of this thesis appeared as an article I wrote called “Just the Place is Different: Comparisons of Place and Settlement Practices of some Hong Kong Migrants in Sydney”. This was published in *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 1998, 9 (1): 58-73.

A recording of an audio composition called *City in Between* is included as an appendix in this thesis. It was jointly composed by Robert Iolini and myself, and was commissioned by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1997 for broadcast on the program, *The Listening Room*.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my late father, Raymond Hon-mon Mar, who only dimly remembered the cobblestone streets of Kowloon from a distant childhood. It is also dedicated to Jo Daniels, who bore the brunt of my self-absorption over the past few years.

This thesis, like most research, relies on an accumulation of gifts, some recognised and some unrecognised. Primarily it owes its existence to people in Hong Kong and Sydney whose migration accounts provided its material and its inspiration. Jacky Chan and Alice Chan were particularly helpful with providing contacts in Sydney and Hong Kong. Luth Leung Pui-yi and Lei Man-chu have given me encouragement and lasting friendship.

Fieldwork in Hong Kong would not have been feasible without the extraordinary hospitality of Patrick Law Pui-Lam, Luth Leung, Tiger and Connie Chan, Kenny Siu, Lau Kin-chi and Oliver Chan, who provided help with housing, many dinners and conversations. Jo Daniels, Robert Iolini and Roberta Ryan provided long distance support at various hours of need. Robert Iolini and Chan Wai-fat provided musical support and inspiration.

Dr. Ghassan Hage, my principal supervisor at Sydney University, bought countless lunches, always providing encouragement and intellectual stimulation. Ghassan has been an important influence on my thinking for some years: the traces are no doubt present in the work. Dr. Yao Souchou, who was also good for lunch, was always there to talk about things Chinese, and helped out with many things including computers.

Dr. Gil Bottomley, Dr. Marie de Lepervanche, Dr. Neil Maclean, Jo Daniels, Nigel Smith, and an anonymous reader from the Australian Journal of Anthropology read

my work at various stages, providing useful advice and reassurance. I am grateful to Anita Mack for sharing her knowledge of Australian films about migration. Clara Law generously spared the time to talk about her film, *Floating Life*.

A few sidekicks made postgraduate existence at Sydney University bearable. I mention only Ashley Carruthers, Maude Frances, Clive Morgan, Nigel Smith, Craig Browne and Mark Winters, and other malcontents of the Friday night dinners.

The Centre of Asian Studies at Hong Kong University welcomed me as a Visiting Scholar in 1999. I couldn't have done without the facility of the Postgraduate Arts Centre in the Arts faculty at Sydney University, which provided computers, printers and a de facto internet café.

This research relied on the financial assistance of funding from various bodies. The Australian Postgraduate Award provided a living wage enabling this project to take shape. The Carlyle Greenwell Bequest, G.H.S. & I.R. Littweiler Scholarship, and Sydney University grant-in-aid funds provided support towards fieldwork, travel and language tuition. The Listening Room and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation also provided support for a trip to Hong Kong in 1997.

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