

## Abstract

Writing the Margin: Sinophone Macau Literature of the pre-postcolonial era, 1987-1999

Rosa Falcão Trigoso Vieira de Almeida

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This dissertation examines Sinophone Macau literature in the context of the formation of a new local literary field during the years preceding the 1999 handover of sovereignty from Portugal to China. I argue that Sinophone Macau literature of this period has made use of its cultural and politico-economic marginality in order to navigate its peripheral position in a newly reintegrated Chinese nation. My aim is to show how the Sinophone Macau literary field developed the particular resources it needed to leverage marginality to its own advantage, coming up with innovative ways with which to productively engage with the past colonial narrative as well as find its place within the future postcolonial moment. This study examines marginality as a resource for an under-resourced margin and presents the marginal location not as a condition to be overcome but as a strategic state of being to be capitalized upon. Considering Macau peripherality to stem in part from its colonization by a minor European nation, the first two chapters together relate the city's Sinophone literature of the transition era to late Portuguese colonial discourse. Chapter One examines Portuguese anthropological texts, helping to situate Macau literary narratives, both Lusophone and Sinophone, within the context of larger discussions on the Macanese Eurasian *mestiço*. Chapter Two argues that a narrative of Eurasian extinction has been a crucial mode in which to articulate belonging in the

literary spaces of Macau, both stabilizing Macanese nativity and also aiding in the development of a new Macau Sinitic subjecthood. Chapter Three introduces what I call a “poetics of insignificance,” a concept that enables us to consider how the periphery can be a place where China centrism is strategically articulated and marginality is bent at will. The final chapter addresses the city’s promise of locality and demonstrates how the Macau literary field conceives of the non-local as a form of necessary literary and cultural capital for the growth of a burgeoning local literary system. By questioning prevailing assumptions about marginality and showing how the space of the margin can be articulated for the benefit of small and incipient literary projects, this dissertation seeks to not only further our comprehension of the under-studied field of Macau literature but also to contribute to the methodological approaches that constitute Sinophone literary studies.