International Journal of Education and Humanities
ISSN: 2770-6702 | Vol. 24, No. 2, 2026

"We are Children of the Dragon": Hakka Heritage and the Negotiation of Chinese Caribbean Identity in Easton Lee's Poetry

Yanrong Tang[1], Ping Su[1,2]

[1] School of Foreign Languages, South China University of Technology, Guangzhou 510000, China
[2] Think Tank for Blue Humanities and Sustainable Development, South China University of Technology, Guangzhou 510000, China

Abstract: This article examines the Hakka cultural inheritance and identity negotiations in Easton Lee's *Heritage Call: Ballad for the Children of the Dragon*. It argues that the collection of poems constructs Chinese-Jamaican identity through the interplay of ancestral memory, everyday practice and relational belonging. The article first explores ways of reimagining the Hakka ancestral homeland as a narrated and ethically charged space, rather than as a fixed origin of return. It then looks at the way in which Lee presents food, rituals, language and shop routines as embodied practices of cultural transmission. Finally, it shows how Hakka heritage is negotiated in Jamaican family and community lives. Ultimately, Lee's poetry imagines Chinese Jamaican belonging as a creolised formation rooted in memory, performance, and translation.

Keywords: Easton Lee, *Heritage Call: Ballad for the Children of the Dragon*, Hakka Culture, Chinese-Caribbean identity.

1. Introduction

The history of Chinese migration is an important but often neglected aspect of Caribbean modernity. Chinese migration to the Caribbean was a product of the colonial system of post-emancipation labour replacement in the early nineteenth century. Walton Look Lai identifies the first arrival of Chinese migrants to the British Caribbean as the bringing in of indentured labourers into Trinidad in 1806. He points out that the high point of Chinese migration to the British West Indies was from 1859 to 1866 ([12]: p. 9, 126). This migratory history complicates reductive narratives of Caribbean modernity as determined by Afro-Caribbean or Indo-Caribbean relations alone. Chinese migrants played an important role in the plantation economies, commercial networks and local retail systems and thus contributed to the development of a multicultural and creolised Caribbean society ([27]: p. 11).

The majority of Chinese migrants to the Caribbean in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came from the province of Guangdong, and some came from the neighbouring province of Fujian. Particularly relevant to this broader pattern of migration is the distinction between Cantonese-speaking Punti and Hakka groups, as the latter have had a distinct history of migration, linguistic identity, and community formation ([13]: p. 69). Jamaica has a special place in this history because the Chinese in Jamaica were almost exclusively the product of Hakka settlement. The Jamaican Chinese community was relatively linguistically and culturally cohesive compared with Chinese communities elsewhere in the Caribbean. Through kinship networks and shared ethnic affiliations, Hakka migrants developed rotating credit associations, mutual aid societies, schools, newspapers, commercial organizations, and homes for the elderly and poor ([13]: p. 78). These institutions promoted economic mobility and also sustained Hakka cultural practices in diaspora. Hakka migrants contributed not only to the Chinese community itself but also to the enrichment of Jamaica's developing creole and multicultural society ([22]: pp. 92-93).

Despite their significant historical presence, Chinese migrants and Chinese culture had been marginalized or stereotypically represented in mainstream Caribbean literature for a long time. Chinese characters were often portrayed as alien, inscrutable, linguistically deficient, economically calculating, and socially isolated shopkeepers on the margins of national life ([27]: pp. 11-12, [29]: p. 193). Linguistic barriers, minority marginalisation and the perception that Chinese Caribbean experiences would not be of much interest to wider West Indian audiences curtailed the representation of Chinese people in West Indian literature ([16]: p. 104). Those representations reified Afro-Creole centred understandings of Caribbean identity and obscured the place of Chinese communities within Caribbean histories of nation, culture and belonging.

The emergence of Chinese Caribbean literature has challenged the exclusions. Writers like Easton Lee (1931-2021), Victor Chang, Meiling Jin, Willi Chen, Kerry Young, Jan Lowe Shinebourne and Hannah Lowe reimagine Chinese Caribbean subjectivity from the perspective of the Chinese diaspora itself ([27]: pp. 11-12, [28]: p. 42). These writers relocate Chinese Caribbean identity from the status of permanent outsider to a location within Caribbean cultural and national space. Lee-Loy points out that later Chinese Caribbean writing reworks earlier images of Chinese alienness by making Chinese part of West Indian identity, not external to it ([16]: p. 106). Chinese Caribbean literature, therefore, does not simply add another ethnic voice to Caribbean writing, but it reconfigures the boundaries within which Caribbean belonging has been imagined. Easton Lee is a figure of considerable importance in this regard.

Born in rural Jamaica in 1931, Lee was a playwright, poet, broadcaster, actor, communication specialist and Anglican priest ([24]). His writing is heavily influenced by his upbringing in and around his father's village grocery shop in rural Jamaica. Lee employs Jamaican patois, oral storytelling, vernacular humour and everyday speech to create a challenge to the conventions of standard English literature and to expand the linguistic parameters of Chinese Caribbean writing ([7], [25]: p. 153). His poetry is centrally concerned

with Hakka ancestry, genealogy and cultural memory. In the preface to his collection of poems *Heritage Call: Ballad for the Children of the Dragon*, Lee suggests that Chinese descendants in the Caribbean are "children of the dragon" with roots in Longgang and its neighbouring districts in Guangdong, a region he called the historical homeland of the Hakka people. And the children of the dragon are responsible for remembering and embracing both "ancestral heritage and adoptive countries"([14]: p. 13).

Lee describes the collection as an attempt to preserve the "stories and feelings and experiences" that arise from the encounter between China and Jamaica, East and West ([14]: p. 12). This article contends that *Heritage Call* constructs Hakka cultural inheritance as a primary basis of Chinese Jamaican identity formation. It examines, through close reading of selected poems, how Lee uses genealogy, ancestral memory, ritual practice, food culture, and vernacular interaction as poetic devices of diasporic belonging. Instead of imagining China as a lost homeland to which one might return or Jamaica as a site of complete assimilation, Lee constructs a Chinese Caribbean subjectivity in which Hakka tradition survives through remembrance, performance, translation and creolisation in the context of Jamaican family and community life.

2. Ancestral Homeland and Genealogical Memory: Reimagining Hakka Origins

It is known that "the good custom of ancestral reverence is a source of pride to the Hakkas" ([18]). *Heritage Call* establishes Lee's Hakka inheritance of ancestral reverence in the preface. His "family register" or "Chook Poo", traces more than twenty generations of continuous residence in the ancestral village near Longgang, Guangdong ([14]: p. 13). Genealogy is thus both documentary evidence and symbolic structure. It provides the speaker with a place from which to imagine ancestry, but it also creates an obligation to remember. A longing for cultural grounding is a kind of "homing desire" ([3]: p. 177) that does not require literal return to a fixed homeland. Lee's homeland is not so much a place of destination but rather a structure of memory, attachment and ethical orientation.

In the opening poem, "Heritage Call", ancestral reverence becomes an imperative for the younger generations. The speaker starts with the command, "Look, look my children" and points descendants towards "the land of your forefathers" ([14]: p. 19). The repeated verb "look" is an ethical summons to turn one's gaze toward ancestral knowledge and to challenge the shame that stems from colonial and racial disparagement. The poem sees heritage as "obscured by cruel prejudice / and the borrowed ways of other lands" ([14]: p. 19). This "cruel prejudice" is not just about diasporic estrangement but also about the racialized marginalization of Chinese Caribbean communities. As Ping Su argues, Caribbean national narratives and literary traditions have often "cast Chinese subjects as outsiders, and reduced them to stereotypical figures such as the materialistic and linguistically deficient shopkeeper commonly identified as 'Mr Chin'" ([28]: p. 41). Su's argument throws light on the historical pressure behind Lee's poem: the call to remember Hakka heritage is also a call to resist the demeaning images through which Chinese Caribbean subjects have been symbolically excluded.

However, this exclusion was not only literary. In Jamaica, the social mobility of the Chinese was often linked in colonial and popular discourse to gambling, opium, moral danger, and economic exploitation, and Chinese Jamaicans served as scapegoats for larger social anxieties that fueled anti-Chinese violence in the twentieth century ([10]). This context sheds light on why Lee presents heritage as a thing that needs to be actively reclaimed. The children are urged to "take" what history has given them and to consider themselves as "children of no lesser god" ([14]: p. 19). It does not claim racial supremacy but restores dignity from racialized exclusion. This is clearer in Lee's later poem "Instructions on Equality". The poem recalls Chinese achievements in printing, architecture, silk weaving, jade carving, bronze casting, porcelain, and systems of law and order, but finally declares that "no man is your superior / none your inferior / you are better than none / but equal to all" ([14]: p. 84). "Heritage Call" and "Instructions on Equality" together reveal that Lee's appeal to ancestry is not a turn to racial hierarchy. It is an ethical revaluation by which Chinese Jamaican people recover dignity without repeating the logic of domination that marginalized them.

Hakka identity is not a "pre-given" or "automatic" essence but a "production" ([9]: p. 50) made through history, memory and representation. Lee's poetry does not recover Hakka identity as pure, unchanging inheritance, but produces Hakka Chinese Jamaican identity through poetic acts of selection, narration, and symbolic reconstruction. According to William Safran, the disapora values collective memory, a sense of homeland and the wish to retain communal identity, and "they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship" ([26]). Lee applies this model to shift the focus from return to reevaluation. Heritage is not a passport back to China, but an ethical resource with which diasporic subjects resist shame and construct self-worth in Jamaica.

This is particularly the case in "Home Coming". The poem seems to speak of a material return to the ancestral village, but it is already mediated by prior narration. The speaker arrives at Chia Har, the ancestral village of the Lee family, and recognizes it because the father's description was "accurate, precise" and because the speaker had been "schooled in what to expect" ([14]: p. 48). Hence China is not something the speaker encounters as unmediated reality, but something he knows through photographs of relatives and paternal storytelling. As Pierre Nora suggests, "memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects" ([23]). The ancestral village is both physical and textual, both a place and narrative. The paths where his father ran, Grandmother's kitchen, and the family book that tells "our family's story" ([14]: p. 48) become mnemonic devices connecting the Jamaican-born descendant to ancestral time.

The emotional power of "Home Coming" is in the tension between fulfillment and belatedness. The speaker is "home", and this home coming realizes not only his dream but also that of his father. Thus, the return is inter-generational, and it is done for the father, for the ancestors and for the descendants who will have to inherit the story. The father's tales are part of intergenerational communicative memory, but the ancestral village and family register turn them into more resilient "cultural memory" ([1]). Return, then, does not eliminate dislocation; rather, it shows how memory, narrative,

and familial duty create a sense of belonging.

Longgang and Pao On's symbolic geography expands on this poetics of memory. Many Chinese Jamaicans can trace their origin to Longgang and neighboring Hakka towns in Guangdong ([14]: p. 13). These place names serve as mnemonic anchors that stabilize diasporic identity in addition to being geographical markers. The act of naming itself turns into a cultural preservation effort. The significance of familial consciousness, ancestral memory, and native-place attachment among scattered Hakka groups has been highlighted by studies of Hakka migration ([17]). But such attachment in Lee's poetry is not simply a sociological fact; rather, it is a literary method by which Hakka identity is consistently narrated.

As the Chinese-Jamaican writer Hannah Lowe, who also shares a Hakka lineage, said, "the Hakka people are always moving" ([20], [31]). The "Pao On Trilogy" extends this preoccupation with memory by re-working migration as hope and trauma. The poem is framed by different perspectives: the migrant who waits in Panama, the "widowed mother" who is left behind in Guangdong and the "young wife" who is separated from her husband. The first voice is waiting for permission to enter a "new life / in a new land". But hope turns to despair when he realizes that "he cannot return home empty handed or pay back the money borrowed for passage" ([14]: pp. 41-42). Migration does not get romanticized as heroic mobility. It is shaped by debt, shame, delay, masculine obligation, and the ghost of failure. The second voice addresses the mother's grief, conjuring rice crops watered by her tears, and the third voice registers the wife's waiting and the migrant's loneliness in a foreign land ([14]: pp. 42-43). This tripartite structure enables Lee to transform the history of Hakka migration into a history of intimate emotions.

The importance of "Pao On Trilogy" is that it does not reduce migration to economic success. Historical studies of Chinese Caribbean migration have focused on the origins in Guangdong, kinship networks, district ties and communal institutions ([12]: p. 19, [13]: p. 78, [8]). Lee does not deny this history, but argues that migration must also be understood through grief, fear, loneliness and affective debt. This notion of belonging in Chinese Caribbean narratives is often imagined through tension, cohabitation, and constant negotiation rather than seamless integration into the nation" ([11]). Lee's migration poems are not just backward-looking family stories, but also reveal the emotional negotiations that produce Chinese Caribbean belonging across generations.

But at the same time, Lee avoids constructing ancestry as solely ethnic nationalism. His poems always link ancestral memory to Jamaican social life. In "One World", the speaker imagines that "the sun shining on the China road at Longgang / is the same one shining on the road at Wait–a–bit Jamaica" ([14]: p. 77). The image obliterates geographical separation in favor of shared cosmological experience. China and Jamaica are not oppositional spaces but interconnected sites in a transnational emotional geography.

Lee recreates the ancestral homeland, not as static origin but living cultural memory. Villages, genealogies, names of ancestors, migration routes, family books, maternal tears, paternal stories and ethical instruction are poetic tools for the survival of Hakka identity through displacement and rupture of history. Homeland is not about what kind of physical space you occupy, but what you remember, what you narrate and what you transmit.

3. Family, Ritual and Everyday Practices: Performing Hakka Heritage

In *Heritage Call*, the ancestral homeland offers the symbolic ground of Hakka identity and family, and everyday practices are the concrete mechanisms through which that identity is transmitted. Lee's poetry repeatedly shows that Hakka cultural inheritance is not mainly maintained by formal institutions or abstract ethnic consciousness, but through domestic rituals, food preparation, language acquisition, inter-generational disciplines, and the ordinary routines of Chinese-Jamaican life. Diasporic identity is not something that is fixed, but is constituted through "the materiality of everyday life" and the stories people tell about themselves on an individual and collective level ([3]: p. 180). Hakka identity is not only remembered as origin, but is made livable through repeated domestic and communal practices. Diasporic traditions are "continually reworked and transformed as a consequence of the migration experience" ([9]: p. 107). Lee's poems dramatize this process vividly: Hakka culture does not survive by remaining still, but by changing, performing, and re-embedding itself in Jamaican family and village life.

One of the clearest examples of embodied cultural transmission can be found in the poem "Grandma's Moon Cakes". The poem is set during the Mid-Autumn Festival and features Po Po (Hakka word for "grandma") sitting under a tree in her "red silk scarf" and the "black kerchief / of her Hakka tradition" while children wait for the "treasures" of moon cakes hidden in her bamboo basket ([14]: p. 34). The grandmother's body becomes a visible archive of Hakka memory, the kerchief, basket, food and ritual occasion all materialize cultural continuity within a diasporic setting. But Lee does not offer this tradition as a static ethnic symbol. It is through the emphasis on anticipation, touch, smell, eating, singing and dancing that the Hakka culture is presented not as a doctrine but as a daily sensory experience.

When Po Po opens the basket and distributes the cakes ([14]: p. 34), the children do not simply learn about heritage, they taste and experience it. "The preparation and consumption of Chinese food is an empowering practice that facilitates the preservation of ethnic roots, grants authority over diasporic life, and reinforces Chineseness of family" ([29]: p. 201). Thus, the moon cakes of Lee are not ornaments of "China" but objects through which Hakka memory is reproduced in family space. Brinda Mehta's argument that diasporic subjects may "claim subjectivity through the cultural politics of food" is also illuminating here ([21]). In Lee's poem, food enables children to take on culture, to inherit it bodily before they can fully conceptualize it as identity. The sharing of traditional food is an "incorporating practice" ([4]) through which social memory is transmitted via repeated embodied acts within communal life. The eating, dancing and festival participation of children are such incorporating practices, and Hakka heritage enters the body through ritualized repetition, making memory both affective and physical.

The figure of Po Po also points to the gendered work of cultural preservation. Hakka women in Jamaica were described as hardworking, sacrificial and quietly enduring, and the survival and success of Chinese Jamaican families was largely dependent on the labor of Hakka daughters, wives and mothers ([15]). This historical context sharpens the meaning of Po Po's presence in the poem. She is not merely a

nostalgic grandmotherly figure, she is the ritual organizer, food keeper and embodied transmitter of Hakka memory. Her silence and gestures are culturally authoritative. It is through this domestic femininity that Lee presents the basis of diasporic continuity.

"New Year Ritual" develops this performative understanding of heritage in an even more explicitly ethical structure. The poem offers a series of rules: "clean the halls, hang good-luck signs, offer candles, fruit, incense, and wine at ancestral shrines, cleanse the mind of anger, pay debts, forgive debtors, care for the old, bring happiness to children, and greet the new year with moral renewal" ([14]: p. 44). Its imperative syntax reads like a ritual manual whose importance lies in the fusion of outer practice with inner discipline. Cleaning the house becomes a kind of self cleansing, worshiping ancestors a form of forgiving others, and celebrating the new year a pledge for social and moral repair.

While Chinese ritual wouldn't be confined to ethnic spectacle. Lunar New Year is presented as a colorful tradition of the old country, and as a diasporic channel of ethical continuity. Identity is maintained in communities through symbolic forms and repeated practices that extend beyond direct personal memory ([1]). Lee's poem turns the New Year observation into such symbolic form, which is capable of carrying Hakka values through migration and generational distance. Nichole Constable observes that Hakka self-identity is often described in terms of hard work, honesty, thrift, cooperation and practical endurance, historically forged in the experiences of migration, poverty, persecution and resettlement ([5]). Lee does not simply list such values in an abstract way, but dramatizes them as ritual actions. Paying off debts, forgiving others, looking after elders, and making children happy, all these performances transform Hakka ethical ideals into daily household practices repeatedly. Therefore, the New Year ritual is not just a Chinese or Guangdong village custom now. It is significant in the Chinese Jamaican household, where ritual repetition connects ancestral reverence with the ethical demands of Caribbean life. The poem, therefore, shows that tradition survives because it can travel, adapt and acquire new meanings.

"Language Class" moves from ritual inheritance to linguistic and emotional intimacy. The poem is about a Jamaican mother teaching the Chinese father English, while he teaches her his Chinese language "without her suspecting". Finally, she speaks his "strange language as if she was born in it" ([14]: p. 75). It depicts the "intimacy of translation between Lee's Afro-Jamaican mother, who learned the Hakka dialect, and his Chinese father, who struggled with English" ([7]). The act of speaking Hakka which is deemed as "strange" and "inappropriate" becomes a native phenomenon in Jamaica. This harmonious scene troubles any essentialist conception of Hakka culture as being solely transmitted through blood or descent. Language is relational which can be learned through marriage, affection, repetition and domestic harmony.

Tzarina Prater's reading of Lee's vernacular poetics helps clarify the significance of the poem. Prater contends that Lee's work dramatizes the encounter of vernaculars such as Chinese-inflected speech, pidgin, patois, and rural Jamaican idiom, in ways that challenge conventional understandings of Chinese diasporic identity and its relationship to the nation ([25]: pp. 150-151). This insight is important because "Language Class" depicts not only a Jamaican woman learning a Chinese language, but also the Chinese-Jamaican identity being created through linguistic exchanges. The mother's learning does not make her any less Jamaican. Instead, it produces a creolised domestic space that renders Hakka culture intimate, shared and locally transformed. So, the poem's last description of this exchange as a celebration of "a culture that refused to die" ([14]: p. 75) should be read with some care. Culture rejects death since it transgresses the limits of race, language and origin.

The quotidian practices of the Chinese-Jamaican shop extend this logic of cultural performance even further. "Every Day" shows the village shop through the regular exchanges of bread, salt butter, fish, cocoa, sugar, oil and credit, as it moves "two side a counter" with the regularity of sunrise and moonshine ([14]: p. 60). The rhythm of the poem mimics repetition: buying, selling, measuring, waiting, trusting, owing, and returning. Although Chinese rituals are not foregrounded in the poem, it is integral to Lee's representation of Hakka heritage as it demonstrates how labour, discipline, thrift, service and family obligation are localized within Jamaican rural life. Arron Chang Bohr points out that Chinese migrants, leveraging their Hakka heritage and commercial expertise, became heavily involved in retail trade in Jamaica, but this success was dependent on sacrifice, long working hours, frugality and dense social networks ([2]). Lee transforms this history into poetic rhythm. The shop is not only an economic space, but also a daily school of discipline, reciprocity and survival. As Lee-Loy similarly argues, Lee's Chinese Jamaican characters are not isolated outsiders, but part of the Jamaican community, and their Chineseness characterizes the sociocultural complexity of that community rather than its separation ([16]: pp. 114-115). The shop counter is a zone of contact where Hakka family discipline meets Jamaican social exchange.

This reading is also compatible with Su's conception of the Chinese shop as a creolised hybrid space. In her discussion of Willi Chen's fiction, Su argues that Chinese foodways and shop practices are adapted to local Caribbean life and thereby help Chinese diasporic subjects negotiate belonging rather than remain socially enclosed ([28]: pp. 45-46). Lee's shop poems, including "Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Every Day, Today, Next Day, One Day, Some Days, All Week, Every Night, Some Nights, Saturday Nights" ([14]: p. 55-69), perform similar cultural work. The Chinese shop is not a sealed ethnic enclave but a space in which goods, words, debts, trust and habits circulate between Chinese-Jamaican families and rural villagers. This renders everyday commerce a kind of cultural translation.

Lee's poems show that Hakka cultural inheritance in Jamaica is performative, embodied, and relational. Food, rituals, language and shop routines transform heritage from abstract ownership to lived practice. Lee's poetry challenges the dichotomy that Hakka identity is either frozen tradition or assimilated disappearance. Rather it presents Hakka culture as something that is continually reenacted in the life of family and community. Hakka heritage is cooked and eaten, spoken and cleaned, remembered, traded and translated. Through these everyday practices, Lee creates a Chinese-Jamaican poetics where diaspora is both a condition of displacement and a continuing practice of cultural making.

4. Creolised Belonging: Negotiating Hakka-Jamaican Identity

The other dimension of Lee's poetic crafting of Hakka identity involves his refusal of the separation of Chinese inheritance from Jamaican belonging. *Heritage Call* neither redeems China as a homeland nor treats Jamaica as a space of the disappearance of ancestral memory. Instead, Lee imagines Chinese Jamaican identity as a relational formation made through Hakka memory, rural Jamaican life, patois, interracial intimacy and family history. This position is clear from his preface: descendants owe loyalty to China, but also owe a great deal to the countries which they have made their home ([14]: pp. 13-14). This statement is the ethical basis of the collection. Hakka-Jamaican identity does not require cultural amnesia or ethnic absolutism, but a constant negotiation between ancestral inheritance and the Caribbean home.

"One World" presents an expansive form in this poetic negotiation. The poem begins with the Chinese father coming across the ocean and asking the speaker's Jamaican mother to marry him despite the anger of the maternal grandfather toward the "celestial Chinaman" ([14]: p. 76). The phrase registers the racial suspicion around interracial intimacy, but the poem redirects the attention from social hostility to mutual learning. The parents sit under the moon on a still Wait-a-bit evening, singing songs from each other's worlds, and trying to follow each other's words and melodies ([14]: p. 77). Belonging emerges as a practice, with the lovers entering each other's emotional histories through learning to listen, repeat and respond. The scene makes music a medium of creolised intimacy.

The poem's cosmological imagery extends this domestic scene into a transnational vision. The sun that shines on the road at Longgang is the sun that shines on the road at Wait-a-bit. The moon over Jamaican guinea grass is the moon that lights the bamboo lane in Chia Har Village ([14]: p. 77). Lee does not homogenize cultural differences. Longgang and Wait-a-bit remain historically and geographically specific. They are connected by shared illumination, affective memory and familial imagination. According to Édouard Glissant, Caribbean creolisation generates a condition in which people may be simultaneously rooted and open, situated and elsewhere ([6]). This archipelagic poetics finds its way through the relational network between Chinese heritage and Jamaican home: a network in which Hakka memory enters Jamaican landscape and Jamaica is capacious enough to hold Chinese songs, ancestral longing and mixed descendants. Nettleford's reading of Lee as a poet of the heterogeneous, "life-giving" cultural world of Jamaica further confirms that harmony emerges through difference rather than its erasure ([22]: p. 93).

"Birthday Song" elaborates this relational belonging through birth and music. The father sings songs of a far-off land, and the words are strange, but the mother knows what he means. On the day the child is born, her heart beats to the rhythm of his voice, with its own melody ([14]: p. 81). The newborn Chinese-Jamaican child thus enters into a household already framed by cultural translation. One intimate scene brings together the Chinese paternal song, the Jamaican maternal response and the child's later English-language memory. In Lee's representation, Jamaican and Chinese spaces are often harmonious rather than antagonistic, particularly when music from both worlds becomes present within Jamaican spaces ([16]: pp. 114-115). This poem envisions birth as the moment when different sonic inheritances come to make a common domestic world.

But the poem will not give an idealised account of inheritance. Later the speaker admits that he does not know the ancient songs and will never hear them again, because the father's voice is silent ([14]: p. 81). Thus, the transmission remains incomplete. The father's songs are memory, not sound to be recovered. Lee's speaker cannot restore the Chinese voice that is lost to him, but he can make its absence a poetic memory. Prater's discussion of Lee's vernacular practice sharpens this point. According to Prater, Lee's work is a performance of Chinese-Jamaican identity in the confluence of oral forms, Chinese-inflected speech, patois, and narration in the English language ([25]: pp. 150-151). The songs of the lost father are not entirely lost. It resurfaces as poetic testimony to a cultural legacy that lives on through transformation.

"Heart's Land" moves from birth to memory, locating diasporic attachment in the rural shop. The father is seated "at the back" of the "little village shop", in a chair built with his own hands, chanting the classics learnt in youth while remembering the ancestral village under the full moon of his "adopted island home" ([14]: p. 86). It is that spatial compression that gives the poem its emotional power. Chinese classical learning, handmade labour, Jamaican rural trade and ancestral yearnings are all on the same stage. The body of the father is in Jamaica but his memory travels back to China. The shop becomes a place where such movement can happen without the need to leave.

This spatial configuration recalls Goffe's description of Lee's writing as being deeply grounded in rural Jamaican life, Jamaican proverbs and patois ([7]). The father's longing for China is spoken from the rural world that provides Lee's poetry with its texture. Jamaica's "colourful, multi-layered majesty" ([22]: p. 93) is on show at the village shop counter. The back of the shop builds up many layers of attachment simultaneously: the father's Chinese education, his migration, his handmade chair, his adopted island home, and the moonlit memory of the ancestral village. The father shed tears of homesickness, gratitude and unfulfilled longing. China stands not as another home somewhere else, but as a memory made intimate by the place from which it is evoked.

"The Tong Knin" is a more explicit meditation on mixed Chinese-Jamaican identity. The poem recalls the "eleven o'clock children", who heard stories of the motherland, learned manners and codes, and were taught to honour ancestral birth even though they were scattered over the earth ([14]: p. 85). The term "eleven o'clock children" refers to descendants who are positioned between Chinese ancestry and Jamaican social life. Hannah Lowe's memoir *Long Time No See* (2015) gives the phrase a more acute social resonance. "Ship yit diam", or "eleven o'clock child", could refer to a child who didn't quite make it to "twelve", Lowe explains, in addition to other derogatory names like "Half-Chiney" ([19]). Lee turns this stigmatized in-betweenness into an inheritance. The "Tong Knin" (a Hakka term for Chinese people) may be far from China, but stories of the motherland, codes of conduct and ancestral instruction provide them with a cultural vocabulary through which they can understand themselves.

While identity is made by translation, not by determined origin. Lee's poem recounts a specific Chinese-Jamaican history: Hakka migration from Guangdong, interracial family making, life in rural stores, patois-speaking communities, and stories of China passed down through generations. The mixed

child is thus neither a watered-down Chinese subject nor a culturally empty Jamaican. He or she becomes a bearer of a transformed memory. Therefore, Chinese-Caribbean writing moves beyond the monolithic figure of "Mr. Chin" ([7], [16]) by foregrounding heterogeneity, hybridity, and the politics of inclusion and exclusion. The mixed descent becomes a place where Chinese inheritance is not simply preserved or lost but reinterpreted in Jamaican conditions in Lee's poem.

The comic racial exaggeration of "Best Man" complicates this negotiation. The story of creation seems to present the yellow "Tong Knin" as the "perfect" product of divine making ([14]: p. 80). But the poem's racial taxonomy functions through parody, not doctrine. Lee pushes the colour hierarchy into comic excess, exposing the absurdity of racial ranking, while allowing Chinese and mixed Chinese-Jamaican subjects a moment of reparative pride. Read in conjunction with "The Tong Knin", "Best Man" demonstrates Lee's awareness that ethnic affirmation can become ethically problematic when it merely reverses existing hierarchies. The performance of his sarcasm is delicate since it both counteracts racial shame and visualizes mixed Chinese-Jamaican identity, while also preventing pride from hardening into racial absolutism as well.

The theme of creolised belonging persists in *Heritage Call*. Lee's poems register racial suspicion, frail memory, lost songs, homesickness, and the uncertainties of mixed inheritance. But they also show how relation is made possible through shared music, interracial family, vernacular speech, moonlit, remembrance and ancestral instruction. China is a source of memory and ethical orientation, while Jamaica provides the social, linguistic and emotional world in which memory is lived. Thus, Lee's Chinese-Jamaican subject is a product of negotiation, not resolution. *Heritage Call* extends Caribbean creolisation itself, bringing Hakka heritage into the textures of Jamaican rural life, and presenting Chinese-Jamaican belonging as one of its constitutive forms rather than an exception to it.

5. Conclusion

In *Heritage Call*, Easton Lee transforms Hakka inheritance into a poetic grammar of Chinese-Jamaican belonging, beginning with a private family memory. His poems do not speak of ancestry as a fixed ethnic essence, or a nostalgic return to a pristine China. Instead, they show how Hakka identity is formed through remembering, narrating, performing and translating. As Hannah Lowe said, "In Jamaica, the Hakka people are very proud of their ancestry, and the community is tight-knit, prosperous, Christian, quite morally upright" ([30]). The ancestral genealogy, village names, paternal stories, and migration routes point to the ancestral homeland, yet the meaning of the homeland is continuously reconfigured through Jamaican family life, rural shop culture, patois, interracial intimacy, and everyday social exchange. Lee's poetic achievement resists such a separation of cultural continuity from creolised transformation. *Heritage Call* shifts the transmission of Hakka culture from the abstract domain of heritage to the domain of lived practice, foregrounding food, rituals, language, domestic labour, and shop routines. Culture lives in the body, in the mouth, in repeated gestures, in the affective ties of family and community. Lee's poetry, meanwhile, resists the erasure of assimilation and ethnic closure. Chinese-Jamaican identity is a negotiated formation, grounded in Hakka memory, shaped by Caribbean social life and open to relation. In this sense, Lee's work challenges earlier literary and national imaginaries that have placed Chinese-Caribbean subjects as marginal outsiders. His poems affirm that the Chinese-Jamaican experience is not adjunct to but constitutive of Caribbean creolisation. *Heritage Call* thus expands the terrain of Chinese Caribbean literature by articulating a poetics of inheritance in which ancestry, diaspora and Jamaican belonging become mutually transformative.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Guangdong Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Sciences under the Lingnan Culture Project, "Research on the Transmission and Dissemination of Lingnan Culture in the Caribbean Region" (No. GD24LN11).

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