

Language and Inheritance in Sarah Howe's *Loop of Jade*

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Abstract

Identity is an essential theme in postcolonial and diasporic literature, and in Hong Kong literature. Hong Kong was once a British colony and many people fled before 1997 due to their fear towards the handover. Sarah Howe's story is under this historical background. Like many migrants struggling with their identity, Howe, as a British-Chinese migrant who has left Hong Kong in her childhood, attempts to identify who she is and where she belongs. She wishes to explore her biracial identity and connect to her Chinese side by looking back to her family history in China. However, language and words' taxonomy make the exploration difficult as they define racial identities too stiffly. On the other hand, looking back and understanding her familial past also fails to connect her fully to her Chinese side, as the passing on of personal history and cultural heritage from her mother using language would inevitably encounter losses and changes. While language, the mixing of racial identities and heritage are all inherited and passed down the family line, they continue to change, develop, and progress.

Through a textual analysis of Sarah Howe's *Loop of Jade*, this paper explores the relationship between language and inheritance. The first part of the essay centres on the connection between language and words as inherited systems and peoples' developing bloodline. The second part examines language as a medium to pass on cultural heritage and its effect on generational change. The paper concludes with the poet's anticipation of the development of language and inheritance in her family line.

Reflection

I have developed a keen interest in literature during my four years here as an English major. Through the variety of courses offered by the department, I have gained

knowledge of ancient myths, Hong Kong literature, and various literary theories. All these formed the basis for my capstone project. The project allows me to interpret a poetry collection of my choice with what I have learnt, while I have also discovered more on feminist literary criticism along with other philosophical and literary theories. I am very grateful to have this opportunity to explore texts and themes that I like, and in which this capstone project would remain an unforgettable memory to revisit. Lastly, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Michael O'Sullivan, for his patience, guidance, and wholehearted support for my project.