

## MELTING POT

Casting a Caribbean Chinese Body

by JOSHUA LUE CHEE KONG

刘贵強



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## **ABSTRACT**

In *Melting Pot: Casting a Caribbean Chinese Body*, I use the conceptual framework of creolization to interrogate the representation of becoming and being Trinidadian-Chinese-Hakka. This is a fluid identity that inhabits and flows within the hyphens between cultures, through the construction of my memories, fantasy, narrative and myth of family dinners, childhood memories behind the shop counter and the voices of my ancestors. As an artist, I explore these ideas of translation and transculturation through my art practice of bronze casting, mould-making, 3D printing. *Melting Pot* highlights the autobiographical qualities of wax, resin and bronze in expressing the entanglement of the Chinese body within the Caribbean.

**KEYWORDS:** CREOLIZATION, CARIBBEAN, HAKKA, CHINESE, DIASPORA, SCULPTURE

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

THIS THESIS HONOURS THE ANCESTORS.

I welcome my ancestors to inhabit my thesis with their presence. I invited my ancestors to guide my art-based research around the narratives, history and culture that has become embedded into my body, a Trinbagonian-Hakka Chinese body. I honour this body that I have inherited from my parents and ancestors. My body is in flux. My body continues to change. Hakka Chinese. Trini Chinese. Chinese Caribbean. Sino Caribbean. Creole Chinese. Creole Caribbean. Asian. West Indian. My ancestors are my constant.

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## DEDICATION



Fig. 1. *Ancestral tablet in the hot wax cauldron* (2019)

*Generations from ancient times,  
Gateway to ancestral families,  
May the present and future family lines  
continue to spread and be successful always.  
(We speak these words to our ancestors)*

I honour ancestral memory by making a wax copy of this tablet. By melting the tablet in the cauldron, I acknowledge the ancestors' presence in the making of the work. My work is a gateway to the ancestral realm, and they speak through my body. We often call this experience *intuition*; I call the ancestor's voices.

**To my mom, dad, brothers, family and Angelo Bissessarsingh  
this thesis and work are for you!**

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## PREFACE

I would never have imagined that I would be finishing the thesis during the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant secluding myself away from society while I contemplate what I have learned during my two years at OCAD University. The pandemic meant the early closure of the university and the cancellation of my exhibition at Sur Gallery. As a consequence, I am unable to complete work on the details and installation of my work. Most of the thesis was written before the abrupt closure of the university and still contains my intentions I had planned for the exhibition.

That being said, do not expect to be provided with clear directions about how to read the Caribbean. Read the words held within these pages at your own risk, as this is not necessarily a re-tracing of roots or about Chinese food as a marker of identity - what it is about is the transformative and performative processes that blur those fixed boundaries of identity and complicate social and cultural expectations. There will be no sipping of Pina Colodas under palm trees in these pages and this work.

INTRODUCTION

**Casting of Ideas**



Fig. 2. *Wax Head Cast in the Wax Cauldron, 2019*

*As a process-based thinker and maker, I open spaces for my ancestors.*

*As a process-based thinker and maker, I create work to tell my stories.*

*As a process-based thinker and maker, I have authorship of my body.*

***Melting Pot: Casting a Caribbean Chinese Body*** is an exhibition that was scheduled to take place at Sur Gallery, Toronto from 12th-18th April 2020 but was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The exhibition intended to follow my memories of family both at home in Trinidad and in Qingxizhen, China. Throughout this thesis, I have allowed myself to share my memories of my family and their stories. Their names are:

*My zia-gung*

王谭进

*My zia-po*

李官凤

*My mother*

**Wang Xue Qiong**

*My a-gung:*

**Roderick Lue Chee Kong**

*My a-po*

**Virginia Lue Chee Kong**

*My father*

**Robert Lue Chee Kong**

The exhibition and thesis documentation presented in this document explore material dialogues concerning my Caribbean Chinese body. By employing creolization as a theoretical frame, I make a space that is not defined by race but rather by my culture and my upbringing. *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* by Edward Kamau Brathwaite is seen as the core text on modern Caribbean creole cultures (qtd. in Lee Loy 74). In his book, Brathwaite noted that Jamaica was already creolized as the result of the “organic synthesis of cultural elements” of individuals to their surroundings (74). As an artist, I inhabit and work with ideas of cultural intermixing and creolization taken up by Édouard Glissant and Stuart Hall through the transformative process of casting/

recasting of my body in bronze, wax, plaster, resin, sand and slurry. These materials act as an autobiographical medium as I recall encounters with the land, family, ancestors and strangers. In other words, this is a thesis of multiple introductions, with multiple encounters that may seem unrelated to one another. However, these encounters are crucial in supporting the imaginative space I create with my work.

Creolization, as a theoretical frame assists me to carve out space for my own identity. Hall in "Creolite and Creolization" (2003), provides us with a definition of Glissant's framework of creolization. He states,

Creolization in this context refers to the processes of 'cultural and linguistic mixing' which arise from the entanglement of different cultures in the same indigenous space or location, primarily in the context of slavery, colonization and the plantation societies characteristic of the Caribbean and parts of Spanish America and Southeast Asia. In Glissant's terms, slavery, the plantation and the tensions and struggles associated with them were necessary conditions for the emergence of Creole. (15)

The migration of different cultural groups made the Caribbean a "contact zone" and what Mary Louis Pratt describes as "asymmetrical relations" between people and cultures (qtd. in Hall15). It is in the specific context of Trinidad, the Caribbean more broadly, a place where colonialism and slavery created the conditions for multiple cultures to collide, cohabit, and create new cultural forms that I draw memories and inspiration for the artwork I produce. In 1498, Trinidad or *Kairi*<sup>1</sup> was claimed for the Spanish empire by Christopher Columbus and his men in their belief that they have arrived in the far east (Saunders 243). In the centuries after, the Spanish settlers' encounters with the local inhabitants led to the decimation and oppression of the Amerindian population (Brereton 8). After the British conquest of the island from the Spanish in 1797, they led the development plantation economy requiring the importation of African slaves to work on the estates (8). Following the abolition of the slave trade and emancipation (1834-1838) of the African slaves, the plantocracy on the

verge of collapse introduced the indentureship of East Indians and Chinese to Trinidad to secure additional labour force for the island (10).

Creolization, as an epistemology, references the Caribbean as a cosmopolitan space based on its history of cultural mixing within the context of colonization. The Caribbean is composed of many cultures that share the same ghost of colonization; and because of creolization, the resulting entanglements of these cultures create mixed cultures and/or races of people. Glissant, describes these entanglements or “relation” like a rhizome becoming a metaphor for the process of creolization. The rhizome, like creolization, presents an epistemological break from cultural and racial purity. This identity becomes altered by the multiple roots, tangled and continuously shifting without beginning or end (Clarke 12).

In her discussion on multiculturalism and embodiment, Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed highlights that “such encounters include both the fixity and the impossibility of fixation of identity where we tend to seek ourselves within the stranger through reading the signs on their body, while at the same time not creating a new community of strangers (8)”. Ahmed reminds us it may not be easy or possible to read other bodies and avoid only recognizing the differences between bodies that risks “reopening the prior histories of encounter that violate and fix others in regimes of differences” (8). Ahmed and Ahmed’s work reminds me that our ancestors are in our bodies.

Casting as a methodology recognizes the interrelationship between the melting of wax and bronze and the transformation of my body through the bronze casting process. It is within this molten state, or state of fluidity that materials flow to form connections or have the potential to become any form I desire. I also associate this quality of becoming with fused deposition modelling (FDM) 3D printing. I experiment with 3D printing to highlight the different qualities that occur between my digitally scanned body and the body casts

created from bronze.

Throughout this research, I activate my encounters and entanglements while learning how to do bronze-casting and the transformative melting of wax and bronze with the transculturation associated with creolization. I am interested in how the materials and melting, both inform the complexity of my history and identity formation as a Chinese Caribbean body; a complexity that includes having direct Hakka Chinese roots on my maternal side and being 2nd generation Hakka Chinese Caribbean on my paternal side. Hakkas are generally known as “guest family” as they have a long history of migration within China. Since the colonization of the Caribbean, the Hakka Chinese have become a part of the Caribbean diaspora. Throughout this thesis (visual and written), I reflect upon my family history and my family’s experiences as a point of reference into a familial ontology. This reflection includes thinking about activities of kinship between the traditional family, community and the Chinese Caribbean diaspora. One of these activities includes foods and snacks that were critical, indeed crucial, to my upbringing. These foods and snacks, bring my home in Toronto, my father’s home in Trinidad, my mother’s and ancestral home of China together beyond time and space. It is here that I will suggest that my home(s) act like Foucault’s heterotopias creating spaces with multiple layers of meaning (23). As liminal sites for creolization and identity formation, it is at home where I consume my history and traditions, both Hakka and Trinidadian. Beyond these homes, I address how Chinese speciality grocery stores enable the reproduction of Caribbean Chinese social relationships and ground the diasporic identity (Renne 616). It is a hot pot of food that calls my family and ancestors to the dining table.

*Melting Pot* as praxis is also shaped by the interdisciplinary practices I have gained from bronze casting in conjunction with mould making and 3D printing while at OCADU. As a process-based artist, I am attracted to the physical and transformational nature of

raw materials in the bronze casting process (wax, bronze, sand, slurry, silicone, plaster and resin). The wax melts between your fingertips. The bronze can solidify leaving traces of your fingerprints. The slurry transforms itself into a version of my skin. The sand is the land that my body stands on. The resin holds my memory. The silicone and plaster create the vessel. As a maker, I witness the personal relationship between these materials. As a maker, I choose to work with my Caribbean Chinese body to reproduce my Hakka Chinese body. The meeting of materials enables me to do this by allowing myself to play and experiment with the materials. I am discovering that wax, resin and bronze each have symbolic qualities concerning my body. In this somatic process, a body made of wax is warm, organic and feels more personal while a body made with bronze is sacred, cold and distant.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Throughout this research, I have asked myself the following questions:

1. How do I carry the stories of my home and family?
2. Would I be able to become a vessel for my ancestors?
3. What memories (memories of the past, memories of the present, memories of the future) are embedded onto my body?
4. What do we do with the memories and objects we inherit?

## **EXHIBITION DESIGN**

The exhibition is composed of three areas based on the materials used to produce the artwork: bronze, resin, and thermoplastics. The bronze category will contain a series of life-size casts of my head and arms along with miniature bronze figures of my digitally

scanned body. The second, resin, comprised a series of apothecary bottles made from moulds and were cast in resin and embedded with preserved red mango, salt prunes, tamarind balls, sorrel, Chinese soup ingredients. The third, thermoplastics, consists of a series of 3D printed copies of photographs belonging to my family and also from my trips to my mom's home village in China, all printed with white thermoplastics.

## ENCOUNTERS/ENTANGLEMENTS

In this section, I reflect on becoming a creolized Chinese in Trinidad as well as my experiences of being a creolized Chinese in China. In *Life Behind the Shop Counter* and *My Mother's Village* are the stories of my childhood home in Trinidad and my mother's home in Qinxizhen, China. It is these two stories that give meaning to my thesis and the underlying narrative of the work I create. Instead of hybridity, one can reframe Ien Ang's text in "Beyond Asia" Deconstructing Diaspora as:

...(creolization) marks the emancipation of the diaspora from "China" as the transparent master-signified of "Chineseness": instead, "Chineseness becomes an open signifier invested with resource potential, the raw material for the construction of syncretic identities suitable for living "where you're at" (35).

In my attempts to find myself in Canada, I began questioning my Chineseness within the large Chinese and Caribbean-Chinese diaspora in Toronto. A similar feeling of displacement faced by migrants living in host countries as they strive to retain their identity or connections of home. Being in Canada made me realized the gaps in my family history both in the place of my birth (Trinidad) and in the home of my ancestors (China). I found that similar feeling of displacement faced by migrants living in host countries as they strive to retain their identity or connections of home. Having a dad who is first-generation Trinidadian and a mom who is mainland Chinese created a dichotomy, reshaping my experiences of what it is to be Trinidadian and Hakka. And my mother, who is a storyteller, reveals a China that would otherwise be closed off by my lack of understanding the language and culture. Through autobiographical reflection, I interrogate representations of Caribbean Chineseness and the universalization of "Chineseness". In the case of my research, autobiography is considered as "the cultural act of self-reading" determined through the active engagement of my experiences of being Caribbean Chinese, being creolized.

## LIFE BEHIND THE SHOP COUNTER

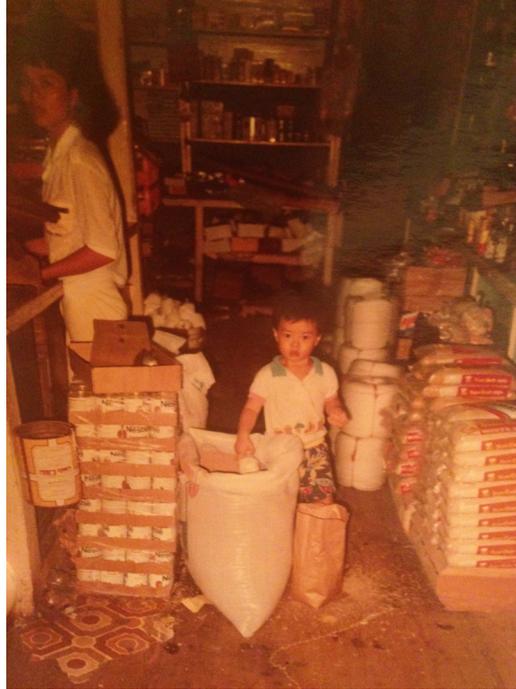


Fig. 3. *The Shop in Cedros, 1991*

My way of living behind the shop counter began when my parents moved from my grandparents' home and set up shop in Bonasse Village, Cedros, on the south-western tip of Trinidad. My parents' shop was on the bottom floor of a two-story wooden structure which was initially a store owned by the Austin family at the turn of the 20th century. The shop front faced the main Southern road and beyond the road was the beach overlooking the Gulf of Paria. Just like my grandparents' shop, it was the centre of village life mainly because it was the only shop in the community that included a bar area where folks can sit and drink and have an *ole* talk. It was also a place where every ingredient or food product the community needed to cook their Sunday lunch could be found from the lentil peas to make dhal or coconut powder to add flavor to the *callaloo* (dasheen leaf soup). My parents' shop had it all.

Trinidad became home to many diasporic communities with their foods while incorporating the local flavor to their palette. My mom, when she moved to Trinidad from China, picked up a recipe for callaloo from *de woman down de road* whose callaloo she tasted. Now it is one of her favorite dishes that she enjoys preparing for the family. It is these inflexions that occur with food, where creolization exists, as I attempt to understand my identity formation, through reflecting on my family history and experiences as a point of reference into a familial ontology. This ontology includes activities of kinship between the family, community and the Chinese Caribbean diaspora.

These relationships shaped the way I came to know myself and helped me to know more about the different cultures that lived in the village. This was Trinidad. This was my world. One of my best memories was witnessing the parade of the *Tadjah* (float) and the rhythmic beats of the *Tassa* drums on the tenth day of *Hosay* celebrated by the Shia Muslims in remembrance of Muharram<sup>2</sup>. From the shop, I witnessed the entire festival, which ended when the *Tadjah* was pushed into the Gulf of Paria. Then there was *Eid-ul-Fitr* which marked the end of the holy month of Ramadan for the Muslims. It was also a moment to share sweets with their friends and neighbors. My family would receive sweets like sawain, kurma, rasgulla. All in clear plastic bags and all made with ingredients bought from my parents' shop. The shop was not only an essential space for the community with regards to the reproduction and consumption of foods but was also crucial for the reinforcement of cultural identity. The shop also acted as a third space<sup>3</sup> where endless possibilities form and where the encounters over the counter shaped my experiences.

It is a different story behind the shop. The kitchen was located separately from the main building. My family shared this kitchen with the landlord and my aunty (by default) Sheila Austin. Everyone becomes an aunty or uncle as a sign of a close relationship and respect for those who are older than you. It was in this kitchen and backyard where we

would have a feast with aunty Sheila's family and friends almost every Sunday. There was always a large selection of dishes that would include stew chicken, pelau, callaloo, oil down and provisions such as dasheen, cassava and eddoes, to name a few. Other Sundays, my family would go and eat with the other Chinese families in the area. These aunties and uncles would make and share Hakka dishes that would include a combination of tofu stuffed with minced pork, dasheen pork, stuffed caraili (bitter melon), steamed chicken with ginger and most importantly steamed fish.

These memories of meals and memories of home surfaced because I was invited to dinner by Richard Fung, another Trinidadian writer, filmmaker and culinary academic that shares a similar interest in family history and the Chinese diaspora. A dinner prepared by Richard will have a wide variety of dishes; in my case, the meal was all Chinese dishes that he learned from his family and his encounters with the Chinese diaspora. I remember one moment, his uneasiness in preparing the steamed egg custard, unsure if it was the same way his mother had made it. This shows how much he treasures the memory of his mom and the importance of making sure that we, his guests, tasted his mom's cooking. There is also something about identity here and about reconnections to place. He is his mother when he is cooking. He is honoring his mother when he is cooking. Richard has been instrumental in my understanding of what it means to be away from home. He reminds me to feel like I am home through the sharing of stories over food and creating friendships in a strange land. In the stories that follow, I write of my various crossings and encounters to highlight the narratives that come together to form my identities and surface in the artwork for *Melting Pot*.

### **清溪镇 MY MOTHER'S VILLAGE<sup>4</sup>**

There is a myth from the Ming Dynasty, a deer guided the Hakka people to a stream at the mouth of the Yinping Mountain. This was how my mother's village came to be called Qinxi or the Village of Deers. At the village centre is a monument celebrating this myth, a grey pillar supporting a half a globe on which stand three deer.

Visiting my mother's old Hakka village was intriguing. It is an enclosed hamlet surrounded by a wall of single-story buildings. I assume that the design was deliberate to act as a fortification to protect the village from outsiders. The interior is a series of intersecting narrow corridors. Merged into the exterior wall of this village was the Wang Ancestral Hall dedicated to the deceased patriarchs of the Wang family. My grandfather was Wang Yong Zhen (b.1919 — d.2000), whereas my grandmother was Li Guan Feng (b.1926 — d.1998). They earned a living as simple farmers and raised five children in the village, one son and four daughters.

The hall itself is a very modest structure with architectural details of the classical Lingnan style, which is found mainly in the Guangdong region. The term Lingnan means "South of the Five Ranges", mountains located between Guangxi and Hunan province. It covers a geographical area that includes Guangxi, Hunan, Guangdong, Jiangxi, Fujian and Hainan Island. The bas-reliefs and the frescoes that adorn the walls depict stories from classical Chinese literature such as the legend of the Eight Immortals crossing the Seas, Romance of the Three Kingdoms or Water Margins. The layout of the ancestral hall adapted to the sub-tropical climate of Guangdong, with open courtyards and high ceilings providing ventilation for ceremonies and gatherings that involve the burning of incense and paper blessings.

The Wang Ancestral Hall has two courtyards, each separated by a doorway. The first courtyard would be the reception area where all the families would gather during festivals or main events. In the second most inner courtyard is the main tiered altar that houses numerous eight-inch high green enamel rectangular tablets. Each one of these tablets is a memorial dedicated to a deceased family member, whose name is inscribed in gold. It was from their memorial tablet that I discovered that my grandparents were the 25th

generation of Wang and my mother the 26th generation. However, I am not to be from the Wang clan as my paternal family belonged to the Liu clan.

With the help of a translator, I learned from the tablets that hung on the doorways that the Wang clan emigrated from Huai Shu (pagoda tree) Village, Hong Tong county located in Shanxi province in the north-west of China, next to Hebei province, where Beijing is located. This mass migration was officially organized in the Ming Dynasty from 1117-1123 through about 1795 in the Qing Dynasty. This migration involves some 80,000 people of 500 surnames. They went to the north as well as the south, where they called themselves Hakka. Today, there is a prominent shrine in Huai Shu village, regarded by many as the original root of the family.

The Wang Ancestral Hall itself would have been built during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), as there are twenty-six generations of memorial tablets in the hall. The hall offers an insight into the old traditions of China, as these were the status symbols of their day, reflecting the prestige of the family. Not everyone could have built an ancestral hall, as one could only gain the title officially from the government, bypassing the imperial examination, and this was very difficult to achieve. This examination stopped at the end of the Qing dynasty in 1912.

The ancestral halls still play a vital role in family gatherings, where all ceremonies, such as weddings, deaths or holidays are performed to include the ancestors in these events. Two important ceremonies are the Spring and Autumn Ancestral worship during the second and ninth months of the lunar calendar. Most times, these rituals are performed on auspicious days to ask the ancestors for protection, good health and prosperity. This is why the ancestors are highly regarded as they were responsible for the birth of the future generation and the present family must keep them happy in the afterlife, so that they, in turn, can bless the family.

I was able to witness one such ritual where the mother of the bride seeks the

ancestors' blessings for a good marriage and a happy life for her daughter. Both mother and daughter were present with an array of offerings, which included an entire cleaned and gutted chicken, various fruits and snacks. Then the mother proceeded to pile a stack of paper offerings on the ground before the altar in the open courtyard and began burning the pile while whispering blessings. Afterwards, the mother walked to the altar, continuing her blessings. All the offerings were removed from the altar and firecrackers were lit outside of the hall, concluding the ceremony.

After the ceremony, I visited the Wang family burial plot located on the fringe village. Walking on the narrow dirt track towards my destination, I reached the top of the hill before turning right, passing an old water tower standing like a sentinel guarding the entrance. I was greeted with two rows of three-foot-high earthenware jars surrounded by an open concrete enclosure. Inside these earthenware jars are the bones of my ancestors, including those of my grandparents. The funeral rights for the Hakkas are distinct as they practice the custom of double burial. This custom may seem strange to most, but it is a perfect example of filial piety, which is part of the Confucian philosophy that defines a person's love, respect and devotion for their family, even in the afterlife.

The double burial involves the first burial in a coffin for several years until the body is exhumed and the bones cleaned before being placed in the earthenware jar to be reburied in a specially chosen area. The location is very crucial, as it must have good *Fengshui* – (*Feng* (wind) *shui* (water) is used to find the best location to store the ancestors' bones with ideal airflow and moisture level) for the continued welfare of the entire family (Wu 20). The double burial is attributed to the constant migration of the Hakkas in the past, where the family would carry their ancestors with them whenever they decide to go. Now that deer have taken my family to Trinidad and all corners of the world.

## PASS THE HAM CHOY

*Nyi Hao Mao? Sin Ti Hao Mao?*

*How are you? How is your body?*

*Hi mom, I am fine.*

*I am eating well and working hard.*

*Always remember to eat.*

*Thanks mom*

Once away from home or away from my mom, she will call to ask how I am doing. Growing up, my mom always made sure I was never hungry and had a plate of food. However, she will always say, "Make sure you eat every grain of rice," and made sure we did not waste any food as kids. This warning was not without reason, as my mom shared stories of hunger during the hardship of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. Her parents and siblings would use traditional food preservation practices such as drying, salting and pickling the vegetables they had planted on their farm. Fresh meats like beef and pork were a rare commodity and were only available through government rations except for chicken which they raised themselves. These methods of preservation became acts of resilience for my maternal family as they carried on with their daily life.

Food helps to form a relationship with my mom as family stories are told around meals. One story about food surrounds ham choy and pork, which my mom ate with her family during the Cultural Revolution. Ham choy means pickled or dried salted greens either gai lan, bok choy or yu choy. Then the ham choy was prepared with the "poor" cuts of pork like the ribs or shoulders. Nothing was wasted. Everything was used, even the excess fat was

left on the pork ribs and/or shoulders, as the oils would help flavor the coarsely chopped ham choy. In a wok, boil the pork ribs and/or shoulder in water, barely covering the meat. Then stir in black bean sauce and soy sauce according to smell, reduce the heat and let it simmer until you hear the sizzle when you stir it. At this point, it will become a thick sauce at about half an hour. Add chicken broth and cover making sure the heat is at medium. Let this simmer until the pork is tender in about an hour. Then add the ham choy and cook for 5 minutes. Please serve with jasmine rice.

Back home in Trinidad, I learned how to cook this dish by watching my aunt, who is my mom's older sister cook at home. There are no recipe books, and nothing was measured, all the ingredients added by taste and smell and with experience. Knowledge passed on through senses between generations, diaspora and spaces. Like my mom, my aunt would have faced similar circumstances and cooked meals like this back home in Qingxizhen, China. Now my aunt prepares this meal for my family in Trinidad. Soon ham choy and pork became my home food, as I consume my family history. In Trinidad, this dish of pickled/dried choy and pork is genuinely a home-cooked meal, as this Hakka dish is considered a peasant food due to its history and the ingredients used to prepare the meal. This makes it unlikely for ham choy and pork to appear on any restaurant menu or major Chinese celebrations.

## 阿婆 POPO: THANK YOU FOR THE GUAVA JAM

*Dear Popo,*

*Did you know one of my best childhood memories was eating your homemade Guava jam with some Crix biscuits? The epitome of classic Trini treats that I still enjoy to this day. As long as I can remember, you always had a fresh jar of jam, always with a ripped off label. Even if I realized your homemade jam was Mable's Guava Jam manufactured by National Cannery Limited, it is still my favourite homemade jam. I hope I can get some when I come to visit you again.*

I return to this memory every time I think of you popo, even as your memory gradually fades. I was able to chat with you over the summer, and you were happy to see me. The white laced mosquito net that hung over your bed and fluttered with every turn of the fan provided me with a haven for my childhood dreams. Now those dreams are gone. And now the mosquito net, the jasmine perfume that I remembered wafting through your room is replaced with the smell of Dettol Antiseptic Liquid. I guess nothing lasts forever, even our memories or our bodies.

Uncle Steve is still running Kong's Cafe, the small shop you started with gung-gung. It is here where I remembered greeting you behind the counter after coming from the movies with gung-gung. This little wooden building facing the Eastern Main Road in Arima, Trinidad was where you made your *aloo pies* (Indo-Trinidadian potato pies), roast chicken, fried bake and cheese or coconut bake with saltfish in the kitchen behind the shop. These were made for your patrons to eat as they sipped on their beer or soft drinks while discussing the latest bacchanal in the community. I also remember as a child, I would escape

into the shop and climb the shelves to get to the snacks like Corn Curls, Cheese Sticks, Chinese Mango, aka my fantasy world.

The parlor was also part of my childhood and how I would come to identify, dis-identify and re-identify myself as a Trinidadian Chinese. Looking back at my childhood, I do not recall you or gung-gung ever talking about your life growing up in China. This was a China that remained distant from your house, no old family photos or any visible signs anywhere. The only hint of China in the living quarters behind the parlour was the Cantonese opera music that gung-gung would play in his room. On my last visit (2019), you trusted me with your old family photos. The faces of family members I never knew I had and that I will never know as your memory has faded. I would like to think you finally found a place you could call home while you learned and cooked for the tastes of your new community. I have come to realize that there was no need to teach me any Hakka Chinese traditions or feed me any stories of past lives to become Trinidadian. I cannot say I grew up in a traditional Hakka family.

For this research, I explored the relational qualities that are imbued in food, qualities that create a sense of home and provide us with memories of home. For me, food calls the family and ancestors to the table. Aloo pies, ham choy, Chinese mango become an embodiment of creolization within my stories as it highlights the entanglement of the different cultural groups in Trinidad. It is within these contact zones that creolization for transformation and translation becomes a melting pot and creolization centers my body within the Caribbean.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### LITERATURE REVIEW

When our mind fails us as a result of the overarching memory of colonial imperialism, the body's memory and embodied knowledge take over. When our access to traditional knowledge is blocked, our bodies become tools to remember. When our familial practices have undergone generational erasures, our collective and community-based recollection instructs us. When our mind's memory fails us, her body will remember. (Sutherland 11)

The artworks created for *Melting Pot: Casting a Caribbean Chinese Body* are grounded in research that includes the fields of studio practice, material culture, cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and diaspora studies. Scholarly writings and exhibitions have assisted me in parsing out ideas related to cultural identity, the multicultural Caribbean, diaspora, memory, and embodiment. The artwork for *Melting Pot* provides the praxis to express the contradictory nature of the Caribbean Chinese identity that emerges within my research and studio practice.

In July 2019, I attended the Indigenous Summer Intensive that ran for two weeks at the University of British Columbia (Okanagan) campus in Kelowna, BC. During that time, I visited the Kelowna Art Gallery to see the exhibition *Her Body Will Remember (2019)* by curator Erin Sutherland. The exhibition included the works of three artists – Mariel Belanger, T̓ṣēmā Igharas and Tiffancy Shaw-Collinge whom all explored the interconnections between technology and memory concerning Canada's First Nation Art practices. T̓ṣēmā Igharas decolonizes design practices in accessing her traditional knowledge and dismantling the power of colonialism. In *Tegodi (2018)*, Igharas recreates a hide scraping tool made of bone into resin, bronze and hydro stone privileging Tahltan knowledge in the making. While Mariel Belanger's work also centers indigenous ways of knowing through oral history and

performance. As makers of indigenous knowledge, their work becomes a form of resistance and resilience against the erasure that started with early European settlers, “leading... families to stop making or stop talking about their practices” (Sutherland 4) within their communities. Mariel Belanger, T̄ēmā Igharas and Tiffany Shaw-Collinge create connections through making with their family and community. It is through this process of making that they uncover the knowledge held within the body passed between generations. *Family Pattern* by Tiffany Shaw-Collinge included in this exhibition uses the beading patterns passed down by her great-grandmother. Shaw-Collinge creates a dialogue with her great-grandmother by 3D printing, CNC milling and laser cutting the patterns. Shaw-Collinge is interested in technology as a way of activating her great-grandmother’s patterns more than the final product from the process. *Her Body Will Remember* motivated me to consider how technology like 3D printers can forge the memories embedded within my body. This exhibition also helped me to think about strategies to gain access to that embodied knowledge through the making that can activate my familial history and cultural identity.

In *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, both Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey acknowledge that within the absence, connections materialize themselves onto texts, images and objects as ways “to recall persons, (home), relationships and events that are no longer immediately present” (25). This omnipresent absence exists within my art practice as a mnemonic response to my connections to home, family and ancestors. When home becomes absent, I cook food that smells and tastes like home, when my parents become absent I give them a call and when the ancestors become absent, I look at old family photos. Hallam and Hockey regard this absence of bodies and spaces as “displacements that create distance, either spatial or temporal” (25). For me, this absence becomes transient as the ancestors and home reside within my body. Making a connection through memory is a crucial aspect of my approach into the casting of the Caribbean Chinese body.

## THE FLUIDITY OF IDENTITY

Stuart Hall complicates the authority and authenticity held within cultural identity by viewing "identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (22). In his dialogue of cultural identity from within the West Indies, Stuart Hall notes:

We cannot speak for a very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side— the raptures and discontinuities which constitute precisely, the Caribbean's 'uniqueness.' Cultural identity in this... sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'...constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but of a positioning (225-226).

It is within the framework of creolization that I posit the Caribbean-Chinese cultural identity. Creolization provides the groundwork addressing the ambivalence and marginalization of being Chinese within the Caribbean. Hall also uses words like "blends", "cross-overs" and "cut and mix" to describe the endless potential for the formation of the Caribbean identity through processes of creolization (236). As an artist, I explore these ideas through the use of different materials that, when mixed or blended, create something new. Wax, resin, and bronze become the personification of my form of creolization or mixture and in the end make space for my body, family, ancestors and the diaspora to become part of this ongoing process of identity production.

## FAMILIAL ENCOUNTERS AND RHIZOMIC IDENTITIES

Glissant describes encounters within the creolized context as rhizomatic in its refusal to being fixed (Diawara 50:46). Drawing from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari A *Thousand Plateaus*, Glissant reads these encounters like a rhizome whose entangled roots move horizontally, overlapping, and interweaving independently between elements that have no immediate relation to each other. Deleuze and Guattari further explain that when the rhizome ruptures new lines are formed deterritorializing and reterritorializing its environment and other roots. Highlighting the potential of becoming something different formed by these interactions where this “line of flight...can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying (10). Glissant’s ideas of the rhizome challenge the idea of roots and “conventional notions of diaspora that tend to posit the homeland at the center... that determines the activities, the loyalties, and the identification of the diaspora” (Siu 163). Being part of the Caribbean Chinese diaspora means offering a different perspective. *Encounters/Entanglements* (See pg. 8) is the beginning of my rhizomatic identity of moving between places of origins (homes) within Trinidad, and also between Trinidad and China. The research, making, and exhibition become my rhizome, a body full of complexity and never-ending possibilities, a body without a finite conclusion. Glissant describes this rapture from the rational, systematic thinking as “tremulous thought” proposing that we will understand the world better once we tremble with it (23:25). This tremble produces both organic and geological resonance through the complex relations between individuals.

Boundaries are social constructs that can be used to contain people and ideas to the point that boundaries become convenient and easily manageable than people. This idea expands into the construction of nation-states and the walls used to keep out foreign bodies from those lands. This idea also speaks to the drive for bodies to lock ourselves

from within. We close ourselves to the speculative. We close ourselves to uncertainty, and we close ourselves to the potential to expand beyond the metaphorical and physical borders (identity, nationality, culture, history), especially within a globalized community. I am not suggesting that borders should be abandoned or ignored – that is not the focus of this thesis. Instead, I am hoping my work can serve as a call to action to push beyond the confines of nationality and ethnicity. I have been thinking about the metaphoric boundaries that I have encountered after viewing Manthia Diawara’s documentary *Edouard Glissant: One World in Relation* (2010). In the documentary, Diawara shows Glissant speaking against borders being weaponized and used against migration. However, Glissant states the necessity of borders to appreciate the passage between spaces, which he defines as “the flavor of one country to the flavor of another” (43:46). This symbolic crossing of borders facilitates a framework for the building of relations.

The frameworks of creolization and identity-making within multicultural contexts allow me to open up a dialogue about becoming and being Trinidadian-Chinese-Hakka. This identity is fluid — it inhabits and flows within the hyphens, and between cultures constructed through my fantasies, narratives and myths of family dinners, childhood memories behind the shop counter and the voices of my ancestors.

CHAPTER TWO

**MAKING CONNECTIONS:  
PROCESSES OF MAKING/SELF-MAKING**

**3D SCANNING AND PRINTING**



Fig. 4. *My Body in the Cobra Full Body Scanner* , 2019

During my digital fabrication course in the winter semester (January 2019), I was introduced to 3D printing. It was here I discovered the potential of mapping my entire body in expressing my creolized identity. I hoped that by scanning my body and then reproducing my body through 3D printing, I could explore the continuous production and reproduction of my identity. In a moment, my body was enclosed inside a vessel with about a hundred cameras, capturing every angle of my body, and in a second, my body became immortalized as a digitized body. With the help of photogrammetry software, such as *Autodesk ReMake*,



Fig. 5.  
*Digital Rendering of my Body, 2019*

the software plots out common points where images overlap to produce a digital rendering of my body (see fig.3). The act of scanning becomes a translation creating a separation between my physical body and my digital body. Leading to my digital body being translated and becoming creolized bearing “traces of the original” (Hall 16).

These computer-generated images were used as a canvas where I created multiples of myself, multiples that can exist in many forms, scale, and spaces. I have explored different techniques of embedding autobiographical elements onto the digital model of my body. Throughout this research, I used these 3D printed models to cast into bronze.

The first technique involves using the software program *Fusion360* and digital assets found on the *Thingiverse*<sup>5</sup> website to create multiple versions of myself. These versions always had two elements that reflected on the ambivalence of being positioned as Chinese and anglophone Caribbean. This can be seen in *Guardians* (fig.6) where I embed both Foo Dogs and a rose window (a generalized cathedral rose window reference) onto my 3D printed body. In this instance, my body takes on an unintentional sacredness as the rose window forms

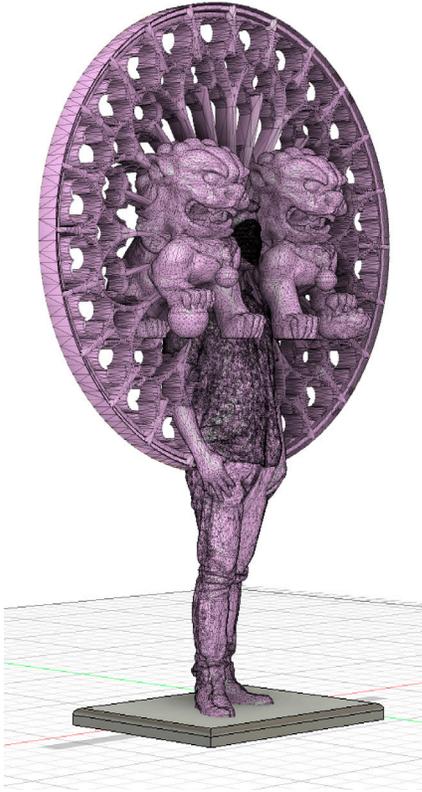


Fig. 6. *Guardians*, Digital Model, 2019



Fig. 7. *Maternal Family Shrine*, 2015

a halo around my body, and then the placement of the Foo Dogs adds additional weight to my shoulders.

The perceived sacredness of these pieces becomes autobiographical. I associate the rose window with the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches of my childhood, especially the memories of going to church with my popo and my mom every Sunday. *Guardians* (Fig.6) represents the memories of my reluctance of going to church as I have always felt out of place in that environment.

The Foo Dogs are protectors. They guard the entrance of most Chinese establishments such as restaurants and temples. The Foo Dogs symbolize my first meeting with my ancestors in the ancestral hall belonging to my mom's side of the family. The Foo Dogs share the altar with the tablets inscribed with the names of my ancestors (Fig. 7). Though I have been to my mom's village many times in my childhood, there was a moment which became my first time at the ancestral hall. I will always remember this experience. (I explore more about this experience further in the section *Finding Myself Through my Family*). The Foo

Dogs become familial and yet still feels so unfamiliar.

These Foo Dogs always come in pairs where one is male with its right paw on the ball, and the other one is female with its left paw on a cub. The dogs' emphasis on heterosexual relationships is to ensure the Chinese family line is protected. This too feels unfamiliar to me. On the basis, because I look Chinese, I am expected to connect with the Foo Dogs.

*Guardians* reveal this balancing act as my body becomes a fulcrum that represents my hyphenated identity, Caribbean- Chinese. The symmetry of *Guardians* hides the imbalance I feel in my own life. My body feels out of place from the ambivalent weight of being Caribbean-Chinese. There is a burden, for a Creole Chinese body, to fit neatly in either a Chinese or Caribbean mould. I do not want to confuse this burden with the refusal of being either Chinese or Caribbean but my intention to expand beyond the roles of nationhood, ethnic purity and multiculturalism that excluded the Chinese diaspora and their descendants.

## MOULD MAKING



Fig. 8. *Negative Impression Left in Clay and 3D Print Encased in Silicone*, 2019



Fig. 9. *Two Part Mould*, silicone and plaster, 2019

As a part of my research, I learned about and created a two-part mould for one of the 3D printed versions of my digital body. As part of my research-creation, I hold the two-part moulds like books that embody the narratives I have experienced within, and around, my body—a book containing the story written between the lines of thermoplastic. The 3D print (Fig. 8) forms a dialogue with the silicone (my skin), the clay (my home) and the plaster (my guardians) in the making of my identity. This mother mould then gives birth to multiple wax bodies (Fig. 10), as the characteristics of wax allow my body to become creolized to bare the cultural influence of being Caribbean Chinese.

One half of the 3D printed body is surrounded by clay and encased within a wooden frame. Holes are impressed in the clay. These holes will become keys that lock the two halves of the silicone together (Fig. 8). Once done, three coats of silicone were applied. Each coat



Fig. 10. *Wax Body After Wax Poured into Silicone Mould*, 2019

of silicone takes about six hours to cure. Then the mother mould was made by pouring the plaster over the silicone. This half of the mould is flipped and the clay removed while keeping the 3D print in place in the silicone. Another step was adding mould release; this helps to release the mould as silicone will stick to silicone and will ruin the mould, then steps are then repeated to complete the second half of the mould (see fig. 10). Once the 3D print is removed, a negative imprint, or space, is created.

The negative impression of the body in the clay (see fig.8) brings to mind *Eureka*<sup>6</sup> the work of Bahamian artist Janine Antoni. In *Eureka*, Antoni submerges her body completely in a tub filled with lard. The lard displaced by this performance is mixed with lye and water to make a cube of soap. The artist then washes her body with the cube of soap, slowly eroding the edges with multiple bathings. Through the transformative performance of displacement, her body then becomes the cube of soap. It is from *Eureka*, the tub of

lard becomes a site of reproduction, left with the traces of Antoni's body emerging from the lard. For me, I see this negative space like my mother mould, the plaster casing that supports the reproduction of my wax body model multiple times (see fig. 10), carrying on Hall's idea that identity is always in the process (222). The mould becomes a locus of identity formation as I was able to combine autobiographical elements with the wax to reference the multiplicity of my identity. These wax models are then prepared for bronze casting. This process begins with the attachment of wax rods, creating a gating system. This system allows for the flow of molten bronze and the venting of gases to avoid having air pockets forming on the bronze sculpture.

For my summer residency at the University of British Columbia (Okanagan) campus in Kelowna, BC, I worked with one of the engineering department, *Starlabs*, which focused on technologies, strategies and standards that save lives and create more resilient communities and the *Maker Space*, which is the general workspace and creative hub for the university. Working with the lab technicians, I was given advice on what types of filaments to use in 3D printing of my models for bronze casting. From my repeated experiments with Starlabs, using different printers and filaments, it was determined that *Polycast* metal filament with a fused deposition modeling<sup>7</sup> printer would be best for bronze casting my 3D printed models. For me, it came down to two factors; the printing costs and the choice of thermoplastic. Any ash or residues that are produced in the burn off will create inclusion on the surface of the bronze cast.

An important piece to consider, within the 3D printing process and the building of the design, is the creation of supports generated wherever there is an overhang on your model (Figs. 12-14). Without any support the 3D print would misprint as each layer of thermoplastic is extruded through the heated nozzle. These supports are designed to be easily removed. There were many experiments in trying to figure out the best configuration



Fig. 11. *Hyphenated Being*, 3D printed resin , 2020



Figs. 12-14. *Maquettes, 3D printed resin , 2020*

to print my models. In the Maker Lab at the University of British Columbia (Okanagan), I made three maquettes (Figs. 12-14) of my digital models with the Formlab SLA 3D printer. The three maquettes with their supports were printed using ultraviolet light that cures the clear resin producing the maquettes. The supports created for these maquettes activated and captured my fascination because I realized that they were similar to the gating system for the wax models in bronze casting. They also remind me of Glissant's rhizome. These examples of supports are essential in the production of my exterior body. I view these supports as interconnections between my body and the autobiographical elements of my family story and cultural experiences.

## GATING



Figs. 15-16. *Masquerader* (front and back view), wax and styrofoam, 2020

Wax rods are attached to the sculpture after the wax and 3D printed models as completed. These wax rods are called sprues or gates. There are different sprue sizes, thicker sprues help circulate the molten bronze into the ceramic shell, and thinner sprues are venting off-gases. In the process, a Styrofoam cup is also attached to the base to create a funnel. After making the ceramic shell with multiple dips of sand and slurry (see figs. 18 & 19), and doing the burn-off, the ceramic shell is planted in a sand bed with the cup base facing upwards and ready for the molten bronze (see Fig. 29). In *Masquerader* (Figs.15-16) you can see an example of the gating system that creates a network of rods connecting my body to the other elements. These take the form of a wax cast dragon headpiece and a cape moulded from my digitally scanned face.



Fig. 17. Maquette, wax, thermoplastic, styrofoam, 2019

Another example of an earlier maquette (Fig.17) shows another form of a gating system that was a little more elaborate. There are more gates attached to the 3D model because of the details of the rose window. I had to create another row of wax rods to ensure that the molten bronze can enter the rose window from all directions. This elaborate system of wax rods, gating, together with the ambivalence of my Caribbean Chinese identity is, what I understand as a physical embodiment of Glissant's idea of identity as a rhizome, this rhizomatic thought where every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other (Clarke 19). Rhizomatic thinking, and theory, become very appropriate because of the land now known as the Caribbean. This land is one giant rhizome, a rhizome which

extends itself to me and my body and my ancestors. Glissant's concept of the rhizome allows me to make connections between the gating system and the autobiographical elements of my project with my body. As I continue my enquiry into the encounters that informed the making of my work, the encounters between friends, family, ancestors, strangers and spaces which create meaning.

## PRODUCING THE CERAMIC SHELL



Fig. 18. *Fragmented Thoughts*, after one coat of slurry and sand, 2020



Fig. 19. *Fragmented Thoughts*, after nine coats of slurry and sand, 2020

*My skin dries, cracks and whitens, and  
my body reminds me that I am away from home.*

The wax body cast must be coated nine times in order to make a strong enough vessel to hold the molten bronze. In this process, there are specific reinforcements applied on the sixth coat before the other three coats are added. After each coat, my wax body gets more substantial and heavy with each dip in the slurry, and my skin becomes dryer. Soon the cracks on my skin look like the cracks on the ceramic shell. It is an uncomfortable skin sensation that I am familiar with since coming to Canada, especially during the winter. I am reminded that I am not at home, a home where I can feel the sand beneath my feet, and the waters from the Caribbean Sea heals my body. Sara Ahmed adds that similar skin sensations are felt on diasporic bodies which results in “the splitting of homes, one as a place of origin and home as the sensory world of everyday experience” (90). This becomes



Fig. 19. Giselle Carr, *Metamorphic rock on Blanchisseuse Beach, Trinidad and Tobago*, 2012



Fig. 20. Broken Piece of Ceramic Shell, 2020

a story of migration involving a spatial reconfiguring of the body, “a transformation in the very skin through which the body is embodied” (Ahmed 90).

The use of clay and sand in this mould making and bronze casting processes allows me to connect with my body’s memories of, and relationship to the landscape of Trinidad. I feel a deep connection to the land and the relationship between the sand and my body allows me to become the carrier of stories, where my words and making carry meaning. The sand is also a carrier of stories about moving between spaces. The plasticity of the clay along with the sand records the traces of my body much like the making of the ceramic shell, each layer of sand and slurry becomes recorded within the ceramic shell (Fig. 21).

Back home, there are a series of rock formations on Blanchisseuse beach on the north coast of Trinidad. These rock formations were created from layers of sand and mud repeatedly deposited over millions of years in the marine system. As each layer gets deposited, it gets buried and the heat and pressure from the earth bake these layers of sand and mud where

it becomes metamorphic rock (Fig. 19)<sup>8</sup>. To create some of the artwork in *Melting Pot*, (Fig. 22) I employed using fused deposition modelling (FDM), which also requires heat and pressure to melt the thermoplastic through a nozzle. FDM is an additive process that creates physical models through the action of melting into a series of lines. Each line symbolizes the connection I share with my body, the land, and the lines to the ancestors. In *How Do you Carry the Land?* (2018) by Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin, Tarah Hogue describes the relationship between body and land as a generative space for bodies to come through their encounters and experiences<sup>9</sup>.

It is through these lines on the objects that I acknowledge the presence of the ancestors. It is through these lines I acknowledge the land my body stands on. It is through these lines I honour the making of knowledge. It is through this acknowledgement that I choose to leave the lines made from the 3D process in the bronze casting process. As the thermoplastic undergoes its metamorphism into bronze, these lines continue to exist. The interlacing of these lines becomes the embodiment of the continuum of the land and ancestors through my body. In a way, this becomes a topography of my memories and experiences as a diasporic body and identity that is constantly in flux. I further explored this topography with 3D printing to produce a series of photographs (Fig. 24). Images of my father's land, my mother's land and ancestors' land took shape within the layers of thermoplastic. These are photographs I inherited from my travels to my mother's village with other photographs belonged to my popo that hold her memories of home in Trinidad and her family in China. In this process, 3D printing becomes visceral as it transforms the two-dimensional surface into a three-dimensional surface. The series forms a topography, the geographies created through the layering of thermoplastics. The image of my zia-po and zia-gung (Fig. 23) is the only image I have of my maternal grandparents together. The original photo resides with my mother's family. The 3D printed photographs of my zia-po

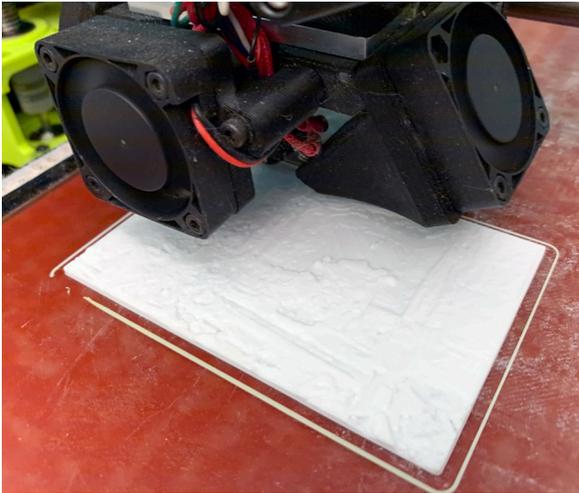


Fig. 22. *3D Printing of a Photograph, 2020*



Fig. 23. *Detail of a 3D Printed Photo of my Zia-Po and Zia-Gung, 2020*



Fig. 24. *3D Printed Photo of my Zia-Po and Zia-Gung, 2020*

and zia-gung became my ancestral tablet (Fig. 7) that I can carry and negotiate old and new places much the way my ancestors travelled with the bones of departed family members.

Light also plays a unique role in translating these topographic forms to reveal the multiple layers of my family history. It is not until the photo is held towards the light that the viewer becomes aware of the portraits. At the moment of holding the object, the light offers a different perspective for the viewer to look beyond the surface. The action of unrevealing has a profound effect on the viewer as they become acquainted with my family. Light captures an intimate moment between the viewer and my ancestors; I want this work to offer the viewer a possibility of resonance.

This series of work in *Melting Pot* began as an interest in learning new art practices that slowly evolved into a journey of reconnecting with my family and cultural identity. Producing the ceramic shell reminded me of home, and 3D printing showed me that my body is made up of layers where each layer holds the story of the land and the ancestors. Mould making – physically and metaphorically – became my third space in the reproducing of my hyphenated identity of being Caribbean Chinese. The gating was my rhizome that reminded me that I have many homes, identities and encounters that influenced my own path of creolization—all of these processes playing a vital role in casting my Caribbean Chinese identity.

CHAPTER THREE  
**MEMORY OBJECTS**

*In the memory of my friend Ian*



Fig. 25. *Blue Apothecary Bottle*, 2020

*Dear Blue Bottle,*

*I had hoped we could have been reunited again under better circumstances, but time does not wait for anyone. After Ian died, you were packed away along with the other mementoes of his life; a second burial. I guess it helps not to be reminded that Ian won't be around anymore. Two years seems like it was only yesterday when I had a bottle of ice-cold Sprite with Ian while talking about his memories of his son, who also died at a young age. That time you were standing proudly next to family photos and a miniature model of the old BWIA airplane. You seem like you belonged on that wooden cabinet in the living room.*

*I asked Ian to tell me about your history.*

*How such a beautiful blue gem came to his possession?*

*What I remember was that Ian did not start with your origins in Bristol, England, or that you were made in the early 20th century. He began with the story of his countless visits to his uncle's pharmacy in Princes Town, Trinidad. Blue, you were his memories of his time spent in that pharmacy, a memento of his uncle. Now, I have inherited your story. Now, I have inherited Ian's story. You have now become part of my story.*

*Thank you, Ian, for allowing me to carry on your memory.*

*Regards,*

*Joshua*



Fig. 26. Resin Cast of the Bottle being Prepared in the Mould, 2019

Before writing this thesis, I did not understand the situations that enabled personal stories to become embedded into objects. This realization started to influence my imagination. In the book *Death, Memory and Material Culture* by Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, they explain, "As such, metaphors of memory, which connect the intangible with the material, either convey notions of fixity and stability or they highlight process and transformation. At either end of this spectrum; however, metaphors of memory always allude at some level to continuity" (27).

I carried this blue bottle with me from Trinidad to Toronto as within it resided memories of my friend, Ian, who passed away in April 2017. The bottle within the scope of my research, and in the context of my work is in flux between the fixity of my memories of Ian and the story it now carries with my family history. A continuity of stories attached to this blue bottle emerges as the bottle also contained Ian's memory of his uncle's

pharmacy, from Bristol, England. The bottle becomes a vessel for transformation, a place where memory takes on many forms and is carried between spaces. The bottle is not about England.

The process consisted of multiple phases that were dependent upon the passage of time and the addition of several layers of resin at the appropriate time. To give the appearance that the ingredients are floating within the resin cast, I employed a two-part mould of the original bottle (see fig. 28). The final step in the process involved strapping the two halves of the mould together and pouring the resin into the channel at the top. This allowed the resin to flow into the void between the two. I needed to pour the food materials and resin together as my initial attempts resulted in either all the ingredients floating to the top or sinking to the bottom.

The use of resin as a material connects its mnemonic qualities of fixing objects in space with its ability to fix time. This resin became an object which helped me to remember. I understand this more because of my efforts to embed food and ingredients within the resin. This notion of food as the metaphor is embedded in resin alongside my desire to acknowledge the elusiveness of my memories. Initially, I wanted to use home cooking, but my family dishes refused to be fixed and were ultimately meant to be consumed with my family. The refusal of my family dishes to become preserved in resin and become fixed in time relates to the failure of memory in *Death, Memory and Material Culture*:

Metaphors of memory often highlight the notion of containment and so the ability to remember is frequently represented as the act of storing something in a vessel or structure. On the other hand, the ephemeral or fleeting nature of memories is acknowledged with the recognition that memories 'fade' or threaten to wither or die and consequently need to be 'kept alive'. (27)



Fig. 27. *In Between Here and There (Series 1)*, Resin Cast Bottles with Various Ingredients, 2020

Learning from my attempts to preserve family cooked dishes, I realized that I could use preserved Chinese ingredients such as the dried ham choy (mustard greens). The dried ingredients with no oils or moisture would be better suited for resin casting. In addition, the dried ham choy already retained the narrative of my family history and could be preserved within the resin cast. In Toronto, these preserved food products are readily available at specialized Chinese groceries and herbal stores like T&T Supermarket with no relation to Trinidad and Tobago. The cultural anthropologist Purnima Mankekar notes that these specialty stores reproduce home and “form a crucial node in the transnational circulation and consumption of commodities and discourses” around ideas of migration (qtd. in Abbot 117). This idea holds true only if the home was one place like Qingxizhen, Dong Gong in China, then places like T&T Supermarket could inform my ethnic identity of being Chinese. Dried Ingredients like shiitake mushrooms, lily flowers, wolfberries and red dates allow my



Fig. 28. *In Between Here and There (Series 2)*, Resin Cast Bottles with Various Ingredients, 2020

family to carry a little taste of China to Trinidad, a taste of family cooked meals.

In addition to the dried Chinese ingredients, I also included preserved snacks and sweets that were brought to me from my parent's grocery Wang Li and Sons' Supermarket in Trinidad. Within these resin bottles, you will find Chinese red mango, preserved red peaches, Haw Flakes and preserved prunes (Fig. 27). Each bottle contains snacks that are memories from my childhood and my connection to my home, in my case, the Chinese Shop (see *Being and Belonging Behind the Shop Counter*). Like my earlier experiments of using home-cooked foods, the preserved red mango and red peaches left voids as they shrank. The snacks, like the home-cooked food, displayed acts of resistance against my attempts to preserve their physical shape as if to communicate that they should be remembered through the act of eating. The use of food as metaphors also brings focus to aspects of absence. Through food and the use of sensory memory, home becomes closer. Similarly, when the body becomes absent through death, memory allows for the person to continue living within the memory.

CHAPTER FOUR  
**MELTING POT:  
RESONATING WITH MY BODY**



Fig. 29. Molten Bronze being Poured in Ceramic Shell at OCADU Foundry, 2020

Throughout the paper, I have attempted to shed light on my somatic relationship to the materials used to create this representative body that centers both my Hakka and Trinidadian ways of being. Interconnecting ideas of cultural identity by the embedding of food memories in resin forms connections with my family and homes. In the transformation of family photographs into topographic landscapes, I connect the past with the present and the future. I now extend ideas of the fluidity of identity and memories to the responsive qualities of bronze as they resonate with my body and connects my body to my ancestors. The word “resonate” captures the many emotions and memories I feel in that moment of seeing the molten bronze being poured into the ceramic shell which contains traces of my body. It is magic! This magic is illuminated in the book *Chinese Bronzes*:

Metallurgy in all its form seemed miraculous to the layman. Those who worked metals and those who bought them up from the bowels of the earth and mixed them so knowledgeably seemed wizards who were constantly in touch with the infernal forces; and all the more so because the melting operations was preceded, accompanied and followed by religious ceremonies, exorcism, and magic rites. Because of this, it was thought that bronze objects such as swords and vessels had a spirit. (Bussagli 23).

By allowing my body to be present from the moment of the preparation of the wax models to the creation of the ceramic shells to the application of the final patina on the bronze allowed my spirit and those of my ancestors to be embedded in the objects I created. There was a lot of sweat, pain and tears that went into this labor-intensive process. This close and intimate engagement with the making of bronze casts became a ritual. It becomes a ceremony. In each step, I was able to inscribe my memories of family, home and ancestors into the bronze casts. In the pouring of the bronze, the ceramic shell and the sand that supported the ceramic shell became the scaffolding for my memories.

My ancestors became active participants throughout this process, especially with the making of Sacred Bodies (Fig. 30). Here you can find the same inscription on the ancestral



Fig. 30. *Sacred Bodies*, Wax Cast of my Arms with Inscriptions, 2019

wax tablet that I melted in the hot wax pot as a dedication to the ancestors (see fig. 1). One line of the inscription reads, "Gateway to ancestral families" and it is from this line I position my body as a gateway to my ancestors and my family. With the melting of the ancestral tablet, I open a gateway to my ancestors using the melted wax to cast my arms from two-part moulds. Twelfth-century Chinese scholar, Zhu Xi (or Chu Hsi), describes this relationship between the living and their ancestors as qi (qtd in Wu 19). Qi can be found in all things in the world, both with form and without form, the descendants and their ancestors (19). These wax arms gain sacredness as they follow the route of transformation into bronze symbolizing the temporality of the body and the continuity of ancestral bodies of knowledge. As a descendant of the Hakkas, the caring of family and the ancestors play a central part of my life and cultural identity. It is this same level of care that I bring into the making of my bronze work constructing a gating system to ensure the proper flow of



Fig. 31. *Sacred Bodies*, bronze, thermoplastic, cloth, fruits and snacks, 2020

molten bronze and laboriously create a ceramic shell that can withstand the weight of the molten bronze. My art practice becomes my *fengshui* to make sure that the ancestors are happy with my work. The artist Zhang Huan highlights this deep connection to the ancestors in his work *Peace*<sup>10</sup>. In the work he inscribes the names of eight generations of his ancestors from his family village in China on a traditional Chinese bell. With this bell, he uses a gilded bronze cast of his entire body as a clapper to ring the bell. As the sound reverberates, Zhang Huan is reunited with his ancestors. The ancestors and Zhang Huan talk to one another.

*Sacred Bodies* was one of the few works I was able to take home in Toronto before the closure of the studios at OCAD University due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At home, I worked on the installation (fig. 31) of my bronze arms interacting with the 3D prints of my family photographs. I also offered fruits and snacks as I welcomed my ancestors into my home. Now my ancestors live with me in Toronto as I carry their memory in my work.



Fig. 32. *Fragmented Thoughts*, bronze, 2020



Fig. 33. *Fragmented Thoughts (detail)*, bronze, 2020



Fig. 34. *Ceremonial Vessel (first configuration)*, bronze, preserved prunes, 2020



Fig. 35. *Ceremonial Vessel (second configuration)*, bronze, 2020

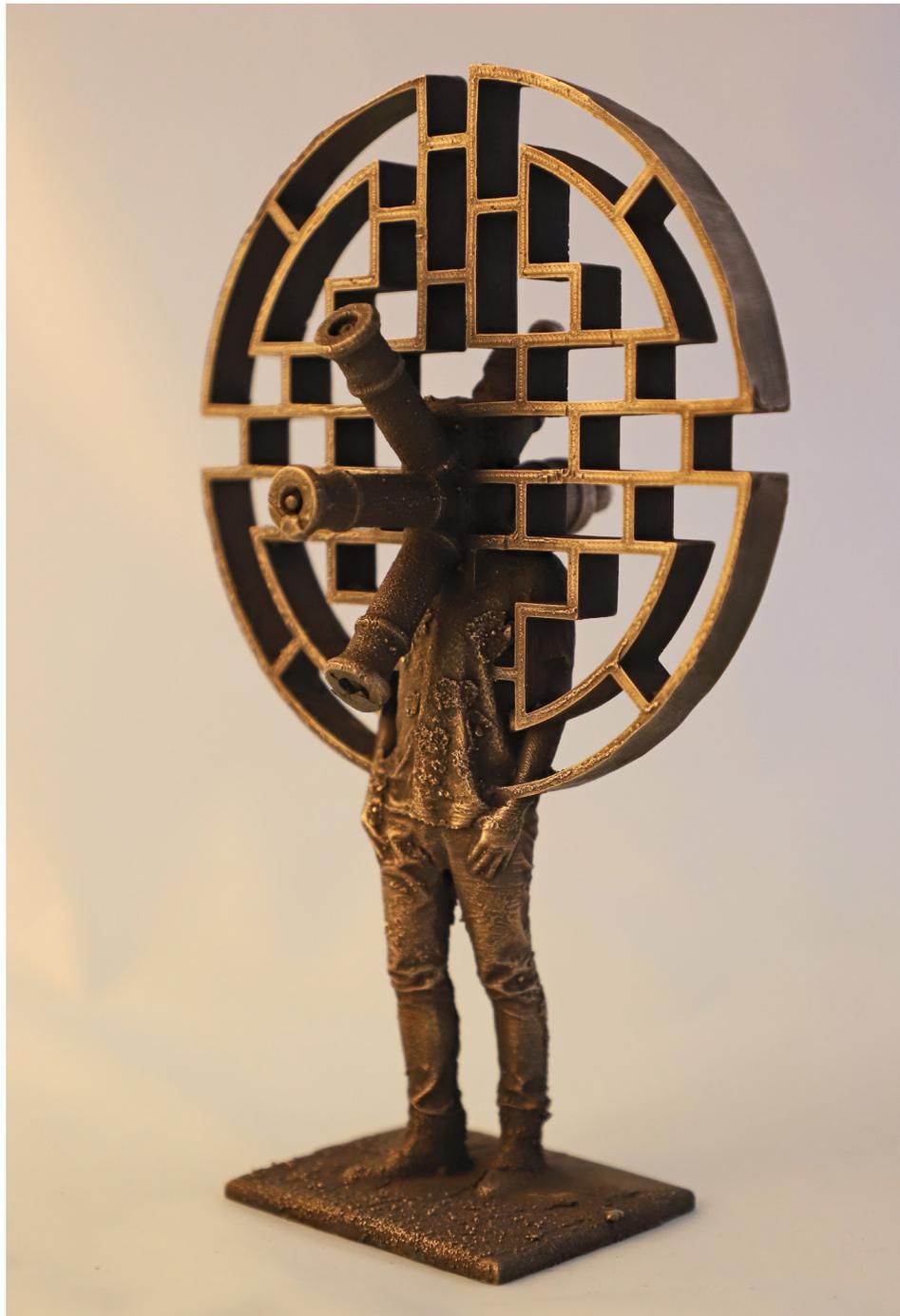


Fig. 36. *Cannon*, bronze, 2020



Fig. 37. *Guardians*, bronze, 2020



Fig. 38. *Masquerader (front)*, bronze, 2020



Fig. 39. *Masquerader (back)*, bronze, 2020

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **CONCLUSION: ARRIVING HOME**

*Melting Pot: Casting and Recasting of a Caribbean Chinese Body* is a celebration of my family, ancestors and their stories. Being away from home, considering absences, I have gained a better sense of myself and the importance of home. I am reminded of the narrative of migration that began with my ancestors in China, my family in Trinidad and now my own body in Toronto. My written thesis and acts of art honor the roots of my ancestors who have travelled along. In the context of making my work, home is not easily defined when considering the history of the migration of my family. As part of the Caribbean diaspora, movement on land has a profound meaning as my body moves across each space I encounter. I had mentioned that my body feels at home when I walk on the sand that meets the ocean. Walking makes a deep connection to the land and the relationship between the sand and my body. Sand allows my body to become the carrier of my stories, where my words and making contribute meaning. The sand calls me home. As I walk, I am actively reconfiguring my own body and the future work I make. My art practice allows me to take authorship of my work in centering ancestral and familial knowledge by working with bronze, resin and wax I honor their memory.

Within a theoretical and material framework, I have created a body of work that informs my sense of being creolized by transforming the narrative of displacement into a site of production and introducing the multiple ways of being Caribbean and Chinese. With material experimentation, I articulate this multiplicity through the translation of my body into different material realities. Over this process and coming to terms that my identity will always be in process, changing and problematizing attachments of homeland, origins and cultural fixity. More importantly, creolization allowed me to be empowered to

overcome my uncertainty of being Caribbean and Chinese. This thesis became a creative syncretism to express my hyphenated identity, one that does not privilege one identity over the other. With this work, I am honoring my unique position of being from the Caribbean with two different perspectives of being Chinese within my family, within my history and my upbringing. Taking a line from Camille Isaacs who was on my thesis committee, "Oftentimes those in the diaspora face gaps in their history when homelands of origin are not remembered, or connections are lost." Doing my master's degree at OCAD reminded me how much I appreciate being Caribbean Chinese and coming to terms with its complexity and multiple layers of identity. The stories my family share with me and the memories of many home-cooked meals all feed my artistic expression and have my ancestors take part in my work.

As the travel bans, social isolation and uncertainty become a part of daily life under Covid-19, my research provided me with the methods to thrive. What changed is that instead of wax at the studio, I am at home making a pot of Trini style stew chicken with plenty of green seasoning from home or ham choy. It seems being in Toronto has made me appreciate both my Trinidadian and Hakka heritage through food. As a form of reaffirmation, in making Toronto feel like home, with the help of *The Hakka Cookbook* by Linda Lau Anusasananan and *Foodie Nation*<sup>11</sup>, I cook my home foods no matter where I am. It is with this knowledge of food that I carry my stories of my ancestral home, my home in Trinidad and now my home in Toronto.

## NOTES

1 Kairi is the name given to Trinidad by the local Amerindian inhabitants – the Lokono, Nepoyo, Taino, Yao, Shebao and the Carinepagoto before Christopher Columbus claimed the island for Spain.

2 “The first ten days of Muharram (*al-muharram*) in the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar, Shi’i Muslims...commemorate the martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson, the *imam* Husayn...in the seventh century on the plains of Karbala (Iraq)” (Korom 1). *Hosay* an adaptation of *al-muharram* came to Trinidad by indentured East Indians who came to work in the plantation starting in 1845 (6).

3 Homi Bhabha’s concept of “third space” is seen as an in-between space where roots and routes intersect unequally from their original cultures which cannot return to its purest states.

4 *My Mother’s Village* is a published online article on Medium recounting my last visit to my mother village in 2015. <https://medium.com/@jlckcreative/red-gate-residency-part-2-cdf7a1ce977e>

5 [www.thingiverse.com](http://www.thingiverse.com)

6 [www.janineantoni.net/eureka](http://www.janineantoni.net/eureka)

7 In FDM, an object is built by selectively depositing melted material in a pre-determined path layer-by-layer. The materials used are thermoplastic polymers and come in a filament form. FDM is the most common form of 3D printing available to the general public.

8 The explanation was provided by geologist James Derry about the rock formation on Blanchisseuse beach (see fig.16).

9 *Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin: How do you Carry the Land?, p. 15.* Fused Deposition Modelling is an additive manufacturing process that belongs to the material extrusion family.

10 [www.zhanghuan.com/worken/info\\_65.aspx?itemid=996&parent&lcid=152](http://www.zhanghuan.com/worken/info_65.aspx?itemid=996&parent&lcid=152)

11 [www.foodienationtt.com/](http://www.foodienationtt.com/)

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## APPENDIX A

# STEPS FOR LOST WAX CASTING BRONZE IN CERAMIC SHELL

### 1. Creating a Wax positive

- Positive form/ sculpture
- Mould original: using rubber or plaster
- Pour wax into mold : - variable temperatures
  - Variable material
  - Variable sizes
- wax original
- finished wax chased and smoothed

### 2. Preparing to de-wax

- Spruing /gating : direct wax to wax : hot knives
- Application of ceramic shell, varying coarseness 8- 10 steps(dips)
- Chip cup and drill release holes
- De-waxing: in burn out kiln (individually by heat gun or in boiling water)

### 3. Prepare to pour Metal

- Patch and repair ceramic shell
- Metal pouring

### 4. Preparing and working the metal till finished

- Devesting - chip and sandblast cooled metal work
- Cut of bars
- rough metal chase
- Fine metal chasing

### 5. Prepare for patina; cleansing sandblast

## APPENDIX B

# ACCOMPANYING DIGITAL MATERIAL

### 01. Ancestral Tablet Offering

The melting of a wax cast of an ancestral tablet in a hot wax cauldron at OCADU foundry, 19 Nov 2019.

01\_Ancestral\_Tablet\_Offering.MOV

### 02. Creating a Digital Model

Working on my first digital model in Fusion 360 of using full-body scans with the Foo Dogs, 2 Mar 2019.

02\_Creating\_Digital\_Model.MOV

### 03. 3D Printing Digital Model

Utilizing the Lolzbots Taz 6 3D printers to create my 3D models printed with support at the Marker's Lab, 8 Mar 2019.

03\_3D Printing\_Digital\_Model.MOV

### 04. First Resin Cast

Revealing the first resin cast of the apothecary bottle in a two-part mould, 2 Jul 2019.

04\_First\_Resin\_Cast.MOV

### 05. The Making of Sacred Bodies

Showing the final wax casts of both arms with embedded inscriptions before it is gated and dipped in a slurry to create the ceramic Shell, 15 Nov 2019.

05\_Making\_Sacred\_Bodies.MOV

### 06. The Making of Sacred Bodies

Showing the final wax casts of both arms with embedded inscriptions before it is gated and dipped in a slurry, 15 Nov 2019.

05\_Making\_Sacred\_Bodies.MOV

APPENDIX B

**ACCOMPANYING DIGITAL MATERIAL**

**07. Applying Patina to Bronze**

Applying a cold patina (antique brown) on one of my  
bronze pieces in the foundry, 9 Dec 2019.

07\_Applying\_Patina\_To\_Bronze.MOV

**08. Polishing Patina on Bronze**

Working on cleaning my bronze work with a fine metal pad, 12 Mar 2020

08\_Polishing\_Patina\_On\_Bronze.MOV

**09. Pouring of Molten Bronze**

The foundry technicians at OCADU were preparing to pour molten bronze  
into the ceramic shells resting in a sand bed.

09\_Pouring\_Molten\_Bronze.MOV