

VOL:1, ISSUE II,  
MONTH - FEBRUARY

*Into the*

*Shoes*

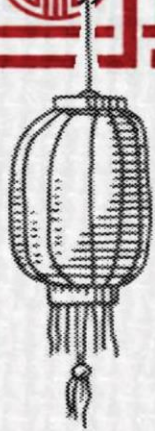
*of a*

*Chinaman*

中国人



自壽功福榮財德喜愛美



# CHC School Journal

in collaboration with  
**THE HERITAGE SCHOOL**

*presents*

## "Into the Shoes of a Chinaman"

### Content

Shreyansh Das [ VII A ] \* Aarohi Sur [ VII A ] \* Prapti Basu [ VII A ]

Enakshi Chanda [ VII B ] \* Kabir Mukherjee [ VII F ]

Rajeshwari Roy [ VII F ] \* Krisha Bidawatka [ VIII C ]

Abheri Ghosh [ VIII C ] \* Biyas Dutta [ VIII C ]

Homrika Jaiswal [ VII I ] \* Varshika Deb Ray [ IX I ]

Aarushi Chakravorty [ IX I ] \* Vaibhav Venkataramanan [ XI H ]

### Art & Design

Shreyansh Das [ VII A ] & Anirbed Das [ VII B ]

### Cover Design

Hridika Deb [ X F ]

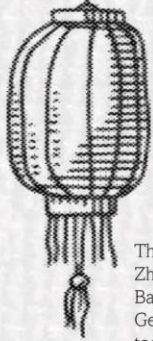
### Mentors

Sulagna Purakayastha & Ira Bhattacharya



# The Chinese in Kolkata

—from the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the present times



## The Beginnings

The first recorded presence of a Chinese person in Calcutta is that of Acchi or Atchew (Yang Da Zhao) in 1778, believed to be a sailor on a Chinese merchant ship that was caught in a storm in the Bay of Bengal, and whose ship and crew took shelter in Calcutta harbour. The then Governor General of British India, Warren Hastings, gave Acchi a grant of land (of about 400 acres in what is today Achipur) to develop a sugar plantation, sugar mill, and piggery, whereby pork and lard could be supplied to the English residents. Hastings allowed Acchi to import indentured labour from China. But following Atchew's sudden death in 1783, the sugar mill closed down and the Chinese workers shifted to Calcutta.

## The Nineteenth Century

Thereafter, more of the Chinese continued to arrive in India throughout the 19th century. They settled mainly in the Bowbazar [largely immigrants from Canton] and Tangra [largely immigrants from Hakka] areas of Calcutta. They had a general tendency to specialise in carpentry and shipbuilding, and later in the tannery and shoe-making businesses as well. This marks the beginning of Calcutta's Chinese settlement.

These early residents were termed "sojourners" as they often went back home to marry—they would use a steamer service running between Calcutta and Canton (Guangzhou) and/or Hongkong – and also remit their earnings to their families in China. This practice was common even during the Qing Dynasty and during the Republic of China period (1911-1949).

## The Twentieth Century to the present times

When Southeast Asia was occupied by Japan in late 1930s, it resulted in the migration of ethnic Chinese as refugees from Malaya to British India. After World War II, there could have been almost 15,000–20,000 ethnic Chinese who had arrived from different areas of Southeast Asia and China. These Chinese were engaged in various enterprises, including carpentry and dentistry. In addition to the popular Chinese food, they also brought in the hand-pulled rickshaws.

According to the India Census of 1951 and 1961, the population of ethnic Chinese people peaked at 9,215 and 14,607 respectively, though community members speak of Calcutta alone having a population of about 30,000 Chinese people. The community was well settled, but after the border war of 1962 between India and China, and the difficulties they faced in India because of the tension between the two countries, large numbers emigrated abroad and their population in India dwindled.

However, within the heart of Kolkata, the music and rhythm of China remains vibrant and continues to be integral to the incredibly cosmopolitan spirit of this city.

The Indian Chinese community in Kolkata believes Atchew, or Yang Da Zhao, to be the first of them to land on these shores. Historians, however, think that Chinese migrants were already living around Kolkata by the time Atchew arrived. It does not matter. The ashes of old offerings and incense still lie in the curve of the red tomb, where Atchew is venerated as the first ancestor. "In Chinese culture, we have ancestor worship," said Dominic Lee, who owns Pou Chong Food Products in Kolkata's Tiretti Bazar area. "It is part of Confucian culture. When someone passes away, he turns into a spirit, and you seek his affection and blessings. Over the course of time, he is elevated almost to a godly figure."

May the spirit of Atchew live on and may the heart of Kolkata always beat to the music and rhythm of many cultures.



# Into the Shoes of a Chinaman



## Grave Talks

In Chinese culture, it is a tradition to be respectful and loving towards elders and accompany them so long as they live in this world. On the day of passing, the family members put up a white banner, and send the body for burial.

If the elder lived beyond 80, the family celebrates the long life that he or she had lived. The casket is unearthed after five years of burial, and the dead are asked formally to wake up. The bones would then be collected, and either left untouched or ground to ashes, and the remains finally left to rest in new graves.

Women in the family often wear mourning flowers in their hair. The colour depends on their relation to the loved one:

- \* White is for the wife, daughter, daughter-in-law.
- \* Green is for the grandchildren.
- \* Blue is for the great-grandchildren.
- \* Red is for the great-great-grandchildren.

A mild winter breeze swept through the air that morning. Children ran about the dusty bylanes of Achipur, a hamlet on the banks of the Hooghly near Budge Budge, happily playing, oblivious to the fact that on that dim winter day, the first Chinaman in Bengal, Yang Da Zhao [also spelled as Yang Tai Chow] or Atchew was laid to rest near the Chinese Temple, along the way that led to the river.

When we visited the Toong On Cemetery on 64, Matheswartala Road, Kolkata we saw many graves. There was provision to keep flowers and treasured articles; there was also a compartment to burn spirit paper and incense sticks. Although faded with time, the inscriptions and murals reminded us of the former glory of Chinatown.

As we were walking inside the cemetery, reading the gravestones, we could suddenly smell some incense. Smoke surrounded us. The vapour fused to make a face-like structure, and the eyes started to glow red. Its mouth began to open with a creak.

Frightened, we clutched each other and gasped for breath. As the cloud of smoke eventually faded, the figure of an elderly man emerged before us. With small, glistening eyes and a warm smile, he greeted us.

"Our Chinatown needs to be preserved!" he murmured ruefully. "You, my children, are the future of Kolkata. You must ensure the history of the Chinese in Kolkata never fades.

He said to us, "I will take you around Chinatown, and help you learn about it." We were too scared to speak, and simply followed him, almost shrouded in mystic smoke. He wafted through the gates of the Toong On Cemetery and walked down the streets to an old ally beside the Chinese Kali Temple. Surrounded by smoke and dust, we came to an old house, plastered in blinding red lanterns and charms, wishing us luck for the new year.

"My friend Chum Yang Chong will do the rest," whispered the man, fading into inexistence, his words lingering in the air." And in this fashion came about our walking tour, and we found ourselves into the shoes of the Chinaman.





## RED: The colour of Prosperity



### The importance of RED in Chinese tradition:

#### Myth 1:

The founder and first emperor of the Han Dynasty [202-195 BC] are said to have been the "son of Emperor Red". Red symbolises both authority as well as privilege.

#### Myth 2:

Once upon a time, around the Lunar New Year, a mythical beast called Nián Shòu came and devoured cows and humans. Luckily the younger one was sensitive to loud noises and was afraid of the colour red. Therefore, it has become a New Year's tradition to light firecrackers, hang red lanterns and red scrolls on windows and doors, as well as perform a Chinese lion dance.

When we visited Tangra we saw puppies sleeping beneath a wooden shelter. It struck us that even the colour of that shelter was red.





## Platters of Porcelain



### Sauce Talk

The authentic Chinese food is very bland because preserving the food's original flavor is their goal and hence, they often add little or no salt, or sugar to their dishes. That is why sauces have played a very important role in Chinese cuisine since the 1st Millennium BC by maximizing flavours, adding succulence, and improving the mouth feel of a dish.

Soy sauce is one of the most used sauces in Chinese cuisine and is used in marinades and dips. Light soy sauce is salty while Dark soy sauce has a rich flavor. Dishes like Tofu Marinade are made with soy sauce. Hoisin sauce is a thick, dark brown sauce known for its pungent, slightly sweet flavor with just a bit of heat. It is used to marinate meat and as a dip. Spare ribs with Hoisin sauce is a very common dish.

Indispensable in Chinese cooking, rice wine is used as a tenderizer in marinades, to add flavor to sauces. Rice wine forms an acidic ingredient in Kung Pao Chicken. In China, this jam-like sauce with a sweet and sour flavour is also used in cooking. Spicy plum chicken thighs constitute a delicious dish made with this sauce. Made from oyster extract and spices, it is used to enhance existing flavors and add a darker colour to dishes. Gai Lan is made with this sauce. Oyster can be replaced with mushrooms to create a vegetarian version. Chili bean sauce is thick and spicy. Made with chilis, fermented soybeans and fermented broad beans and a variety of seasonings, it is used in preparing Chao Xia.



### Red: The Colour of Sauce

Now we may think, the food that we eat which we term as Chinese is the same sort of food Chinese people eat in China; however, it's actually quite different! We as Indians, have over the years, come to love Chinese food, or at least what we interpret as Chinese food. For instance, I'm sure we all love noodles, that is, the noodles that come with the fried, spicy flavours Indians love- with a Chinese twist, with ingredients like soy sauce, vinegar, and Schezwan sauce. There is also the Manchurian style of cooking, which uses meat and vegetables fried in a spicy soy sauce with the Indian's touch of flavouring using garlic, ginger and green chillies. These are used, not as seasoning, but as primary ingredients.

But how did we end up with our own versions of Chinese food and where did we learn about it? A very popular Indo-Chinese dish most of us have eaten is Hakka noodles. Now where did we actually get to know about Hakka noodles? The history of Hakka noodles actually originates in India. It is said that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a Chinese community known as Hakka settled down in the presidencies of Calcutta and Bombay. They brought with them their food and culture. Therefore, after eating their food, Indians thought of creating their own version of it using more spices and stronger, more pungent-tasting ingredients. It was from this meeting of cultures that Hakka noodles came about. In India, the Hakka Chinese mainly settled in Tangra, Calcutta which has now come to be known as the Chinatown of India.

The Chinese originally invented noodles, and their original noodles are, as stated before, quite different. The Chinese have various types of noodles, for example, Ramen, Udon, Rice, Soba, Glass, Somen, Vermicelli and many more. Whereas our noodles are made up of unleavened dough using rice and wheat flour, vegetables, oil, soy sauce, vinegar and spices, the Chinese noodles are made with chicken, egg, garlic, sesame, tare (the rich sauce flavouring the soup), broth, pork, fish and sometimes even seaweed.

In conclusion both Indo-Chinese and original Chinese cuisines are tasty and unique in their own ways.



# The Zodiacs

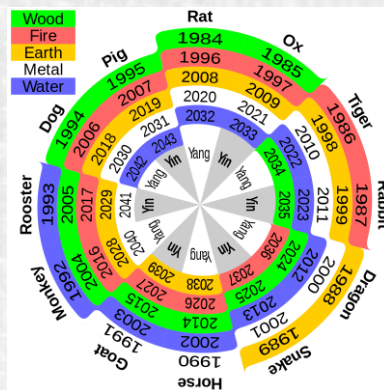
One always wonders why every traditional Chinese calendar has a specific animal assigned to it, and why the year 2023 marks the year of the Rabbit. How do we know which animal is assigned for which year? What is the range of animals? Is there a method to the type of animals represented in the calendar?

Of all the myths revolving around the Zodiac Animals, "The Great Race" is the one that is most widely known in popular culture.

Jade Emperor ruled the heavens (Yü Di) and needed a way to measure time. He organised a race where animals would compete. The first twelve animals that were able to make it across the river would earn a spot in the zodiac calendar, in the order in which they had arrived. The Rat woke up early for the race but right before he crossed the river, he met the Horse, the Tiger and the Ox. He was not particularly fond of water and was one of the worst swimmers. He hoped to cross the river on the back of a bigger animal. The Horse and the Tiger refused, but the kind-hearted Ox let him ride him, so he jumped onto its horns. Just as they were reaching the end, the **Rat** jumped off the horns of the Ox and secured the first place. The **Ox** came second, followed closely by the **Tiger**. The **Rabbit** jumped across stones and wooden planks and with loud thumps accompanying his arrival, he secured the Fourth position. The fifth to reach was the **Dragon** who could have easily flown across, but decided to make several stops along the way. He had made rain to help all the people and creatures on Earth and also given a puff of breath to save the Rabbit who had almost slipped and fallen off a log of wood. Emperor Jade was certainly pleased with the Dragon!

The Horse came in galloping and would have made it to the sixth position if not for the Snake. For the **Snake** suddenly slithered out of its hiding, giving the **Horse** a scare and beating it at the race. The great big beast quickly recovered itself and made it as the seventh animal. The Goat, Monkey and Rooster were on top of a raft, using teamwork to make it across the river. The Monkey and Goat had tugged at the weeds and foliage to clear the way while the Rooster had expertly navigated the raft to the shore. The three animals unanimously agreed for the **Goat** to come eighth, followed by the **Monkey** and **Rooster**. Surprisingly, the eleventh animal to arrive was the **Dog**, who was easily the best swimmer of the lot. However, he could not resist the temptation to play and frolic a little longer in the water. Just when Emperor Jade wanted to wrap things up and call it a day a squeal and oink signalled the arrival of the **Pig**. It had stopped for a feast along the way and followed it up with a siesta. The twelfth and last position was promptly given to the 'lazy little Pig'.

Though infinitely hard to believe, the Cat and Rat were fast friends until the Great Race. When they began the race, the Rat woke the Cat up early. Both shared a dislike for water and swimming; being extremely smart, both agreed that they would hitch a ride on the Ox's back. However, in its eagerness to win the race, the Rat pushed the Cat off the Ox's back, causing it to drown and get disqualified from the race. Ever since then the Cat has hated the Rat with a passion and must chase it. Each year is associated with one of the twelve animals in that exact order, and the cycle repeats itself every sixty years and not twelve. Why not twelve? Read more to find out: <https://ytlui0.github.io/ChineseCalendar/sexagenary.html>





# Of Mandarins and Lettuce

The scarlet Chinese lanterns, engraved with aureate Mandarin inscriptions, swayed in the breeze above our heads as Chum Yang Chong led us through the crowded streets of Chinatown. New Year paintings of Tsai Shen, the God of Wealth hung on every door and wall as many families waited for the deity to ascend from heaven and bless them. Tomorrow the people will burn these pictures and bid the God farewell. Numerous strands of fairy lights twinkled overhead as people sat, preparing dumplings.

"Do you know," Chum Yang Chong spoke, "tonight everyone will be out in the streets with their friends and family? They will wear new clothes bought at the Spring Festival or gifted to them by their elders." "But why is everyone wearing red or gold?" I asked Chum Yang Chong. "Well, that's because red is considered to be the luckiest color. It represents strength and prosperity. Gold symbolizes wealth. People wear these colors to attract good luck in the new year," he explained. A colossal red, green and yellow tiled flat arch loomed into our sight. The sound of drums echoed through the streets as we approached the overhead arc. We steered our way through the crowd, muttering a thousand "Excuse me's" as we maneuvered our way to a clearing, where the celebrations were about to take place.

We had the illusion of a very tall pinkish red lion, until we realized it was a person standing on someone's shoulder, wearing the costume. "What's happening?" we asked the old man, but it needed no further explanation. The pinkish-red lion, hungry for the lettuce, tried to eat it. But the lettuce was hanging high from the second floor window. He jumped but every time the lettuce was pulled back. However, the lion did not give up and kept on trying. Finally he succeeded. The crowd clapped and jumped with glee while the boys who donned the lion mantle doffed their caps and acknowledged the lion. They took out the red packet from the lettuce and handed it over to the lion. As the lion-feeding ritual ended, the people cleared the way for the main attraction of the night: The Lion Dance.

"In Chinese culture, the lion represents power, wisdom, and superiority. People perform lion dances at festivals to bring good fortune and chase away evil spirits. It is one of the most important traditions at New Year celebrations. It is performed to bring prosperity and good luck in the new year. The lion dance is also a way to create a festive atmosphere and bring happiness," Chum Yang Chong informed us. As he spoke, a group of people started playing gongs and cymbals and two lions trotted into the clearing. It took us a minute to realize that it was actually two people dressed up in an elaborate costume. One person held the head of the lion and the front limbs while the other person formed the body of the lion. The lion had a humongous head, rather like a dragon with large, fierce eyes as big as ostrich eggs, and a great mouth. Bright orange fur covered its entire body. The dancers mimicked the lions' movements with the music, and it was mesmerizing to watch. The lions hopped along, and one of them picked up a lettuce with its mouth, the other soon following its lead. They pretended to chew on it for some time, and then threw it into the air gracefully, scattering it over the crowds and us. We tried to get them off ourselves, but the old man said "Don't. The lettuce brings great fortune to the one it falls on. Oh, and try to catch the mandarins. They bring good luck." Confused, we looked back at the dragons to see them juggling mandarins. In a split second, two were thrown into the air. The crowd leaped up to catch them, and later shook hands with the fortunate people who caught them. "When the lion eats the lettuce and spits it out at the audience, it symbolizes blessing them with wealth and prosperity in the new year. In Chinese and Cantonese, a word for leafy greens sounds a lot like a word for becoming wealthy, that is why lettuce is considered lucky. Mandarin resembles gold and wealth. When the lion throws the Mandarin, whoever catches it is considered to be the fortunate one and will be blessed with wealth in the new year," explained Chum Yang Chong. "Oh! Have you ever caught a mandarin?" I asked, eyes still on the mesmerizing lions. "Chum Yang Chong?" I asked again, turning to look at him but instead of seeing his smiling face, I saw an elderly lady looking at me confusedly; she must have thought I was crazy. I looked around frantically trying to find him but in vain. Chum Yang Chong had disappeared into the crowd.

## Tangra New Year Festival

The grounds of the Peimay School were decorated with multicolour lights and there was also a huge stage with chairs all around it; the scene was breathtaking. Food stalls offered Fish Sui Mei, fried Mekopan, Chicken Hakka, Honeycomb Cookies, Taro pakora, Chicken Hakka Sau Mai, Cheese Roll, Egg Tart, and other Chinese delicacies. Game stalls offered exciting possibilities of winning prizes. Music added to the charm of the late evening. We heard people speaking in Mandarin to one another. They were all beautifully dressed- the men in suits, women in elegant dresses and children in pretty clothes. Some among them wore carnival costumes. In the end we witnessed the highlight of the celebrations, the exceptional Dragon Dance.



The Nam Soon Church on 17, Damzen Lane  
 For he goes there to play Mah-jong  
 Or the Sun Yat Sen Street, Tiretti Bazaar,  
 In the midst of ports, steamers and woks,  
 Perched on a stool enjoying stuffed buns and soup.  
 If you are looking for him at lunch time you  
 might want to check Eau Chew on  
 12, Ganesh Chandra Avenue, for the family that  
 runs this authentic Chinese restaurant is close  
 to his heart.

Late afternoons, Chum Yang Chong likes to chat  
 with Clayton Chen and the other members of Shining Stars  
 whose music and Dragon Dance took  
 our breath away!

Do you get the impression that our Chinaman  
 buys his vegetables from JustShop24.com  
 Or Reliance Fresh?

No, not at all.

In front of Kim Ling  
 always sleeps a dog  
 and opposite the sleeping dog  
 sits in the shade of the sun O-JU  
 with his generous spread of  
 everything our Chinaman might desire  
 pak choi, snow peas,  
 yard-long beans,  
 water spinach and more.

Do you want to meet him at his house?

Go to Tangra

It's the third lane left and then  
 the second bylane right  
 You will see a house with a  
 Red window and a red door.

Knock eight times,  
 For 8 is the luckiest number.

After the Dragon dance, we decided to  
 go and eat something. We remembered  
 Chum Yang Chong telling us that he  
 would be late, and we could find him at  
 the entrance just below the huge  
 carnival poster. He said he was going to  
 meet a friend after a long time. Sure  
 enough, when we went there, we saw  
 him engrossed in a conversation with  
 his friend. We thought we should leave  
 the two alone.

Chum Yang Chong had been with us for  
 nearly a week. Not only did he give us  
 his precious time, but also a rare insight  
 into the Chinese community in Kolkata.  
 He is indeed a busy man, dividing his  
 time between the two Chinatowns,  
 supervising all the temples, churches  
 and burial grounds; making sure that the  
 porcelain sparkles and the red shines.  
 He is everywhere, engaging in small or  
 important talk, making sure his  
 community is together and happy.  
 Would you like to meet him now that  
 you have travelled in the shoes of a  
 Chinaman? And where would you look  
 for him? Well, try one of these places.



## Yang Da Zhao, Achipur, Calcutta and Kolkata



Having completed our research and designed the journal, we reflected on our new experience and wondered what makes the Chinese community in Kolkata so endearing. What is it that keeps the soul happy? Certainly it's not just the dim sum alone.

We found an answer to our question, though not the only one, when we visited Tangra on 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2023.

To say that India is a secular country would be an understatement when one stumbles upon the Kali Temple in Tangra. Not only is the temple identified as 'Chinese Kali Mandir' but the Chinese community here start their new year celebrations by offering a midnight puja here. The dragon dance troupes may only begin their performance once they have paid their respects to the goddess and received a cabbage or an orange as blessing.

While we huddled close together peeping over the heads of the crowd so that we could catch a glimpse of the puja, our eyes strayed to a poster hanging from a nondescript wall opposite to the mandir. It was a couple of months old, inviting the people of Chinatown to the Sarbojonin Kali Puja that is celebrated across Bengal in autumn. But what is it about the Kali Puja that stands out? The inaugural ceremony consists of a dragon dance performance by a Lion dance troupe and the chief guest-of-honour is the Consul General of China.

Not only does the Chinese Kali accept offerings of bok choy and napa cabbage, but the prasad offered to the devotees consist of chop suey and noodles. Sticky rice happens to be a particular favourite of the cannibal demon goddess who will usually not accept anything less than a goat as sacrifice.

**We express our sincere gratitude and would like to say a big "Thank you" to:**

Calcutta Heritage Collective for making the above experience possible. We enjoyed discovering a part of our own city. But for this task at hand, namely, preparing the journal, we would perhaps have never known the rich diversity of Kolkata, and the people who make this city so charming and endearing.

Our gratitude also to **Yang Da Zhao** and his sugar mill for that is equally the source and inspiration of most of this story.

Above all, we would like to thank the **Chinese community in Kolkata**. You celebrate not alone but with the whole city; you feel as much at home praying to Kali, as your own deities, and you give this city its singular character, not just with your cuisine but by sharing your rich culture with us. Thank you for inviting us so generously, and making us feel a part of you during the entire week of the Chinese New Year celebrations.

Printed and Published by Calcutta Heritage Collective. This publication is solely for educational purposes under CHC's initiative for heritage awareness.

A special thanks to CHC's school journal team - Rajiv Soni, Navpreet Arora, Nikita Kejriwal, Mukul Agarwal, Sangeeta Dudhoria

[Visit for Additional Information](#)

