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Report

Everyday lived spaces of the Chinese community in central Kolkata

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Abstract

One of the issues of 'cosmopolitanism' in recent times is on the 'cosmopolitan community', the 'mixed' identity and the city. The present study is concerned with the colonial city of Kolkata when various 'colonial' communities: the Anglo-Indians, the Parsees, the Chinese, the Jews and Armenians formed an integral part of the socio-cultural landscape of Central Kolkata. The focus of this paper is limited to the Cantonese Chinese community residing in Central Kolkata, analysing their location-specific histories; their neighbourhood geographies and how these geographies have changed over time. It also intends to conceptualise the pattern of their migration, formation of the diaspora and the urban space of the city with a specific focus on everyday lived space of the community in the city. The issue of multi culturism associated with the community has also been discussed. The research is based on qualitative approach using material drawn through participant observation and focus group discussion.

Key words: Cantonese, migration, neighbourhood, diaspora, multi culturism.

Introduction

There has been a surge of interest in the idea of cosmopolitanism in recent times. The concept has been used in two broad areas of research. One is linked to global political aspects of cosmopolitanism and engages with ideas of citizenship, human rights, universalism and global/ social justice. The other is linked to the 'cosmopolitan community' with the presence of

diverse communities within the contemporary city, the 'mixed' identity and the city. I have focussed on the latter within the colonial and not the contemporary city of Kolkata. Calcutta (now referred to as Kolkata) can be definitely classified as a 'diaspora city' as like most colonial cities, it grew through the migration of different groups of people. As a trading city, besides attracting communities from other parts of India (the Marwari, Punjabi, Gujarati, Tamil, Bihari, Oriya, etc) it also did so from outside the country (the Jews, Chinese, Armenian, Parsees, and Anglo-Indians). Berry (1986) said that a multicultural society encourages all groups to maintain and develop their group identities, develop other-group acceptance and tolerance, engage in inter group contact and sharing, and learn each other's language. It is a situation where in every group, including the dominant, accepts the differences in the cultures, meanings, and value systems of the other groups. These differences are welcomed as expressions of cultural diversity. All the communities mentioned above formed an important facet of Kolkata's multicultural fabric in both the colonial and the postcolonial times. They formed an integral part of the socio-cultural landscape of Central Kolkata (depicted in figure 2&3), where several cultures were sharing the same geographical area during the colonial period resulting in cultural fusion. The city is often mentioned as Calcutta since the work focuses on the urban history during the colonial period. In 2001 the official name of Calcutta was changed to Kolkata in keeping with the Bengali pronunciation of the city's name. This was part of a wider trend of renaming cities and also roads in India along regional lines to reflect 'local' or 'indigenous' history.

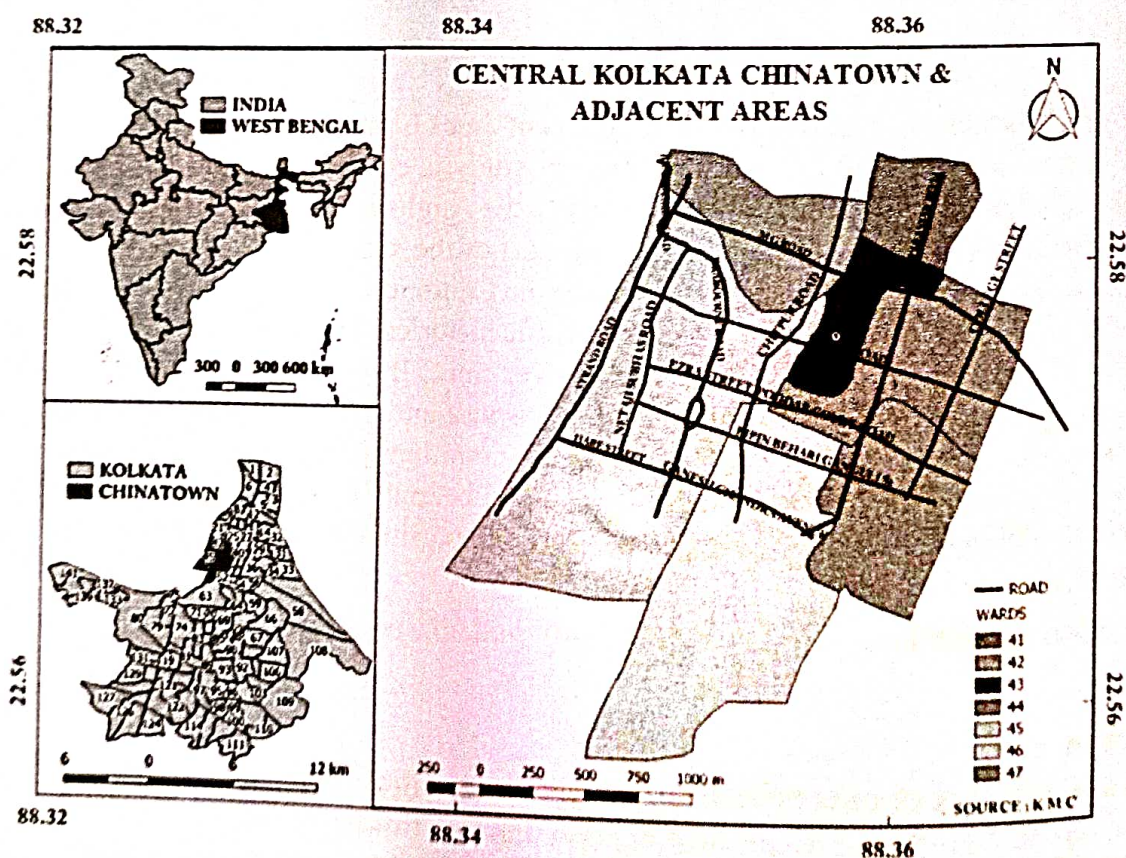


Fig 1: Central Kolkata Chinatown



Fig. 2: Partitioning of urban space

Extracted from Kalikatar Naksha (1884) and cited in Dasgupta (2012). Represented the latter's work.

Significance

Identities based on place remain very important in the present times of globalization. Territorial identities have by no means disappeared in the process, but equally they are no longer obviously supreme, and many have been refashioned. The Chinatown of Kolkata exemplifies the long-dominant territorially based construction of collective identity, an adopted territorial homeland which is now being refashioned in the global-local phenomenon. As a part of an ongoing research work, only the historical, socio-economic and cultural rubric has been emphasized in this paper.

Chinatowns of the world and India

'Traditional territorial identities are based on contiguity, homogeneity, and clearly (physically and socially) identifiable borders' (Scholte, 1996). Ethnic groups are highly territorial in organization: be it Chinatowns, Japanese towns, Italian towns, etc. Areas known as "Chinatown" exist throughout the world, including America, Europe, Africa, Australia and Asia. A Chinatown

may be conceived as Chinese living quarters in a particular section of a city or as an agglomeration of Chinese restaurants, grocery shops and other businesses, or as concentration of both Chinese people and businesses in one area. To some, it is a tourist attraction while others regard a Chinatown as an identity and a root of Chinese heritage in the host society. Some also regard Chinatown as a low-rent neighbourhood for poor and elderly people or a reception area for new immigrants who have problems assimilating into the host society (Lai, 1988:274). While discussing the evolution of the Canadian Chinatown, Lai mentioned the influence of immigration acts and regulations, the changing political and socio-economic conditions within Canada and China.

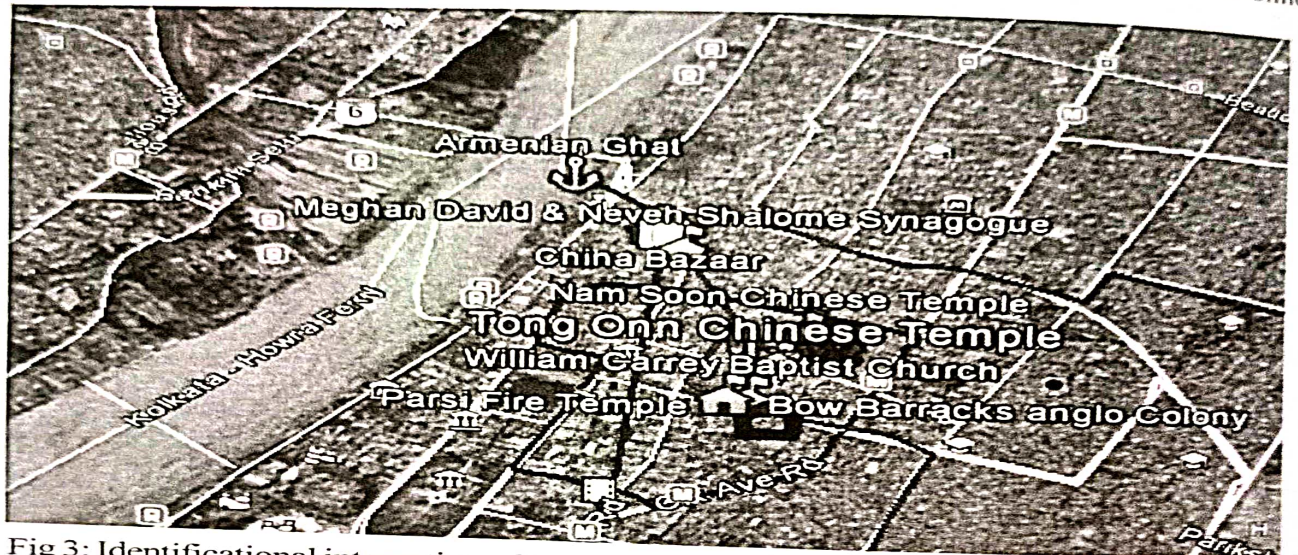


Fig 3: Identificational integration of the ethnic minority communities in Central Kolkata
(Extracted Imagery Date: 17 Nov, 2016; 22°34.2' N; 88°22.28' E.)

Institutions typical of Chinatowns, clan associations, temples and monasteries may be found in close juxtaposition to each other. Amsterdam Chinatown is the largest of its kind in the Netherlands with Chinese restaurants and shops offering different types of Chinese pastries and is also home to He Hua Temple, the largest Chinese Mahayana Buddhist monastery in Europe. This monastery is a tourist attraction and offers visitors a free tour at schedule times. One of the oldest Chinatowns in the world is the Bangkok Chinatown in Thailand. Many shops in this town were seen with large neon boards advertising their brand or products. These include articles for daily use, religious artefacts and some popular food items such as tea, dumplings, *bao* and *man tou*, *dim sum*, bean paste pastries, prosperity cake, *bakkwa*, peach *kueh* and *ang ku kueh*. I had been to this part in 2013 and I also saw some stalls offering

birds nest soup and sharks fin soup. In recent times the idea of Chinatown has been analysed within broad parameters of the discourse on globalisation and trans-nationalism (Yeoh, 2001) where it is seen as a place for consumption and as a cosmopolitan space in the city.

India happens to have two Chinatowns –one in Mumbai and the other in Kolkata. The one in Mumbai (in Mazagaon dock area) had Chinese community hailing from Canton of Southern China, mostly as merchants, traders and sailors; their population now dwindling in number. The city of Kolkata is a very unique and exclusive example of having two Chinatowns which differ significantly from typical Chinatowns elsewhere. The older Chinatown- the first in Calcutta, took shape in the vicinity of Tiretta Bazaar in Central Kolkata presently in ward number 44 under the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) as seen in Figure 1. It was located in the heart of colonial Calcutta -in the mid 19th century. Often known as Tiretta Bazaar Chinatown or '*Chinapara*', it is also referred to as the 'Calcutta Chinatown'. The newer Chinatown known as Tangra is located in the eastern part of the city where most Chinese in the city live today. It is presently in ward number 58 under the KMC. The latter neighbourhood began to take shape around 1910 (pre- First World War) when some Chinese leather makers (Oxfeld, 1993) and specifically the shoemakers –the Hakkas -decided to process leather for their business and moved out of central Kolkata. The Tangra area was then at the eastern margins (periphery) of the city beyond the municipal limits; the area was also called Dhapa (Oxfeld, 1993); a marshy area with very little permanent settlements around. This movement from the core to the periphery of the city in its early days led to the formation of the second ethnic enclave, predominantly a Hakka neighbourhood. This enclave is based on the occupational niches of earlier waves of migrants of this community. Today the area is a self contained urban enclave of the Hakkas as the tanneries do not depend on people from other communities(cited by Paul Chung in his interview clippings in Mukherjee and Gooptu, 2012) giving an insular image with its high walls and a more suburban location. Tangra has gradually taken over Tiretta Bazaar as the hub for Chinese food in the city since the 1980s.

Focus of the study

The main objective of this study is to explore the idea of neighbourhood as a semi-public, semi-private space; and how the space of this neighbourhood has retained the identity of the Chinese community and produced a unique cultural landscape. The research is on the evolution of the physical and social landscape of colonial Calcutta through its historical trajectory; conceptualising everyday space in the city, exploring how the Chinese communities are 'placed' in the context of Calcutta. The focus of this paper is limited to the Cantonese Chinese community residing in Central Kolkata, analysing their location-specific histories and geographies; their neighbourhood geographies and how these geographies have changed over time till the pre Indo-Sino War. It also intends conceptualising migration, diaspora and the urban space of the city with a specific focus on everyday lived space of the Cantonese in the city. The issues of multi-culturism and the idea of Calcutta as a 'diaspora city' have also been discussed.

Methods

A qualitative approach dominates the research, using material drawn through participant observation and focus group discussion. The secondary material was analyzed based on

community publications (particularly of the Indian Chinese Association), pamphlets and newspaper reports, and websites having relevant articles and blogs. To get a sense of everyday geographies and lived space- encompassing the daily rhythm of everyday life -for the Chinese living in central Kolkata, the focus was on the morning market near Tiretta Bazaar (the Chinese breakfast hub, and its vicinity). On Sundays it is still a gathering place for the Chinese. I saw some professional reporters taking snap shots. I understood that this was a common feature as no one was curious when their photos or of the area was being shot by outsiders. I visited the localities of the Sunyat Sen Street, Chattawala Gully, Lu Shun Sarani (renamed as New CIT Road and Peter Lane), Blackburn Lane and the Chittaranjan Avenue: all within 1 km range from Tiretta Bazaar. The study was done with tools such as a field note book, a semi structured questionnaire, a camera, a GPS and digital voice recorder (recording taken with the prior permission of the interviewees). Information was also extracted from the socio- economic institutions/associations: the *huiguans*, the club, the temple/church, the restaurants and the provisional stores where the community congregates. The Chinese community being predominantly patriarchal in structure and so the contacts I got were mostly men. The sample of interviewees purposively chosen was above 60 years old as the young has mostly migrated out from here leaving behind the aged who could not or did not move out. The interviews were conducted in 2015 mainly in public spaces through snowball sampling technique.

The old Chinatown

On migration and its socio cultural consequences:

Diasporic groups were an important part of all colonial cities and Calcutta was no exception: their attachment to particular areas of Calcutta. Since this study is limited to the overseas migration of the Chinese communities to Calcutta /Kolkata, the other diasporic groups have been intentionally omitted. Zhang and Sen (2013) gave an account of the overseas migration of the Chinese communities. The pattern of Chinese migration to South Asia and the experiences of this community were in many ways similar to those made earlier in Southeast Asia. In the 18th and 19th century, Chinese migration to various parts of Asia, was due to push factors such as population pressure, domestic turmoil (the devastating rebellions), and pull factors such as the formation of colonial commercial and labour networks, the expanding commercial exchanges, and the development of steam ships. The British colonizers in their trade with China used Calcutta as an important link. Commercial relations between Calcutta and Canton (now Guangzhou) grew rapidly after opium was introduced by the British as one of the main Indian exports to China. Chinese goods, such as tea and silk, were transported to Britain through Calcutta. Expanding commercial exchange between the Indian subcontinent and China after the Opium War in 1839–42, the subsequent opening of the “treaty ports” in China, the development of steam ships and the devastating rebellions within China during the second half of the 19th century led to an increased pace in Chinese migrant population in Calcutta and elsewhere in India. The 1901 Census recorded 1,640 Chinese in Calcutta. The movement of the Chinese overseas can be characterised both as voluntary (economic: formation of colonial commercial and labour networks) and involuntary (impelled by population pressures and domestic turmoil) in nature. Most of the early migrants originated from the southern coastal regions of China. They were both skilled and unskilled labourers, and initially it was a male-centred immigration.



Fig.4: The Chinapara: buildings of the Chinese with the unique red and green coloured walls



Fig. 5: Sea Ip Church: the most popular place of worship

Immigration is an intrinsically dynamic process. The Chinese migration to Eastern India near Kolkata (in Hooghly) can be traced to the late 18th Century (in 1778) when Yang Da Zhou or Tong Atchew, the first Chinese migrant (to South Asia), a tea trader, came with a group of Chinese workers and later established a sugar mill near Budge Budge, 33 km from Calcutta. A migration system, once started, has considerable momentum. This late 18th century flow was followed by a series of Cantonese carpenters migrating to Calcutta port for working under British Government during the mid 19th Century residing in the Tiretta Bazar area. Later on the Hakka tanners moved into the city followed by the Hubeian dentists and the Shanghaian dry cleaners in the early 19th century. These groups were mostly endogamous, had their own native-place associations (*huiquans*) and engaged in specific occupational specialties (Zhang and Sen, 2013). Literature study on cross-border migration across the world reveals that such migrations are mostly economically driven. When immigrants come to a place, their primary aim is to earn a living. So when they came to India (Calcutta), they picked up the easiest strategy for survival, i.e. sticking to their ancestral crafts like carpentry, leather making and dentistry in which they had mastery.

For the migrants, integration refers to a process of learning a new culture, an acquisition of rights, access to positions and statuses, a building of personal relations with members of the receiving society and a formation of feelings of belonging and identification towards the host society. Integration implies both the preservation of home culture and an active involvement with the host culture. The communities established various cultural and social institutions, created remittance and exchange networks to their ancestral homelands, and were 'affected by local cultural and political ostracism' (Zhang and Sen, 2013). The integration process is commonly divided into a number of spheres (Engbersen 2003) – economic, social, cultural, political and spatial. Heckmann (2005: 13-15) classified these into:

- (i) Structural integration – the acquisition of rights and status within the core institutions of the host society, particularly access to employment, housing, education, health services, and political and citizenship rights;
- (ii) Cultural integration (or acculturation) – the cognitive, behavioural and attitudinal change of immigrants and their descendants in conformity to the norms of the host society;
- (iii) Interactive integration – social intercourse, friendship, marriage and membership of various organisations;
- (iv) identificational integration – feelings of belonging, expressed in terms of allegiance to ethnic, regional, local and national identity.

This integration process is clearly exemplified in the forthcoming section.

Economic specializations in Old Chinatown and structural integration

Through generations, the Chinese have maintained their social distinction in the field of their businesses. Over time, they were able to find occupational niches within the South Asian societies. These niches became intrinsically linked to the four main sub-ethnic groups. In India, the Cantonese were identified as carpenters, the Hakka as shoemakers/ tannery workers, the Hubeinese as dentists and those from Shandong as silk traders. Even today in Kolkata, the Hakka are the tanners and shoemakers; the Hubeinese the dentists; the Cantonese the carpenters and restaurateurs; and the laundries are the stronghold of the Shanghai group, those from Shandong as silk traders. There is no trace of the presence of the Shandong silk

traders in Kolkata today; they seem to have not lived in India beyond one or two generations (Zhang and Sen, 2013).

The Chinese in the Old China Town were mostly Cantonese, with a few from other communities such as the Hakkas, Mongolians, Manchurians and Tibetans (mentioned by Paul Chung in his interview clippings in Mukherjee and Gooptu, 2012). He stated that the Cantonese were skilled people: carpenters and engineers while the Hakkas were the unskilled ones. Carpentry was one of the main occupations of the Cantonese: most of them learned their skills in China and were employed in Calcutta and other South Asian cities by companies and private individuals to work at shipyards, to undertake repair and maintenance work on their ships and in railway companies. With the reputation as hardworking, cordial, and highly skilled, they were highly sought after (received high remunerations, reportedly on par with American and European workers) both by the local Indians and the British living in Calcutta (Zhang and Sen, 2013 who in turn have referred to Zhang, 2011 and Liang, 2007). Initially these Cantonese were engaged in part-time work; but, after learning English and Indian languages (i.e., cultural integration), they were able to obtain subcontracts from large carpentry factories and other companies to do interior woodwork and make home and office furniture and became factory owners as well. In the 1950s, there were more than 300 Cantonese carpenters working on ships in the Hooghly dock in West Bengal and more than 20 Cantonese-owned carpentry factories in Calcutta. The Cantonese carpenters continued to be employed at the docks in South Asia even after the end of the colonial period.

Settlement

Colonial Calcutta exhibited a unique allocation of urban space between the rulers (the British) and the ruled (natives): the 'White Town' and the 'Black Town' respectively- indeed a racial discriminatory practice of the British. Literary evidences notably as those of Bose (1968), Chatterjee (2009) and Dasgupta (2012) on colonial Calcutta demonstrate the high degree of cohesion and interaction amongst the ethnic minority (migratory) communities settled here (fig.2 &3). Such collective identity secures a sense of place and communal solidarity. The idea of neighbourhood invoked a sense of living alongside one another as neighbours. It has important social and political significance in tracing the histories of the communities within and across cities. The neighbourhood represents the home for a community, as a lived space encompassing the daily rhythm of everyday life, and also as a space in and through which the community developed a sense of belongingness to the city (identificational integration).

The Chinatown presents an image of a space in the city which could be defined as Chinese. Such cognition is important as it creates an idea of dwelling in specific parts of the city; the characteristics having influenced upon by the urban development of the city; and the evolution traced to the immigration of the overseas Chinese. The credit for one of the earliest references of this *Chinapara* neighbourhood (fig 4) goes to C. Alabaster whose study appeared in the *Calcutta Review*, 1858. He gave a detailed account of the temples, the graveyards, the opium dens and the living quarters of the Chinese along with the economic specialisations of the various sub groups. This neighbourhood developed as a Chinatown in the 1930s and 1940s when there was a significant influx of migration from China bringing the families. Prior to this period it was mainly a community of men (thus gender specific demographics) with rudimentary habitat structures. With the migration of families, construction of more permanent structures gave the visual aspects of a Chinatown.

The Old Chinatown, a typical ethnic neighbourhood in the city of Kolkata is the creation of a territorially based construction of collective identity with the Anglo-Indians, the Parsees, the Jews and Armenians. The Old Chinatown became an adopted territorial homeland of the Cantonese. Pockets of Hakka population were also found here resulting in some inter-marriages (i.e., interactive integration); the Chinese being endogamous and traditionally rooted by nature. The terms 'multiculturalism' and 'cosmopolitanism' have often been used interchangeably (Bonnerjee 2010:34): 'multiculturalism' is often used to portray the social reality of the 'global' city, while 'cosmopolitanism', although being used in the context of globalisation, incorporates a wider connotation of engaging with different communities in the city. It is the increasing presence of the 'minoritarian cosmopolitans' that has been the focus of the studies on the multicultural city. The concept of 'cosmopolitanism' has been analyzed in the specific context of neighbourhood interactions that cut across community boundaries in *Chinapara*.

The *Chinapara* : That the neighbourhood as a spatial unit is an important part of an Indian city is reflected through the use of a wide range of words- *mohalla*, *wadi*, *bazaar*, *chawl*, *pol*, *para*. *Para* is the Bengali word for neighbourhood. The *para* is rooted in a Bengali consciousness of life in an urban locality (Bonnerjee, 2010); it also draws on a meaning of 'community' and 'sociability'. The sense of 'community' invoked in the *para* often cuts across ethnic and/or class lines. The Chinapara Chinese tended to socialize more with other ethnic communities (interactive integration) - and led a more cosmopolitan life (cited in Bonnerjee, 2010) in her study of the Chinese and the Anglo- Indians. They were/are well conversant in English, Hindi and/or Bengali (cultural integration) and hence do not face any linguistic barrier. Use of different languages- their own and that of the host society- is seen bi-directional and orthogonal relationship between the Chinese people's culture of origin and the second culture in which they are living. The alternate model of second culture acquisition (La Fromboise et al, 1993) assumes that it is possible for an individual/group to know and understand two different cultures, to alter their behaviour to fit a particular context, to participate in two different cultures, to use two different languages, to have a sense of belonging in two cultures without compromising their sense of cultural identity. This type of biculturalism of the ability to function effectively and more productively within the context of Calcutta's core institutions while retaining a sense of self and Chinese ethnic identity is reflected in the Chinapara Chinese; the Cantonese in particular.

Everyday 'lived' spaces of Calcutta's Chinese community

Everyday life normally extends beyond the immediate locality of residence, through work spaces and community's recreational activity: all playing a focal role for the Chinese community. An understanding of the spaces of attachment in the city, the community's sense of identity and belonging can be done through the lived space. The contribution of the Chinese community to the social and economic spheres of Kolkata through their restaurants, tanneries, laundries, beauty parlours, provisional stores, etc, has been felt by many to be disproportionately large when compared with their population. The ethnic minority and migratory communities often create cultural landscapes that replicate the landscapes of their places of origin. Such cultural setting incorporates the various institutions (educational, religious, commercial); reflects on the specificity of Calcutta, and the ways in which the city is typified by its close networks and connections.

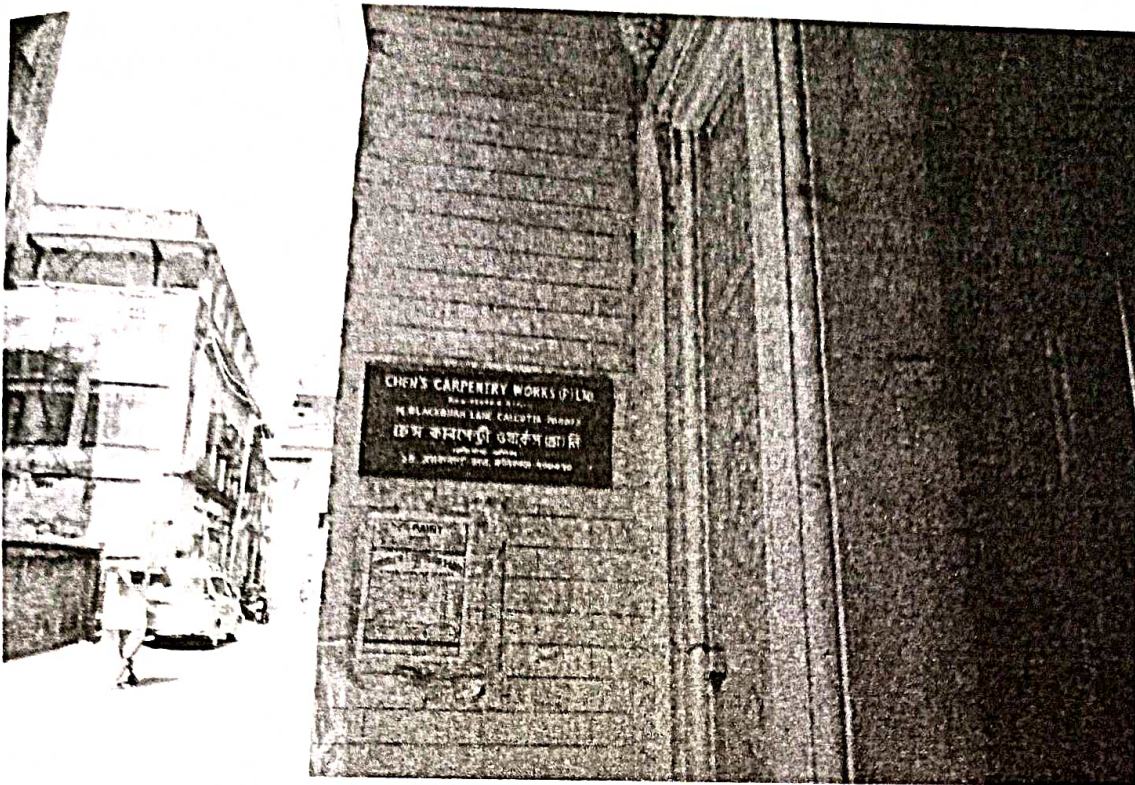


Fig. 6: Chen's Carpentry Works: this building has multiple uses: economic, socio-cultural, recreational



Fig. 7: Tung Nam Eating House on Chattawali Gully

The lives of the Chinese in the city revolves around particular sites: the morning *breakfast* bazaar in Tiretta Bazar , the club , the various temples , cemeteries dotted around the area .Community organisations (such as the Indian Chinese Association) and institutions like churches/ temples dedicated to Chinese deities for Guandi and the Goddess Tianhou (Zhang and Sen(2013), schools, social clubs around which the Chinese life revolves played an important role in the overall physical development of the area. The Ling Liang Chinese School at Blackburn Lane, in close proximity to the Tiretta Bazar area, previously was the most successful Chinese educational institution in Calcutta; but now it has become an English medium institution following the ICSE curriculum where some of the remaining Chinese students study. Bhattacharya and Kripalani (2015) have referred to this older Chinatown as a 'melting pot' of various communities where the Chinese have long shared residential and business space with the Anglo- Indians besides the local lower caste Hindus and Dalits. The societal formations resulting out of the processes like assimilation, adjustment, and adaptation of the immigrant groups in the host societies were multiculturalism, plural society and cultural pluralism. In the context of cultural pluralism different immigrant groups maintain their 'particularistic identity' even when they have integrated into the Indian society and this is found in the Old Chinatown.



Fig. 8: Pou Chong Properties Pvt Ltd: the building has been renovated according to the current architectural style

Partitioning of urban space

In the late 1950s construction of a thoroughfare cutting across the centre of the Chinatown by the then Calcutta Improvement Trust changed the urban landscape. The Chattawala Gully,

phears Lane and Blackburn Lane were fragmented. Road names such as the Sunyat Sen Street and, Lu Shun Sarani hold on to the Chinese presence in this area of Kolkata till date. So also pockets of old China Bazar and New China Bazar . The fragments of Chinatown still exist in and around this area, where Chinese owned shoe shops can still be found (evidenced through field observation) though much reduced in number: 06 out of a total of 132(<5%) in Rabindra Sarani area. Along the Tiriti bazaar area stalls (all being under the sky) can be noticed selling *momos* and other Chinese delicacies besides the normal green vegetables. All the stalls were not run by the Chinese thus reflecting the relationship with the local host society. Besides this open sky phenomenon, some permanent structures have come up reflecting the space of the Chinese. They are as follows:



Fig. 9: Residential- cum-commercial space

Huiguans (native-place associations), temples/ church and associated functions: *Huiguans* were Chinese merchant guilds in major Chinese cities and coastal regions especially during the 18th and 19th centuries. In foreign lands, these associations provided / organized places for lodging, community gatherings and celebrations, and religious rituals and ceremonies. Some of them also operated as unofficial courtrooms where members of the overseas Chinese community settled their legal disputes. In Calcutta, five such *Huiguans* were established by

the Cantonese immigrants, in the vicinity of Blackburn Lane in the Bowbazar neighbourhood. Named after specific regions in Guangdong province (Zhang and Sen, 2013), these were the Yixing (Ye Hing), Nanshun (Nam Soon), Dong'an (Toong Oon), Siyi (Sea Ip) and Huining (Wei Ning) *Huiguans*. Since these *Huiguans* also housed shrines devoted to Chinese deities, they were usually called "churches". On a personal visit to the Sea Ip Church (Fig 5), the most accessible of the Chinese temples of Tiretta Bazar and the only one located on the main road having been built in 1905, the Guandi and Guanyin shrine in this 'Church' was found. This church draws Chinese worshippers settled in different parts of India during the festive season (Zhang and Sen, 2013). The oldest (built in 1820) and the most spacious *Huiguan* is the Nam Soon Church which also has a school in its walled premises. The Chonghee Dong Thien Haue Church (built in 1859) is located at the crossing of Damzen and Blackburn Lane; the building is now shabby in appearance on account of poor functioning of the *Huiguan* as mentioned by the respondents. The smallest of the churches is the Sea Voi Leong Futh located in the Blackburn Lane built in 1908. The Gee Hing Church built in 1888 was later shifted to the present location of 13 Blackburn Lane in 1920. It is located above the Chen's Carpentry Works (P) Ltd. The Toong On Church (fig 6) had the famous Nanking Restaurant on the ground floor with the Church on the first floor. It was closed down in 1980s but after the dispute has been settled, the building has been handed over to the temple trust. The buildings of all these associations are in close proximity to each other hardly a few meters away. They still form a significant part of the urban space being easily identified by the unique vibrant red and green colours along with their unique architecture. The Yi Xing temple is another shrine cum 'native place association' in Central Kolkata. (<https://rangandatta.wordpress.com/2011/11/10/chinesetemplesoftirettabazar/>).

Most of these *huiguans* continue to function and are places for people to gather to play *mah-jong* (Oxford 1993), read newspapers, venerate Chinese deities, or attend special events. Mah-jong is a tile based game having its root in China using Chinese characters and symbols. It is usually played by four players. In a personal visit to the Siyi *huiguan* which housed the Sea Ip Church on the first floor and the club on the ground floor a diary/ log book was found on the table where the visitors wrote down their cell phone contact numbers; their Chinese name and the corresponding 'other name' (a Chinese person with a conventional English name), where they hailed from, all written in English. Overseas Chinese Commerce of India- a newspaper daily circulated among the Chinese communities was also kept. All information of birth, death, marriage, name change, matrimonial advertisement, etc, and other community related incidents are to be found besides the usual news events. This reflects the social networking among the Chinese communities especially the senior ones, the younger ones preferring the online sites. On visiting the club, attached to the Gee Hing Church on a Sunday evening it was seen that the senior citizens were playing the traditional game of *mahjong*. It is thus seen that the overseas Chinese, as elsewhere in the world, tend to recreate their social structure wherever they go. They tend to hold fast to their native culture in their lands of adoption, their mode of adaptation is marked by a clear preference for economic integration more than cultural assimilation. When they carve out a niche for themselves, they find the necessity of constructing and continuing certain traditional institutions of their motherland: exemplifying the phenomena of cultural persistence/maintenance and the socio cultural plurality of the host society (integration). The process of adaptation is multidimensional in which

acculturation interacts with economic adaptation, social integration, satisfaction and degree of identification with the new country.

Eateries: The Asian propensity for family-held businesses/family-owned enterprises; attributing to the close family ties that keep the family together as an economic unit is exemplified through the

(a) *Tung Nam Eating House* (Fig 7) on 24, Chattawala Gully. There were 9 four seater tables laid for visitors. The owner allowed taking snaps of the restaurant. There was a room inside where five males and a lady (Chinese) were busy cutting vegetables and meat, preparing sauce, etc for the lunch. Only the cleaning up and serving of dishes was done by a non- Chinese. The cash transaction was not near the entrance to the restaurant as is the usual practice; it was inside and managed by the female family members. On inquiry it was found that this building was used for their stay with the family as well: hence residence-cum – commercial use of the space.

(b) *Pou Hing* Located on Sunyat Sen Street is an expert in Chinese Cuisine (written on the name plate of the shop).

(c) *D'Leys Eating House* Located on 16, Black Burn lane in Tiretta Bazaar area on the main road: the cash being managed by a very senior citizen in his late eighties; the cook and attendant being non Chinese.

Furniture shop: Since Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Colombo had frequent maritime exchanges with the Far East, European shipping companies used these ports to undertake repair and maintenance work on their ships. Cantonese carpenters had earned a reputation as hardworking, cordial and highly skilled; were most sought after. In the 1950s, there were more than 20 Cantonese-owned carpentry factories in Calcutta (cited by Zhang and Sen 2013). Today, with continuing depletion of the Chinese population, only a few Chinese carpentries survive in the Kolkata area. Remnants of such can be traced to only a few notably:

(a) *Furnico*, along 8 Sunyat Sen Street is on the ground floor. The building still has remnants of Chinese architecture with several rooms (residential structure) having a common verandah on the first floor.

(b) *Chen's Carpentry Works (P) Ltd:* on Blackburn Lane established in 1920 (fig 6); this has a mixed use of space with the top floor for recreation and worship.

Provision Stores: Hap Hing Company in 10 Sunyat Sen Street, just opposite the stalls off Tiriti bazaar area is a Chinese provisional store selling authentic Chinese style sauce, noodles, tea and medicines. The shopkeeper was seen not using a calculator but abacuses in the sale transaction process.

Pou Chong Brothers' Pvt. Ltd: a retail store along with the Pou Chong Food Products Pvt Ltd as the wholesale store; the latter is on the premises named as Pou Chong Properties Pvt Ltd. It is a four storied commercial cum residential building solely of the Chinese but now being renovated to contemporary Indian architectural style (Fig 8).

Sing Cheung a sauce factory set up in 1954 is along the main road (Lu Shun Sarani renamed as New CIT Road).

Dental clinic: While the focus is on the Cantonese, a brief mention of the Hubeinese, known as “teeth setters” in China, is essential as the dental clinics run by them form part of the urban landscape of the older Chinatown till date. After migrating to South Asia, the Hubeinese dentists travelled with their families from one region to another, just as they did in China. By the end of the Second World War there were around 300 Hubeinese-owned dentistry businesses in India. Indian customers were attracted to these teeth setters because of their reputed skills and low fees (cited by Zhang and Sen of 2013 from Yu 1956: 34). In Calcutta itself, there were more than 80 such clinics run by people from the Tianmen area in Hubei province. These clinics catered to the local Chinese and non-Chinese customers. After independence, the Indian government established new laws requiring dental clinics to either procure certification from a regular hospital specializing in dentistry or the approval from the health department. This was a major setback for the Chinese dentists as very few of them had proper training or standard facilities and most did not meet the necessary standards to work as dentists. The biggest blow to this community and their livelihood came during the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The restrictions placed on the movement of the Chinese in India forced the roaming teeth setters to choose a place to settle down and most of them chose Calcutta. A few Hubeinese teeth setters can still be found practicing their craft in Kolkata and Karachi. Dr. Mao Chi Wei’s dental clinic at 81-B Chittaranjan Avenue is one such clinic visited by the author. He has a BDS degree from Kolkata and has done MRSH from London (as seen in the name plate). Dr. Melvin Mao and Dr (Mrs.) Al Ling Hu, with a BDS degree also offer their services to the people from this clinic located at the important road junction of Central Kolkata.

Educational: The only one still with the Chinese name traced out is the four storied Ling Liang High School adjacent to which is the Ling Liang Chinese Church. The school attached to Nam Soon Church is defunct due to lack of Chinese students.

Beauty Parlour: Lily’s is the Beauty salon next to the D’Ley Eating House again having the locational advantage of being on the main thoroughfare.

Conclusion

Geographers are interested in urban ecology, which studies the total environment of a city as a human life-support system. One branch of urban ecology is the study of spatial components of residential areas and the ecological and ethological ideas of community in space. In each city, the structural analysis of an ecological organization entails examination of the spatial distribution of land-use types and population, such as the study of residential segregation among ethnic groups. Chinatown is an urban ethnic enclave which can be likened to an ecological niche similar to the way different forms of plant life are in their ecosystems. A Chinatown is a section of an urban area in a country other than in China where a large number of Chinese reside. Unlike elsewhere in the world where Chinatowns are residentially ‘exclusive’ entities, the Old Chinatown in Central Kolkata demonstrates a way of living along side diverse communities. Historically, there have been more inter-marriages in and around Chinapara, with Anglo-Indians and also with other communities (Bonnerjee 2010). Living in areas with a relatively greater proportion of immigrants in the local population conditions a greater likelihood of cosmopolitanism among individuals and this was seen among the Cantonese. Although not a self contained urban enclave as elsewhere; these Chinese consider the Tiretta Bazar area as

their home. The possible societal formations resulting out of the processes like assimilation, adjustment, and adaptation of the immigrant groups in the host societies are multiculturalism, plural society and cultural pluralism. In the context of cultural pluralism it is seen that the different immigrant groups maintained their 'particularistic identity' even when they have integrated into the Indian society. There is an identifiable 'community' in Turret Bazaar area, spatially (through concentration in particular neighbourhoods) and socially (through the presence of various community associations). Physically and functionally it is a 'town within a town'.

Kolkata was an important link for the British colonizers in their trade with China. Chinese goods, such as tea and silk were transported to Britain through Calcutta and in return, silver bullion was exported from the Indian port to China. Commercial relations between Calcutta and Canton (now Guangzhou) grew rapidly after opium was introduced by the British as one of the main Indian exports to China. This colonial trading network, between Calcutta and Canton contributed to the formation of Chinese settlements of skilled and unskilled workers. The factors responsible for the migration of the Chinese community, their migratory pattern, the structure of economic opportunities availed in the source of destination, the occupational niches carved out, the causes and nature of residential concentration and the cultural setting in a specific urban space of Calcutta in the Old Chinatown, envisages the idea of Calcutta as a 'diaspora city'.

The Push-Pull theory of migration can be traced out through economic factors of migration in the sending country as well as in the receiving country. The push factors of migration were demographic pressure, high unemployment and low living standards in the home country. The factors of migration in the receiving country included the demand for labour, promising economic opportunities identified as pull factors. Push factors attribute to the negative characteristics operating at the centre of origin whereas pull factors identify the positive characteristics at the centre of destination. There are also other variables that exert an important influence on decisions to migrate, including non-economic reasons, such as war, ethnic discrimination and political persecution at home. The 1962 Sino-Indian conflict had a great impact: many Cantonese Chinese from Chinapara emigrated from Calcutta after the conflict. Such a large-scale migration of community members invariably meant an end to Chinese neighbourhoods in the city, an end to the long-dominant territorially based constructions of their collective identity. The Chinese population in South Asia declined rapidly after the India-China conflict of 1962, when almost 3,000 Chinese were deported from India. Many others decided to immigrate to North America, Europe, Australia and other countries. The Chinese still living in India is estimated to be between 4,000 and 5,000. The impact of the war has been deliberately left out in the present study. This ethnic work-cum-living Chinese space may altogether disappear from the city's landscape unless steps are taken to preserve the cultural heritage of colonial Calcutta: the Old Chinatown being one.

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